



The Changing Nature of Participation and Solidarity: Voluntary Action, Volunteering, and NGOs in Contemporary History. Nicole Kramer, Historisches Seminar, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt; Christine G. Krüger, Historisches Institut, Universität Gießen / SFB/TRR 138 "Dynamiken der Sicherheit", 10.09.2015—11.09.2015.

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The Changing Nature of Participation and Solidarity: Voluntary Action, Volunteering, and NGOs in Contemporary History

While the history of voluntary action and charities has long been an established field in Britain, little attention to volunteering has been paid so far by German historians. To analyse these differences and to discuss the changing nature of voluntary action since the mid-20th century and the changing interaction of volunteering and the welfare state, Nicole Kramer (Frankfurt am Main) and Christine G. Krüger (Gießen) brought together scholars from English and German speaking countries for a critical inventory of approaches to voluntary action history. See workshop announcement: *The Changing Nature of Participation and Solidarity: Voluntary Action, Volunteering, and NGOs in Contemporary History*, 10.09.2015 – 11.09.2015 Frankfurt am Main, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 28.08.2015, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-28698>>.

Unfortunately, due to the pilots' strike, the opening keynote of NICHOLAS CROWSON (Birmingham) about theoretical concepts and the state of research on voluntary action history as well as the paper by ALEX MOLD (London) on voluntarism and health in post-war Britain had to be cancelled. Although this was regretted, the additional time for a more detailed discussion was welcomed. MELANIE OPPENHEIMER (Adelaide) correspondingly adjusted and expanded her keynote talk on gender and voluntary work to wider observations and let the attendees benefit from her far-ranging experience and findings in the field of voluntary action research. She outlined the Australian situation related to and in-

spired by the establishment of the British *Voluntary Action History Society* (VAHS) in 1991 and applied William Beveridge's and Geoffrey Finlayson's thesis of the 'moving frontier' between state and welfare sector to the second highpoint of Australian voluntary action in the early 1970s. Oppenheimer then reflected on the negative connotation of female voluntary work embodied by the literary characters 'Lady Bountiful' and 'Mrs Jellyby' and sketched out how hard it was for women to break this stereotype. Women's voluntary work was hardly recognised unless it was activism for their own rights – and was likewise neglected by historians.

The first panel of the workshop addressed the effects voluntary bodies can have as agents of change on a political and a social level. Looking at the social act of handing over money as the core of philanthropy GEORGE GOSLING (Warwick) called for an economic perspective for the history of voluntary action in modern Britain and identified a "moving frontier" between volunteerism and the market. By drawing on the work of sociologist Viviana A. Zelizer among others, he stressed the importance of considering the recipients as consumers, the donors' charitable motives, the social and symbolic meaning of money in philanthropic contexts and the interaction of giver and receiver. Appeals of the *Bristol Hospital Funds* served Gosling as an example for asking how the payment into hospital contributory schemes (an *NHS* preceding form of insurance to receive subsidised medical treatment which at the same time raised funds

for hospitals) was constructed as a civic duty and which meanings and emotions it might be subject to.

The two remaining papers of the panel both focused on the demographically increasingly relevant topic of ageing. MATTHIAS RUOSS (Bern) explored the origins of the nowadays omnipresent paradigm of active ageing in post-1945 industrialised nations. After expounding the problems of the vague, homogenising term, Ruoss argued that the paradigm became prevalent as a model of retirement as well as a guide for social policy in the 1970s but had actually already emerged in the immediate post-war period when voluntary organisations working in the field of elderly care regained significance against the developing welfare state. Using the example of the Swiss organisation *Pro Senectute* he showed how these organisations – together with gerontologist experts – approached the bad image of retirement and tried to improve the psychosocial wellbeing of the retirees by providing recreational services as well as courses on how to find new roles and keep up an active participation in society.

