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**From Religious Relief to
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by:

HANS MAGNE JAATUN

ABSTRACT

The emergence of a sustained scholarly interest in the origins of humanitarian organisations is a relatively new phenomenon, which has – in part – led to an overly positivistic and uncritical understanding of humanitarianism, in both its current and past iterations. This article is an examination of one of the earliest, and perhaps most influential humanitarian organisations of its time: the Near East Relief – and details the organisation’s transformation from a coalition of religiously selective relief committees into a secular, permanent, and development-focused humanitarian institution. Through exploring the setting, birth, and early history of the NER, it is possible to create an image of the general development of international humanitarianism in the interwar years. Factors such as field experience, donor pressure, internal organisational disputes, paternalistic attitudes, a growing academic presence within the NER, and the influence and changing character of religious doctrine and thought, all combine to form a more nuanced image of the origins and evolution of modern humanitarianism.

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As Michael Barnett states in the opening words of his book on modern humanitarianism, *Empire of Humanity*, “[all] communities get their history wrong, and the humanitarian community is no exception”!¹ For many years, the history of NGOs in general and humanitarian organisations in particular represented a woefully understudied area within the field of history. The narratives surrounding the emergence of early humanitarian organisations had been left mostly to the whims of biographers or to members of the organisations in question, whose bias often prevented a thorough and critical historical analysis. As a result, these foundational stories were often subject to retroactive romanticism, teleological arguments and “great man” thinking. In response to this, and influenced by larger academic and public debates surrounding globalisation, aid regimes and civil society, historians have recently started engaging more thoroughly with the origins of NGO “precursors”, alongside the sets of ideas they were founded upon or influenced by. Historians such as John F. Hutchinson and Harald Fischer-Tiné are good representatives of this trend through their work on the origins of the Red Cross and the Salvation Army respectively.² Barnett offers perhaps the most ambitious study from this perspective, attempting to sketch out a full historical trajectory of humanitarianism, wherein the interwar years are described as a transitional point between what he terms the “Age of Imperial Humanitarianism” and the “Age of Neo-Humanitarianism”. During the interwar years, Barnett argues, “[t]here were signs that need, not identity, was the increasingly important criterion for deciding who received attention; that a secularized humanity was replacing a religiously based compassion; that institutionalization was replacing improvisation; that public governance of relief was replacing private morality; and that internationally coordinated responses were replacing nationally driven action.”³

While his choices of periodisation are a matter of some debate, there remains little doubt that both the theories and institutions surrounding international humanitarianism were undergoing profound changes during the First World War and interwar years. The early humanitarian organisation Near East Relief (NER) represents a useful unit of study for analysing and understanding said changes. One of the first ‘true’ humanitarian organisations, the NER emerged out of American missionary circles in the war-torn Ottoman Empire in 1915, and would in the span of 15 years transform itself from a temporary coalition of committees engaged in religiously selective emergency relief into a permanent humanitarian organisation championing a “full round of life for all” through technical programmes of comprehensive rural and social development.⁴ In 1930, in order to

1 Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity* (Ithaca, 2011), 1.

2 John F. Hutchinson, “Rethinking the Origins of the Red Cross,” *Bulletin for the History of Medicine*, 63, no. 4 (1989): 557-578; Harald Fischer-Tiné, “Global Civil Society and the Forces of Empire. The Salvation Army, British Imperialism and the “Pre-History” of NGOs (Ca. 1880-1920),” in *Competing Visions of World Order. Global Moments and Movements, 1880s-1930s* (London, 2007), 29-67.

3 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 82-83.

4 Michael Limberg, ““A Full Round of Life for All”: Transforming Near East Relief into The Near East

communicate these changes to world, the NER reincorporated itself as the Near East *Foundation* (NEF), officially confirming the organisational changes that had been developing internally over the preceding years.

