Non-State Humanitarianism: From Colonialism to Human Rights

Workshop 2 Report

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Report on Workshop 2 of the 'Non-state Humanitarianism: From Colonialism to Human Rights' international research network: 'Sources and Uses of Humanitarian History'. National University of Ireland Galway, 20-21 June 2013

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URL: http://nonstatehumanitarianism.com

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Following the wide-ranging discussions at the network's first workshop at the University of Birmingham on 15 March 2013 (see http://nonstatehumanitarianism.com/workshop-1/), on 20-21 June participants met at the National University of Ireland Galway to discuss the subject of 'Sources and Uses of Humanitarian History'. In his opening remarks, MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) outlined a key future challenge for the network: the need to bring together case studies of NGOs and non-state actors in order to examine how they operate in national contexts, and to explore the intersection between those experiences and international languages of humanitarianism. While these issues looked beyond the next two days' debates, he remarked, they would provide major thematic issues for the network's future deliberations.

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN (NUI Galway) added to Hilton's comments with a reminder of the key themes that had emerged from the network's first meeting at Birmingham: the blurred boundaries of non-state action (state/non-state, colonial/post-colonial, religious/secular); the concept of recipient narratives and alternative interpretations of humanitarianism; the debate over periodisation; the incorporation of narratives from the global South; and the tensions between transnational and local actors. He further suggested that one of the aims of this workshop should be to continue the model of co-production pursued at Birmingham, looking to create research frameworks that would meet sectoral and academic needs, and to clarify the potential uses of humanitarian history.

PANEL 1

NORBERT GÖTZ (Södertörn University) opened the first session of the workshop with his paper on *'British voluntary aid to Sweden, 1808-09: Asymmetry in civil society development and its implications for archival preservation'*. He began by commenting on the relationship between historians of NGOs and the materials they work with. Historians of non-state actors are at a disadvantage, he argued, as resources tend to be scattered across numerous archives whose

thoroughness can vary, depending on the nature and size of specific organisations. Access to private archives is always delicate, and the tendency towards idealising the NGO sector, he argued, is partly due to a lack of archival access. As historians, therefore, we need to be creative, supplementing NGO sources by looking to state papers and the archives of aid recipients.

Götz then offered some observations from his case study of the Napoleonic Wars. In late 1805, members of the British and Foreign Bible Society founded the Committee for Relieving Distressed Inhabitants of Germany and Other Parts of the Continent. In the coming years Napoleon's continental blockade forced the Committee to redirect its aid from Germany to Northern Europe, while official funds from Britain were also distributed through voluntary channels. Material covering this cross-border relief effort is sparse, with documents scattered across private archives, parliamentary archives, and online journal and newspaper articles. The available printed material is extensive, and sufficient enough to write a basic history of this relief campaign. But there are other archives that can be consulted to gain a fuller picture. It is important, Götz argued, to take recipient archives (for example Swedish foreign office documents, and church archives) into account, as aid is an asymmetric relationship, with different patterns of archival documentation on each side. He concluded by describing research on voluntary organisations as complicated, challenging and rewarding – often resembling a 'detective's task'. The call for including the recipient perspective can help us to move beyond narrow studies that focus solely on donor intentions and enable our studies to become more comprehensive and balanced.

EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) introduced her paper on *'The Save the Children movement and "welfare states" in Europe, 1919-40'* as an interrogation of the relationship between NGOs and the state. When the Save the Children Fund (SCF) was created in 1919, its founders (Dorothy Buxton and Eglantyne Jebb) believed that state-led diplomacy was insufficient to maintain peace, and that civil society could provide an important counter-weight. This preference was reflected in SCF's early relief work, using child sponsorship schemes to link Austrian children with British helpers, for example. Yet the period also witnessed a blurring of boundaries between volunteer traditions and the emergent welfare state. In creating a personal connection between giver and recipient, SCF aimed to foster both a coherent national society and a more cohesive internationalism. This approach informed SCF's work across the continent, in the hope that streaming aid raised by the public through existing welfare machinery – for example, channelling all food relief through local municipal kitchens – would prove a positive step in improving the quality of that assistance.

In the uneasy tension between SCF's voluntarist ethos and state-led welfare agenda that these moves created, the latter won out. During the Russian famine in 1921, SCF became a channel for official British government funding. At the height of the Depression, SCF enhanced its credibility by becoming a provider of essential services such as the nursing schools it built and staffed in the Welsh valleys and Northern industrial towns. This shift away from radical, anti-establishment movement to moderate, insider status also led the Fund to make a highly publicised turn to Africa that nonetheless failed to cultivate the kind of influence on government that the organisation craved. Baughan concluded by arguing that the story of SCF's relationship with British and European states has important implications for how we write humanitarian history. As historians, we need to integrate the growing literature on global civil society with the growth of modern welfare states, recognising the power of the national context. For the humanitarian sector, this history is also instructive in understanding the sector today, not least the delicate question of when interaction *with* the state means sub-ordination *to* the state.

In her paper on *'Colonial humanitarianism: debates and activities in India during the 1930s'*, MARIA FRAMKE (ETH Zurich) examined the extent to which Indian humanitarianism was shaped by national and international objectives. She focussed her remarks on two case studies of Indian responses to international crisis: the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, and the Spanish Civil War. The Indian National Congress's close alignment with Abyssinia – expressing solidarity and condemning imperial aggression – was matched by an increasingly critical stance towards the British government's policy towards the region. The humanitarian response was bound up with these issues of political legitimacy and identity. The realisation that aid from colonial countries tended to lack legitimacy in the eyes of local communities led the Indian National Congress to channel aid through the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS). 90-95 per cent of the IRCS's members were Indian nationals, while the its standing as a branch of an international organisation further divorced it from the colonial administration.

