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Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

Published in:
New Political Science

DOI:
[10.1080/07393148.2018.1528538](https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2018.1528538)

Publication date:
2018

License
Unspecified

Citation for published version (APA):
Richey, L. A. (2018). Conceptualizing “Everyday Humanitarianism”: Ethics, Affects, and Practices of Contemporary Global Helping. *New Political Science*, 40(4), 625-639.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2018.1528538>

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Journal article (Accepted manuscript*)

Please cite this article as:

Richey, L. A. (2018). Conceptualizing “Everyday Humanitarianism”: Ethics, Affects, and Practices of Contemporary Global Helping. *New Political Science*, 4(4), 625-639. DOI: 10.1080/07393148.2018.1528538

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *New Political Science* on 25 Oct 2018, available online:

DOI: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/07393148.2018.1528538>

* This version of the article has been accepted for publication and undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the publisher’s final version AKA Version of Record.

Uploaded to [CBS Research Portal](#): June 2019

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Conceptualizing “Everyday Humanitarianism:” Ethics, Affects and Practices of Contemporary Global Helping

Humanitarian responses to disaster, poverty or pandemics have been around since antiquity, but humanitarianism as a field has a more recent history linked to international aid, non-governmental organizations and “humanitarian” actors.¹ International relations scholars use the term “humanitarianism” with a specific historical reference to the 1864 Geneva Conventions’ recognition in international law of humanitarian principles to govern the moral practice of war. In his history of humanitarianism, Barnett traces the more recent expansion of humanitarian space from the 19th century approach of governing war suffering to the 20th and 21st century nebulous interventions on behalf of an assumed shared humanity.² He dates this emergence of the new humanitarian mission to the end of the cold war as a result of the expansion of the global governance system and the growth of externally-focused humanitarian organizations within this system.³ Even earlier, however, with the late 1960s crisis in Biafra, humanitarianism had already begun to take on an assortment of media-driven and commercial interventions, with iconic press photographs and television footage, and massive donation advertisements in the name of an assumed shared humanity. Today, the field is more mediatized and marketized than ever, with social media campaigns relying on likes and shares while online forms of shopping and celebrity appeals contributing to organizations’ branding success.⁴

Everyday humanitarianism,⁵ a term I introduce in this special issue, links together and further expands on these developments, seeking to capture a broad set of emotions and practices *both* in the everyday lives of citizens/consumers as they engage in humanitarian practices outside of the formal structures of humanitarian actions, *and* in the quotidian practices of humanitarian actors within the increasingly complex parameters of the international humanitarian system.⁶ At the heart of my use of everyday humanitarianism is the assumption that, while an ethics of altruism may continue to inform what ordinary people and organizations do, the rhetoric and actions involved in such “helping” have changed for both of them. This may be because, as Calhoun explains, in the face of sustained economic instability and political crises, humanitarianism—both far away and closer to home—proposes an alternative ethical response: “Humanitarianism flourishes as an ethical response to emergencies not just because bad things happen in the world, but also because many people have lost faith in both economic development

¹ Monika Krause, *The Good Project: Humanitarian Relief NGOs and the Fragmentation of Reason* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 7.

² Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

³ Barnett.

⁴ Kennedy Denis, *Selling the distant other: Humanitarianism and imagery—Ethical dilemmas of humanitarian action* *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* 28 (2009): 1-25; Richey, Lisa Ann, and Ponte Stefano, *Brand aid: Shopping well to save the world* (U of Minnesota Press, 2011); Chouliaraki Lillie, *The ironic spectator: Solidarity in the age of post-humanitarianism* (Cambridge: Polity 2013)

⁵ Lisa Ann Richey, “Humanitarianism,” *International Political Economy of Everyday Life*, September 15, 2017, <http://i-peel.org/homepage/humanitarianism/>.

⁶ For accessible histories of humanitarianism, see Clive Barnett et al., *Globalizing Responsibility: The Political Rationalities of Ethical Consumption* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, n.d.), <http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1405145587.html>; M. Barnett and T.G. Weiss, eds., *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

and political struggle.”⁷ What does humanitarian “do-gooding”⁸ look like in the age of market-driven, celebrityized, digital media-based action? The contributions to this Special Issue examine the alternative individual and institutional practices of humanitarianism and provide unconventional, interdisciplinary approaches to understanding selected aspects of this civic and organizational benevolence. In this Introduction, I first discuss the key features of contemporary humanitarianism and, subsequently, I introduce the seven articles of this special issue, as they are organized around three key themes of everyday humanitarianism, namely “professionalization,” “marketization” and “mediatization.”