NICOLE KRAMER (Frankfurt am Main) gave insights in her research on women's rights in an ageing society, dealing with the case of carers for elderly and disabled in post-war Britain. When demographic change led to an increased demand for informal care work, this was provided almost exclusively by female, mostly unmarried and unpaid relatives who had to face economic and health risks and disadvantages as a result. Advocacy groups developed in the 1960s and 1980s merged into the main membership charity *Carers National Association* in 1988 (since 2001 *Carers UK*), offering support services and political campaigning for the recognition of their labour. Kramer tried to identify functional equivalents among West German welfare providers and made a case for researching society on the basis of voluntary action groups as they are not only agents of social policy but also offer insights into changing perceptions of ageing, labour, family relations and gender roles as well as into the ideas and lives on the clients' side.

The ensuing discussion focussed on the role of voluntarism within *Second Wave Feminism*, the availability of sources about the receiving end of volunteering services and consequently the idea of oral history being a form of voluntary action itself. Other points of discussion were the causes for the different voluntary traditions in Britain and Germany regarding the handling of elderly care and health insurance, the recognition of vocational donation of labour in the case of child care by grandparents and the changing social status of volunteers compared to the

unemployed.

The second session dealt with new research on volunteering and philanthropy in Europe. CHRISTINE G. KRÜGER (Gießen) underlined that youth voluntary programmes in West Germany and in the UK illustrate a re-consideration of voluntary action and philanthropy that went along with the expansion of the welfare state. However, at their beginning, the main youth volunteer programmes pursued different purposes in the two countries: The German "Voluntary Social Year" (FSJ) primarily aimed at women after the re-introduction of compulsory military service for men and was considered as a way of training women for marriage. By contrast, the British counterpart *Community Service Volunteers* (CSV) rather targeted men and was designed as an adventure and a substitute for military service. While participant numbers of the FSJ shrank due to the criticism by the New Left and some conceptual readjustment was necessary, CSV easily adapted to the new principles of volunteering in the 1970s. In both countries, youth voluntary services now aimed at training youth for political citizenship rather than for social citizenship in the welfare state.

ANA KLADNIK and THOMAS LINDENBERGER (Potsdam) presented their research project on voluntary fire departments in communist Central and South Eastern Europe. They underlined that voluntary work did exist in dictatorships, although sometimes with special features while at the same time being part of a century-old-tradition of voluntary work in the former Habsburg and German empires. Voluntary fire departments were important local agents which continued to exist before, during and after the communist rule. Looking at a case study of voluntary fire departments in four towns in Central and South East Europe can thus help to answer questions regarding both late-state socialism and the history of transformation in post-socialist societies.

LUCY ROBINSON (Brighton) dealt with the charity single during the Thatcher era. In the 1980s, charity singles had become formulaic and shared the modern aesthetics of the music video, but at the same time Victorian ideals of charity re-emerged. Especially charity singles and concerts raising money for HIV/AIDS had a strong political element. Consequently, Elton John and George Michael performing "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me" together in 1991 can be seen both as the creation of collective identity but also as a form of collective memorialisation. In a broader sense, the charity single managed to build a community of people affected by AIDS and, more importantly, by claiming the charity single, the gay com-

munity in the UK was able to claim a traditional form of self-help.

The ensuing discussion considered interdisciplinary work in the field of voluntary action history. Furthermore, in face of the long history of the concepts and institutions presented in all three papers, the question was raised how exactly ‘new’ characteristics of philanthropy in the late 20th century can be defined and what role older traditions played. The discussion then turned to the similarities and differences in the development in Eastern and Western Europe after 1945 and the role of the Cold War.

The third session dealt with transnational and global histories of voluntarism. In the first paper, KATE BRADLEY (London) used the example of the Medway Towns and East London to look at the complex relationship(s) between space, place and voluntary action. Stressing that research on voluntary work tends to concentrate on institution(s), Bradley proposed to take the community as a starting point of analysis. As an example, she then studied the dockyard closures in the Medway Towns and the subsequent transformation of these spaces into heritage and education centres. Thus, the complex relationship between various actors in the social sphere became apparent, illustrating also the influence of global policies on a local level.

