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"Rationales of Humanitarianism: The Case of British Relief to Germany, 1805-1815."

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Abstract:

This article examines the British humanitarian relief campaign initiated by the Committee for Relieving the Distresses in Germany and Other Parts of the Continent (1805-1815). It demonstrates the significance of two aspects for the campaign: the activism of London-based immigrant communities on the one hand, and British solidarity with allied countries during the Napoleonic Wars and the related matter of national mobilisation against France on the other. While immigrant activism was a major driving force of the campaign, its impact depended on the integration of immigrants into British society and on the mobilisation of Britons. Moreover, while the alliance with German states was often underlined in the

publicity efforts of the campaign, wider humanitarian concerns were also addressed.

The dominant cosmopolitan narrative of humanitarianism credits noble-minded individuals and social movements with the provision of relief in situations of great need. Since the end of the Cold War, war and philanthropy have been merged in the concept of "humanitarian intervention" and triggered new scholarly perspectives, including an effort to historicise this phenomenon.¹ It is possible to distinguish two ideal types that make up the prevalent directions in humanitarianism research: a power-civilising approach and a novel power-utilising approach. The power-civilising perspective is linked to traditional liberal ideas in international relations: it regards the idealistic activism of individuals and international organisations as a counterpoise to power politics and as a model to transform the world. In contrast, power-utilising relates to the current "rational" fusion of neo-liberal and neo-realist thought. It assumes that humanitarian activism is best served by employing power in a purposeful way. Despite their radical differences, these approaches have something in common: both suggest changing the

¹ B. Simms / D. J. B. Trim (eds.), *Humanitarian Intervention. A History*, Cambridge 2011.

world through the manipulation of power and are based on normative understandings of their subject. Scholarly research committed to these approaches is therefore subject to distinct epistemological limitations. This study therefore adopts a third approach: it examines humanitarianism on its own terms, as a practice with multiple meanings and a contingent relation to political power.²

The article scrutinises the relationship of charity and bellicism by focusing on an early case of voluntary humanitarian relief: the London-based Committee for Relieving the Distresses in Germany and Other Parts of the Continent (1805-1815).³ Despite its path-breaking initiative - remitting the remarkable sum of approximately £ 250.000 to sufferers abroad - this committee is largely unknown. A brief chapter in a book on Quaker relief describes it as "a splendid ecumenical precedent" for much later relief efforts.⁴ The most thorough account features in a chapter of Ernst Gurlt's monumental

² See e.g. R. Gill, *Calculating Compassion. Humanity and Relief in War, Britain 1870-1914*, Manchester 2013.

³ In this article, the terms "committee", "London Committee" and "City Committee" are also used, depending on the context.

⁴ O. J. Greenwood, *Quaker Encounters, vol. 1: Friends and Relief*, York 1975, 17.

history of wartime humanitarian relief, published in 1873.⁵ An article from 1921 suffers from its anti-British bias and misunderstandings.⁶ Apart from their overly descriptive nature, these three works have two other limitations in common: they are based on a narrow set of sources and are mostly oblivious of the body's early history. Apart from these accounts, the British relief initiative remains relegated to footnotes in a few books on British philanthropy and German charities.⁷

Michael Barnett has pointed out that "impartiality, neutrality, and independence were not part of humanitarianism's original DNA".⁸ As this article shows, the campaign for victims of the Napoleonic wars involved prominent figures from the early history of humanitarianism – for instance luminaries of the anti-slavery movement such as Henry Thornton and William Wilberforce. While the abolitionist cause

⁵ E. J. Gurlt, *Zur Geschichte der internationalen und freiwilligen Krankenpflege im Kriege*, Leipzig 1873, 800-821.

⁶ C. Niedner, "Rudolph Ackermann und die englischen Hilfsaktionen 1807 und 1813 ff.", in: *Neues Archiv für sächsische Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 42 (1921), 242-255.

⁷ N. Götz, "Civil Society and NGO: Far from Unproblematic Concepts", in: B. Reinalda (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Non-State Actors*, Farnham 2011, 185-196, at 190.

⁸ M. Barnett, *Empire of Humanity. A History of Humanitarianism*, Ithaca/NY 2011, 5.

as such was universal, anti-slavery worked primarily within limits of the British Empire. By contrast, the campaign for continental relief connected different polities. The prototypical service organisation - the Red Cross - only emerged half a century after this initiative. Historians of humanitarian action can therefore benefit from an engagement with this early case that involved the transnational delivery of services, goods and monies. While war-related charity can ostensibly be subsumed under the broader war effort, this article concentrates on the humanitarian dimension. It examines the role and interaction of cosmopolitan, expatriate, and national motives of transnational relief work in the context of armed conflict.

