

Gender & Humanitarianism: (Dis-)Empowering Women and Men in the Twentieth Century

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While there is currently a lot of research on the history of Humanitarianism, its relationship with the analytical category of gender still lacks systematic exploration. The international conference „Gender & Humanitarianism: (Dis-)Empowering Women and Men in the Twentieth Century“, which was funded by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation and held at the Leibniz Institute of European History (Mainz), was organized with the aim of filling this gap in research. It explored how gender shaped and was shaped by humanitarian discourses and practices in the period between the First World War and the end of the Cold War. The conference papers discussed this relationship by emphasizing historiographical issues relating to processes of inclusion and exclusion, adopting multiple transnational perspectives. Integrating humanitarian organizations and actors from across the whole globe, the papers presented had multiple geographical focuses on the Middle East, on India, on Western Europe, as well as on Central and South America.

After a brief introduction to the topic by JOHANNES PAULMANN (Mainz), KATHARINA STORNIG (Giessen) and ESTHER MÖLLER (Mainz), the first panel, dealing with masculinities and femininities in humanitarian discourse and practice, started with two papers discussing the roles of women as relief workers in moments of historical crisis. Focusing on the context of the Armenian genocide and the displacements of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, INGER MARIE OKKENHAUG (Volda) inquired into the interaction between Scandinavian female health care professionals of the Danish and Norwegian *Women's Mission Organization*, on the

one hand, and female Armenian refugees and relief workers, on the other, between 1925 and 1935 in what is today Lebanon and Syria. She highlighted different forms of cooperation involving close connections and interactions between Armenian and Scandinavian women, while especially stressing the role of religion in the encounter between Lutherans and Armenians. Okkenhaug also discussed the relief workers' perception of their roles as women and their interaction with male refugees or co-workers.

MARIA LIDOLA (Konstanz) concentrated on official discourses of gender related to humanitarian actors in the case of Cuban medical missions in the second half of the twentieth century. Lidola showed how the increasing number of female physicians within Cuban international medical missions since the early 1960s was used as a politically and ideologically charged argument on the part of the Cuban socialist government. She stressed the linkage between humanitarian practice and political ideologies, which were deeply gendered, because women's supposed equal access to profession was used as evidence for their equal standing in Cuban society. At the same time she argued that, by contrast, the high quota of women in the Cuban medical profession abroad played a part in contributing to undermining the significance of Cuban medical aid in general in Western discourses.

Subsequent presentations, meanwhile, investigated the role of masculinity in the context of humanitarian aid. BERTRAND TAITHE (Manchester) focused on humanitarian narratives on the basis of biographical sources, pointing out changing and controversial norms of masculinity, which were closely related to perceptions of heroic manhood. By taking a closer look at biographies of humanitarian workers, Taithe was able to explore common points and differences in their presentation of masculinity throughout the twentieth century. Taking a different perspective, KERRIE HOLLOWAY (London) argued that male humanitarians have been marginalized in humanitarian history. She exemplified this by showing hitherto unrecognized male relief workers in the history of the Spanish Civil War. Holloway suggested that strict conventions and the perpetuation of traditional gen-

der narratives directed women into spheres of providing relief, which contradicted ideas of masculinity. As a result, male humanitarian workers were, according to Holloway, frequently absent from aid narratives.