The Indian National Congress's response to the Spanish Civil War was founded on similar principles. Portraying the conflict as part of a global struggle between fascism and democracy, Congress's criticism of British non-intervention reinforced its claims for a distinct Indian foreign policy. British policy was depicted as an obstruction of democracy, while parallels were drawn between Spain and India as victims of colonial aggression. The relief committee established to send food aid to Spain was inseparable from these broader concerns, not least the pursuit of a foreign policy that was distinct from the British government. Humanitarian relief, Framke argued, could therefore be read as a complex reaction to crisis that was motivated by both moral and political considerations. She concluded by commenting on the diverse actors and groups engaged in humanitarian activity in India in the inter-war period. The Indian middle-class donated to help Abyssinia and Spain, were integrated into the international Red Cross network, and adopted the International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) emphasis on neutrality as their own. Indian humanitarian aid may have been a moral necessity, she argued, but it was also a political instrument to distinguish India from British policy.

The presentations were followed by an open discussion on some of the issues raised by the three papers. ANDREW JONES (University of Birmingham) began the debate by raising the question of how difficult it is to capture recipient histories in 'weaker' states. NORBERT GÖTZ (Södertörn University) agreed that Sweden's strong state tradition and accompanying administrative culture had a positive effect on archival and documentary preservation. We can expect more in Europe, perhaps, than in other parts of the world.

ANDREW JONES (University of Birmingham) then turned to SCF's inter-war experiences and asked whether it reflected an embedded belief in British government circles that voluntary agencies were more 'suited' to famine relief work? This view, he suggested, arguably endured well into the post-1945 period. EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) replied that there are real questions to be asked about how we think of the state/non-state relationship. British government anxieties about how its assistance compared to American aid in Russia were not just down to money. NGOs and public donations can become stopgaps for relief that the state cannot, and will not, provide. ESTHER MÖLLER (IEG Mainz) added that it can be difficult to distinguish between donors and actors. In the Indian narrative laid out by Framke, she argued, it is striking how frank Jawaharlal Nehru was on the self-interest gained by providing aid. Humanitarian actors are rarely so. MARIA FRAMKE (ETH Zurich) responded that Nehru was trying to convince the Indian middle class why it was important to help, despite the prevalence of domestic issues. Appeals to national self-interest moved beyond the moral issue, instead framing humanitarianism as a device to grant legitimacy. NORBERT GÖTZ (Södertörn University) commented that the donor/recipient dichotomy can be over-simplified. First-degree recipients can become second-degree donors. In the Swedish press, British sources of aid went

unmentioned. Committees that administer funds can become donors in their own right, using aid for their own power.

EAMON DARCY (Trinity College Dublin) expressed his interest in narratives of mobilisation. How did humanitarian organisations promote their own agenda, and how did they mobilise their supporters? Is it simple propaganda, or does it go beyond this? NORBERT GÖTZ (Södertörn University) replied that in his case study, this involved wartime propaganda, the publication of subscriber lists, using church collections, and holding public meetings. EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) responded that SCF were, in their own terms, 'ground-breaking' – employing a publicity agent and relying on images of starving children. In place of their initial ideas of understanding the humanity of former enemies and transcending war hostility, humanitarianism became an apolitical project. The starving child has no politics, and no nationality.

MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) remarked that it was useful to break down boundaries between political solidarity and humanitarianism. Traditional solidarity is as much about reinforcing the power of the nation-state as it is about universal humanity (as so effectively demonstrated by Framke). EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) responded by remarking on the moving frontier of the welfare state in this period. In the children's sphere, this move established childhood as a legitimate space for state intervention. Thus, for SCF, the boundary had already been moved for them.

MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) observed that all three papers draw on transnational solidarities. Is there anything sustained in these case studies that point to a persistent building up of transnational humanitarianism? Transnational moments may occur without being consolidated upon. NORBERT GÖTZ (Södertörn University) commented that in his story the case of the British committees is fascinating, and many of the issues they raised play a role in current discussions relating to accountability and transparency. The boundaries of state and non-state are difficult to fix. This was a period of ad-hoc initiatives, and many of those involved were also involved in the anti-slavery movement, suggesting that we should perhaps think of their actions in terms of networks. MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) followed up with a further question: if there is a consolidation of transnational solidarities, it stands to reason that we care more about the plight of others more around the world at this point than 100 years ago. This is an unanswerable issue, but relates to the question of transnational networks. EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) commented on her interest in how these debates are exported: if people believe childcare is legitimate in Britain, how do they do it abroad? There is a trade-off between nationalism and creating transnational civil society, often resolved by feeding children in a municipal kitchen with the British flag flying above it. MARIA FRAMKE (ETH Zurich) commented that African and Asian solidarity was built on the Non Aligned Movement. Global moments build up on each other.

ENRICO DEL LAGO (NUI Galway) then turned the discussion towards the relationship between non-state humanitarianism and imperialism. EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) responded that the SCF was an explicitly internationalist movement. SCF's founders saw themselves as the far left of internationalism, being anti-imperial and distrusting of such kinds of governmental networks, yet they realised that to raise funds required the mobilising of imperial language and drawing upon imperial networks. Internationalist language was anti-imperial, but drew upon old hierarchies that underpinned the imperial worldview. Internationalism was deeply hierarchical: when interacting with societies, certain states were seen as developed enough to 'deserve' a welfare state, while others were not. NORBERT GÖTZ (Södertörn University) asked if imperial self-image was confirmed by the act of generosity? MARIA FRAMKE (ETH Zurich)

replied that we would need different case studies for different groups. For example, Gandhi was obviously very important in the 1930s, but was not involved in the humanitarianism being propagated by Nehru. The special context often overlooked is traditional help systems and charity networks (such as the obvious differences between Muslim and Hindu communities). The idea of how to donate, and who to donate for, is often based on traditional networks. It is interesting to look further at indigenous actors and agents.