This study analyses the British relief effort for Germany 1805 to 1808 that was eventually thwarted by Napoleon's dominance on the continent. It then examines how the campaign was revived and carried out between 1813 and 1815. It also casts light on a parallel high-church and aristocratic Westminster initiative for German sufferers and on a parliamentary grant. The conclusion argues that neither power-civilising nor power-utilising explanations suffice to explain the humanitarian action examined here, but that a complex mix of motivations prevailed.

1. The First Campaign for the Continent, 1805 to 1808

The British relief campaign for Germany was initiated in late 1805 by Karl Friedrich Adolf Steinkopf, minister of the German Lutheran chapel in the Savoy in London. At the time, detailed accounts described the horrors of war and the suffering in different parts of Germany. One of the letters received in London suggested that people were in such a state of despair that, without rapid change, "we shall have a general revolution".⁹

By November 1805, Steinkopf had collected evidence from numerous correspondents. For instance, the oculist and author Johann Heinrich Jung (well-known at the time under the name Jung-Stilling) observed in a letter that people used grass for vegetables and that some ate the flesh from places where dead horses were dumped. He begged for English assistance.¹⁰

Steinkopf enclosed the correspondence in a letter to merchants Joseph Hardcastle and Joseph Reyner, asking them to communicate the contents to their friends, hoping that this might prompt donations. The letter described Great Britain as distinguished by inestimable civil and religious privileges and as hitherto wonderfully protected, while it portrayed the Germans as suffering fellow-Christians and continental

⁹ *The Evangelical Magazine* 14 (1806) 1, 44.

¹⁰ *The Evangelical Magazine* 13 (1805) 12, 569.

brethren who had contributed to fend off the invasion of England. Already one day later, on 22 November 1805, Hardcastle and Reyener hosted a fundraising meeting with thirteen participants, chaired by George Wolff. They formed a committee "to receive Subscriptions, and to apportion future Relief, to be sent to various Places and Persons on the Continent". The initial fundraising efforts brought in about £ 300, mostly individual subscriptions, but also collections in two churches. However, from the beginning, the aim was to engage a larger public.¹¹

The thirteen initial committee members shared a particular background: they were all mentioned in the first report of the British and Foreign Bible Society, an association that had been founded one and a half years earlier. Ten of them were represented in the committee of the Bible Society; Steinkopf was the Society's foreign secretary and two others were listed among subscribers and benefactors.¹² The relief committee was therefore an offspring of the Bible Society. Steinkopf and two other members of the relief committee were of German origin, Wolff was a native of Christiania (now Oslo) and Danish

¹¹ Ibid., at 569-570.

¹² *Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society* 1 (1805).

consul-general, another member was of Swedish descent.¹³ Some of the founders had previously collaborated in philanthropic endeavours - for example, Butterworth, Sundius and Wolff in a society for the support of Methodist preachers and in the Strangers Friend Society.¹⁴ Others, such as Hardcastle and Reyner, were childhood friends and business partners. Like the Bible Society, the German relief campaign was an enterprise with cosmopolitan and imperial traits, but its element of a well-integrated German immigrant network was stronger. New members of the relief committee frequently had German names; among them were three ministers of German congregations in London. Britons that joined the Committee by 1806 included such well-known philanthropists as Wilson Birkbeck and Robert Howard.¹⁵

¹³ John Daniel Hose and Herman Schro(e)der were German immigrants; Christopher Sundius came from Sweden. Wolff's father had immigrated to Norway from Germany.

¹⁴ P. Borgen, "George Wolff (1736-1828): Norwegian-Born Merchant, Consul, Benevolent Methodist Layman, Close Friend of John Wesley", in: *Methodist History* 40 (2001) 1, 17-28, at 21-22.

¹⁵ *Northampton Mercury* (31 May 1806) - the German ministers were the Revs. William Küper, Christian A. E. Schwabe, and Georg(e) Segelken.

After the battle of Austerlitz, in December 1805, the activists convened a meeting at the City of London Tavern to support humanitarian work in German lands and Moravia.¹⁶ Hardcastle's memoir stresses that the funds were not only meant to help the population in parts of Germany that had suffered most from the war, but also to strengthen "their attachment to their British allies".¹⁷ By requesting small donations from as many British subjects as possible, the campaign also served the purpose of domestic mobilisation. However, at least initially, the outcome of the penny collection did not meet the expectations of the organisers.¹⁸ In the end, the first campaign brought in almost £ 25.000.¹⁹ Although funds were collected across the country - from Aberdeen through Abergavenny to Dublin, and Guernsey - the result was perceived as having been achieved "by the exertions of a few citizens only". One of the prominent subscribers was

¹⁶ Greenwood, *Quaker Encounters*, 12.

