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Award given to book that says that NGOs often overlook those hardest to reach

A sociologist at Goldsmiths, University of London has won a major prize for a book that says that humanitarian organisations often help those who are easiest to assist, rather than the hardest.

Dr Monika Krause was awarded the Philip Abrams Memorial Prize by the British Sociological Association at its annual conference in Glasgow last week. Dr Krause, a senior lecturer in sociology, receives an award of £1,000.

Her book, 'The Good Project: Humanitarian Relief NGOs and the Fragmentation of Reason', is published by University of Chicago Press. To research it she spoke to 50 desk officers and directors of operations in 16 of the largest relief NGOs working globally.

Dr Krause argues that relief agencies try to help people but, in practical terms, the main focus of their work is to produce good projects. In an effort to guarantee a successful project, organisations are incentivised to help those who are easy to help, while those who are hardest to help often receive no assistance, given the limited and short-term funding for NGO-work.

In giving the prize, the current BSA President, Professor Lynn Jamieson, said the book was a "stunner". She said that Dr Krause had found that for NGOs a good project was about "meeting the expectations of donors, it's to do with the capacity of what the organisation can deliver, it's to do with the market positioning and the competition between relief organisations themselves, and not straightforwardly to do with the needs of those who need relief."

The book was not "simplistically blaming" NGOs but was a "challenging and very well-evidenced piece of work with a strong political punch," said Professor Jamieson.

The book also examined "the fact that large sectors of the world's population lack access to the basic means of living as a normal state of affairs...and the way that we all tolerate that."

The Philip Abrams Memorial Prize is presented annually to the best first and sole-authored sociology book. It was set up in memory of Professor Abrams, who died in 1981 aged 48, and whose work contributed substantially to sociology and social policy research. The award is judged by the BSA President and its two Publications Directors.

The other works shortlisted for the prize were: 'Benign Violence: Education in and Beyond the Age of Reason', by Ansgar Allen; 'The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm', by Kieran Durkin; 'Comedy and Distinction: The Cultural Currency of a 'Good' Sense of Humour', by Sam Friedman; 'A Cosmopolitan Journey? Difference, Distinction and Identity Work in Gap Year Travel', by Helene Snee; and 'Love, Marriage and Intimacy among Gujarati Indians: A Suitable Match', by Katherine Twamley.

- Dr Krause joined the sociology department at Goldsmiths in 2011. She holds a PhD in sociology from New York University and an MA in political sociology from the London School of Economics.

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Notes

The British Sociological Association's charitable aim is to promote sociology. The BSA is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales. Company Number: 3890729. Registered Charity Number 1080235 www.britsoc.co.uk The British Sociological Association's annual conference took place at Glasgow Caledonian University from 15 to 17 April 2015. Around 800 research presentations were given.