

The Rockefeller Foundation Fellows in the Social Sciences (1920s-1970): Transnational Networks, Construction of Disciplines and Policy Making in the Age of Globalization

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I

I undertook research at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) in the summer 2012 as part of a collective research project entitled “Rockefeller Foundation Fellows in the Social Sciences (1920-1970): Transnational Networks, Construction of Disciplines and Policy Making in the Age of Globalization.” A French-German group of researchers coordinated by Ludovic Tournès, University of Geneva, and Michael Werner, Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris will analyze the role of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) in the shaping of the social sciences between the 1920s and 1945, especially through its fellowship program. The project is based on a study of fellows, the goal of which is to reconstruct their professional careers and trajectories in the long run, before, during, and after their fellowships.

The worldwide geographical scope of the project gives us the opportunity to go beyond national borders and to draw a global map of the transnational networks of social scientists in the construction and development of which the RF played a prominent role. In following the fellows’ careers, we also study the ways social sciences were used, both at the national and international levels, as intellectual tools in the elaboration of public policies, especially through the channel of expertise.

This program fits into the growing field of transnational history, applying its methods to the intellectual and institutional history of fellows, who have been largely neglected by historians of philanthropy, most studies having focused on grants given to institutions. In so doing, the project aims at a transnational and trans-disciplinary history of the social sciences by analysing how the social sciences, as a disciplinary unit, were shaped by travel for research or educational purposes and border-crossing interaction during the interwar period. In this way, the project seeks to determine how the boundaries of every discipline were in constant evolution and redefinition throughout the period.

II

The aim of the research trip was twofold. In the first step each scholar contributed to the construction of a database which collected biographical and professional information about more than a thousand world-wide Rockefeller fellows in the social sciences between 1924 and 1945. This collective work was done with Justine Faure, (University of Strasbourg), Morgane Labbé, (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales) Frédéric Attal, (École Normale Supérieure de Cachan), Ludovic Tournès, (University of Geneva) and Marie Scot (Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris).

The information came from the *Rockefeller Foundation Directory of Fellowships and Scholarships* and from a 1943 RF document called *European Fellowships*. Since these documents were available in advance, this information was added to the database during the preparatory stage in Europe. However, the Directory provides only core information about the fellows' biographical background, so additional data is needed to achieve the overall aim of the project: to sketch a full picture of the profile, the duration, terms and the consequences of the individual fellowships for the disciplinary transformations of the social sciences as a whole. Consequently, additional data was needed. For this purpose, each member of the

group consulted the RF fellowship cards of respective fellows as well as the project files pertaining to the programs in which the fellowships were awarded.

Accordingly, the first goal of the trip was to advance the completion of the database of RF fellows in the social sciences. Each of the researchers had been assigned about two hundred fellows, whose cards were to be consulted in order to augment the information previously gathered. During my week at the RAC I consulted the fellowship cards and the fellowship files. Two hundred fellowship cards were consulted in the first three and four days. A lot of additional information not found in many individual entries in the fellowship directories was located, such as birth date, nationality, and professional positions at the time the fellowship was awarded. The fourth day was also used to consult the personal files (when they existed) in order to find information lacking in the cards. The last day of my visit was used to create, with the help of the fellowship cards, detailed biographical notices of fifteen fellows who were considered to be particularly interesting regarding their intellectual and institutional itineraries. All researchers in our group were to select from their two hundred fellows a few interesting ones who deserved particular attention, so as to combine the quantitative approach of the database with a qualitative approach by focusing in more detail on specific lives and careers.

III

In the second phase, each group member pursued their own research project which combined the collecting of the biographical information of the RF fellows in the social sciences with a particular focus on a discipline, the evolution of disciplinary perspectives and paradigms or on a transnational network of researchers. In my case, my research concentrates on the refugee scholar program the RF set up in 1933 to help scientists to escape from National Socialist Germany. Although the role and impact of American

philanthropy on refugee scholars is a well-established field of study, a bundle of open questions remain.

Many studies follow a national perspective by analyzing the reception of the refugee scholars and pass over the essentially transnational lives of the refugee scholars and do not ask how they shaped the cultural entanglement of the concerned societies in a context characterized by nationalism, global conflicts, and war. Secondly, most studies concentrate on the refugee scholar program and minimize the extensive networks of supporters in which the RF itself was embedded. For this reason, my research deals with the RF's institutional and personal network and asks, for example, if the RF cooperated with other philanthropic bodies, e.g., the Carnegie Endowment and Oberlaender Trust. How did cooperation with private refugee organizations in Europe develop? Was there cooperation between the RF and the League of Nations, the International Student Service or the International Federation of University Women as the files of the League of Nations suggest?

Thirdly, the project pays attention to another overlooked topic, the transition from World War II to the early post-war years and the role the RF played in the reformation of assistance programs for displaced scholars and the realignment of these programs to other world regions since the 1950s.

Considering this particular set of research questions, the project pursues a three-fold goal: First, it aims at re-conceptualizing the RF's refugee scholar program as an essentially transnational initiative that not only aimed at rescuing persecuted scholars, but also established transnational networks and structures of cooperation with groups and institutions in Europe before, during, and after World War II. The second aim is to position the RF's refugee scholar program in the history of the formation and re-formation of civil society networks in times of global crises and war, which consisted of philanthropic bodies, universities, private refugee organizations, and international governmental and non-

governmental organizations. Finally, by pursuing the careers of some refugee scholars and by analyzing the continuation of these private and philanthropic networks in the early years of the cold war the project traces the role refugee scholars played in bringing the RF together with academic refugee organizations and international organizations.

This second part of my research project is incomplete, because my stay at the RAC was exclusively dedicated to the collection of the biographical information and completion of the database. However, I profited on the fifth day of my stay by using the extensive and well-documented finding aids to create a list of documents that will allow me to dig deeper into the topic. The finding aids confirmed my early assumptions about the RF's close cooperation with other philanthropic organizations. Many folders of correspondence between the RF and the Oberlaender Trust, the International Student Service, the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars, and the Notgemeinschaft deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland or the High Commissioner for Refugees Coming from Germany, set up by the League of Nations in 1933 are available.

Second, while reviewing the finding aids, I discovered the personal papers of Alfred E. Cohn, one of the major American supporters of the refugee scholars. Cohn was one of the first American cardiologists and was appointed as assistant physician at the hospital of The Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research in 1911. From 1933 onwards, he interceded with grant giving institutions and American institutions of higher education on behalf of prosecuted scholars by engaging in concrete rescue missions within the framework of the larger Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced German Scholars and the more specialized Committee in Aid for Displaced Foreign Physicians. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to complete a first glance at his personal papers. Hopefully his correspondence will give insight into the functions and mechanics involved in setting up and integrating these

particular rescue missions into an expanding and already well-established landscape of higher education and philanthropic bodies.

IV

My research at the RAC was immensely valuable because it revealed to me the concrete dimensions of the fellowship program in the social sciences and its close and oftentimes complicated entanglement with the concurrent refugee scholar program of the RF. My participation in the database project allowed me to integrate the refugee scholars into a wider historiographical context, one that goes beyond the histories of refugees and humanitarianism, but also by includes approaches from the social and transnational history of border crossing networks. Therefore, at a later point in the project I will consult the archival material made available by the RAC more closely.

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