Everyday Humanitarianism

Humanitarianism is being conceptually debated, understood, and reworked through a large and diverse academic literature. The study of humanitarianism has gained considerable attention over the last decade as politics scholars struggle to define the remit of the concept whose effects hover through the realm of global governance, while simultaneously being invoked at the level of individual politics as a justification for moral action. Indeed, normative questions of whether or not humanitarianism is justified, under what conditions and for which kinds of actions by which actors have been central concerns to scholarship on the politics of humanitarianism.⁹

Debates about the goods, and ills, of humanitarianism center on its politics. This is bound up with the very character of humanitarianism – as Robert van Krieken notes, humanitarianism arises when the devout worry about the moral character of society and “takes on a life of its own, overshadowing the sorts of social, economic and political issues underpinning the problems being addressed.”¹⁰ Belloni argues that intervention in the domestic affairs within states on the grounds of a shared humanity, as humanitarianism is currently practiced in North–South relations, serves to support the interests of powerful elites and undermine the moral basis of human rights on which this intervention is predicated.¹¹ Alex De Waal argues that humanitarian organizations in north-east Africa failed to engage in the politics of famine production. They did not recognize that states avoid famine when it is deterred by the demos. But he insists that his critique is “not to abandon humanitarianism, which can again be a force for ethical progress. But a humanitarianism that sets itself against or above politics is futile.”¹²

This special issue takes these debates into account as it uses the term “humanitarianism” to signify the “good-doing” response to distant suffering, whether this distance is actually geographical or geopolitical (historically-derived inequalities characterized by an economic

⁷ Craig Calhoun, “The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order,” in *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 29.

⁸ Jo Littler, “‘I Feel Your Pain’: Cosmopolitan Charity and the Public Fashioning of the Celebrity Soul,” *Social Semiotics* 18, no. 2 (June 2008): 237–51.

⁹ Clifford Bob, “Merchants of Morality,” *Foreign Policy*, March 1, 2002, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2002/03/01/merchants_of_morality; Barnett and Weiss, *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*.

¹⁰ van Krieken, Robert, “Celebrity Humanitarianism and Settler Colonialism: G.A. Robinson and the Aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land,” in *Celebrity Humanitarianism and North-South Relations: Politics, Place and Power*, ed. Richey, Lisa Ann (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 189–209.

¹¹ Belloni, Roberto, “The Trouble with Humanitarianism,” *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2007): 451–74.

¹² Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (London, UK: James Currey, 1997), 6.

disparity), that includes an explicit or implicit claim for the moral and political basis of its engagement. Good-doing entails giving money, things or time. It can include raising awareness, fundraising, political interventions, policy lobbying or diplomacy in quiet rooms with powerful organizations, collaborations with the private sector, armed interventions, training, workshops, and projects to transform livelihoods, the spread of diseases, environmental change, infrastructure or gender relations. But it can also include shopping, following social media accounts and liking of celebrity campaigns or tweeting relevant information – all of which may contribute to expanding the reach and impact of traditional good-doing. In all these forms, everyday humanitarianism refers to an expanded series of practices in the everyday lives of citizens that purport to make a difference outside the traditional boundaries of humanitarian activity, and it can also refer to the quotidian practices of humanitarian workers as they constantly negotiate the boundaries of formal structures. Both involve, in Redfield’s words writing about Médecins Sans Frontières, “Moving along the sharp edge of morality... confront[ing] politics at every turn while seeking to stand against it.”¹³ Everyday humanitarianism as documented in this collection, can be found in shopping malls and International Organizations alike, and the struggles over its ethics and politics are consistent.

Despite the new definitional twist to the term that I am constructing here, everyday humanitarianism has a history. Initially the term was used to refer to the realm of humanitarian affect and the structure of feelings of helping and helpfulness.¹⁴ The idea is already implicit in Adam Smith’s “moral sentiments,” as he describes how doing-good is tightly linked to empathetic emotion,¹⁵ the capacity to imagine oneself in the shoes of suffering others, thereby potentially feeling responsible for them. The specific term everyday humanitarianism has been used by Schwittay to describe how Kiva.org, the world’s first person-to-person microlending website, used digital platforms to routinely nurture affective connections between Northern publics and worthy recipients through the use of new media.¹⁶ Schwittay’s work on microfinance demonstrates how these structures of feeling gave rise to diverse practices and enabled the longer-term creation of affiliated communities. It is important to note that her study concludes with an affirmation that such affective politics of everyday humanitarianism open up “spaces of hope.”¹⁷ In a similar spirit, Miriam Ticktin claims that such affective engagements are directly connected to politics, arguing that humanitarianism is “an ethos, a cluster of sentiments, a set of laws, a moral imperative to intervene, and a form of government.”¹⁸

Indeed, far from being separate sides of humanitarianism, the affective dimension of helping is fundamental to global governance, and all forms of humanitarianism are on the rise. North-South aid is increasingly shifting from “development” to “humanitarianism,” and even while contributions from individual nations ebb and flow, aggregate official budgets for humanitarianism have skyrocketed. For example, humanitarian aid from OECD DAC donors has increased from USD 10.9 billion per year in 2007-9 to USD 16.4 billion per year in 2013-15.

¹³ Peter Redfield, “Humanitarianism,” in *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, by Didier Fassin, 1st ed. (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012), 464.

¹⁴ Anke Schwittay, *New Media and International Development: Representation and Affect in Microfinance* (Abingdon England ; New York: Routledge, 2015), 9.

¹⁵ Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (London: University of California Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Schwittay, *New Media and International Development: Representation and Affect in Microfinance*.

¹⁷ Schwittay, 173–77.

¹⁸ Miriam Ticktin, “Transnational Humanitarianism,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014), p. 274.