This essay is an attempt to showcase what caused the transition of NER into NEF through an analysis of its origins, internal developments and field experience. In doing so, I use the NER as a lens through which we can observe the general development of international humanitarianism in the interwar years. Far from being the story of an organisation moving inevitably towards a greater stage of liberty and humanity, this essay will show that NER's transition was the result of a complex set of factors, including internal organisational strife, donor pressure, wider trends in international humanitarianism, continuing influences from its missionary origins and, perhaps most importantly, experiences made 'on the ground' by NER operatives and associates. The sources I have used, especially works by Watenpaugh, Limberg, Rodogno and to some degree Kieser, can be positioned within the same scholarly movement as Barnett, Hutchinson, and Fischer-Tiné, owing to their shared objectives of complicating and critically re-examining the early histories of international humanitarianism. For better insight into the organisation's internal affairs, I have also consulted a series of research reports based on recent material gathered from the NER/Rockefeller Archives. For the sake of readability, the pre-NEF iterations of the NER (ACASR, ACRNE) will all be referred to as NER throughout the essay, as they were the NER's direct organisational forebears.^v

The NER emerged from a long-standing American interest in the MENA region. In the Near East specifically, American philanthropism had left its mark as early as the beginning of the 19th century, when a mix of philhellenes and religiously motivated individuals provided rebellious Greeks with supplies and volunteers to assist them in their struggle against the "intolerable despotism" of Turco-Muslim rule.⁵ Perhaps more importantly for the later emergence of the NER, the Near East had also received significant attention from American missionaries, arriving in limited numbers as early as 1819 and picking up steam from the mid-19th century onwards.⁶ Initially concerned with the millenarian and "somewhat utopian and romantic aspect of Israel's restoration", the realities of the holy land soon caused a shift both in target audience and in doctrine.⁷ The original target group, the Jews, proved unreceptive to the efforts of the missionaries while the region's majority Muslim population were, according to an early American missionary to Palestine, shielded "almost impenetrably from the influence of Christianity"

Foundation," (Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online, 2013) <<http://rockarch.org/publications/resrep/limberg.pdf>> [Accessed 23 May 2018], 1.

5 Edward Mead Earle, "American Interest in the Greek Cause, 1821-1827," *The American Historical Review* 33, no. 1 (1927): 52-53.

6 Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Nearest East: American Millennialism and Mission to the Middle East* (Philadelphia, 2012), 38.

7 Kieser, *Nearest East*, 34.

on account of their faith and political circumstance.⁸ Instead, the Americans decided to focus their efforts on the region's Oriental Christians, in particular the Armenians, who soon found themselves subject to western attempts at spiritual and cultural reform with the goal of achieving a "revival of Christianity in the East".⁹ While evangelisation was the original goal of these missionaries, they soon found themselves engaged in a wide variety of work, resulting in the establishment of schools, hospitals and other developmental institutions intending to "uplift" the region's Christians spiritually and culturally so that they would, in time, become more receptive to the evangelical gospel. Following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the proselytising aspects of the American missionaries and educators would be toned down even further, complimented by "experiments and new conceptual fermentation" centred around the idea that the best way to preserve and reinvigorate Christianity in the East would come through a general improvement of conditions for *all* residents in the area, through the creation and support of a liberal, American-influenced and Ottomanist civil society.¹⁰ While this more holistic approach would prove optimistic – ultimately the *Osmanlilik* identity implemented by the new Ottoman regime proved authoritarian, centralist and often hostile to non-Muslim elements – it still serves to indicate that the idea of a comprehensive societal transformation in the Near East predated the establishment of the region's dedicated humanitarian organisations.¹¹ These ideas were already present in the Near East missionary and educational communities that would later form the backbone of NER.