BERTRAND TAITHE (University of Manchester) commented on the interesting idea of diplomacy by proxy in Maria's paper. Humanitarian aid reinvents social interactions within India – the Tata family undertakes humanitarian work in Northern India very early on. Is this a way of critiquing both the colonial state and themselves? MARIA FRAMKE (ETH Zurich) responded that the Tata were interested in rural development and natural disasters, and therefore do not feature in Framke's work, which focuses on humanitarian aid in response to armed conflict. Indian nationalists were very critical of the League of Nations, and there were calls for a new international organisation in which the 'exploited of the world' would have more say. The critique of the Indian state and Indian society is definitely there. Indian nationalists inherited the idea of the civilising mission; they also felt the need to civilise their fellow countrymen, to educate and raise the common standard of their society. KEVIN O'SULLIVAN (NUI Galway) commented that there is a large amount of useful material on official aid that discusses the relationship between the construction of the state and national identity and aid giving. The narrative of the BRICS becoming major donors in the last decade is part of this.

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN (NUI Galway) then posited a further question about the core tenets of humanitarianism. Where does this idea of 'humanitarianism' come from? Who constructs it? How do these ideas filter between the local and international contexts? Is there a hard core to these diverse ideas of 'humanitarianism'? EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) commented that the idea of maturity in humanitarianism goes back much further than the last decade. SCF humanitarianism designated tribal communities a childlike status, Balkan states were the next rung up, leading to Britain and the US at the top – states that were so civilised they were interested in the world's children as well as their own. SCF were not the only group to use these notions to generate donations in the dominions. There was a clear discourse of rallying the empire to the mother country in a time of need – the SCF movement maintained the patronising idea that if underdeveloped states have a national movement, they should focus on themselves, but pay a tithe – to teach them internationalist principles.

MAŁGORZATA MAZUREK (Columbia University) observed that there is a fascinating story of how donors imagine the world they are trying to 'save'. If we juxtapose SCF in Russia with the more politically grounded history of the Soviet Union, caricatures clash, as they are operating on a territory which is an empire, a non-sovereign political state. How do you deal with this imagined world, against the more classically defined political histories? Framke's story is also a genealogy of the global Cold War. India's position during the Cold War is one of clear co-operation between states – this is not a story of non-state humanitarianism. EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) replied that Cold War dynamics were at play in the case of SCF. The organisation was comfortable dealing with Russia as a nation – it was interested in the socialist experiment, and wished Russia to be productive and preserve trade with Britain – but it was uncomfortable with the experiment potentially seeping over and becoming an imperial project. SCF settled Russian children in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria in the hope that they would grow up healthy and strengthen these nations against the Soviet threat. The organisation lacked a coherent policy, but this pointed to a gap. Being socialist did not necessarily exclude a state from co-operation, yet it was a struggle to communicate this to the public – in this context, the Fund emphasised the apolitical imagery of suffering children.

PANEL 2

MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) opened his presentation on *'Ken Loach and the Save the Children film: humanitarianism, paternalism and imperialism in twentieth-century Britain'* by remarking that a second paper on SCF in itself revealed the freer availability of archival sources for some organisations over others. He began by relaying the story of how, in 1969 (the organisation's fiftieth anniversary and the end of the UN Development Decade), SCF commissioned left-wing filmmaker Ken Loach to make a documentary that it hoped would reflect positively on the organisation. Yet the free reign it granted to Loach led instead to a film that associated the organisation with the broader problems of colonialism in Africa, and that ended with a complete rejection of charitable solutions as 'sticking plasters' and remnants of Victorian philanthropy. Unsurprisingly, SCF did not allow the film to be broadcast in public until 2011.

Using the film as an entry point, Hilton reflected on a number of elements of SCF's early history. The organisation used images of starving children in appeals that looked backwards to the Victorian era, while also looking forward to modern NGOs, and had a strong preference for institutional solutions – such as the work schools it established in Budapest to create 'excellent factory workers', or the suggestion that working class children be relocated to camps during wartime evacuations in Britain. SCF's attitude to Africa took the moral high ground, advancing the rights of charitable organisations to intervene more generally, and, from the 1940s, shifting away from the internationalist ideals of its founders towards a more military-driven approach. In later decades, its threat to withdraw from more 'political' activities acted as a moderating influence on other agencies, though the internal response to Loach's film did lead SCF to bring its image more in line with other NGOs. Hilton concluded by positing four major implications from his case study: (a) the need to unpick the imperial/post-imperial dichotomy; (b) the need for an historical analysis of the fluctuating relationships between state and non-state action; (c) the shifting political legitimacy of charity; and (d) the need to examine how and why the contemporary humanitarian sector uses history in its public statements.

ESTHER MÖLLER (IEG Mainz) began her paper on *'Non-state humanitarian aid in Egypt in the twentieth century: an entangled history'* with a comment on sources of humanitarian history: they are, she argued, not easy to detect, often incomplete, and sometimes of questionable value. Möller's research on humanitarianism in colonial and post-colonial Egypt depicts an entangled history of aid in the Middle East, which emerged out of its European origins to be received and transformed in non-Western societies. She described the creation of the British Red Cross Society in Egypt in 1882, and the Egyptian Red Crescent in 1912, remarking that both societies were part of a single international movement that claimed the diffusion of universal humanitarian rights and duties. This story raises an important question: why did opponents of the Western presence in the Middle East work with a Western organisation? Both the Egyptian Red Crescent and the British Red Cross society were associated with different communities in Egyptian society, and were used at various stages by the British and Egyptian authorities for their own purposes.