¹⁷ *Memoir of Joseph Hardcastle, Esq., First Treasurer of the London Missionary Society. A Record of the Past for his Descendants*, London 1860, 202.

¹⁸ Letter by Rev. Charles Simeon, 21 March 1806, to Hardcastle, *ibid.*

¹⁹ *The Evangelical Magazine* 16 (1808) 11, 494.

the Prince of Wales, contributing £ 500.²⁰ The anti-slavery activist and MP William Wilberforce was listed with a contribution of £ 20.²¹

A journal article regarded the campaign as displaying "trophies of humanity, more honourable and more durable than trophies of victory: because, they *distinguish* Britain". It stressed that the relief was not directed at fellow-subjects or at people with affinity to Britain by political association or "by ties of blood". The decisive characteristic of the aid recipients was their being "men and christians".²² Committee publications presented the cause as one of "suffering humanity".²³ At the same time, a significant factor was the compassion for victims of French aggression and exploitation, in particular such victims that could still be regarded as allies.²⁴ Where this was not the case, it was underlined that

²⁰ *The Literary Panorama* 1 (1807), 1040. For an overview, see *Reports of the Committee for Relieving the Distressed Inhabitants of Germany, and Other Parts of the Continent* (1806), 17-19.

²¹ *York Herald* (17 May 1806).

²² *Literary Panorama* 1 (1807), 1040. Italics in the source.

²³ *Reports of the Committee for Relieving the Distressed Inhabitants of Germany, and Other Parts of the Continent* (1806), 13-16, at 13.

²⁴ *Evangelical Magazine* 14 (1806), 45.

the distressed people had no part in public affairs and therefore were still "worthy Objects of British Generosity".²⁵ The suffering of the Germans was said to be an "exemplification of the miseries reserved for England in the event of a successful French invasion".²⁶ One author suggested to drive this point home by erasing the name of Germany in accounts of calamities and substituting it for Britain.²⁷

Kinship was another theme. It was argued that the dynastic relations with the inhabitants of the Electorate of Hanover had "rendered their suffering the more severe" and put "a peculiar claim on our attention".²⁸ A report of the London Committee expressed this connection in colourful terms: "The finest fruits, at present to be found in many of the English gardens, have been raised from Hanoverian stocks or grafts."²⁹ Corresponding accounts came from the Electorate, pointing to the shared King with great and generous "Old England", a nation seen as "the only one in Europe, where liberty and the

²⁵ *Northampton Mercury* (31 May 1806).

²⁶ *The Christian Observer* 5 (1806) 6, 361.

²⁷ *Literary Panorama* 1 (1807), 1040.

²⁸ *The Literary Panorama* 2 (1807), 1203-1207; *The Christian Observer* 4 (1805) 12, 775. See also *Evangelical Magazine* 14 (1806), 45.

²⁹ *Literary Panorama* 1 (1807), 1046.

rights of men have not yet been subdued, and trampled upon, by the iron laws of despotism and insatiable rapacity".³⁰

From the outset, translated letters from Germany featured prominently in the Committee reports, describing the distress caused by the French army's movements and quartering in Germany. While detailing the calamities confronting their home countries, the German authors also praised their British benefactors and the results of their relief efforts. They addressed them as "excellent English friends", and portrayed them as noble, benevolent and characterised by a generous spirit. A letter from Hannover stressed that of all allied forces, only the English paid for themselves, and that the example of the London Committee would occasion a patriotic emulation there.³¹ A British article asked the rhetorical question whether those who had been cherished by her care would be able to hate Britain. The author concluded by pointing to the "sentiments of gratitude excited by the bounty of compassionate Britons".³² While the relief campaign had a multi-denominational background, it was sometimes perceived along religious rather than national lines. For instance, a

³⁰ Ibid., 1044 (address by Gebhard Timäus from Lüneburg).

³¹ *Reports of the Committee for Relieving the Distressed Inhabitants of Germany, and Other Parts of the Continent* (1806), 9-12.

³² *Literary Panorama* 1 (1807), 1040.