The NER's interwar transition from relief to societal transformation can be traced back to a series of humanitarian crises in 1915. In response to the devastation brought about by an artificial famine in the Greater Syria region and to mounting reports of atrocities committed against the Ottoman Empire's Armenian populations, 1915 would see multiple relief committees set up by American educators and missionaries stationed in close proximity to affected regions and communities.¹² These efforts were soon centralised into the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR), which in 1919 would be incorporated into the NER. The organisation combined massive public fundraising campaigns and religious fundraising networks in the US with local contacts and knowledge in the Near East to create what Davido Rodogno calls "an American humanitarian actor as relevant as the American Red Cross or the American Relief Administration"¹³. As funding increased and aid networks expanded, the suffering of non-Armenian communities became increasingly

8 Kieser, *Nearest East*, 18.

9 Kieser, *Nearest East*, 44-47.

10 Kieser, *Nearest East*, 73.

11 Kieser, *Nearest East*, 63-98.

12 Keith David Watenpugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland, 2015), 97.

13 Limberg, "A Full Round of Life for All," 2; Davido Rodogno, "Beyond Relief: A Sketch of the Near East Relief's Humanitarian Operations, 1918-1929," *Monde(s)* 6, no. 2 (2014): 45.

apparent to NER fieldworkers. In response, the organisation would slowly extend their aid to Muslim, Jewish and Alevi populations as well.¹⁴ In many ways this represented a watershed moment in the history of international humanitarianism, as previous relief efforts had been dominated by religious and ethnic exclusivity. In addition, NER operatives started responding to developing needs on the ground by assuming care for displaced orphans – another unintended development dictated by need rather than top-down demands. This would in turn become a cornerstone of NER operations, with hundreds of orphanages in operation from the Russian Caucasus to the cities of Greater Syria.¹⁵ After the armistice of Mudros in 1918, the NER would take American missionary and evangelical work with the Armenian population to its furthest conclusion, when it became involved in large scale resettlement and repatriation programmes of Armenians into entente-controlled areas of southern Anatolia (primarily Cilicia), in an effort to carve out a new Armenian state constructed on “modern liberal nationalist, Wilsonian lines.”¹⁶ What had started as a limited intervention to alleviate the suffering of Christians in the Near East had over the course of the war developed into a vast enterprise with direct responsibility for tens of thousands of refugees and orphans, engaged in ambitious programmes to demographically, politically and socially reshape the landscape of the Near East.

The magnitude of the famine, the massacres and the displacements “forced the relief committee to transcend the levels of organization that had characterised all earlier efforts to solicit relief funds outside the circle of givers to the missionary boards.”¹⁷ As the NER’s financial power increased, so did the scope of its aid and the complexity of its organisational structure. Professionalisation and bureaucratisation occurred not only because of changing ideological drives in NER leadership, but also as a logical response to the organisation’s expanding assets and the increasingly complicated and prolonged nature of the disasters it involved itself with. In addition, many of the NER’s operatives in the Near East were slowly falling victim to what Hugo Slim terms “ethics creep”: as their moral obligations towards the objects of their aid thickened over time, solving *immediate* problems was no longer seen as sufficient.¹⁸ This manifested itself on a personal level, evidenced by the many friendships forged between aid workers and locals over the course of NER activities in the area, and to a lesser degree on an organisational level,

14 Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 30-57, 91-124.

15 Shaloma Gauthier and Davide Rodongo, “The Near East Relief’s Caucasus Branch Operation (1919-1920)” (Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online, 2011), <<http://rockarch.org/publications/resrep/gauthier-rodogno.pdf>> [Accessed 26 May 2018].

16 Keith David Watenpaugh, “The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1927,” *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (2010): 1318.

17 Yehonathan Brodski, “The Near East Foundation Records at the Rockefeller Archive Center” (Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online, 2012) <<http://rockarch.org/publications/resrep/brodski.pdf>> [Accessed 27 May 2018] 7-8.