Möller then drew on the biographies of two important figures in twentieth-century Egyptian humanitarianism as a means of elaborating her case study. Henri Naus Bay, a Belgian industrialist, supported Egyptian industrialisation and emancipation and acted as treasurer to the Egyptian Red Crescent in its initial years. Bourgeois and asymmetric, it is difficult to fit his character into one pattern of humanitarian aid; rather, Möller argued, his involvement merely highlights its entangled complexity. Patrice de Zogheb's work with the Egyptian Red Crescent, through which he attempted to promote the idea of the international Red Cross movement as a

cosmopolitan movement without politics, also pointed to a life as a cultural broker that was similarly difficult to categorise. In her conclusion, Möller suggested that a biographical approach offers an important method for overcoming the problem of fragmentary source materials. Biography has the potential to detect multiple layers of humanitarian engagement and the linguistic limits of humanitarian aid.

ENRICO DAL LAGO (NUI Galway) began the open discussion by reflecting on the issue of imperialism. If NGOs are agents of imperialism, do they obey the logic of the Cold War? The end of the Cold War paradigm also led to the end of critiques from the left like that posited by Loach. Have NGOs abandoned the logic of the Cold War? Is it the case that in the age of empire, the possibility existed for different identities to co-exist? Has nationalism broken up this co-existence? MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) replied that this story is not simply a Cold War one. The institutional legacies of imperialism are important for operations on the ground, and how aid gets to recipient communities is not to do with the Cold War. It is important to acknowledge the laziness of Loach's critique – for example, Loach would presumably like an organisation such as War on Want (left-wing, radical), yet on the ground War on Want was not too different from SCF. The story of how the humanitarian sector later adopted a rights-based agenda provides an additional dimension to this story. NGOs such as Oxfam like to tell a narrative of how they came to adopt rights as a natural progression of their work, Hilton argued, allowing their activities to be applied more generally. Yet, it also reflects the desire of NGOs to find a language to communicate their activities, while also engaging in the language of governmental donors.

EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) commented that SCF's discourse on Africa exhibited a shift in its approach as much as continuity. The organisation was more progressive in the 1930s, and we should be wary of taking quotes of missionary guests as statements of SCF policy. The Fund's more radical workers departed during the war, and there followed a reverse colonisation of SCF as decolonisation of empire took place. Anna Bocking-Welch has recently argued that the 1960s UN Freedom from Hunger Campaign was an outlet for imperial officials who had lost their role, while Tom Scott-Smith's work traces concepts of humanitarian relief organisation to military camps. MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) replied that the last flourishing of Jebb internationalism for SCF was its child protection conference. SCF became a less progressive organisation, with a laziness in its thinking.

BERTRAND TAITHE (University of Manchester) asked commented on the construction of expertise and how it is used by NGOs. Expertise in the 1940s comes from missionaries and colonial administrators, and we have to engage with this fact when studying the humanitarian sector.

WILLIAM MULLIGAN (University College Dublin) added that the recipient of humanitarian aid has to be identified. The recipient can also write themselves into the work of humanitarian organisations by manipulating ideals. It is also interesting, he argued, to think about how archives are used. Do we need to work on objects (the ambulance, the sack of food) as well as documents? ESTHER MÖLLER (IEG Mainz) noted the process of manipulating humanitarian aid for other purposes. Egyptians came to Geneva, and used it for commercial purposes and political relations as well as for humanitarianism. The role of women is also very interesting. Women were very active in the Egyptian Red Crescent, which was disturbing for an organisational leadership that reflected the patriarchal structures of Egyptian society.

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN (NUI Galway) asked how the imagined geographies of the Third World shape what organisations themselves do? How do organisations drive those same images of the

global South? Identity has to match the transition from colonial to post-colonial. ESTHER MÖLLER (IEG Mainz) noted that a Committee was created in 1948 to provide aid to Palestinians. Which leads to a question: how narrow is aid for Palestinian refugees? Does it exclude those from Jordan?

ELEANOR DAVEY (Overseas Development Institute) returned the discussion to the issue of institutionally driven histories. Does a focus on institutions exclude the possibility of individual aid workers acting as 'active resistance', trying to bring about change from within? MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) replied that SCF reports were very comprehensive, and SCF's public image meant that it did not attract a generation who wanted to shift world order but then got 'lost' in the archive record. EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) added that internationalists would leave and get involved in other campaigns. ELEANOR DAVEY (Overseas Development Institute) commented that historians are repeatedly attracted to these kinds of organisations, associating history with the institutional narrative. MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) agreed that a history of activists is necessary, but argued that in this regard SCF is not the organisation to be looking at.

BERTRAND TAITHE (University of Manchester) picked up on the very problematic nature of SCF, declaring that it did more harm than good in the past, which can be used to maintain a lack of scrutiny of the organisation. JOHN BORTON (Overseas Development Institute) noted that the timing of the first public showing of Ken Loach's film – it was aired in public soon after Justin Forsythe moving to SCF – is very significant, and suggests a potentially opportunistic burying of the past.

PLENARY 1: FAMINE IS NOT THE PROBLEM

CORMAC Ó GRÁDA (University College Dublin) began his plenary address by stating that popular understanding of famine depends on the images disseminated by the mass media and aid agencies. Journalists tend to struggle to distinguish between misery and famine, leading to 'famine hype' and the consistent exaggeration of famine. Quoting Alex de Waal, Ó Gráda argued that famine deaths are rarely, if ever, on the scale reported. To explore this idea further, Ó Gráda focussed his attention on three very recent famines. In 2002 the BBC warned that 10 million people faced starvation across four African countries, yet the actual death toll was miniscule – an increase of only 1 per cent above the normal rate. Three years later the story of famine in Niger, broken by Hilary Andersson (BBC) and Jan Egelund (UN), attracted significant international attention and a rapid response on the part of the humanitarian community. Subsequent analysis of the crisis, however, suggested that the famine was manufactured, with much of the blame apportioned to the UN and Médecins sans Frontières (leading the latter to reflect deeply on its own response mechanisms in this kind of crisis situation). Ó Gráda argued that what was described as 'famine' in Niger was not actually famine in practice – rather, we need to distinguish famine from more normal, everyday poverty and destitution. His third example – claims made in 2011 that 750,000 people could die in Somalia within months – further underlined the difficulties of estimating excess mortality. The UN criteria for declaring famine (20%+ of population on <2,100kcals daily) are bettered by Somalia in non-crisis situations (estimated 1,734kcals per capita daily food consumption in 2001), while Ó Gráda argued that academic research into mortality rates was undermined by many gaps and flaws.