Catholic minister in Silesia in a sermon reportedly exclaimed his astonishment that the Moravian brethren - a group that had previously been judged as heretics and persecuted with hatred - now assisted members of his church with ample relief.³³

The committee collaborated with different kinds of German partners. For example, funds destined for the Electorate of Hannover were earmarked for different purposes and specific municipalities and regions. While those locally commissioned with the distribution of the bounties cannot always be ascertained, committees as well as individuals were among them. In Hannover, local relief societies and the burgomaster of Hannover were among the collaborators.³⁴

By February 1807 the work of the committee slowly came to a halt because Napoleon's continental blockade made communications difficult, but also because humanitarian relief to areas controlled by political and military adversaries was problematic. A scholarly account of the relief work assumes that the committee's activities ceased in March 1807 and that the body remained in abeyance for seven years. According to this study, only a few underground links between German groups

³³ *The Evangelical Magazine* (1807) 4, 186.

³⁴ *Kaiserlich- und Kurpfalzbaierisch privilegirte allgemeine Zeitung* (3 Aug. 1806), 860.

and their London benefactors persisted.³⁵ However, a report published in autumn 1808 made clear that the committee had intended "to have finally closed their accounts" when it noticed that the situation of Swedish Finland was such "as to render it still necessary to appeal to the benevolence of the Public".³⁶ This was done by underlining that "our brave and faithful allies, the Swedes, have a strong claim on British friendship".³⁷ In the following months, goods and services to the value of £ 7.000 to £ 8.000 were remitted to Sweden, a country drifting away as Britain's last remaining ally at the time. Thus, after the continental blockade had been established, relief to Sweden replaced relief to the European mainland for some time. Contacts to Sweden and Germany persisted at a low level through the network of the British and Foreign Bible Society. There was even a limited flow of money for the society's purposes.³⁸

2. The City Campaign for Germany Sufferers, 1813 to 1815

³⁵ Greenwood, *Quaker Encounters*, 12.

³⁶ *The Evangelical Magazine* 16 (1808) 11, 494.

³⁷ *The Christian Observer* 8 (1809) 1, 56-58.

³⁸ J. Owen, *The History of the Origin and First Ten Years of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, vol. 1, London 1816.

After the monumental battles of 1813, depressing reports from Leipzig and vicinity reached London.³⁹ The dormant Committee for Relieving the Distresses in Germany and Other Parts of the Continent was about to reconvene when London publisher Rudolph Ackermann learned about its existence. Being of Saxon descent, he had intended to start his own subscription for the area around Leipzig. Instead, Ackermann - a man without apparent connections to the British and Foreign Bible Society - became the key figure in the second phase of the German relief enterprise. The informal meeting leading to the reestablishment of the Committee took place at his house.⁴⁰ Steinkopf, who had initiated the first campaign some eight years earlier, remarked to a German correspondent that he felt happy to have contributed to the establishment of the Committee, but that the greatest merit belonged to Ackermann.⁴¹

Printing an account of the battle of Leipzig, supplemented by requests for relief, Ackermann provided the committee with an

³⁹ See *Reports of the Committees Formed in London in the Year 1814 for the Relief of the Unparalleled Distresses in Germany, and Other Parts of the Continent, occasioned by the War which Terminated in the Treaty of Paris, 31st March 1814*, London 1814, 4-10.

⁴⁰ J. F. von Zezschwitz, *Mittheilungen aus den Papieren eines sächsischen Staatsmannes*, Dresden 1864, 411.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, at 406.

effective propaganda tool. In the preface to his book, dated 10 January 1814, he stated that the profits generated by this publication would benefit the inhabitants of Leipzig and vicinity. Moreover, he announced preparatory steps for a public subscription as well as the possibility of contributions for immediate relief.⁴² The book sold out quickly and was reprinted in at least ten editions. Subsequent printings included a memorial written in the name of the city of Leipzig "to the independent and benevolent British Nation", imploring relief for the inhabitants of the circumjacent villages and hamlets.⁴³ Moreover, the assessment of a sub-committee of clergymen was attached, which had been tasked with examining the sources of the book in response to criticism that its account was exaggerated. In their joint statement, the reverends Küper, Schwabe, Steinkopf and Latrobe - the members of the body - spelled out that they were

⁴² F. Schoberl, *Narrative of the Most Remarkable Events which Occured in and near Leipzig, Immediately before, during, and subsequent to, the Sanguinary Series of Engagements between the Allied Armies and the French from the 14th to the 19th October, 1813*, 7th ed., London 1814, iii.