18 Hugo Slim and Miriam Bradley, “Principled Humanitarian Action and Ethical Tensions in Multi-Mandate Organizations,” *World Vision* (2013), 3.

evidenced by the NER's flexibility in adapting to on-the-ground demands (from non-Christians and orphans).¹⁹ Many members started calling for more comprehensive programmes aimed at solving the root causes of their suffering, no doubt influenced by trending discussions on the role and nature of humanitarianism, but based primarily on personal experiences and the developing sense of a deeper and wider responsibility for the region's suffering. After the First World War, the continuation of violence in the Russian Civil War, the French termination of Hashemite rule in Syria, the Turkish War of Independence and in subsequent Greco-Turkish population transfers eliminated the prospects of an immediate withdrawal for the NER, as it became increasingly clear that a full retreat would result in "disastrous consequences" for refugees and orphans in NER care.²⁰ For the first two post-war years, the NER stayed in the region primarily because wartime conditions persisted. By the mid-1920s "[t]he acute phase of need – the humanitarian emergency – had passed" and socio-political developments in the Near East dictated a corresponding change in the activities of humanitarian organisations present there.²¹ The Christian communities of Anatolia had all but vanished following genocide, expulsion and population transfers, the colonial powers of France and Great Britain had divided the Levant and Mesopotamia between themselves, while increasing Soviet hostility towards Western aid organisations made work in the Caucasus difficult. The NER had since its inception been structured principally around the relief of immediate suffering resulting from uneven inter-religious conflict, but now it found itself situated in a region with a whole new set of different issues to solve.²² Many of the projects that the NER had to adapt to during the conflict were either vanishing or required different solutions to what had been previously attempted. Refugees were slowly becoming settled and orphans, who since the conclusion of hostilities had been the NER's primary object of attention, were reaching the age of maturity, which released them from the direct responsibilities of the NER. The much larger issue of the what to do with the Armenian diaspora also required new answers as the expulsion of French and British troops from Southern Anatolia eliminated any prospects of repatriation and nation-building. Coinciding with these developments was also the issue of funding. Private fundraising appeals increasingly failed to bring in as much money as before, be it due to the elimination of the traditional "call to alms" surrounding oppressed Christians and orphans, or simply donor fatigue.²³

These developments spurred a series of debates within the ranks of the NER on the organisation's future that would eventually result in the reincorporation of the relief-based NER as the development-focused NEF.

19 Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 91-123.

20 Limberg, "A Full Round of Life for All," 5.

21 Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 184.

22 Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 183-184.

23 Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 184.

However, as I alluded to above, this development was far from certain when it was discussed at the time. Powerful voices within the NER's board were declaring that the mission had been accomplished and called for a Near Eastern withdrawal, with local authorities or permanent religious associations taking over responsibilities.²⁴ Others imagined a limited continued engagement centred on the declining numbers of refugees and any orphans who still needed assistance.²⁵ Finally, there developed a growing number of voices arguing for an increased and permanent commitment to the Near East. These long-term discussions initially revolved around the future of the thousands of orphans in NER care, exemplified by this 1920 statement by the then director Charles V. Vickrey:

It may be doubted if any American organization has ever had an opportunity equal to ours in shaping the future of the Near East. The 100,000 children now under our care, wisely guided will become the leaders in a New Era in the Old World. They will be the trained agriculturalists, the mechanics, merchants, manufacturers, bankers, educators, lawyers, doctors, governors and national leaders of the New Near East.²⁶

Though its aims were grandiose, under this model the responsibilities and presence of the NER would effectively cease after the successful upbringing and education of the orphans. In the following years, the increasing number of academic experts serving and collaborating with the NER would slowly push for a much broader engagement. In the initial years of the First World War as the NER grew in size and complexity, it had experienced a growing influx of non-missionary and non-evangelical personnel. Over the course of the next decade these men and women would gradually enter into positions of influence and leadership within the organisation. Influenced by developing academic theories surrounding development studies and international humanitarianism, these people perceived the NER not only as an instrument to do 'good' in the world based on their own understandings of the word, but also as an arena in which they would be able to work and experiment with the practical implementation of said theories.²⁷ The early sociologist Thomas Jesse Jones brought with him educational experience, and started lobbying for more comprehensive