Ó Gráda then turned his attention to three further elements of the famine narrative. First, he argued that recent famines are small by historical standards. Infanticide, voluntary enslavement, desertion, cannibalism – all associated with the classic biblical famine – are extremely rare. Second, he spoke about the question of 'hidden famines'. The famine in North Korea in the 1990s, for example, remains poorly documented and mysterious. Excess mortality is now one

tenth of that claimed at the outset, not by the media or NGOs, but by academics. The latter, Ó Gráda argued, wanted to use these original numbers to campaign for regime change – abusing the demography and study of famine to advance political objectives. Yet the contemporary signs on malnutrition (which he distinguished from famine) are positive. Famine is no longer a serious problem to organise around, while malnutrition is – hence their ready conflation in some quarters. We can be fairly confident, he argued, that famine will not be a major problem in peacetime over the next 10 years – though global warming, peak oil, and other issues may alter that narrative. Finally, Ó Gráda turned to the relationship between NGOs and famine. Several NGOs owe their origins to famine: ad-hoc organisations began informally, not intended to last, and later redefined themselves as something different and more permanent. Their subsequent relationship to famine highlights an important dimension of non-state action. The majority of NGOs promote disaster hype (such as in Niger, 2005), yet there is disconnect between disasters and bureaucracy. Agencies become bureaucracies that focus on development aid, blurring the hunger/famine distinction. The public are much more willing to donate for emergencies, while development aid becomes dependent upon state-aid, effectively semi-nationalised. This tension was embodied in the history of Concern in the 1990s, and the debate between famine vs. development. All of this raises some serious dilemmas, Ó Gráda concluded. Idealism has been lost in the move from voluntarism to paying for foreign aid through taxes. A new emphasis on smart relief can also imply a distinction between deserving and undeserving poor, while NGO aid can be used to aid or abet dictatorships, such as in Ethiopia in the 1980s.

ANDREW JONES (University of Birmingham) opened the question and answers session by commenting on the shifting power of famine to mobilise over time. As recently as the 1960s, both the British government and British NGOs shared the view that famines struggled to influence the public when compared to natural disasters, as they were slow to occur and 'preventable'. This myth ended with Ethiopia and the Sahel in the 1970s. CORMAC Ó GRÁDA (University College Dublin) responded by describing the Irish Famine as the 'first globalised famine', generating considerable publicity. But if famines last, then donor fatigue will emerge as a problem. Since the nineteenth century, famines have moved popular compassion. But now, there are no more famines.

ESTHER MÖLLER (IEG Mainz) asked if Ó Gráda could comment on the state perspective of famines? CORMAC Ó GRÁDA (University College Dublin) replied that in Niger, the government denied famine as an attempt to attack the regime. In Somalia, the President called for assistance, then accused the NGOs of claiming famine falsely.

CIARA LOUGHNEY (Christian Aid Ireland) commented that it is true that not many NGOs are solely humanitarian now, although this is not necessarily cynical; we cannot keep fighting fires forever, and have to turn to addressing the causes of poverty. The problem for us as aid workers, she argued, is that if the media desire emergencies, how do we raise funds? Disaster prevention is not an attractive cause for fundraising. It is perhaps unfair to claim that NGOs 'want' famines. CORMAC Ó GRÁDA (University College Dublin) replied that famines are 'easy', and development is not – it is difficult to prove to people that spending development aid in Malawi has a tangible effect. NGOs have ways to do this – engaging in micro-projects, targeting villages and people – but when you ask for development funds, it is difficult to show results.

BERTRAND TAITHE (University of Manchester) observed that the collapse of the AIDS death rate is linked to a cheapening of medical product. This is problematic, because cash is required to fund permanent treatment; we still have a system where money is coming from without to feed into situation. He then turned to the Niger crisis in 2005, which, he argued,

emerged within MSF partially because of the depiction of emergency centres, and the difficulty in translating the acute local context into the global. Children were not dying of famine, but they were still dying regardless. How does an NGO acquire the mechanisms to translate the local into a more rigorous diagnostic? CORMAC Ó GRÁDA (University College Dublin) replied that there is a reduction in the number of people at risk. There is a preventive aspect to social learning – this is partially down to NGOs, but it is also due to public health policies within nations.

PANEL 3

JOHN BORTON (Overseas Development Institute) began his discussion on *'Improving the use of humanitarian history by the humanitarian sector'* by suggesting three ways in which greater knowledge of history could be of benefit to the humanitarian sector: (a) as part of the necessary context analysis of a particular operational area; (b) as an aid to thinking out the response to current operational challenges; and (c) as an aid to strategic change processes and understanding the sector's role within different geo-political contexts. He then moved on to discuss the main obstacles to the greater use of historical knowledge by the sector. Limited access to materials was a key problem. Not only is historical research on humanitarianism spread across a wide range of journals, agency personnel often do not have access to those materials (not least because of the high subscription costs of academic journals) and are therefore not exposed to new research. A further obstacle was created by prevalent attitudes within the sector towards the relevance (or irrelevance) of history. The demand for rapid, flexible responses in a difficult funding environment, and with high turnover of staff, mean that agencies tend to privilege the present and to question the relevance of events that took place more than ten years ago.