The second panel analyzed the role of gender in conjunction with the politics of humanitarianism, mainly in form of women's rights discourses and in connection with the construction of nationalisms and nationalist politics. By focusing on links between nationalism, the women's movement and humanitarianism, the first presenter CEREN AYGUEL (Istanbul / Mainz) examined discourses on women's relief activities in the *Ottoman Red Crescent Delegation of Women* in the Ottoman State during World War One. In developing her argument, she referred to interpretations of women's activities by politicians as indicators of patriotism and modernization. Ayguel connected such instrumentalization to women's engagement in humanitarian activism as a process of raising consciousness, solidarity, attempting to influence society and as an act of social integration. The paper by FRANCESCA PIANA (Binghamton) shifted the focus to another geographic, social and political context, in shedding light on the all-women's actors of the medical organization *American Women's Hospital* and their engagement in Europe. By reference to the transnational careers of female doctors and nurses Piana considered medical work in the interwar period as a gendered practice strongly connected with women's right discourses, rather than the rights of the beneficiaries of aid. She thus strengthened the entanglement of humanitarian movements with processes of professionalization and feminism. The third paper in this panel by MARIA FRAMKE (Rostock) examined the activities of non-state relief groups in India, which aided suffering people after the partition of British India in 1947. By analyzing the aims and strategies of the *All-India Women's Conference* and two Hindu nationalist organizations (the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* and the *Hindu Mahasabha*), Framke explored ideas of femininity and masculinity in the humanitarian context from the perspective of both humanitarian workers and beneficiaries. She thereby pointed to the emergence of hierar-

chies of religion, ethnicity and race in humanitarian activities. Based on a case study of the *First Women's Welfare Association in Jeddah*, NORA DERBAL (Berlin) discussed changes in the self-perception of female welfare associations in Saudi Arabia since their origins in the 1960s. Derbal argued that in the founding years the associations assumed obligations for the society in educating women, nursing or working for families in a perceived context of 'development' and 'national advance', that went hand in hand with creating a space for women outside the home. After a shift in ideals of femininity in the 1980s and early 1990s women's charity work was framed in far more religious terms. Interestingly, feminist ideas or discourses on women's rights did not play a role in Saudi women's welfare associations, contrasting with the other institutions explored in the previous presentations.

The third panel turned its attentions to the gendered body and in particular examined humanitarian concerns and action with regard to sexual violence. Concentrating on *Peace Corps* missions to Bolivia in the 1960s, JADWIGA PIEPER MOONEY (Tucson) engaged with questions relating to gendered and racialized constructions of both relief workers and beneficiaries, while also discussing the reproduced gender hierarchies that followed from this. With the example of a media-initiated debate about alleged secret forced sterilizations of indigenous women, Pieper Mooney showed how human reproductive choices as a form of population control were interpreted as instruments of power in decision-making that was gendered male and ascribed to US-American volunteers. The subsequent lively discussion focused on the interaction between the discourse employed by the historical actors about the alleged sterilization campaigns and the political dimensions of organized humanitarian aid. In turn, the next speaker SONJA DOLINSEK (Erfurt) discussed the shifting constructions of victimhood in discourses on 'human trafficking' for the purposes of prostitution between the 1960s and 1980s. Outlining the gendered and sexualized dimension of discourses of 'trafficking' by NGOs, the United Nations and governments in France, Germany, the USA and UK, Dolinsek added race and class as

highly relevant analytical categories, regulating female bodies in context of migration and prostitution. With regard to the humanitarian discourse, she also referred to media debates about the question of who had to be rescued by humanitarian initiatives and why.

Finally, the fourth panel proposed a gendered analysis of humanitarian work for children. BETH BARON (New York) provided insight into the array of public healthcare actors and their practices towards children during the crisis in infant mortality in interwar Egypt. Baron offered an analysis of the interweaving networks and practices of transnational medical missionaries, local activists, and colonial state officials, addressing in particular the role of women in educating girls, shaping healthcare and founding hospitals and mother-child clinics. In doing so, she demonstrated the link between healing and faith practices while hygiene was promoted as a medical strategy and transferring cleanliness as a symbol of Christianity. The panel closed with a presentation by NAZAN MAK-SUDYAN (Berlin), who explored the situation of post-genocide Armenian boys and girls in Istanbul's orphanages between 1919 and 1922. She inquired into the Armenian genocide's consequences for children not only through the lens of nationalist and ethnic humanitarian discourses but also in foregrounding the perspective of orphans and their strategies to survive in the face of the refugee crisis in Istanbul. Makyudyan thus initiated a discussion about the role of children as passive victims in historiographical studies. It would be an exciting task to expand this gender perspective on child-centered humanitarian activism even further by analyzing the ways in which gender shaped policies, practices and imaginations with regard to the young beneficiaries of aid and their perception as boys and girls in need.

