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Writing the “Other” into humanitarian discourse

Framing theory and practice in South–South humanitarian responses to forced displacement

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Glossary

Kafalah	Sponsorship system
Shari'ah	Islamic law
Ummah	The worldwide Muslim community
Zakat	The giving of alms for the poor
Zariah	A pilgrimage to sites associated with Muhammed

List of abbreviations

AHA	African Humanitarian Action
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
FBO	Faith-based organization
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
LFC	Local faith community
MSRI	Malaysian Social Research Institute
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OFADEC	L'Office Africain pour le Développement et la Cooperation
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1 Introduction

Although Southern-led development initiatives have enjoyed increasing attention by academics in recent years (e.g. Bobiash 1992; Woods 2008; Six 2009; Mawdsley 2012), there remains a relative paucity of research on South-South humanitarian responses. In part, this limited engagement with Southern humanitarianism is based on the widespread assumption by many academics and practitioners that “Although the idea of saving lives and relieving suffering is hardly a Western or Christian creation, modern humanitarianism’s *origins are located in Western history and Christian thought*” (Barnett and Weiss 2008:7, emphasis added; also see Fassin 2011:1). Indeed, throughout the 2000s, numerous studies have examined the history, evolution and nature of humanitarianism, typically tracing the birth and origins of the moral ideal behind humanitarianism to the Enlightenment period in Europe, and more specifically to the activities and goals of Northern religious groups in the early-nineteenth century (i.e. Barnett and Weiss 2011; Wilson and Brown 2011; Barnett and Stein 2012). While repeatedly asserting humanitarianism’s Western origins, Barnett has nonetheless admitted that despite entitling his book *Empire of Humanity: a History of Humanitarianism*, the reader should note that “Western bias is ahead. This is not a book on the history of *all forms of humanitarianism* around the world” (Barnett 2011:15, emphasis added). On the one hand, therefore, many academics recognize the existence of a multitude of humanitarianisms, including “humanitarianisms of Europe, of Africa, of the global, and of the local” (Kennedy 2004: xv). On the other hand, humanitarian action not borne of the Northern-dominated and highly institutionalized international regime has remained largely neglected in academia. In particular, studies of South-South humanitarian responses in contexts of forced displacement are almost entirely absent from the literature; it is this gap in theoretical and conceptual engagement with “Other” humanitarianism which is critically addressed in this paper.

Defining “the South”: the position of “emerging” post-colonial state and non-state actors

Before outlining the structure of this paper, it is essential to reflect briefly on the terminology used herein. While recognizing the limitations of oppositional categorizations such as North/South, West/East, Developed/Developing, which fail to reflect the complexity and diversity of global realities, the terms “global North” and “global South” are used in this paper in line with McEwan’s suggestion that “it is most useful to think of North/South as a *metaphorical* rather than a *geographical* distinction” (2009:13). Furthermore, the terms global North/South transcend the connotations of typologies such as “First” and “Third” World, “developed” or “developing” which “suggest both a hierarchy and a value judgment” (ibid:12), in addition to transcending the inherently *negative* framework implicit in the usage of the term “*non-West*” as the counterpoint to “West”. Given recent global transformations and the rise of post-colonial states such as Brazil, China, and India in the world economy, along with the global economic position of, for example, oil-producing Arab States, identifying a way of defining the global South is arguably becoming an increasingly problematic endeavor. In his discussion of the rise of post-colonial states as development donors, Six asserts that China, India, and other post-colonial donors defy the Western development model because they occupy a different place in the history of colonial and post-colonial relations (2009: 1108). This assertion can, in turn, be extended to argue that the rise of post-colonial states as development donors demands a reconceptualization of much dominant development theory – including post-development theories themselves – which often rely on colonialist and oppositional formulations in their analyses. These states, according to Six, occupy a “dual position” in the aid world, their historical and contemporary global position contesting the

traditional dichotomy of Southern recipients and Northern donors (ibid: 1110). While post-colonial states do share certain historical and interest-based solidarities with Southern and Eastern countries (ibid), understanding their contemporary global economic and political position is essential in any analysis of the dynamics of relations between these countries and other peripheral states. Indeed as Six asserts, “their political claim to speak ‘for the South’ is problematic as their representativeness is increasingly questionable” (ibid). The “Southern” label nevertheless has the potential to give states, and also non-state actors, a degree of historical legitimacy, as it does not conjure the same neocolonial images as European or U.S. intervention. This historical legitimacy, according to Six, “results in a distinct culture of South-South relations” (ibid: 1113).