How might these obstacles be overcome? First, Borton argued, by persuading the leadership and personnel of humanitarian agencies of the potential benefits of history. Highlighting instances where humanitarian workers have learnt for themselves the value of history could be useful. So too might the process of increasing their exposure to historical analysis – by publishing in journals, magazines and websites like *Disasters*, *Humanitarian Practice Network*, and *Reliefweb*, that are used regularly by NGO personnel. Clarity over historical and current place names and locations is also important, while detailed case studies that show an overlap between historical cases and contemporary operations, and which provide details of past operational practice and issues of current concern to agencies, would also be very useful. Borton mentioned the ALNAP Evaluative Reports Database as a rich resource for historians studying humanitarian programmes undertaken in the last two decades. He concluded by discussing the establishment of the http://www.humanitarianhistory.org website, a joint initiative of the ODI and the University of Manchester, which aims to make the history of the humanitarian sector more easily accessible to humanitarian workers and researchers and to facilitate and support the work of those researching the history of the humanitarian sector.

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN (NUI Galway) opened his paper, *'Humanitarian encounters: the legacy of Biafra for our understanding of the global South'*, by arguing that the Biafran humanitarian crisis holds a critical place in the history of NGOs. He described the NGO response to the crisis in terms of four themes – the rise of NGO humanitarianism, post-imperialism, paternalism, and Western internationalism – looking in detail at the experience of the crisis in Britain and Ireland. Both states featured prominently in the relief effort, both had different attitudes to empire and different vested interests in Biafra, and both played a contrasting role in shaping national identities. Yet the significance of these case studies lay not in their contrasting backgrounds, O'Sullivan argued, but in the similarities that emerged between British and Irish popular

reactions to Biafra, such as the link between missionary values and post-colonial benevolence, and in the dominance of humanitarianism in a very Western form.

There is little new in the claim that Biafra marked the West's first real experience of post-colonial crisis on a massive scale, or that it triggered widespread opportunities for NGOs. Yet, O'Sullivan argued, we need to unpick the nature of that response to better understand the depth of its impact in the longer term. He documented the 'all-consuming' nature of the relief efforts and argued that the image they afforded to NGOs and to a particular vision of Africa was vital in creating an imagined geography of the Third World that has proven particularly difficult for the humanitarian sector to overcome. Imperial continuities were important in that narrative – NGOs like SCF helped to re-package the colonial service impulse to suit a shifting political context, while the relief efforts benefited considerably from a strong Christian missionary presence on the ground. These brought with them a pseudo-imperial sensibility that found ready acceptance among the public. This is not to argue that NGOs, volunteers and publics were taking a consciously superior stance, O'Sullivan stated, but paternalism was clearly a significant force, and we have to recognise this. Africa Concern's work in Biafra was described as a crusade, with obvious implications. In the minds of the watching publics in Britain and Ireland, he concluded, Biafra became 'Africa' – a place to be saved by NGOs and experts. It did not matter that the anti-colonialism used to justify Irish involvement contrasted with British post-imperial benevolence: both British and Irish NGOs communicated in the language of Western internationalism and projected Western conceptions of humanitarianism on to the Third World. But, O'Sullivan asked, how do we unpick these complex motivations for humanitarianism?

DANIEL MAUL (Justus-Liebeg-Universität Giessen) opened the discussion by commenting on the relationship between the Biafran crisis and national humanitarian identities. In Germany Biafra was a moment of alternative nation-building, a 'Christian Vietnam'. In the student movement, the Left rallied behind Vietnam, while Christian students rallied behind Biafra. KEVIN O'SULLIVAN (NUI Galway) replied that while the Irish government had little interest in supporting Biafra, the public was completely different – and the Holy Ghost Fathers were a major part in making that so. They lived and moved with the Biafrans and identified closely with them. Accusations of gun-running helped create a mystique around Biafra, a small state being suppressed by a larger neighbours. NGOs also depoliticised these narratives by ignoring the manipulation of aid, in the Irish case built the response primarily around the missionary connection.

MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) commented on the many insights of Borton's paper, and how it related to the overall themes of the network in looking at ways history can help the sector. O'Sullivan has suggested one more: the language of humanitarianism, which is to be the focus of the next workshop. There is also an interesting question of how NGOs can affect politics. Hilton has tried to track the political structure of NGOs, and struggled to find systematic continuities. We can find varied examples of speaking out, but not necessarily a pattern to draw upon for the future. Many of the questions Borton asks are also about benefitting individual NGOs. The questions the sector might ask of history are the same. The question 'are too many NGOs?' is interesting. If it is a question of operational efficiency, then the answer is yes. If it is a question about the sector's overall impact, then no, because more NGOs equates to more demonstrable public opinion. History is not answering these questions, but opening them up. JOHN BORTON (Overseas Development Institute) responded that the notion of 'too many NGOs' is from an operational perspective. Several hundred NGOs leads to enormous levels of duplication. It also raises questions about what NGOs are doing, what proportion of the population they are reaching, and whether we can get historical case language

into aid worker discourse. To be looking more at practical issues will dramatically increase engagement.

CIARA LOUGHNEY (Christian Aid Ireland) asked if there are different methods of implementation by NGOs? Much of the discussion is centred on Africa, but is the post-colonial argument same across different parts of the world? KEVIN O'SULLIVAN (NUI Galway) replied that his work has focussed on internal discourses and the multiple tensions within organisations, but referred the question of imperial hierarchies to EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol), who commented on the need to acknowledge that famine can shape the ways that we look at things, rather than mapping empire on to famine. Famine creates hierarchies, and underscores them depending on the context. We need to tie down what we mean by imperialism: is it geography, or is it a mindset?

ELEANOR DAVEY (Overseas Development Institute) questioned O'Sullivan's use of the term 'global South'. Is it an explicit use of a particular imagined geography? KEVIN O'SULLIVAN (NUI Galway) replied that 'global South' is the contemporary term, but that 'Third World' is the term that was used in the case of Biafra, with its attendant connotations for the post-colonial context of the late 1960s. TOM ARNOLD (Concern) added that the term 'global South' was not in currency until the 1970s. JOHN BORTON (Overseas Development Institute) noted that Biafra had a very formative effect on how the Third World is perceived. The Bangladesh crisis in the early 1970s was also very significant.