⁴³ Schoberl, *Narrative*, 99-104.

unanimous in their opinion, that far from any exaggeration of facts having been resorted to, in presenting this Narrative to the British Public, facts have been suppressed under an idea that they might shock the feelings of Englishmen, who [...] have so imperfect an idea of the horrors of a campaign, and the unspeakable suffering occasioned by the presence of contending armies, that, to hear more of the detail contained in the said papers, might destroy the effect of exciting compassion by creating disgust, and doubts of the possibility of the existence of such enormities.⁴⁴

The sub-committee also argued that the sources had to be valid as no crudely manipulated accounts could have been published in Germany, where they would have become "liable to the censure of every reader and reviewer".⁴⁵ The circumstance that three of the four reviewers were born in Germany and served German congregations in London does not seem to have led to charges of a lack of impartiality.

Another element in the second phase of the Committees for German relief was the systematic use of newspapers. *The Times*

⁴⁴ Cited in *The Times* (7 March 1814); cf. Schoberl, *Narrative*, supplement p. 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

published at least thirty-six articles on the relief campaign in 1814, almost all of them advertisements. Ackermann's journal, *The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions, and Politics*, and certain protestant magazines also featured articles. However, coverage was far less extensive in the protestant press in 1814 than what it had been in 1806; there was a clear shift towards the use of the mainstream press.

The Committee for Relieving the Distresses in Germany and Other Parts of the Continent had formally been re-established on 14 January 1814. On this day, it was decided to immediately remit £ 3500 to respectable individuals in Germany, requesting at the same time that they form committees of distribution.⁴⁶ On 27 January, a general meeting took place at the City of London Tavern. The Duke of Sussex, who was unable to chair the meeting because of illness, underlined his sympathy for the cause and donated fifty guineas.⁴⁷ He was replaced by the banker, economist and MP Henry Thornton, who also became the treasurer of the Committee. In his keynote speech, William Wilberforce emphasised that the meeting was about assistance to allies "who suffered with us in a common cause". He moved the first resolution, asking "the British Nation for the exercise of its accustomed beneficence". Robert Thornton

⁴⁶ *Reports of the Committees*, 1.

⁴⁷ *The Times* (28 January 1814).

elaborated upon Wilberforce's point: he argued that the Germans had suffered for Britain's benefit, whereas Britons had "participated in the benefit, without any share in the suffering". They therefore had to pay for the "auspicious change that had taken place in the world".⁴⁸

Luke Howard - the meteorologist and chemist with a Quaker background, known for his later contact to Goethe - seconded one of the resolutions and became one of the Committee's two secretaries. He praised disinterested beneficence, grounded in Christian compassion rather than military, political and commercial goals, as a motive "worthy of Englishmen, worthy of Christians, worthy of the nation that abolished the Slave-trade". He emphasised humanity as the common ground, while acknowledging that "Germans should use plans of a political tendency" and that British people "whose principles do not restrain them from warring in war and politics" would join in. His understanding of mutual relations was biblical: the English Good Samaritan confronting "the poor German by the wayside, robbed, stripped and half dead". Howard's speech is of interest also for the target value it set for the campaign:

⁴⁸ Ibid.

suggesting that the £ 4000 already advanced to Germany would be made into £40.000, several voices cried "Fifty".⁴⁹

John Thornton maintained that he had questioned whether adequate funds could be collected and brought to the intended use during the previous campaign, but that his doubts had now vanished. Around Austerlitz, he said, to his knowledge "the British name was never mentioned unaccompanied by benedictions". Another speaker cited a letter describing Germany as a Garden of Eden - before the French invasion had reduced it to a desolate wilderness.⁵⁰

The General Meeting approved of the committee's actions and requested it "to use its utmost endeavours to procure further contributions, to alleviate, as much as possible, the present unparalleled distress on the Continent". It recommended a strictly impartial and needs-based distribution of funds. To acquire adequate financial resources, ministers of all religious denominations were requested to make public collections and "all the corporate Bodies in the United Kingdom" were asked to contribute. Bankers were to receive subscriptions and transfer them on the first of each month,

⁴⁹ L. Howard, Speech at the General Meeting at the City of London Tavern, 27 January 1814, London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/1037/768/2.