According to O'Hagan and Hirono, humanitarian assistance from the donors outside the global North rose almost eighteen times in ten years: from 2000 (USD 35 million) to 2010 (623 million).¹⁹ Yet, humanitarianism is still often explored in a North-South perspective, assuming that organizations funded and dominated by the Global North carry out humanitarian acts of “rescue” in the Global South.²⁰ Furthermore, humanitarianism is mostly assumed to be carried out by (international) organizations and focused on recipients.²¹

The histories of affective bonding in humanitarian governance through representations of “helping” have also been studied.²² For example, Harrison documents the historical process through which representations of Africa have come to constitute national self-perceptions in Britain, creating both British modernity and nationalism over time.²³ Müller, for instance, refers to the extraordinary affective wave that rose out of the Live Aid benefit concert of 1985—an event designed to rally funds and public support for famine relief in Ethiopia.²⁴ This campaign (and the subsequent Live 8 event in 2005) were strongly criticized for their graphic images, painting a visceral portrait of misery, destitution and tragedy in Africa. The association of emaciated children with the hit single *Do They Know It's Christmas?* utilized patronizing lyrics of humanitarian need within “a world of dread and fear” and a place “where the only water flowing is the bitter sting of tears.” Northern audiences were thus made to feel heart-broken, ashamed and guilty for the suffering they witnessed on the concert screen. Such “shock effect” campaigns²⁵ which cast the “other” as a passive victim, may have led to unprecedented donations, but also “marked a watershed” in the debate surrounding western representations of global poverty and prompted some humanitarian aid organizations to establish guidelines and codes of practice within their public communication practices as analyzed by Dogra.²⁶ In response to Live Aid, “positive imagery” has since gained popularity for conversely depicting smiling children and hopeful scenes, intended to project these people’s dignity and self-determination and eliciting more positive emotions of tender-heartedness and hope. Today, both styles of appeal remain “dominant styles of humanitarian communication, co-existing and often

¹⁹ Jacinta O'Hagan and Miwa Hirono, “Fragmentation of the International Humanitarian Order? Understanding ‘Cultures of Humanitarianism’ in East Asia,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 28, no. 4 (2014): 412, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679414000586>.

²⁰ Patricia Daley, “Rescuing African Bodies: Celebrities, Consumerism and Neoliberal Humanitarianism,” *Review of African Political Economy* 40, no. 137 (September 1, 2013): 375–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2013.816944>.

²¹ Michel Agier, *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011).

²² Malkki, Liisa H., *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015); Lilie Chouliaraki, “The Mediation of Suffering and the Vision of a Cosmopolitan Public,” *Television & New Media* 9, no. 5 (September 1, 2008): 371–91; Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (London, UK, Thousand Oaks, CA, and New Delhi: Sage, 2006); Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

²³ Graham Harrison, “Campaign Africa: Exploring the Representation of Africa and Its Role in British Identity,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2013): 528–547, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2012.00520.x>; Harrison, Graham, *The African Presence: Representations of Africa in the Construction of Britishness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

²⁴ Tanja R Müller, “The Long Shadow of Band Aid Humanitarianism: Revisiting the Dynamics Between Famine and Celebrity,” *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2013): 470–84.

²⁵ Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism*.

²⁶ Nandita Dogra, *Representations of Global Poverty: Aid, Development and International NGOs* (London ; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2012), 5.

complementing one another,”²⁷ each strategically mobilized to drum up public action through emotion-oriented appeals, sometimes emphasizing feelings of guilt and shame and others empathy and gratitude.²⁸

More recently, we appear to be experiencing the emergence of a new emotional sensibility, which is digitally-driven and low-effort on behalf of Northern publics, involving small online tasks with little or no engagement with distant sufferers – and hence with low-intensity or no emotional involvement on their part. Chouliaraki uses the term “post-humanitarian”²⁹ to describe this form of humanitarian solidarity that is predicated upon converging logics of consumption and utilitarianism and has thus become less about “others” and more about “us.” Doing good for others now links the traditional humanitarian principle of shared humanity with mundane micro-practices that aim at personal gratification, such as the click of the mouse or an e-signature, or what Richey and Ponte have critiqued as “shopping well to save the world.”³⁰ At the same time, moral universals and political questions of justice and equality may fade into the background of our debates over humanitarian interventions or are treated as irrelevant. What are the everyday discourses and practices of humanitarianism today, its affects and their consequences?

Political science scholarship on the “local turn” has set a precedent for calling attention to everyday humanitarianism. Notably, Duffield has studied the inside of what he terms “the aid industry” from an everyday perspective.³¹ In peace-building and post-conflict studies of IR, scholars such as Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond and have advocated for a “local turn” as a critique of the hegemonic, hierarchical and exclusionary ideas and practices that constitute the more mainstream liberal peace approach.³² However, this has not gone unchallenged. Randazzo argues that “the notion of the everyday can be understood as a double-edged sword, one that has indeed challenged the rigidity of the liberal peace, but one that has been severely hindered by its biased and ambiguous relationship with both its anti-foundationalist roots and normative aspirations.”³³ Other scholars assert that the “micro-moves” in IR theory to integrate affect, space and time are intellectually productive for understanding contemporary global and local politics.³⁴ The “everyday” micro-move has been applied to humanitarianism by Hilhorst and Jansen who focus on the everyday practices of aid delivery as constituting “humanitarian space” noting that “the humanitarian arena is not ‘out there.’ It is discursively created by agencies,

²⁷ Lillie Chouliaraki, “Post-Humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication beyond a Politics of Pity,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010b): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877909356720>.