24 Limberg, "A Full Round of Life for All," 4.

25 Limberg, "A Full Round of Life for All," 9.

26 Limberg, "A Full Round of Life for All," 7.

27 Limberg, "A Full Round of Life for All," 7-11; Sjaak Braster, Frank Simon and Ian Grosvenor, *History of Popular Education* (London, 2014), 179-182; Rodogno, "Beyond Relief," 47-51.

programmes of rural education and development based on prior experience working with what he termed “backwards peoples” such as African Americans.²⁸ Men such as Paul Monroe, who was previously engaged with the establishment of modern school systems for the Iraqi and Jordanian governments, further tipped the internal NER balance of power towards long term development, particularly aimed towards the Near East’s rural sectors.²⁹

While early leadership figures such as Cleveland H. Dodge and James Barton “came to relief work in the Near East largely out of a sense of religious and national duty to the region’s Christian populations”, interwar successors like Barclay Acheson, and Dodge’s son, Cleveland E. Dodge, increasingly became occupied with “science-based” ideas of transformative development and the extension of the NER’s work to non-Christian populations as well.³⁰ In Cleveland Jr.’s case (who took over his father’s chair on the NER board after his death), this reasoning seems to have been based primarily on his background in US philanthropic circles, while Acheson, who had climbed the ranks of the NER from his position as a field worker, was often drawing on what he perceived to be factual “needs” building on his personal experience in the field.³¹ The factions advocating a more comprehensive engagement in the Near East were aided significantly in their efforts by external pressure emanating from NER donors such as the Rockefeller Foundation (RF), which throughout the existence of the NER remained one of its greatest contributors. The RF had exerted this form of pressure before: in 1915, having made \$20,000 available to the NER’s forerunners, the Committee on American Atrocities, it announced that future aid would be given *only* on the condition that the various American aid organisations operating in the region at the time were merged into one entity: the American Committee for Armenian and Assyrian Relief (later the NER).³² When the debate about the future of the NER was raging internally in the mid-1920s, the RF once again made use of this position and alongside the Commonwealth Fund it raised demands for a higher level of professionalisation within the NER, mainly through a focus on long-term technical missions.³³ As previously mentioned, unlike other late-war relief organisations such as the American Relief Association (ARA), the NER was a private organisation that still relied primarily on funding from parishioners, households and philanthropists as well as institutional donors, making it susceptible not only to changing donation trends, but also to the influence and agendas of powerful donor blocks. In many ways, the actions of the RF resembled those of the League of Nations, who made the adoption of certain organisational structures a prerequisite for cooperation between the League and

28 Thomas J. Jones, *Essentials of Civilization* (New York, 1929); Rodogno, “Beyond Relief,” 57-58.

29 Braster, Simon and Grosvenor, *History of Popular Education*, 179-181.

30 Limberg, “A Full Round of Life for All,” 3-4.

31 Rodogno, “Beyond Relief,” 50-51; Limberg, “A Full Round of Life for All,” 12.

32 Watenpugh, *Bread from Stones*, 186.

33 Rodogno, “Beyond Relief,” 49.

independent organisations during the interwar years.³⁴ In this way, the NER was also partly the result of top-down ambitions towards a secular and professional humanitarianism, making the evolution of the NER not exclusively the product of internal decisions, but also of external and deliberate pressures.