PLENARY 2: MODERN IRISH HUMANITARIANISM IN ACTION: A FIFTY-YEAR PERSPECTIVE

Drawing on his experience as CEO of Concern, Ireland's largest humanitarian NGO, between 2001 and 2013, TOM ARNOLD (Chair of the Irish Constitutional Convention) addressed the relationship between national and international humanitarianism by asking: is there a distinct 'Irish humanitarianism'? He began by tracing the historical background of his subject – from the birth of the Irish missionary tradition in the sixth century to Irish involvement in peacekeeping at the UN – and by outlining a number of key Irish humanitarian actors: the government, the Defence Forces, the Irish Red Cross, and NGOs. The milestones in the international history of humanitarianism, he argued, can be divided into two phases: pre-1951 (the Battle of Solferino; the Geneva Conventions; the formation of SCF) and post-1951 (the Refugee Convention; the creation of Médecins sans Frontières; the addition of further protocols to the Geneva conventions; successive crises in Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Darfur, Haiti and Pakistan; the end of the Cold War; and the creation of a variety of international institutions such as UN DHA and ECHO).

Turning back to the question of Irish humanitarianism, Arnold sketched an outline history of Concern and its humanitarian interventions. From its origins in the Biafran humanitarian crisis in the late 1960s, he explained, Concern has worked to the first four ICRC principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. The organisation worked across a range of territories, from countries in conflict to countries with multi-party democracies, employing a range of different methods, depending on the realities of the context. Its modus operandi has changed over the decades – from professional Irish staff and volunteers in the 1960s and 1970s, to capacity building and partnership in the 1980s and 1990s, to a greater localisation of management allied to formal partnerships with local actors in the 2000s – and in recent years its focus has shifted to 'poor vulnerable' countries. Arnold commented on some of the issues that shaped that approach since the 2000s, noting in particular the increasing pressure on humanitarian space in the field (for example, in Afghanistan and Iraq), which had been constrained by an increased politicisation of aid, the new War on Terror-inspired international

security agenda, and a blurring of the distinctions between military and aid workers (with the attendant security issues that that entailed). In the same period, Concern also faced one of the biggest moral dilemmas of its lifetime: in Zimbabwe, where it opted to continue its operations, despite the possibility of sustaining the Mugabe regime.

Arnold concluded by asking whether or not we can discern a distinctly 'Irish' humanitarianism? There is, he argued, and it is influenced by long-standing historical factors that make it an integral part of Irish foreign policy – arguably more so than for other countries. A variety of historical factors mean that the Irish pubic is supportive of humanitarian action and contributes generously to Irish NGOs. Yet, he argued, the historical analysis of Irish humanitarian operations leaves much to be desired – and should be improved.

The discussion opened with a question from ESTHER MÖLLER (IEG Mainz), who asked if Arnold could elaborate more on the shift in Concern's approach to working with local agencies, and the difficulties this creates. TOM ARNOLD responded that moving from a directly operational approach (staff on the ground) to supporting local organisations (local staff in a local context) was a general shift that affected the whole sector from the 1970s onwards. In Bangladesh, for example, Concern operates differently, and now identifies and supports local organisations. In contexts such as Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, however, local capacities are heavily reduced, and NGOs must bring in their own capacity.

ESTHER MÖLLER (IEG Mainz) followed up with an additional question, asking Arnold if he could elaborate on the ongoing humanitarian interventions in Syria. TOM ARNOLD responded that Concern had decided to become operational in the region, working in a neighbouring state and dealing with the consequences of the crisis. Agencies in these countries, he argued, required detailed knowledge of the history and politics of the region.

ELEANOR DAVEY (Overseas Development Institute) remarked on the discrepancy between attacks on expatriate workers and local staff. Has the emphasis on local capacity among the humanitarian community, she asked, transferred risk to local staff? TOM ARNOLD replied that the debate is more a question of whether the UN has transferred risk on to the NGO sector. We need to try and provide similar standards of care for international and local staff, he argued. The principle of care and investment in staff security must be ensured.

FINAL ROUNDTABLE: SOURCES AND USES OF HUMANITARIAN HISTORY

For the final roundtable session, several workshop participants were asked to add their reflections on the workshop and the general theme of 'sources and uses of humanitarian history'. CIARA LOUGHNEY (Christian Aid Ireland) opened the contributions by commenting that Borton's earlier depiction of humanitarian workers being unaware of available resources is correct. In the emphasis on making humanitarian history practical, a distinction has to be made between working in headquarters and working in the field. Working in the field, she argued, leaves little time for reflection. Humanitarian practitioners are solution-based, and we would hope that we could draw solutions from our own history. To be solution-oriented would be helpful, since reflection is not always practical. What added value can an academic perspective bring, she asked? Turning to the evaluation approach, she argued that while it is useful to have a shared language – and one that is deeply embedded in the humanitarian sector – if academics were to also look through an evaluation lens, it would raise the question of added value. What additional perspective do they bring? Adding to this discussion, Loughney raised a number of questions for the workshop to reflect on: is the identity of organisations internally or externally defined? Most agencies retain capacity for local action, but are they being pragmatic or

ideological? If the partnership approach is the correct one, she argued, the sector requires a framework to support this.