²⁸ Chouliaraki, “Post-Humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication beyond a Politics of Pity.”

²⁹ Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism*.

³⁰ Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte, *Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World*, A Quadrant Book (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

³¹ Duffield, Mark R., “Duffield, Mark (2010). ‘Risk-Management and the Fortified Aid Compound: Everyday Life in Post-Interventionary Society. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 4(4), 453-474.” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 4, no. 4 (2010): 453–74.

³² Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P Richmond, “The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace,” *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (June 1, 2013): 763–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.800750>.

³³ Elisa Randazzo, “The Paradoxes of the ‘Everyday’: Scrutinising the Local Turn in Peace Building,” *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 8 (August 2, 2016): 1351–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1120154>.

³⁴ Ty Solomon and Brent J. Steele, “Micro-Moves in International Relations Theory,” *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 2 (March 7, 2016): 267–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066116634442>.

media and other stakeholders.”³⁵ In examining the ways that power is negotiated in two humanitarian arenas—the Kakuma refugee camp and the Asian tsunami of 2004—they call for research that bridges the gaps between the formal and the informal practices of humanitarian aid, linking the daily struggles with macro-political dimensions. As Malkki’s work with refugees in Tanzania and Finnish volunteers demonstrates, international humanitarianism begins at home, somewhere local and specific in context, and these practices shape the humanitarian subjects.³⁶

This Special Issue arises out of ongoing conversations over the politics of contemporary humanitarianism from an exploratory conference³⁷ and beyond between scholars coming from diverse disciplines and research areas. Political scientists have begun to recognize the critical challenges that marketization and mediatization have posed to humanitarianism.³⁸ Our authors come from the disciplines of political science, law, anthropology, development studies, and media and communications. Linking the history of humanitarian politics with its contemporary manifestations based on empirical research and conceptual development is a contribution of this special issue.

Framing of everyday humanitarianism has also been inspired by the conference keynotes given by Craig Calhoun historicizing the “emergency” and Miriam Ticktin charting an ethnography critical of “innocence.”³⁹ As an historian and sociologist, Calhoun has been influential in thinking about the construction of the humanitarian response to human suffering. He interrogates the assumption that the morality of humanitarianism is a higher response to the suffering of strangers than to that of our countrymen and women or kinfolk. His work has demonstrated how the concepts of “humanitarian” and “emergency” are socio-cultural and part of a social imaginary that shapes how we come to imagine the world and how the management of emergencies has become big business.⁴⁰ Calhoun explicitly links the ideational and representational world with its political institutionalization, both formally and in everyday practices. The “emergency imaginary” is an “historical, distinctive, mainly modern way of thinking. To imagine human beings in the abstract, as it were, in their mere humanity, dis-embedded from kinship, religion, nationality, and other webs of identity and relationship is not universal. Replacing ties among people with a notion of equivalence among strangers is linked not only to ethical universalism, though, but also to the notion of ‘bare life,’ and to the administrative gaze of states, and to thinking in terms of populations.”⁴¹ The contributions here on everyday humanitarianism constitute individuals, whether they are consumers or humanitarian workers in war, as grounded, contextualized and grappling in their practices with

³⁵ Dorothea Hilhorst and Bram J. Jansen, “Humanitarian Space as Arena: A Perspective on the Everyday Politics of Aid,” *Development and Change* 41, no. 6 (2010): 1117–39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01673.x>.

³⁶ Malkki, Liisa H., *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism*.

³⁷ The research network on Celebrities and North-South Relations based at Roskilde University in Denmark collaborated with the London School of Economics and Politics in the UK to convene an international conference to explore “everyday humanitarianism.” <https://celebnorthsouth.wordpress.com/activities/upcoming-conference-everyday-humanitarianism-ethics-affects-and-practices/>

³⁸ See Chapter 9 in Hoffman and Weiss, *Humanitarianism, War and Politics: Solferino to Syria and Beyond*.

³⁹ Miriam Ticktin, “A World without Innocence,” *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 4 (2017): 577–90, <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12558>.

⁴⁰ Craig Calhoun, “A World of Emergencies: Fear, Intervention, and the Limits of the Cosmopolitan Order,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 41, no. 4 (2004): 373–95; Calhoun, “The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order.”

⁴¹ Calhoun, “The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order,” 34.

the relationships between the universality of humanitarian principles and the diversity of politics in context.