The concluding discussion of the conference opened with remarks by JOHN C. WOOD (Mainz) who identified different emphases on the terms gender and humanitarianism in the papers presented. Using gender as a category for analyzing female and male relief workers' practices opened up a variety of ways for describing self-understanding and normative constituents of humanitarian

work. Gender also proves to be fundamental for the analysis of power relations and the constitution of hierarchies within the field of humanitarianism, which ranged from the work of physicians and missionaries to the calls for solidarity or human rights.

Taken together, the presentations showed how gender was embedded in other religious, political and national ideologies, while also intersecting with categories of class and race. In addition, they pointed to the crucial role of violence as a trigger for auxiliary processes, but also as a potential component of the relief work itself. Finally, the transnational dimension was necessary in order to emphasize the dynamics of the relations between locally situated people and those coming from 'outside' to influence this local context. Therefore, the conference papers demonstrated links to approaches in global history, thus enriching current debates about creating and crossing boundaries with emphasis on gender. Participants also emphasized the importance of relying on studies that have already been done by gender historians for pursuing interconnections between gender and humanitarianism. Beside the fact that a broad range of sources, including mass media, ego-documents and archival documents, was taken into consideration by the participants, the conference was full of rich source-critical discussions about the potential in historiographical approaches to humanitarian work.

Accentuating gender as a category in the historical study of humanitarianism and discussing the relations and consequences of various gendered practices of humanity in different geographical, social and political contexts, the conference contributed multiple perspectives to current debates on humanitarian activism and the circulation and development of its policy models. It could show that for exploring the history of transnational humanitarianism not only cultural and racial asymmetries play an important role but also the consideration of ideas, practices and interactions related to gender differences.

Conference overview:

Esther Möller (Mainz), Johannes Paulmann (Mainz), Katharina Stornig (Giessen): Introduction

I. Masculinities and Femininities in Humanitarian Discourse and Practice

Chair: Ulrike Weckel (Giessen)

Inger Marie Okkenhaug (Volda): Gender and Humanitarian Practices after World War I: Female Scandinavian Relief Workers and Armenian Women Refugees in Lebanon and Syria

Maria Lidola (Konstanz): Gender and the Formation of Humanitarian Discourse in the Global South: The Specific Case of Cuban Medical Missions

Bertrand Taithe (Manchester): Masculine Character and Heroics in Humanitarian Aid: A Long Perspective

Kerrie Holloway (London): Where are all the Men in Humanitarian History? A Re-assessment of Field Workers during the Spanish Civil War

II. Gender and the Politics of Humanitarianism

Chair: Ulrike Lindner (Cologne)

Ceren Ayguel (Istanbul/Mainz): The Interplay between Ottoman Red Crescent, Women's Movement and Nationalism in the Ottoman State during World War One

Francesca Piana (Binghamton): The Struggle for Rights. The American Women's Hospitals in the Interwar Period

Maria Framke (Rostock): The Politics of Gender and Community: Non-Governmental Relief Organizations in Postcolonial India: Redrawing the Boundaries of Gender in Terms of Femininity and Masculinity?

Nora Derbal (Berlin): Humanitarian Service in the Name of Social Development: Women's Welfare Associations in Saudi Arabia

III. Gendered Bodies, Sexual Violence and Humanitarian Responses

Chair: Manfred Sing (Mainz)

Jadwiga Pieper Mooney (Tucson): Asymmetries of Care: Power, Populations, and Peace Corps Projects in Bolivia

Sonja Dolinsek (Erfurt): From „White Slavery“ to „Sexual Slavery“: Framing Women's Sexual Labour in Transnational Migrations

from the 1960s to the 1980s

IV. Gendering Humanitarian Work for Children

Chair: John Wood (Mainz)

Beth Baron (New York): Medical Missionaries, Gendered Bodies, and Infant Mortality in Interwar Egypt

Nazan Maksudyan (Berlin): The Orphan Nation: Armenian Children in Istanbul (1919–1922)

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