Not all of the “Southern” state and non-state actors outlined within the case studies explored below occupy this contested global position. However, when conducting analyses of states’ responses in the humanitarian arena, it is necessary to consider the global position of states holistically, accounting for political, geographical, social and economic factors which may shed light on the nature of their actions. This approach thereby offers a preliminary redress to the essentializing tendencies of the North/South dichotomy, and serves to promote a better understanding of the complexity of South-South relations and the diversity of the “global South.”

Methodological note

In line with the above, in order to explore the nature and potential implications of Southern humanitarianism, a preliminary mapping exercise was undertaken as part of a broader research project¹ investigating South-South humanitarian responses in contexts of forced displacement.² This mapping exercise resulted in the identification of the case studies explored in this paper. Due to time and resource constraints, secondary sources have been used exclusively throughout this preliminary investigation; due to a lack of academic material on South-South humanitarian initiatives, especially in contexts of forced displacement, much of the information detailed in this paper derives from digital and online media sources, including online news sources, and organizational websites. As it has not always been possible to verify their content given the time and resources available, the reliability of the data may be questionable at times, especially in those instances involving state-owned/monitored news sources. Throughout the paper, the nature of the sources referred to is specified to enable the reader to recognize the possible limitations of this data. In addition, while seeking to provide a

¹ This paper, and the mapping exercise completed by Julia Pacitto, which it builds upon, form part of Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s broader research project into South-South humanitarian responses to displacement, funded by an Oxford University Fell Fund Award (2012-2013) (see <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/research/governance/south-south-humanitarianism>). It is also informed by an international workshop on the same topic, convened by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford in October 2012, and which was generously supported by the Oxford Department of International Development and Refugee Studies Centre (University of Oxford) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ Policy Development and Evaluation Service. For a summary of the workshop, see Pacitto (2012). Acknowledgements and thanks are due to Tom Scott-Smith for his useful comments on an earlier version of this paper. An earlier version of the paper was published as part of the UNHCR *New Issues in Refugee Research* series.

² The remit of study includes situations of both internal and international displacement resulting from conflict and natural disasters.

wide-ranging overview of initiatives on a global scale, the nature of the search for case study material has invariably been influenced by personal biases and pre-existing knowledge and language skills. In particular, future research will expand the scope of this review through a purposeful multi-lingual strategy, in order to access a wider range of accounts and case-studies. A further limitation of this study arises from the very nature of local humanitarian initiatives and their global (in)visibility, and the limited inquiry into the topic by academic commentators. As such, the extent and diversity of South-South humanitarian responses in contexts of forced displacement cannot be fully elucidated through this initial review. The examination of theory and practice presented in this paper should therefore be considered a stimulus to further debate and investigation in the field of South-South humanitarian responses, rather than as any sort of exhaustive or definitive study.

Structure

This paper starts by offering a selective review and analysis of existing theories on humanitarian action, taking inspiration from broader critical engagements with development and human rights. The paper then argues in favor of an expansion of the current field of inquiry to allow for “Other” forms of humanitarian responses, with the aim of demonstrating the utility of investigating South-South humanitarian action, not just as a phenomenon of interest, but because of the potential that it has to demand a radical reconceptualization of much dominant humanitarian theory.

It then argues that investigating humanitarian responses requires a horizontal broadening in order to incorporate the humanitarian initiatives of Southern states and international bodies. However, to focus exclusively on state-led and institutionalized efforts is arguably to reproduce a selection of the Northern biases that one would hopefully seek to redress in examining Southern humanitarian action. There must also, therefore, be a corresponding vertical expansion of the field of inquiry, to engage with humanitarian action that occurs at levels other than that of the state or the Northern-dominated regime of international organizations. We therefore attempt to develop such a horizontal and vertical theoretical expansion – albeit within the constraints of the aforementioned methodological limitations – in the following two sections of the paper.

The second part of the paper details a number of emergency humanitarian assistance efforts emanating from the South at a multitude of levels, from the household upwards. In turn, the third section addresses Southern humanitarian protection initiatives with a multi-level focus. The notion of humanitarian action often invokes the image of immediate and life-saving assistance in times of conflict or natural disaster. Indeed there are commentators who argue that the word humanitarian has become synonymous with the “provision of life saving assistance” (Ferris 2011: 16). However, humanitarian agency can also be considered to consist of both “an emergency branch that focuses on symptoms, and an alchemical branch that adds the ambition of removing root causes of suffering” (Barnett 2011: 10). As will be demonstrated, this duality of humanitarian response is particularly visible in contexts of forced displacement, and it is for this reason that both of these aspects are engaged with throughout this paper. The paper concludes by reaffirming the value of what we refer to as “writing the ‘Other’ into humanitarian discourse”, thereby redressing the biases inherent to much humanitarian theory. It reengages with the popular debates around politics and humanitarianism to argue that politics pervades not just humanitarian practice, but the “humanitarian” epithet itself, and that by reappropriating the label we are promoting a lexical counter-politics that serves to confront the privileging of this Northern appropriation of the

