

Institution: The University of Manchester		
Unit of Assessment: 28 (History)		
Title of case study: History for humanitarians: Developing and deploying historical methods for humanitarian agencies and policy makers		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Bertrand Taithe Eleanor Davey	Taithe: Professor in Cultural History Davey: Senior Lecturer (2017-2019), British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow (2014-2017), Lecturer (2014)	Taithe: 2000-present Davey: 2014-2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Davey and Taithe's body of research has produced one of the first historical analyses of the emergence and development of the humanitarian aid sector and historicised its practices. It has, for the first time, brought historical analyses into the strategies and training of two of the four largest Nobel Prize-holder global humanitarian organisations, Médecins Sans Frontières and Save the Children (more than 60,000 humanitarians worldwide), allowing critical humanitarian histories to inform humanitarian futures. Their historical expertise has been deployed in the humanitarian sector and contributes to research and policy agendas for INGOs, funders and standard-setting organisations, shaping the entire humanitarian sector. This has integrated historical thinking in accounting for ongoing work. It also impacts on record keeping and archiving practices. The research also contributes to reshaping the educational agenda of global humanitarian agencies.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Taithe's late-1990s work on humanitarian history was a vital precursor to what is now a dynamic field of enquiry. Taithe works primarily on historical consciousness in the humanitarian sector and the shaping of epistemic communities in humanitarian practice. The research explores the genealogies of aid, looking at missionary genealogies, colonial encounters and forms of humanitarian governance [1]. Most recently, the research has been integral to the development of a policy-relevant investigation of pre-1912 practices of fundraising and accountability within the charity and humanitarian sectors [2]. Taithe's current research on Cambodia involves the development of new archival practices for humanitarian archives and historical analysis of ongoing medical work on hepatitis C.</p> <p>Davey (University of Manchester, May 2014-October 2019) previously held a position at the DFID-funded think tank Overseas Development Institute (ODI), where she specialised in the relevance of history for humanitarian policy and practice. Her research emphasises the evolution of public debates in which humanitarian agents participate, highlighting the important role played by political agendas and the interface between human rights, international aid, and domestic activism [3]. Davey's research has brought an original history of ideas approach to humanitarian studies, countering a tendency to focus on institutional archives and related methodologies.</p> <p>Taithe and Davey's research has focused on tracking the dynamic origins of humanitarianism, the professionalising dimension of the sector and key ideas that have shaped how humanitarianism has grown as an applied practice. Methodologically this research stresses knowledge co-production [4] with users and practitioners as a method of historical enquiry. It invites a growing awareness of the uses of history, archives, and ideas about the past in humanitarian decision-making processes.</p>		

The research has contributed a number of important insights for the field:

- Revealing the heterogeneous origins of the humanitarian sector [2];
- Questioning institutional narratives that present humanitarianism as timeless and apolitical [1];
- Furthering understanding of the development of manifold professional practices within the humanitarian sector (advocacy, fundraising, public relations, accountability) [5];
- Historicising reform agendas and processes within and around the humanitarian sector [3, 6].

Taithe and Davey's experience as applied researchers is captured in a series of working papers and joint publications with humanitarians [4], many of which have translated into academic work, designed to further knowledge exchange between different research users and producers [6]. The research is impact-led from conception through to publication and beyond; it consistently engages with current practices and invites humanitarians to think historically within their practice *in situ*. For example, the *Disasters* special issue [6], edited by Davey with a contribution from Taithe, was the first time this profession-facing journal had ever been devoted to historical questions in its 40-year history. Interdisciplinary and fully peer-reviewed, *Disasters* is the most important forum for critiques of humanitarian response in conflict and disaster settings; it reaches broadly to international non-academic and humanitarian practitioner audiences.

