

Current research projects

Saving humans: risk, intervention, survival

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An inaugural theme of the **Institute of Advanced Studies** (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/ias/index.aspx>), University of Birmingham

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Under what circumstances do individuals, organisations, and states intervene to save human lives? Actions to save human lives can range in scale from the individual to whole populations. They might include medical or military interventions, humanitarian responses to man-made or natural crises, or mechanisms designed to save entire communities believed to be at risk from a changing environment. This theme will examine such actions, addressing three different domains: medicine; human and natural environments; and security and conflict.

Medical interventions to save lives range from the surgical to the epidemiological. Threats to life from human and natural environments range from building collapse or industrial pollution to floods, earthquakes, or climate change-related food shortages—with the latter showing how human and natural environments are connected. In conflict situations states, international organizations, or NGOs may all try to intervene to save lives.

All of these areas are open to investigation from multiple disciplinary perspectives. In order to foster genuine interdisciplinary exchange we will focus on the issues of risk, intervention, and survival. How is the risk to human life constructed and measured? How are interventions decided and carried out? And what can we learn from the experience of survivors? The theme will bring together researchers from across the university and beyond to investigate these questions across a wide range of contexts.

For more information please visit the [theme website \(http://www.savinghumans.org\)](http://www.savinghumans.org), or contact [Sadiah Qureshi \(mailto:s.queshi.1@bham.ac.uk\)](mailto:s.queshi.1@bham.ac.uk) or [Benjamin Thomas White \(mailto:b.t.white@bham.ac.uk\)](mailto:b.t.white@bham.ac.uk).

Non-state humanitarianism: from colonialism to human rights

An AHRC-funded research network

Principal Investigator: Professor Matthew Hilton
Co-Investigator: Dr Kevin O'Sullivan, National University of Ireland, Galway

From the actions of nineteenth century missionaries and colonial officials to the recent food crisis in the Sahel region of West Africa, non-state humanitarianism has become one of the defining characteristics of international action. But how can humanitarian aid draw on its history to respond to current challenges and present-day norms? The 'Non-state humanitarianism' network investigates humanitarianism's past and the uses of that past in a pan-European framework, while combining it with alternative perspectives of humanitarianism from the global South.

The network connects two emerging strands of historical inquiry - from the academic world and from within the humanitarian sector - in a spirit of conversation and collaboration, to examine these questions in a transnational historical context. Building on the firm belief that history's focus on causality and long-term processes of change is indispensable for appreciating the complex dynamics of socio-cultural change, the network contributes a deeper understanding of modern humanitarianism. It provides an historical complement to the wealth of available analyses - internal and external - of the contemporary humanitarian environment. Its broad spectrum of participants - from network partners in the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the University of Manchester Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI) - ensures that the network and its outputs harness the variety of existing historical approaches to humanitarianism.

To achieve its goals, the network brings together participants from across the UK and Europe in a series of virtual discussion groups (via the network website, Twitter feed and email list) and two-day workshops. The network's online activities include the generation of research questions and thematic clusters; the pre-workshop circulation of papers; and on-going discussion before, between, and after the workshops. The involvement of postgraduate and early career researchers - in the form of an online research database, short presentations at the workshops and opportunities for conversation and collaboration with NGOs - will contribute to the sustainability of the network and its outputs.

The first of the workshops, at the University of Birmingham in early 2013, centres on the question of methodologies: how we approach - and should approach - the history of non-state humanitarianism. The second workshop, at University College Dublin in April 2013, explores sources and uses for humanitarian history in a discussion about archival best practice and the value of these archives for NGOs and historians. The third workshop, at ZZP Potsdam in September 2013, focuses on the co-production of a research framework for the study of non-state humanitarianism. Its aim is not only to create a coherent, collaborative approach to the subject, but also to ensure that its practical relevance and impact are embedded from the outset. The final workshop, a joint meeting (facilitated by web conferencing facilities) between participants at the TATA Institute of Social Science, Mumbai and at the HCRI in December 2013, emphasises approaches to humanitarianism from the global South. It provides an opportunity for network participants to review and revise the research framework to take account of the global (South and North) experience of non-state humanitarianism.

The findings of this final workshop will inform an article outlining a clear research agenda for humanitarian history, to be published in a major peer-reviewed research journal. They will help frame another of the network's outputs: an edited volume of papers based on selected workshop presentations. And they will provide a strong foundation for the network's activities beyond the funding period: as a platform for future transnational conversation, discussion, and collaborative research, and as the basis for stronger ties between the academic and practical worlds of the NGO sector.

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: connected collaboration, connected communities and connected impact

AHRC Research Grant, February 2013 to February 2015
Principal investigator: Professor Matthew Hilton

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) is one of the biggest 'brands' of modern British academia. It inspired the creation of a disciplinary field. The year 2014 will mark the 50th anniversary of its launch. The University of Birmingham has committed to marking this event by hosting a conference to assess the work and impact of the Centre. It has also begun to establish a CCCS archive, based on the depositions of the papers of leading figures associated with the Centre, beginning with the papers of Stuart Hall.

This project will focus on extending the archive in order to enable an examination of the working practices of CCCS. While its outputs are well known, less appreciated is the extent to which the collaborations made by CCCS staff were fundamental to how their research was produced, their findings disseminated and the impact they had on the city and nation. The project will be based in the Centre for Modern and Contemporary History and is conceived as collaboration with the Cadbury Research Library (Special Collections). The papers relating to CCCS will be archived and catalogued and then presented in an online form that is most suited to research and public use.

Likewise, the academic research into the working practices of CCCS will be undertaken in conjunction with the work of the archivists: the oral histories will become an accessible part of the archive and materials will be analysed which will then be included in an exhibition at the new Midlands Arts Centre.

Newspapers in Ewe, an African language

The project is currently working, in conjunction with Ghanaian colleagues, on newspapers that were published in an African language, Ewe, which is spoken in the Ghana-Togo border area of West Africa. Historians and political scientists often use newspapers as sources, but they usually focus on newspapers that were published in either English or French, in the major cities of West Africa. These newspapers connect with longer-term narratives on the nature of political activism and mobilisation in rural West Africa and are an unusual and important primary source for the history of the Ewe-speaking peoples.

- **More information** (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/historycultures/departments/cwas/research/african-newspapers.aspx>)

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