The missionary origins and character of the NER also had an important part to play in deliberations on the NER's future. "[A] vision for guiding the future of the Near East had always been implicit in NER's aid to Christian minorities", evidenced by recurring talk of the Armenian population as a "vanguard" for a "New Near East" that was to be revived spiritually, culturally and technologically by the powers of Protestantism and the West.³⁵ These very same ambitions had been present within American evangelical circles as far back as the mid-1800s.³⁶ When the NER emerged out of these circles during the humanitarian crises of 1915, they carried over a significant amount of evangelical ideological and religious heritage that would remain a defining feature of the NER until long after the organisation officially shifted its objectives and methods in the 1930s. When the idea of creating a Christian Armenian nation state collapsed in the political situation that followed the Cilician retreat³⁷, many NER decision-makers went back to the same thinking that ABCFM [what is this?] members and institutions like the Syrian Protestant College had experimented with following the revolution of 1908 – towards creating a liberal, American-influenced region that through an "uplifting" of the entire populace in cultural, technological, and political terms would ensure the prosperity and survival of the Near East's Oriental Christian communities.³⁸ In this way, the continued Christian selectiveness the NER rarely conflicted with the new ideas and theories introduced by growing numbers of "ideological humanitarians" entering the ranks of the organisation. Instead, the missionary origins of the NER seemed to have worked as a force pushing the organisation not only towards maintaining its presence in the region even after the time of emergency had passed, but also towards the adoption of more holistic and transformative approaches when dealing with the issues of *who* to help and *how*. In other words, having a Christian 'character' was not necessarily a force pushing against long-term technical development and a non-discriminatory aid regime (although it was to some degree for people like Vickrey); instead, for

34 Kerstin Martens, "Examining the (Non-)Status of NGOs in International Law," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 10, no. 2 (2003): 9-14.

35 The "New Near East" was also the title of the NER's self-published magazine during the interwar years: Near East Relief Historical Society, "Spreading the Word: The New Near East Magazine," *Near East Relief Historical Society*, 2015 <<https://neareastmuseum.com/2015/12/18/spreading-the-word-east-magazine/>> [Accessed 25 May 2018]; Limberg, "A Full Round of Life for All," 7; Watenpaugh, "'Are There Any Children for Sale?': Genocide and the Transfer of Armenian Children (1915–1922)," *Journal of Human Rights* 12, no. 3 (2013): 293.

36 Kieser, *Nearest East*, 63-79.

37 Following a series of bloody battles, Turkish revolutionaries would succeed in routing Franco-Armenian troops from the province of Cilicia, resulting in the expulsion or massacre of the majority of the area's civilian Armenian population. In 1922, with the last hopes of establishing an Armenian nation state in southern Turkey gone, the NER were once again forced to return to working with the Armenians as a minority population within a primarily Muslim land.

38 Kieser, *Nearest East*, 63-79.

many of the organisation's leadership figures (like Acheson), it would be one of the main forces pushing *for* it.

A more cynical reading of the NER's activities and its pivot from relief to development programmes often involves criticism directed at the organisation's missionary character, notions of American superiority and desires to spread American influence abroad – as well as the NER's widespread use of anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim rhetoric at home.³⁹ While certainly present to some degree, these aspects of the NER's work did not seem to have been particularly important factors in internal decisions regarding the nature and role of the organisation.⁴⁰ In a 2016 interview, Watenpaugh warns listeners against adopting what he terms a “modernist smirk” when examining the early histories of organisations such as the NER, stating that humanitarianism is inherently selective, and that the early prioritisation of Oriental Christian communities should not necessarily be viewed as evidence of hatred towards the Ottoman Empire's Muslim subjects, nor as a form of cultural imperialism.⁴¹ The fact that NER relief efforts were expanded to non-Christian communities as soon as on-the-ground situations demanded it should indicate a disparity between the more hostile and divisive fundraising rhetoric applied in the USA and the actions and beliefs of the organisation's own members working in the Near East and on the NER's executive board. In this way, the expansion of NER programmes to cover all of the region's communities, and not merely the Christian population, should be viewed not only as a product of changes in leadership and doctrine, but also as the natural evolution of an extended humanitarian presence in the Near East. While Christian communities long remained the exclusive or later the primary focus of the NER, they also served as a gateway towards expanding humanitarian efforts in the remaining strata of the Near East, as soon as these strata became “familiarised” to the humanitarian community.