⁵⁰ *The Times* (28 January 1814).

alongside the names of subscribers, to the committee's treasurer.⁵¹

A sermon at St Swithin's Church in London echoed the public sentiment expressed at the meeting. It described participation in the collection as a national duty which, as a result of individual acts, would set up a monument to British liberality in the hearts of the people of Germany. It portrayed England as "the queen of nations", as a "'Land of Bibles', of liberty, and of wealth", and as a country maintaining her superiority by assisting peoples like the Saxons, whose government "weakly and unwisely" had favoured the enemy. Germany was claimed to be "peculiarly connected with us". Examples included the King's lineage, the Reformation, Germans' pivotal engagement in Christian mission, and their being "men of prayer". The sermon suggested that their prayers for England had helped maintain it as a free and independent nation, and that German "thoughts of us are thoughts of love - of gratitude, and of peace". Moreover, it pointed out that British battles had been fought and its victories been won on German ground in a conflict "between the oppressors, and the liberators of the world".⁵²

⁵¹ *Reports of the Committees*, 3-4.

⁵² H. G. Watkins, *Distress in Germany: A Sermon, Preached in the Church of the United Parishes of St. Swithin, and St. Mary*

The central committee in London, with a significant social basis in the commercial class, was supported by a variety of local and denominational committees. For instance, there was a separate Quaker committee with 38 members, in addition to the Quakers being represented in the general committee by seven individuals and one of the secretaries.⁵³ There were also local committees across the country and some that particularly involved women.

3. The Westminster Initiative

In addition to the City Committee (as the London Committee was sometimes called) and its network of auxiliary organisations, a more upscale Westminster Association for the Further Relief of the Sufferers by the War in Germany was founded under the Archbishop of Canterbury. Wilberforce had not been content with the meeting of 27 January, describing it in his personal notes as "a poor meeting as to our respectable people". He contacted the Archbishop and called on Lord Sidmouth to solicit a grant from the Prince Regent.⁵⁴ On 26 March, a

Rathaw, Cannon Street, on Sunday, February 20, 1814, London 1814, 9, 13, 18, 20, 26 (quotes), 10-12.

⁵³ Greenwood, *Quaker Encounters*, 13.

⁵⁴ R. I. Wilberforce / S. Wilberforce (eds.), *The Life Of William Wilberforce*, vol 4, London 1838, 157.

meeting was summoned at the Freemason's Hall, addressing the nobility, clergy and gentry, with the Duke of York in the chair. The event featured accounts of German suffering - mostly based on the sources that had been used for the January meeting. Likewise, the arguments echoed those of the earlier event. According to the Archbishop, Britons "owed the most solid advantages" to the Germans, which they enjoyed without suffering the latter's distress, and the Duke of Sussex called for showing gratitude to providence by assisting "our suffering Allies".⁵⁵ Unlike the January meeting, such arguments were put forward in the adopted resolutions. The participants also resolved that the new committee could unite with the City Committee, should this be deemed expedient.⁵⁶

Whereas newspapers spoke of a "splendid" and "brilliant" assembly, Wilberforce noted in his diary that leading aristocrats refused to attend it for partisan reasons. When he reached Freemason's Hall, he found "all in confusion from one 'contrary' Lord". The meeting was ill-prepared, Wilberforce admitted to himself, and he was too "fearful of appearing desirous of showing off" to put himself in a position to end

⁵⁵ *Morning Post* (28 March 1814).

⁵⁶ Minute book of the Westminster Association, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 1787, inside front cover.

the confusion.⁵⁷ Henry Thornton gave the following account of the meeting:

We all went of course. Our expectations were raised to the highest pitch for we hoped to hear Mackintosh, C. Grant, Wilberforce, & many others. The D. of York made a poor figure literally so well as figuratively. Sussex did much better. The names of the Com^{ee} being read that of Wilberforce produced the finest burst of applause I ever heard. The 2 heads of the Church & 9 Bishops were there. Judge of our mortification when half a doz. resolutions were huddled up by a dull secretary & we were informed that it was the royal mandate that there should be no speaking - fortunately thanks were proposed to the D. of York & W. Wilberforce seconded it in the silver tones of a seraph. Mde de Staël sat close to us - but for Wilberforce what must she have thought of British eloquence.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Life Of William Wilberforce IV*, 157.

⁵⁸ Copy of a letter to Hannah More, 27 March 1814, Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Thornton Family: Letters and Papers, MS Add.7674, 1/N.

Despite the tensions that this account refers to, the two committees collaborated smoothly with one another and Ackermann became joint secretary of the Westminster Association. However, when compared to the sums collected by the City Committee - £ 113.702 in the period between January 1814 and February 1815 - the subscription of £ 11.598 raised by the Westminster Association appeared modest.⁵⁹ In the spring of 1814, the Westminster Association's main activity seems to have been the organisation of a concert at Whitehall Chapel. This social event not only served fundraising purposes; it also provided "an opportunity of bringing together Prince Blücher, the Duke of Wellington, Prince Leopold of Saxe-Cobourg, and all the friends of the sufferers in Germany" a few days after the Battle of Waterloo (Leopold representing the Russian war effort), in addition to the Queen, other members of the Royal Family, bishops, ambassadors and the Speaker of the House of Commons.⁶⁰ It appears that the actual

⁵⁹ For the City Committee see: *The Times* (13 February 1815); for the Westminster Association see: E. Churton, *Memoir of Joshua Watson*, vols 1-2, Oxford 1861, 153-154.

