



Building Aidland: Aid Workers and the Creation of a Global Aid Industry in the 1970s

written by Kevin O'Sullivan
March, 2022

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In this webinar series, we explore the relationship between mobility and humanitarianism in the course of four episodes. We – this is Till Mostowlansky, an anthropologist at The Graduate Institute in Geneva and Agnieszka Sobocinska, a historian at King's College London. Based on our disciplinary pathways, we approach the topic from the vantage point of both anthropology and history. In each episode, we showcase the work of either an anthropologist or a historian of humanitarianism and discuss with them how mobility features in their work.

This interest in mobility is linked to our previous work in which we explored the role of [globally mobile volunteers](#) in humanitarianism and development (Agnieszka) and how managers of Muslim NGOs draw on [far reaching historical-](#)



[religious connections](#) to pursue their projects (Till). But the theme of mobility also has a broader significance in humanitarian contexts. Historians and anthropologists have often defined humanitarianism as concern and action assisting a distant Other. Yet, the different dimensions of distance and ways of overcoming them remain open questions.

In conversation with our guests, we discuss the different types of mobility that inform humanitarianism. We talk about the power dynamics that shape these mobilities, and attempt to traverse static North-South and South-South configurations that have sometimes flattened discussions about humanitarianism into simple binaries. This series is therefore not exclusively about the mobility of people, ideas and artifacts in humanitarianism. It is also about kinship, colonialism, religion, and war. After the conclusion of the series with episode four in a few weeks, we will revisit these themes and how our guests relate to them in their work in the form of a concluding article.

To get the series started, in this episode we talk to [Kevin O'Sullivan](#) from the National University of Ireland, Galway. Kevin is the author of the book [The NGO Moment: The Globalisation of Compassion from Biafra to Live Aid](#), a rich and fascinating account of the historical emergence of non-governmental organizations. In his contribution to the episode, Kevin presents on aid workers and the creation of a global aid industry in the 1970s. We really enjoyed the discussion and we hope you will, too!

Watch the other webinars in this series [here](#).