3. References to the research

Outputs

1. **Taithe**, B. (2016). The Cradle of the New Humanitarian System? International Work and European Volunteers at the Cambodian Border Camps, 1979-1993. *Contemporary European History*, 25(2), 335-358. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777316000102>
2. Roddy, S., Strange, J-M., & **Taithe**, B. (2018). *The Charity Market and Humanitarianism in Britain, 1870-1912*. Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350058019>
3. **Davey**, E. (2015). *Idealism Beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954-1988*. Cambridge University Press. Available from HEI on request.
4. Abu Sa'Da, C., Duroch, F., & **Taithe**, B. (2014). Attacks on medical missions: Overview of a polymorphous reality: The case of Médecins Sans Frontières. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 95(890), 309-330. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383114000186>
5. **Taithe**, B. (2016). Danger, Risk, Security and Protection: Concepts at the Heart of the History of Humanitarian Aid. In M. Neuman & F. Weissman (Eds.), *Saving Lives and Staying Alive: The Professionalisation of Humanitarian Security*, Hurst, 37-53. Available from HEI on request.
6. **Davey**, E., & Scriven, K. (2015). Humanitarian Aid in the Archives: Introduction. *Disasters*, 39(s2), s113-s128. <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12150>. Introduction to special issue, *Aid in the Archives: Academic Histories for a Practitioner Audience*.

Evidence of quality

The quality of this research is demonstrated by considerable financial support from national research agencies (see below), and by successful passage of resulting publications through the peer review process. *Idealism beyond Borders* [3] was reviewed as a "rigorous intellectual history" (*Journal of Contemporary History*), an "erudite piece of historiography" (*International Labour and Working Class History*) and was awarded the International Studies Association (ISA) Ethics Section (IETHICS) Book Award in 2017. With more than 7,000 members, ISA is one of the oldest interdisciplinary associations dedicated to understanding international, transnational and global affairs.

Supporting grants:

- (i) 2011-2014. ESRC, 'Charitable consumption: Innovation in compassion in Britain, 1870-1912', The University of Manchester (UoM) awarded GBP284,073. Co-I **Taithe**. PI Julie-Marie Strange. ES/I031359/1
- (ii) 2014-2017. The British Academy, Postdoctoral Fellowship, 'Relief and the People: Humanitarianism and the Struggle for National Liberation', UoM awarded GBP223,728. PI **Davey**. PF140068

(iii) 2019-2023. Department for International Development/Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), 'Measuring the Impacts of Attacks on Healthcare', UoM awarded GBP1,562,153; total value GBP2,500,000. Co-I **Taithe**. PI Larissa Fast. This project includes a historical work package essential in the design of the research aims.

4. Details of the impact

Taithe and Davey's research has had a multi-level impact on analysis, decision-making and training in the international aid sector. It has brought historical methods and analyses into the strategies and training of two of the four largest Nobel Prize-holder global humanitarian organisations, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Save the Children (SCF). This impact-led research has directly influenced the expansion and diversification of historical research capacity in the humanitarian sector, and, by extension, helped to improve the efficacy of relief work. Aid organisations typically have limited capacity for in-house research and policy analysis, making the role of applied research centres and academic advisory positions crucial. The research of Taithe and Davey informed and contributed to some of the most important humanitarian policy think tanks in the UK and Europe (Centre de Réflexion sur l'Action et les Savoirs Humanitaires (CRASH) for MSF; Humanitarian Affairs Team for SCF), while also advocating for historical perspectives in major global forums shaping aid agendas such as the steering committee of Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP); Fondation de la Croix Rouge; International Humanitarian Studies board; and the World Humanitarian Summit.