⁶⁰ *A Short Account of [Rudolph Ackermann's] Successful Exertions in behalf of the Fatherless and Widows after the War in 1814: Containing Letters from Mr. Wilberforce, Sir Walter Scott, Marshal Blucher, etc.*, Oxford 1871, 22; for the

reason for the creation of the Westminster Association was to lift the issue of German relief to indubitable respectability, to prepare the ground for a parliamentary grant on top of the voluntary subscription and to establish a body that could formally be tasked with its distribution and accountability.

4. The Parliamentary Grant

Hence, on 14 July 1814, a message from the Prince Regent was read in both Houses of Parliament, addressing the "wanton and atrocious devastations committed by the forces acting under the orders of the late ruler of France" and requesting relief to the suffering people of Germany, in addition to that provided by the voluntary campaign. Lord Liverpool, the prime minister, explained that the proposed amount was £ 100.000, a sum of the same scale with two earlier occasions of humanitarian assistance voted for by parliament (£ 100.000 to Portugal in 1811 and even £ 200.000 to Russia in 1813).⁶¹

The debates showed that the grant was not uncontroversial, but also that the opponents were on the defensive. Two negative

attendance of those not mentioned in the quote see *The Times* (29 June 1814).

⁶¹ *Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time* 27 (14 July 1814), 699-702, 707.

opinions were voiced in the House of Lords, and two negative and one critical one in the House of Commons' Committee of Supply. The main objection was domestic distress and financial straits, in particular the recent lack of parliamentary consent to an increase of officers' half-pay. Opponents argued that "we ought first to look at home" rather than giving "money to aid total strangers". Moreover, the timing - a year after the devastation -, the role of domestic and expatriate German efforts, the effects of relief from Britain, and the faithful application of the sum were questioned. Critics also referred to the earlier grants for Portugal and Russia, arguing that there had been a political rationale behind these, whereas this was no longer the case as victory had now been secured. The fact that a substantial share of the voluntary contributions had gone to Saxony, a former ally of France, was not addressed; the portrayal of the people living there as "unfortunate inhabitants" went unopposed.⁶²

Supporters of the grant argued that the German calamities were unprecedented, that public opinion was in favour, and that distress in Britain was less severe than on the continent. They maintained that the aid to Portugal and Russia had done much good and that the current sum was to be distributed in the same way as the voluntary subscription for Germany. They suggested that satisfactory accounts already existed both for

⁶² Ibid., 708-710, 716, 718, 720, 723.

the parliamentary grant to Portugal and the voluntary campaign for German sufferers, and that everything had been done to prevent fraud. Moreover, supporters underlined the one-off character of the proposed measure and voiced the opinion that the grant would meet some of the most immediate wants and function as a psychological and economic stimulus. Another line of argument suggested that Britain's "insular situation" had spared it from the fate of Germany, with which she was engaged in "one common warfare". The existence of "our fellow-subjects in Hanover", the merits of German patriotism for obtaining the peace that Britain now enjoyed, and the "general cause of Europe" were other points supporting a positive vote. Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh went even further: he pointed out that "it was not the interest of this country alone which should be considered, but that of humanity and the world at large". Somewhat paradoxically, this strand of thought had a tendency of shifting attention from relieving distress to the "moral excitement" created by the cause and to Britain's image in the world, a factor addressed by several speakers.⁶³ Opponents thus wondered whether Britain, "after her conduct during the late wars, after bleeding at every pore and exhausting her wealth for other nations [...] must purchase a good character for herself".⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibid., 707, 710-711, 716-717, 721, 724.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 722.

In the end, the resolution for relief was carried unanimously in the House of Commons committee, and was also supported by the House of Lords.⁶⁵ The parliamentary grant – the “national bounty to the sufferers in Germany” – was then distributed by a sub-committee of the City Committee, mainly through the already established voluntary channels (with more or less official committees on the receiving side). The problem of orphans received special attention, with £ 11.000 of the total sum of £ 100.000 devoted to their cause. As the sub-committee felt that it did not have sufficient information on the distress of the clergy, it abstained from addressing this issue, except for recommending it to the attention of the local committees of distribution. The sum of £ 38.000 – more than one third of the total parliamentary appropriation – was remitted to the former enemy country of Saxony, which was to lose more than half of its territory at the Congress of Vienna a few months later. The Kingdom of Saxony’s share of the voluntary contributions had a similar proportion.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid. 712, 725.