However, this is not to absolve the NER of all wrongdoings, or to wash away many of the organisation's more problematic characteristics, chief amongst them the issue of paternalism. For while paternalistic attitudes still permeate humanitarian organisations today, and in some sense must be considered inevitable, the case was far more overt and severe in the early 20th century. The acknowledgement that peoples outside one's own ‘tribal’ group merited aid and assistance was radical enough for the time, but to actually go the extra step and involve their suffering in decision-making processes surrounding their own aid was never even seriously suggested. In the case of the NER, roughly speaking, the missionaries were to serve as moral and religious teachers, and the experts

39 Jaffa Panken, ““Lest They Perish”: The Armenian Genocide and the Making of Modern Humanitarian Media in the U.S., 1915-1925” (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2014).

40 Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 183-205.

41 Watenpaugh, “The Middle East in the Making of Modern Humanitarianism,” interview by Chris Gratien, *Ottoman History Podcast*, 2016 <<http://humanityjournal.org/blog/the-middle-east-in-the-making-of-modern-humanitarianism/>> [Accessed 24 May 2018].

as technical and political ones. The peoples they concerned themselves with were to play the role of the grateful pupil-recipient and nothing more. While, as Barnett states, “any act of intervention, no matter how well intended, is also an act of control”, the level of control that the NER exerted over the people they cared for can be considered disproportionate.⁴² Over the course of the 1910s and 1920s, members of the NER managed to develop a great degree of sympathy and compassion for the members of the various confessions and ethnicities they encountered, but compassion does not equate respect, and it remained implicit in the NER’s message of ‘uplift’, that local traditions and norms in contrast with the organisation’s own were to be gradually phased out in favour of (western) ‘civilisation’.

While members of the NER’s board still disagreed on what the organisation’s future would look like, a 1924 meeting in Constantinople saw them all agree that a reassessment of “what they knew of local societies” was in order, so that their work could be reformulated to meet current needs.⁴³ These talks laid the foundations for a regional survey, approved in 1925 and completed in 1927, where information was collected on “transportation networks, imports and exports, agriculture, tax policies, health and sanitation, education, demographic change, women’s rights, and religious/racial divides in each country’s social matrix”.⁴⁴ While health, education, and to some degree also women’s rights, had by this point become a long-time focus for American missionaries in the region, the inclusion of economic and agricultural fields as units of analysis in the survey clearly indicated the growing influence of philanthropic and academic experts within the NER. This can be seen in the fact that the task of writing the report based on the survey results was given to “Dr. Frank A. Ross, a statistics expert at Columbia University, C. Luther Fry of the Rockefeller-funded Institute of Social and Religious Research, and Elbridge Sibley, a sociology graduate student, also at Columbia University”⁴⁵ – all of whom were academics with no prior connection to the NER. The results of the survey would solidify the various ideas and methods that had evolved within the NER into factions centred on key leadership figures. One of the most influential factions to emerge out of the following discussions was centred on Vickrey’s ambitions for the region’s remaining orphans – a more limited engagement similar to what the organisation had been occupied with in the preceding years, based primarily around aiding the region’s Christian minorities.⁴⁶ Another, broader coalition that formed around Acheson was centred around the advice and growing influence of philanthropic experts and “holistic” missionaries in the NER, arguing for comprehensive societal change in the

42 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 12.

43 Limberg, “A Full Round of Life for All,” 10.

44 Limberg, “A Full Round of Life for All,” 11.

45 Limberg, “A Full Round of Life for All,” 10.

46 Limberg, “A Full Round of Life for All,” 11.

entire region, with special attention paid to rural reconstruction.⁴⁷ In a series of meetings and conferences leading up to 1929, Vickrey's faction would be slowly pushed out by Acheson's, the former leaving the NER in order to start a separate organisation more in line with his own thinking (The Golden Rule Foundation).⁴⁸ Vickrey losing out to Acheson in this time period was far from predetermined, and seems to have been partially the result of Acheson's superior political skill.⁴⁹ Following these developments, Acheson would consolidate power and initiate the technical steps required for the replacement of the Near East Relief with the Near East Foundation. While this process would take many additional years to fully complete, its outcome had already been decided in the post-survey debates, when the NER's official shift from relief to technical societal transformation was irreversibly confirmed.