Miriam Ticktin has provided us with insight into blurring the boundaries of humanitarianism and its explicit moral engagements from an embodied standpoint merging legal and medical anthropology.⁴² Humanitarianism relies on biopolitical processes that “make up people” as victims to be rescued, concentrating on saving lives and upholding human rights. In her work with Ilana Feldman, she describes how The category of “humanity” is constructed in opposition to the “inhumane,” which frequently – and paradoxically – is represented also by human beings.⁴³ This means that differentiation between humans takes place despite of the emphasis on equal value to human lives, and thus the contributions to this Special Issue are attentive to the differentiating practices of everyday humanitarianism. Ticktin has demonstrated how earlier anthropological work attempted to distinguish between humanitarianism and other projects that want to “do good,” such as human rights and development.⁴⁴ Human rights were understood to be about politics and justice, and ultimately, about turning to the law to correct past violations. In contrast, development was about improving economic well-being through long-term investments in the future, guided by a belief in progress. As a distinct field, humanitarianism was seen to exist in the temporal present, with no pretension to longer-term resolutions of inequality. But with the overwhelming growth of the humanitarian aid industry, including new geopolitical actors, these boundaries are being further broken down as we see in the expanding realm of everyday humanitarianism. Additionally, Ticktin pushes research that is explicit in its normative engagement with humanitarianism, a challenge we have presented to our authors as indicated by the subtitle on “ethics, affects and practices.”

Focusing on the “everyday” is an attempt to understand contemporary humanitarian practices and how they are creating ever-expanding notions of humanitarianism. Everyday humanitarianism can be helpful for understanding two different kinds of phenomena: (1) the everyday practices of humanitarian workers and (2) the practices of humanitarianism that take place outside of the formal humanitarian structures. We organize the contributions to this Special Issue under the three themes of the Call for Papers: *professionalization*, *marketization* and *mediatization*. While most articles in this issue address a cross-section of the concepts and themes as they intersect in the theoretical and empirical work under study, I will introduce the contributions organized according to the theme of their primary contribution.

Professionalization

Professionalization refers to two inter-related phenomena: (1) the gradual rationalisation of the routine practices of humanitarianism (through for instance, technocratic administration, audit regimes, skills-based training and human resources management) that focus on humanitarianism as an operational matter while de-ethicizing and de-politicizing humanitarianism;⁴⁵ and (2) the fusion of humanitarian with military concerns, in various crisis zones, where care for the

⁴² Miriam Ticktin, “Transnational Humanitarianism,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43, no. 1 (October 21, 2014): 273–89, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102313-030403>.

⁴³ Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin, eds., *In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ Ticktin, “Transnational Humanitarianism.”

⁴⁵ Krause, *The Good Project: Humanitarian Relief NGOs And the Fragmentation of Reason*.

vulnerable in the name of “common humanity” ultimately serves to support a hegemonic geopolitical order and the interests of its powerful elites—what has also been theorized as “humanitarian securitization.”⁴⁶ This special issue section addresses the following questions: How can we describe professionalized humanitarianism in different contexts of human need and what are its implications for the norms and practices of humanitarianism? Which conceptual and analytical tools do we need to describe and critique the complex power relations of humanitarianism? Which different forms of transnational ethics do they call forth and how do they configure the relationship between donor and receiver, benefactor and sufferer, “us” and “them”?

Rebecca Sutton’s article, **“The ‘Phantom Local’ and the Everyday Distinction Practices of Humanitarian Actors in War: A Socio-Legal Perspective”** analyzes a traditional humanitarian subject, actors in war in South Sudan, but combines a legal and a sociological perspective on how these actors relate to others, both humanitarians and civilians. Sutton’s analysis brings forth the outcomes of the legal basis for humanitarian actions that rely on the production of categories of distinction. She branches the divide between legal scholarship and everyday life. In spite of a universal formality in the Geneva Conventions, interpreting these through local practices during war time requires sociological tools and insight. New categories are used in the everyday practices of humanitarian actors such as the “phantom local” which is an imaginary conglomerate of different categories of “local” actors—beneficiaries, authorities and armed actors. War-affected populations become audiences for distinction and thus shift from being “receivers” of aid to being “perceivers” of aid. Sutton engages with the debates over whether “professionalization” actually unites humanitarianism and compassion or drives a wedge between humanitarian providers and the populations they are intended to assist. This fieldwork-based analysis demonstrates how professional humanitarians are pushed together through the distinction between civilians and combatants, while they are increasingly estranged from the populations they serve through the enactment of “the phantom local.”

In the article, **“From Resettled Refugees to Humanitarian Actors: Refugee Diaspora Organizations and Everyday Humanitarianism,”** Louise Oliff focuses on the day-to-day practices, beliefs and effects of humanitarianism in its diversity of forms, calling us to question which organizations are “humanitarian” and which are not. Oliff’s article focuses specifically on actors and organizations that are outside of what Barnett identifies as the “international humanitarian order” of the multilateral institutions, humanitarian organizations and international NGOs of “organized compassion.”⁴⁷ Her case studies are of Refugee Diaspora Organizations (RDOs) in Australia, and she demonstrates what can be learned from including those humanitarian actors who are less visible and less powerful, but nonetheless acting on behalf of proximate and distant others. In the case of the Australian RDOs, these “others” are not actually “othered” but are instead engaging in a unifying solidarity between refugee humanitarians and “their people” whom they help. As non-traditional humanitarian actors, the RDOs have become sufficiently “professionalized” to straddle the liminal position between caring for kin and caring for an abstract, distant “other.” These organizations are neutral enough to be characterized by

⁴⁶ Duffield, Mark R., *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (New York: Zed Books, 2001); Lillie Chouliaraki and Myria Georgiou, “Hospitality: The Communicative Architecture of Humanitarian Securitization at Europe’s Borders,” *Journal of Communication* 67, no. 2 (April 1, 2017): 159–80, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12291>.