Research agendas of organisations

Through the production and co-production of research specifically for humanitarian practitioner readerships, this research has renewed INGOs' and humanitarian think tanks' internal research agendas. Through this work historical perspectives are now routinely included in debates and projects. Leading think tanks the Humanitarian Affairs Team (SCF) and CRASH (MSF) have initiated new historical projects of their own as a result (several monographs advised by Taithe; edited volumes; occasional papers). Historical considerations highlighted through the research have shaped the way that both individual NGOs and think tanks with a sector-wide focus approached consultations for the United Nations World Humanitarian Summit, a series of international meetings culminating in a conference in Istanbul in 2016. For example, SCF's Humanitarian Effectiveness project, launched at Istanbul, considers evolving understandings of efficiency and value in aid work and was framed in historical terms, citing multiple publications by Taithe and Davey, including [3] [A]. The study advocated for more regular use of historical methods to ensure "*a more rounded perspective on the environments in which humanitarians operate and the effects of humanitarian action within them*" [A, p. 87]. The Humanitarian Director at SCF UK thus states in relation to Taithe's work: "*a key part of my role has been to foster far greater critical reflection within my organisation's leadership space in order to look afresh at our own and the wider sector's history... That simply would not have been possible without [Taithe's] personal guidance and involvement*" [B].

[text removed for publication] The research also extensively informed a flagship report by the ODI's Humanitarian Policy Group. *Time to Let Go* [D] cited Davey's research several times in its 80 pages, and included a section specifically focused on 'learning from history' [D]. The report draws on the research particularly to support the diagnosis of weaknesses in systemic reform as "*less a failure to acknowledge and learn from past mistakes [...] and more a failure to use historical analysis to critically explore some of the foundational assumptions on which the system rests*" [D, p. 12]. The research has also changed the direction of MSF's work on security, away from offering a public relations campaign and towards a research agenda devoted to the study of attacks on healthcare. Taithe's plenary lectures on historical perspectives on attacks on healthcare debates at the Berlin Humanitarian Congress in 2014 made an intervention captured in an article co-authored with MSF [4]. This shift of emphasis produced a book [5] on which the director of CRASH comments: "*[Taithe's] chapter on the history of the notions of danger, risk, security and protection was of great added value to that project*" [E]. The shift towards more research to inform humanitarian practice secured a DFID/FCDO-funded research project (approximately GBP1,500,000 awarded to The University of Manchester; see section 3, grant (iii)) involving MSF,

the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Health Organization and in collaboration with Chatham House, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University (Taithe Co-I). It also influenced the strategy of sector-wide influential think tank, CRASH, contributing to its publications, including an historical project for MSF on Hepatitis C in Cambodia [1] and the development of two major CRASH-led historical accounts of humanitarian work.

The critical organisational and sector history is now accepted and used as part of current NGO policy-making and decision-making. When the Operations Department of MSF France commissioned a critical review of the operations carried out between 2015 and 2016 in Borno State, it included a “*detailed historical account*”. The director of CRASH writes: “*working together has made us... more historically minded than previously. Studying the precedent of relief operations and organizations, critically looking at humanitarian buzzwords and at dominant discourses that are often marred in historical ignorance contributes to forging a culture in which myths play a lesser role*” [E]. They now value historical methods to produce better plans and policies. Practice-based organisations such as MSF and SCF now commission research work which employs historical methods to inform programmes and reform decision-making and policy framing, for instance ex-MSF president Jean-Hervé Bradol and Marc LePape’s historical account of humanitarian aid during the Rwandan Genocide. It has reshaped the writing of evaluation reports and policy papers [A, D, F], evidence of a durable shift which enables NGOs to comprehend their role over time and produce more nuanced policy-making debates [D, G]. As the director of CRASH testifies: “*For MSF, which dedicates important resources to the learning and development of its staff, there is no question that historical thinking contributes to having teams in charge of relief operations that are more astute.*” [E]

Steering of norm-setting organisations in the humanitarian world

Thanks to their historical research profile, both Davey and Taithe have contributed to important debates and policy groups for the entire humanitarian system, in this way informing the development of professional practice for the sector. Taithe, uniquely for a historian, has been invited to take high-profile roles in the humanitarian sector: he has served on the Conseil Scientifique of CRASH since 2013; as a Trustee of UK-Med since 2014; Trustee of the Mines Advisory Group since 2017; and was on the advisory board of the Humanitarian Policy Group-ODI Global History Project between 2011 and 2014. In 2014, he was elected by the NGO member organisations to serve on the steering committee of ALNAP, the largest global learning network of NGOs, UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, donors, academics and consultants, and was elected in 2016 to the board of the International Humanitarian Studies Association as the first historian of this organisation’s governing body. After receiving the Fonds Croix-Rouge Française’s Prix de Recherche in 2016, Davey served as the sole historian on the Conseil Scientifique of its successor foundation between 2018 and 2019.