BENJAMIN MÖCKEL (Köln) used the example of the “Third World Shops” in Germany to argue for the integration of the history of consumption into the history of voluntarism. These shops were part of a transnational movement aimed at politicizing customers and at raising their awareness rather than at making money. By examining the volunteers’ motives in German “Third World Shops” this goal becomes very obvious: They defined the shops as spaces of political and social action, consequently the image of amateur self-dedication was an important part of their self-concept. However, even though the volunteers saw their work as a sign of global solidarity, their motives were in reality much more complex as their testimonies illustrate and the shops thus can be seen as ‘symbolic’ global spaces which were always also local spaces with their own social communities. The ensuing discussion compared the “Third World Shops” to UK charity shops and evaluated the impact of changes in the market for fair trade products.

The third paper in this session by FREDA WAGNER (Gießen) also dealt with a form of transnational solidarity: Wagner presented child sponsorship schemes as a highly contested type of charity. During the West

German economic recovery in the years after 1945, the idea of ‘giving something back’ emerged and child sponsorship schemes appeared very attractive, promoting the idea of a transnational family and global kinship. Many people saw them as the most direct way to help a child. However, Wagner underlined that although these schemes were a very successful fundraising instrument, they attracted negative publicity for reinforcing colonial structures and dependence on the West. As a consequence, most organisations changed to a more holistic approach. The example of the German *Kindernothilfe* illustrates how from the late 1960s on their donors became almost as important to them (as cared for customers) as the children themselves. At the same time the work of volunteers in the Global North became almost as vital as the donors themselves for the work of the organisation.

The concluding discussion focused on the idea of a “moving frontier” not only between voluntary action and the state but also between voluntary action and the economy. The effects of the changes during the 1980s which meant the transformation of an industrial into a service economy and the consequences for voluntary work which were mentioned in a number of papers were stressed. Here several contributions highlighted especially the changes in the UK under Thatcherism. All participants agreed on the potential the research of the individual aspects on voluntary action, charity and civil society has for historiography and particularly for social history. This led to a concluding discussion on the formation of a German-based international network of the voluntary action’s historians and archivists.

Conference Overview:

Introduction (Nicole Kramer and Christine Krüger)

Keynotes: Voluntary Action and Voluntarism in Contemporary History

Chair: Christoph Cornelißen, Frankfurt am Main

Melanie Oppenheimer (Adelaide): Gender and Voluntary Work

Session 1: Voluntary Bodies as Agents of Political and Social Change

Chair: Miranda Leontowitsch, Frankfurt am Main

George Gosling (Warwick): Payment and Philanthropy: Economic Sociology and the History of Voluntary Action in Modern Britain

Matthias Ruoss (Bern): Voluntary Action and the Origins of the Active Ageing Paradigm after WW II

Nicole Kramer (Frankfurt am Main): Carers United. Voluntary Action and Women's Rights in an Ageing Society

Session 2: Rethinking Philanthropy and Volunteering
Chair: Verena Steller, Frankfurt am Main

Christine Krüger (Gießen): "The Volunteer Upsurge": Mobilizing Youths for Voluntary Work

Ana Kladnik / Thomas Lindenberger (Potsdam): Traditional Volunteering from State Socialism to Post-Communism: Comparing Voluntary Fire Departments in Central and South Eastern Europe

Lucy Robinson (Brighton): When George and Elton sang together': AIDS, Community and the Charity Sin-

gle

Session 3: Transnational and Global Histories of Voluntarism

Chair: Florian Schmitz, Frankfurt am Main / Bern

Kate Bradley (London): Global Realignment, Domestic Adjustments: Deindustrialisation and Voluntary Action in East London and the Medway Towns

Benjamin Möckel (Köln): Selling Global Solidarity: Volunteers in West German "Third World Shops"

Freda Wagner (Gießen): Children of the World – Humanitarian Child Sponsorship Schemes and Transnational Solidarity

Concluding remarks and final discussion

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

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