



The Red Cross Movement, Voluntary Organisations and Reconstruction in Western Europe in the 20th century

*This one-day symposium will be held at the Centre d'Histoire
de Sciences Po (Paris, France) on Friday 12 June 2020*

Historical research on voluntary or non-government organisations and their contribution to the reconstruction of states, communities and humanitarian assistance to civilian populations following conflicts, epidemics and disasters through the twentieth century has generally focused on non-Western European countries. The historiography suggests that it is mostly in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa that natural or man-made disasters have occurred, and that these places have been the focus for humanitarian assistance. The major geographical spheres of interest for Red Cross societies and non-government organisations to provide assistance to populations in times of severe crises do not generally include Western Europe, except for World War II. Rather, the humanitarian enterprise is viewed through the binary of the Global North/Global South, those who save and those who are saved.

This symposium intends to explore the ways in which non-government organisations have contributed to the reconstruction, and care for populations, in Western European countries such as France, the UK, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. It seeks to investigate how the Red Cross movement - the League of Red Cross Societies/International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent, the International Committee of Red Cross and individual national societies - alongside other voluntary organisations such as the Rockefeller Foundation, Save the Children and a range of other international and local non-government bodies, have contributed to reconstruction in these countries at both national and local levels following times of crises such as wars, civilian upheavals and natural disasters.

Here, reconstruction is not understood in its narrow and literal sense of the rebuilding of infrastructure, or the return to a previous state of being. Rather, we understand reconstruction as a series of complex social, economic, political, cultural and demographic processes that alter the status quo through their transformative nature, including immediate post-war assistance to populations. As Sultan Barakat (2005) has explained, reconstruction is “a range of holistic activities in an integrated process designed not only to reactivate economic and social development but at the same time to create a peaceful environment that will prevent relapse into violence”, or chaos. The focus of this symposium, therefore, is to survey the role, influence and agency of not-for-profit and non-governmental organisations and civil society in times of reconstruction.

Questions to consider include but are not limited to:

- ▶ What is the role of such non-for-profit organisations in states traditionally understood as strong, stable and self-sufficient?
- ▶ How have those states relied on civil society to assist the population where state services could not?
- ▶ What was the role of Western European voluntary organisations in helping these global powers?
- ▶ How have voluntary organisations assisted vulnerable populations immediately after conflicts or major crises?
- ▶ How have voluntary organisations been able to create institutional resilience in times of crises?
- ▶ What was the relationship between governments and non-government organisations within and between the processes of reconstruction?
- ▶ What role did individuals play in navigating the world of reconstruction?

Please submit a 300-word abstract and a short biography by 21 September 2019 to humanitarianreconstruction@gmail.com. A few small travel grants will be available for PhD candidates and Early Career Researchers. Should you wish to apply for funding, please attach a budget to your application and a short rationale for the funding request. Please note that this symposium is focused toward the publication of new research.

Organising Committee

Dr. Romain Fathi, Flinders University / Sciences Po

Prof. Melanie Oppenheimer, Flinders University

Prof. Guillaume Piketty, Centre d'Histoire de Sciences Po

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