These roles have ensured the far-reaching influence of their research, including participation in the New York and Geneva United Nations humanitarian preparatory meetings and the final World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, which produced the ‘Agenda for Humanity’ – endorsed by most global humanitarian organisations and United Nations agencies [G]. Taithe was the only historian signatory of the commitments for academia formed as part of this Agenda, ensuring history features as part of the commitment to evidence-based humanitarian action [G]. Extending collaborations with the United Nations system, in 2016 the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI) became a collaborating centre of the World Health Organization and in 2018 hosted the world meeting of collaborating centres working on emergency humanitarian responses. The WHO collaborating centre status was renewed in January 2020 under Taithe’s leadership, in recognition of the “*valuable contribution*” to research [H]. The collaborating centre was made its first partner on the ‘triple nexus’ – the relationship between humanitarian aid, development and peace. Only two other collaborating centres on this domain have been identified to date.

Training and practice in the humanitarian sector

The embedding of historical thinking in the humanitarian sector led to the recognition of its importance in training programmes and events. The research [1, 2] has informed the development

and delivery of such training, utilising the findings on epistemic communities and the politics of aid. It produced the historically-grounded training of NGO personnel and underpinned the overall curriculum design for two classes of the Save the Children course *Critical reflection and humanitarian affairs* in 2018, and in 2019 for workshops to MSF staff on the uses of history in ongoing humanitarian work. These very well received workshops, entitled *Histoire synchrone*, built on [1]. MSF commissioned Taithe to create a history course unit for its new postgraduate programme, launched in 2019 by MSF, HCRI and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. The course reached three cohorts of 60 students originating from the cadres of MSF, mostly national staff of MSF from every region in which the organisation operates from Afghanistan to Yemen. This demand echoed previous exchanges with MSF staff on the need to use historical methods to contextualise and improve understanding of humanitarian work. At the request of MSF, the history course has been *made compulsory* for all MSF staff undertaking their MSc since 2018 (between 60 and 90 per year). As the Director of Studies at Fondation MSF testifies: “*Our senior staff...has realised the extent to which history carries lessons for their current practice...all of those I personally debriefed have expressed their enthusiasm in discovering the use of historical methods for their own work*” [1].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. The Humanitarian Affairs Team, Save the Children, ‘The Echo Chamber: Results, Management and the Humanitarian Effectiveness Agenda’ (2016): http://humanitarianeffectivenessproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/SC_Humanitarian_Affairs_Team_The_Echo_Chamber.pdf
- B. Testimonial from Humanitarian Director, Save the Children UK, documenting the impacts for SCF of the research collaboration with Taithe (November 2020).
- C. [text removed for publication]
- D. ODI Humanitarian Policy Group, ‘Time to let go: Remaking humanitarian action for the modern era’ (2016): <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10422.pdf>
- E. Testimonial from Director of CRASH, Médecins Sans Frontières, documenting the contribution of Davey and Taithe’s research in stimulating critical reflection on humanitarian practices within MSF (9 January 2020).
- F. Michaël Neuman, MSF CRASH, ‘Dying for humanitarian ideas: Using images and statistics to manufacture humanitarian martyrdom’ (15 February 2017): <https://www.msf-crash.org/en/publications/humanitarian-actors-and-practices/dying-humanitarian-ideas-using-images-and-statistics>
- G. Statement of Commitments from Humanitarian Scholars at the World Humanitarian Summit: <https://ihsa.info/content/uploads/2017/11/Commitments-WHS.pdf>
- H. World Health Organization letter of renewal of HCRI as a Collaborating Centre (14 January 2020).
- I. Testimonial from Director of Studies, Fondation Médecins Sans Frontières, corroborating the impact of Davey and Taithe’s historically-grounded training for MSF staff (9 January 2020).