⁴⁷ Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

their supporters as viable alternatives to explicitly political groups, yet close enough to their recipient population of refugees to resonate with their needs in ways that larger traditional humanitarian organizations cannot. Oliff emphasizes that “the micro-economies, informal governance and community-based fundraising strategies of RDOs are vastly different from the everyday humanitarianism of professionalized INGOs, even where they are ostensibly helping the same people.” In this case, transnational ethics are mobilized on the basis of place and experience and based on alliances between members of diaspora groups.

Mie Vestergaard’s article, “**An Imperative to Act: Boarding the Relief Flights of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Biafra (1967-1970)**” uses an historical perspective to analyze the everyday practices within one of the world’s most prominent humanitarian organizations during a defining crisis of humanitarianism, the conflict between Nigeria and Biafra. Vestergaard’s work lays bare the human dilemmas behind the governing principles of the Geneva Conventions, as the author of the Red Cross Movement’s Fundamental Principles debated over how to remain a principled actor, yet take exceptional measures when the implementation on the ground necessitated a reconceptualization of concepts of “intervention” and “sovereignty.” Interestingly, the article demonstrates how during the intervention by ICRC in Biafra, mediatization in grounding an ethics of suffering and pity laid the ground for a reconceptualization of interventions contravening Nigerian sovereignty, not the neutral principles of humanitarianism. Additionally, we learn that the ICRC was not suffering from a naïve lack of professionalism in dealing with the Biafrans, but in fact they understood that the Biafran leadership was itself using humanitarian imagery and victim categories to illicit an international response to their mediatized suffering.

All three articles in this section take the perspective of professionalization within everyday humanitarianism in ways that unpack the quotidian practices of actors who operate within formal humanitarian institutions. Sutton and Vestergaard study actors operating during times of war, and Oliff’s cases work in complex emergencies and protracted refugee situations. Thus, all are common sites of humanitarian intervention by professional humanitarians. We learn that professionalization, understood as a consistent and universal implementation of the principles of humanitarian engagement is called into question when the actual practices of the humanitarian workers are examined. All three articles consider the contextualization of the interpretations of categories of assistance and of those to be helped as critical to understanding actually existing humanitarianism, even within traditional organizations and contexts of crisis.

Marketization

Marketization examines the role of the market, the private sector and business in the rhetoric and practices of humanitarianism. Today, humanitarianism is commonplace in the marketplace for the support of benevolent causes linking North and South. Consumers can make “ethical” purchases that deliver AIDS drugs through the RED campaign, play vocabulary games that deliver rice to the hungry through the UN World Food Program, re-tweet images of their favorite humanitarian celebrity or launch a cartoon superhero to Africa and donate a computer to an African child through General Mills “Win One Give One” campaign.⁴⁸ These acts may strike some as empty gestures that fulfill a need to “do something,” by buying a product or playing a game, but fail to address substantive humanitarian challenges. Yet, for others, this marketplace addresses the real need for humanitarian causes in various guises to meet the demands of global

⁴⁸ Calhoun, “The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order,” 29.

and local audiences. How can we begin to theorize the continuities and ruptures that marketisation brings about in everyday practices of good-doing? How do they reconstitute the relationship between benevolence and its values, or action and its moral justification? How can we understand the tensions that such practices introduce in the aid and development? By the same token, how can we understand the implications of marketisation for the Western publics that engage in and legitimize everyday humanitarian deeds?

The article **“Utopia, Food Sovereignty and Ethical Fashion: the Narrative Power of Anti-GMO Campaigns”** by Katharina Glaab and Lena Partzsch analyzes narratives of utopia and the apocalypse as powerful ways to mobilize everyday consumers in social movement campaigns targeting environmental issues. Linking up to debates in normative international relations theory, they argue that these types of narratives constitute diverse identities of ethical consumption, and that to engage citizens as a collective—to constitute political subjectivities—social movements must connect with “the possible.” Interestingly, in the contemporary humanitarian landscape, the engagement of individuals in producing a collective utopia is through consumption. Hence, two cases of marketization of humanitarianism are analyzed by Glaab and Partzsch: the transnational campaigns against anti-GM food and the anti-Bt cotton movements, particularly in India. Both link consumers and producers across North and South, and they do so by using utopian and apocalyptic narratives. The awareness of media consumers of apocalyptic narratives—of “food colonialism” or “dirty fashion”—is fundamental for the construction of an ethically “good” subject position within the social movement. Thus, “food sovereignty” and “ethical fashion” only became possible because of the apocalyptic narratives and the environmental, economic and political realities that gave them traction. This article demonstrates how depoliticizing imagery and narratives are not simply constructed as “negative” portrayals of humanitarianism’s needy “others” but can be engaged in far more sophisticated ways of linking North and South into movement narratives that nonetheless sideline the power politics that enable “monster foods” or “suffering farmers.” In these campaigns, the market and proper ethical consumption are discursively constructed as being the keys to realizing utopia through everyday practices.