⁶⁶ “Instructions and Table for the Distribution of 100,000£ granted by the Imperial Parliament of Great Britain, and the Amount of the Private Subscription for the Relief of the Sufferers by the late War in Germany”, in: *The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions, and Politics* 13 (1815) 1, 24-33. According to this article,

5. Conclusions

The literature on what some call the “NGO-world” or “global civil society” frequently depicts the anti-slavery movement as the original historical reference case, as the starting point for the formation of networks that became an increasingly significant force in world politics in the twentieth century.⁶⁷ Unlike abolitionism, transnational humanitarian relief activities that predated those of the Red Cross are virtually unknown. The present article shows that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, these causes were intertwined elements of evangelical concern – a concern that transgressed issue areas, religious demarcations, as well as national and

£104.350 voluntary contributions had been remitted to Germany, of which £37.250 were given to places belonging to the Kingdom of Saxony.

⁶⁷ S. Charnovitz, “Two Centuries of Participation: NGOs in International Governance”, in: *Michigan Journal of International Law* 18 (1997) 2, 183–286; S.-L. Hoffmann, *Civil Society, 1750–1914*, London 2006; V. Heins, *Nongovernmental Organizations in International Society: Struggles over Recognition*, New York 2008; B. Reinalda, *Routledge History of International Organizations: From 1815 to the Present Day*, London 2009.

imperial boundaries. Moral capital acquired by the anti-slavery movement was harnessed through a vibrant civil society for other humanitarian instances. There was no dramatic time gap in the evolution of the advocacy and service dimensions of transnational civil society. Rather, these dimensions co-emerged and interacted closely with one another. This development in Britain involved a core of evangelical activists at a time when civil society in the United States was still in its infancy.⁶⁸

Two factors contributed significantly to these transnational efforts, namely expatriate activism and nationalism. Immigrant communities played a crucial role for the identification of problems, for activating larger circles of British civil society, for communicating with their home countries, and for organising networks and transfers across borders. A well-integrated network of German immigrants contributed to the relief efforts in Britain, to some degree blurring the categories of "us" and "them". In the life-world of immigrant communities, national attachment to their home countries acquired a transnational quality and set civilian border-crossing operations in motion that involved the larger society of their new homeland. This was one of the ways in which

⁶⁸ See J. N. Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts*, Cambridge/Mass. 2008.

transnationalism was directly connected to national sentiment, rather than being at odds with it.

Nationalism among Britons played a role in different ways. In the rhetoric and practical relief work, there was a marked tendency of advancing the cause of Britain through the support of brothers in arms, frequently combined with anti-French sentiments.⁶⁹ With various nuances and rationalisations – for instance dynastic relations, religious affinities and fairness in the sharing of the burdens of war – this was the dominant line of argument. The mobilisation of national sentiment for a humanitarian cause went hand in hand with the role of a disaster abroad in promoting patriotism and bellicosity at home. At the same time, British protagonists sometimes expressed pride that their nation was capable of caring about others for the mere sake of humanity. Thus, nationalism or benevolent imperialism on the one hand, and cosmopolitan humanitarianism on the other, could go along with each other. While the challenge to the hagiographic view of humanitarianism is perhaps this article's principal contribution to the scholarly debate, it does not support a crude cynical understanding of the campaign for humanitarian relief.

⁶⁹ On the role of anti-French and anti-revolutionary sentiments for British nation-building, see L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, New Haven 2009, 315-320.

Despite the dissolution of the Holy German Empire in 1806, Germany was consistently seen as a larger befriending entity, transcending its complicated system of sovereign states. This both anachronistic and premature vision of a German nation, and the existing cosmopolitan strand of humanitarian thought, enabled expatriates from German states that were not allies of the United Kingdom, such as the Kingdom of Saxony, to direct a remarkably high share of the British bounties to benefit former enemy territories. For all their complex background, their ambiguity and their correlation with the national interest, the British voluntary relief campaigns for German sufferers in the years 1805 to 1815 provide an example of cosmopolitan humanitarianism. This example is in many respects strikingly modern, displaying many parallels to present-day voluntary action across borders, but it shows at the same time how time- and context-bound the supposedly universal ideals of humanitarianism are.