Bridging traditional American missionary work and values with the tools of modern humanitarianism, the NER's transformation from relief to development was the result of a complex interaction between American evangelicalism, modern humanitarianism and organisational and operational experiences. The organisation's missionary origins laid the groundwork for the NER's stated objectives and character and, perhaps more surprisingly, also served as a significant impetus for development in the direction of holistic and religiously inclusive development programmes. The growing number of academics and humanitarian experts that entered into the organisation as it expanded in size and complexity would not only be instrumental in securing the final board majority in favour of a comprehensive and prolonged commitment to the Near East, but would also be one of the main sources of a push for societal "uplift" and for translating this desire into actual policies, primarily through a focus on rural reconstruction. The NER's prolonged engagement in the region gave them a sense of responsibility for the local populations, both Christian and non-Christian, that would prove difficult to shake off in the post-war years, driving the NER operatives and its leaders towards increasingly more comprehensive solutions for aiding the region's suffering. Complementing these developments was external monetary pressure for professionalization coming from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund, which would prove important in steering the direction of the NER in the organisation's formative and transformative years. By the time the NER officially started questioning its future in the interwar years, the odds were already heavily stacked in favour of a shift from emergency relief to transformative development.

Returning to Michael Barnett, it should be clear why the NER is a good example of the changes that international humanitarianism underwent in the

47 Limberg, "A Full Round of Life for All," 11-12.

48 Near East Relief Historical Society, "Charles V. Vickrey and the Golden Rule", 2015, *Near East Relief Historical Society*. <<https://neareastmuseum.com/2015/10/30/charles-v-vickrey-and-the-golden-rule/>> [Accessed 9 Feb 2019].

49 Limberg. "A Full Round of Life for All," 11-14; Rodogno, "Beyond Relief," 57-59.

interwar years. While the transition to a need-based, secularised, and permanent humanitarian regime was far from complete, the first major steps in these directions were taken when traditional religious relief efforts interacted with a developing expert-driven academic humanitarianism in the context of one of the world history's greatest humanitarian disasters. But while this case study in many ways confirm some of Barnett's key arguments about the historic trajectory of international humanitarianism, there are significant discrepancies as well. If *Empire of Humanity's* greatest strength is its scope and reach, its greatest weakness is its limited length. Like any ambitious survey, Barnett's work covers ground unevenly, which leads to the unfortunate omission of organisations, events, and processes that might further nuance an already complicated narrative. While the NER, in the worst case, can be considered a loose fit to the framework of humanitarianism offered by Barnett, certain aspects that proved instrumental to its development are never discussed at length in his work. The role of religious doctrine and thought, and not just symbolism or language, is never adequately dealt with, despite its undeniable importance in the development of humanitarianism in the first quarter of the 20th century. Had the NER been included as a specific unit of analysis in Barnett's work, a further exploration of the changing religious norms and practices and their influence on what we today consider 'secular' humanitarianism would be required, although this is a topic important enough to merit several dedicated monographs. The NER was an amalgamation of secular and religious practises, motivations, and means, that, when granted the opportunity to, never shied away from using colonial or semi-colonial methods and structures to achieve their aims. Driven by a sense of compassion and altruism and informed by experience, but burdened by a strong and unapologetic Western paternalism, the NER was symptomatic of the state of the then-emerging international humanitarian community. The result of clear historical breaks and continuities, the NER serves as an important intermediary organisation positioned between the religiously selective relief committees of the early 20th century and the permanent secular development institutions of today.