Marco Andreu examines the intersection of humanitarianism and marketization in his article, **“A Responsibility to Profit? Social Impact Bonds as a Form of ‘Humanitarian Finance.’”** As part of new value for money trends toward “effective altruism,” “humanitarian venture capital,” and “results-based financing,” the social impact bond is a form of public-private partnership that finances individualized support for those in need, and compensates its investors on the basis of measurable social outcomes achieved. From an in-depth case study of the London Homelessness Social Impact Bond (SIB), Andreu explicates the humanitarian reasoning involved and theorizes the relationship between humanitarian values and investor value. The values expressed by investors in the SIB center around maximizing social outcomes for the homeless and minimizing the burden of public finance, specifically measured by (supposedly non-ideological) numerical targets. The achievement of these targets produces what Andreu terms “morally untouchable” profits, which by their very existence signify the “social impact” created by the SIB. Nonetheless, the project entails considerable amounts of flexibility in implementation that allows for more time to build relationships and individual plans between recipients and their responsible keyworkers. Thus, tactical solutions of humanitarian finance are in fact both tactical, but also, in a limited sense, solutions to everyday problems experienced by suffering “others.” The larger politics of homelessness and the structural violence that is responsible for creating situations of suffering are not addressed through this commodification of

humanitarianism, and the profits to be made were contingent upon a typical humanitarian trope of Fassin's "politics of life"⁴⁹ of the suffering "other."

In his somewhat controversial paper entitled "Marketing Humanitarian Space," Hugo Slim argues that "the power of humanitarian brands is central in promoting the value of humanitarian norms and in transmitting consistent humanitarian messages at every point of contact with potential buyers of the idea."⁵⁰ The articles on marketization demonstrate how ethical values to alleviate human suffering become commodities which can be exchanged for profit. As Krause's study of traditional humanitarian actors has elegantly demonstrated, the "beneficiaries" as well become part of the commodity of the helping project that is sold to donors who finance humanitarian interventions.⁵¹ Richey and Ponte's work on brand aid forms of cause-related marketing calls into particular question the ethical implications of selling suffering strangers for profit, and in their cases, there were actual products sold as instruments of humanitarian helping.⁵² In the cases of the social movements mobilizing ethical and environmental consumption and those of impact financing for better results for the homeless, the values of a shared humanity are sacrificed in favor maintaining the distinction between worthy and unworthy "others" on whom profit can be made.

Mediatization

Mediatization refers to the role that digital media play in the communication of the imperative to do good for vulnerable others. While this imperative has always posed a puzzle of representation, in the effort to inspire empathy for distant suffering without "othering" the suffering body, the instantaneous, interactive and individualized communications of digital technologies have both introduced novel possibilities and new challenges to this puzzle. How do such technologies variously mediate the imperative to care? What are the possibilities and limitations of their communicative ecologies in producing representations of distant others and how do they, in the process, configure the relationship between "us" and "them"? How could technology recuperate agency on behalf of distant spectators?

"Breaking Down Barriers of Culture and Geography? Caring-at-a-Distance Through Web 2.0" by Roberta Hawkins examines a corporate-NGO humanitarian partnership that uses Web 2.0 technologies to link global spectators with local Malawians. These affective links are mediated by CARE USA, through less visible relationships with General Mills and Merck (MSD Pharma). The "Join My Village" campaign is an exemplary case study of the recent trends in international development that rely on new actors and alliances to take up humanitarian causes, combined with the innovative use of digital media technologies for engaging in campaigns at a distance. Hawkins considers three perspectives on how the scope of

⁴⁹ Didier Fassin, "Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life," *Public Culture* 19, no. 3 (2007): 499–520.

⁵⁰ Hugo Slim, "Marketing Humanitarian Space: Targeting and Method in Humanitarian Persuasion" (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, May 12, 2003), 4, <https://www.hdcentre.org/publications/marketing-humanitarian-space-argument-and-method-in-humanitarian-persuasion/>.

⁵¹ See particularly chapter two in Krause, *The Good Project: Humanitarian Relief NGOs and the Fragmentation of Reason*, 39–69.

⁵² Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte, *Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World*, A Quadrant Book (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte, "Brand Aid and the International Political Economy and Sociology of North South Relations," *International Political Sociology* 7, no. 1 (2013): 92–113; Stefano Ponte and Lisa Ann Richey, "Buying Into Development? Brand Aid Forms of Cause-Related Marketing," *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2014): 65–87.

global caring might be extended to include distant others through the use of new media: broadening the category of who is included in the “us;” emphasizing the causal and material connections that already exist, for example, in global value chains; and forming a relational responsibility for dealing with wider systems of injustice. Her findings from the “Join My Village” campaign suggest that although the continual updating of information to bring users into the lives of Malawians in dynamic, everyday ways, confronts the typical representations of a static humanitarian “other,” the opportunities for expanding the scope of global caring were subsumed by superficial engagement with “click to commit” campaigns. The prominent role of corporate partners in the initiative, and the curated nature of the online interaction calls into question the “disinterested” helping expected under humanitarian principles. Furthermore, the mediatization of experiences of the ethical self who must continue to follow, engage and comment on the lives in the campaign and the Southern recipient reinforces an individualization of humanitarianism, not an expansion of its representations or the scope of global caring.