CORMAC Ó GRÁDA (University College Dublin) began his contribution by reflecting on the idea of there being too many NGOs. From an economic perspective, we could be inclined to argue that the more, the better – more competition is good for the consumer. Yet proliferation also leads to confusion, competition and duplication. Ó Gráda then posed an additional question about the life cycle of NGOs, some of which are set up for ad-hoc reasons, then become permanent later. Can we document the life cycle of an NGO? To what extent do NGOs fail because of mismanagement or corruption? What is it that drives NGOs as institutions? Is there a compulsion to become bigger and bigger? Is the process of expanding into territories and staying permanently part of the psyche of NGOs? It is encouraging, he remarked, to hear NGOs admit to mistakes and what they have learnt – not just their moral dilemmas, but decision-making which proved costly and ineffective. Ó Gráda turned finally to the NGO sector's heavy reliance on the media, which can lead to misrepresentation such as famine hype. Advertising agencies have been responsible for the feminisation of famine, for example, yet in practice males are actually more likely to die. In Ireland, the memory of famine is invented – memory does not reach back far in time, and we tend to think things are more ancient than they really are.

MAŁGORZATA MAZUREK (Columbia University) noted that humanitarianism is primarily about the West, a white imaginary perception, and that humanitarianism as history should be understood as a practice/discourse relationship, with people defined in very specific roles. Recipients often require local partners, and we need to unpack the notion of recipients much more. She then turned to a number of pressing issues for historians of humanitarianism. We need to historicise humanitarianism, she argued, its openings, and the time-specific nature of a particular humanitarian discourse. We also need to explore further the relationship of non-state humanitarianism to the state, from the age of nation-building to the age of deregulation and dismantling of the state, or operating in failed states. The importance of experts and expertise requires scrutiny, as does the notion of famine and its misrepresentation. Mazurek added that humanitarianism is a symbolic universe, a world of measurement and coding, in which the language of humanitarianism plays an important role. There is a large historiography on the role of experts, and a tension between abstractions that can be overwhelming for humanitarian practitioners. She also reflected on the tension between historians who reflect on concepts and semantics, and the lived experience that can be academically digested. Is non-state humanitarianism a gap year, a job, or a life risk activity? And what is connected to these languages? Activities have to be coded and represented to donors and publics elsewhere.

TOM ARNOLD added to the discussion by arguing that if we take a fifty-year perspective in any sector, we will find some actors who succeeded and grew, and some who failed and died out. But what are the factors behind this? It is clear, he argued, that successful NGOs adapt effectively to changing operating environments. Arnold then turned to the question of state and non-state action, and argued that humanitarianism involves a combination of both. For example, when the World Food Programme gets food into a country, this food is then distributed by NGOs. He concluded by arguing that there is a need to go beyond these practical partnerships to policy framework issues.

JOHN BORTON (Overseas Development Institute) began the open discussion by picking up on Ó Gráda's comment about economics and competition between NGOs. Spending power lies with the consumer, he argued, yet in the humanitarian context funding comes from above, and the beneficiary has little power or say in the transaction. It is striking how in Rwanda, it was

highly arbitrary if the individual received decent care or not. This talk of competition, he commented, requires further conceptualisation.

WILLIAM MULLIGAN (University College Dublin) reflected on the question of how we use histories of non-state humanitarianism. Historians are under pressure to become relevant, and are being pushed to produce more usable pasts. In order to meet that demand, he argued, we need to better understand the starting point for these consumers of history. Production of history for professional groups will lead to very specific forms of history.

MARIA FRAMKE (ETH Zurich) commented that the history of humanitarianism is the history of a Western idea, with significant continuity from the late nineteenth to twentieth century. In India, for example, there was a natural drive to use Western methods. We require more work, she argued, to account for non-Western perspectives. Responding to this comment, MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) added that the non-Western perspective is an important theme that will be re-visited in later workshops.

EMILY BAUGHAN (University of Bristol) observed that we are trying to do two things in these workshops: talking about a historical agenda, and asking historical questions. Perhaps we need to begin with historically grounded work, and then attempt to distil and communicate these to contemporary issues. MATTHEW HILTON (University of Birmingham) replied that co-production does not take place at any one stage. It is an ongoing conversation at all levels – that conversation has to continue, and we need to maintain the dialogue.

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN (NUI Galway) brought the proceedings to a close by commenting that the first two workshops in the network have had wide-ranging agendas – a reflection of the 'newness' of this field, and our efforts to capture a broad spectrum of research. The crystallisation of a theme and future direction for the network will provide a clearer sense of our ambitions going forward. We have taken a very good photograph of what is out there, he remarked, but now we need to specialise.

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

Introduction
Matthew Hilton (University of Birmingham)
Kevin O'Sullivan (NUI Galway)

Panel 1
Norbert Götz (Södertörn University)
British voluntary aid to Sweden, 1808-09: Asymmetry in civil society development and its implications for archival preservation

Emily Baughan (University of Bristol)
The Save the Children Movement and 'welfare states' in Europe, 1919-1940

Maria Framke (ETH Zurich)
Colonial humanitarianism: debates and activities in India during the 1930s

Chair: Enrico Dal Lago (NUI Galway)

Panel 2
Matthew Hilton (University of Birmingham)

Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film: humanitarianism, paternalism and imperialism in twentieth-century Britain

Esther Möller (Leibniz Institute of European History, Mainz)
Non-state humanitarian aid in Egypt in the twentieth century: an entangled history

Chair: Bertrand Taithe (University of Manchester)

Plenary 1
Cormac Ó Gráda (University College Dublin)
Famine is not the problem

Panel 3
John Borton (ODI)
Improving the use of humanitarian history by the humanitarian sector

Kevin O'Sullivan (NUI Galway)
Humanitarian encounters: the legacy of Biafra for our understanding of the global South

Chair: John Morrissey (NUI Galway)

Plenary 2
Tom Arnold (Chair of the Irish Constitutional Convention & former CEO of Concern)
Modern Irish humanitarianism in action: A 50-year perspective

Roundtable: Sources and uses of humanitarian history
Tom Arnold (Chair of the Irish Constitutional Convention & former CEO of Concern)
Ciara Loughney (Christian Aid)
Małgorzata Mazurek (Columbia University)
Cormac Ó Gráda (University College Dublin)

Chair: Matthew Hilton (University of Birmingham)

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