Budabin and Pruce’s contribution, “**The Elite Politics of Media Advocacy in Human Rights,**” argues that some of the logics behind social media practices in “everyday humanitarianism” are actually rooted in elite, not more democratic politics. The “everyday” of everyday humanitarianism is thought to be eased by new technologies that enable “laptop humanitarians” to care about distant suffering from the comfort of their homes. Yet, we continue to see humanitarianism dominated by power dynamics that are reflected and being reinforced on social media. Budabin and Pruce argue that the communication logics that undergird what they call *media advocacy* should be regarded as “outsider engagement” practices that only give the illusion of a grassroots politics; instead, mobilization through social media functions to sustain the “insider strategies” of elite advocacy organizations. A comparative study of two Northern-based NGOs (Human Rights Watch and Enough!) demonstrates how mass mobilization of as “everyday humanitarians” by means of smartphones and laptops may lend further legitimacy to the political actions of advocacy organizations but fail to foster a meaningful and effective transnational solidarity. The research calls into question the extent of Northern participants’ connection to social movements, to Southern recipients or even to each other. Thus, the role of mass audiences in advocacy and the ways in which Northern organizations continue to use social media suggests a top-down platform instead of a means for greater emancipation.

Our frame of mediatization arises from an engaged debate in the field of media and communication studies where scholars try to theorize the relationships between media and socio-cultural forms.⁵³ The Special Issue contributions to mediatization both focus on the increasing importance of virtual action and engagement through social media, even as both articles are critical of the implications of these shifts for building solidarity or expanding the scope of global caring. The humanitarian clicktivism by prosumers as illustrated by Hawkins’ article, and the virtual “insider strategies” of elite organizations studied by Budabin and Pruce nonetheless constitute meaningful action in the sphere of humanitarian communication as charted by Chouliaraki.⁵⁴ On the basis of a fifty year genealogy of humanitarian communication, Chouliaraki charts a shift in communications demonstrating a show of pity for the distant other to those created by ironic spectators who avoid larger questions of structural inequality and justification for action. Both contributions in this section illustrate this trend, with the increasing

⁵³ See the debate in the journal *Media, Culture and Society*, for example Andreas Hepp, Stig Hjarvard, and Knut Lundby, “Mediatization: Theorizing the Interplay between Media, Culture and Society,” *Media, Culture & Society* 37, no. 2 (February 17, 2015): 314–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715573835>.

⁵⁴ Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism*.

complexity of the greater involvement of both corporate and political elites operating specifically within the digital layer of humanitarian communication.

Conclusions

My starting point in this special issue was in opening up traditional understandings and practices of humanitarianism to bring multi-faceted approaches to a classical area of political inquiry. As the rhetoric and practice of humanitarian good-doing becomes increasingly widespread in our public life – from celebrity culture to twitter messaging and from Christmas shopping to concert-going – key questions arise. What does good-doing look like in the age of market-driven, digital media-based action? Our contributions suggest that it looks like wearing your humanitarian organization's t-shirts in a war zone, helping refugees in your community to receive immigration visas, debating with other delegates in the closed meeting sessions of the International Committee of the Red Cross, protesting the “loss of your hard won independence to the private sector,” investing in social impact, watching internet videos, or following a humanitarian project's Twitter handle, amongst many other practices.

What happens to traditional humanitarian ideals, at the time of an increasing bureaucratization, marketization and mediatization of humanitarian practice? The articles in this Special Issue document both the historical and the contemporary articulation by diverse everyday humanitarians of traditional humanitarian ideals. In fact, diverse articles point to the continuing relevance of the Geneva Conventions in framing the quotidian interactions of humanitarian actors.

What are the implications of such practices for the ethics and politics of contemporary benevolence? Do we live in an age of ‘post-humanitarianism’ where doing good for others is intrinsically linked with feelings of gratification for the self? Universal questions of justice and equality, which once justified humanitarian intervention, seem to be fading into the background as humanitarianism takes on myriad forms and practices at all levels of society from the individual to the state and from the community-based organization to the corporation. What other forms of justification or multiple conceptions of ‘the good’ have taken their place? Some of the contributions to this issue suggest that we should consider the resort to everyday humanitarianism as an indication of political failure. Like traditional humanitarian organizations who survive over a long-term by abandoning their oppositional politics and engaging within the system, everyday humanitarianism appears rarely if ever to challenge the larger political or economic structures of inequality that make humanitarianism necessary.

Scholars must continue to be concerned with humanitarianism's ambiguities, limits and constraints as constitutive of global politics, as charted by Ticktin,⁵⁵ and with the making of a moral world through practices.⁵⁶ To do this effectively, the scope of what constitutes the humanitarianism worthy of study must be expanded beyond the traditional scope of providing urgent help in times of crisis to specific places in the world, and further beyond the security and ongoing human rights actions to include everyday humanitarianism. Everyday practices by individuals for “do-gooding” are based in a complex history of North-South relations and contribute to further production of interconnected and highly unequal subjectivities of people who help and those who need it. The articles in this special issue attempt to address such questions, by expanding existing understandings of humanitarianism to inter-disciplinary and

⁵⁵ Ticktin, “Transnational Humanitarianism.”

⁵⁶ Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

multi-method approaches towards the study of “helping” and its multiple conceptions and forms of justification and to reflect on their consequences for our public life.