term in contemporary systems of knowledge and practice. Further, it engages with the notions of solidarity that resonate throughout almost all of the case studies presented within this paper to argue for an expansion of the field of humanitarian studies to incorporate these multiple and overlapping solidarities. This expansion does not reject the existence or legitimacy of notions of global citizenship that inform some humanitarian action. However, through considering how global society is but one of a myriad of potential spheres of solidarity held by individuals and communities, it rejects the contention that this is the *only* legitimate form of humanitarianism. Finally, it points to these arguments, along with the case studies outlined in the previous sections, in order to advocate for increased academic inquiry into the humanitarianisms of the global South.

2 Theoretical background

Humanitarianism defined

The contemporary international humanitarian regime remains heavily influenced by the Red Cross movement, Western international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations system (Davey 2012a: 2). For many, the International Committee of the Red Cross's definition of humanitarianism is *the* definitive standard (Barnett and Weiss 2011: 9). Ferris argues that the seven organizing principles established by the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement have become fundamental to the humanitarian movement. She asserts that four of these principles have become hallmarks of humanitarian assistance "throughout the international community": humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence (Ferris 2011: 11).

The perspective of humanitarianism borne out of these principles is "that politics is a moral pollutant" (Barnett and Weiss 2008: 4). The strict dichotomy between morality and politics is robustly posited by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other Western international organizations, and is considered to be central to the credibility of these organizations, and thus to their ability to function on the ground in often highly politicized conflict environments. There are those, however, who critique the assertion that humanitarianism should, and indeed can, be separated from politics. The opposing position therefore asserts that it is impossible for humanitarian agencies to be apolitical (Barnett and Weiss 2008: 4).

Engeland describes humanitarianism as "a universal imperative and shared intercultural system of principles" before conceding that the regime has become so deeply influenced by the North in terms of funding, staffing, structure, and political profile that it is under threat of enduring opposition in many Southern contexts (2011: xviii). Humanitarian agencies, in these settings, are often viewed as agents of Northern domination, or as proponents of Christian evangelicalism or post-Christian godlessness (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003: 4). However, with regards to Engeland's assertion of humanitarianism as "a universal imperative", as Bitter argues, "The Red Cross's principle of 'universality' is sometimes impugned as a veil for neo-colonial power and a prolongation of religious missionary activity in a new form" (1994: 100-1, in Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003: 58). Indeed the idea of Northern-dominated humanitarianism as a contemporary manifestation of colonial imperatives is one of the main critiques put to the international humanitarian regime. As noted by Chimni and others: "humanitarianism is *the* ideology of hegemonic states in the era

of globalisation (sic) marked by the end of the Cold War and a growing North-South divide” (Chimni 2000:3; also see Duffield 2001, Agier 2010). While this paper will not, within the context of this review, engage further with these critical analyses of Northern humanitarianism, this literature, along with wider critical literature on development and human rights, lays the foundations for the paper’s argument in favor of a reassessment of the mainstream institutional and academic privileging of a Northern understanding of the “humanitarian” label, and of the authority held by a core number of Northern institutions³ over the “humanitarian” label.

It is, of course, important to note that academic studies often apply the concept of “humanitarianism” in diverse contexts, evidencing divergent understandings of the term such that it is applied both in Ticktin’s study of the French asylum system (sub-titled “the politics of humanitarianism in France”, 2011) and in Bornstein’s analysis of gift relationships in the context of “humanitarianism in New Delhi” (2012).⁴ Nevertheless, following the dominant institutional trend, scholarly research on the history of humanitarianism has largely tended to focus on the actions and agendas of Northern agents and institutions, simultaneously overlooking the capacity for agency of Southern actors. Equally, unless forms of local capacity and action emanating from the South are expressed in the form of Northern-style institutions or in other recognizable ways, they have often been willingly ignored by outsiders (Juma and Shurke 2002:8).

In recent years, however, academics and policy makers in the humanitarian field have paid increasing attention to the rise of “new” or “non-traditional” humanitarian actors with roots in the global South (Davey 2012a: 1). As a whole, this attention has primarily focused on the financial contributions of *high*-GDP Southern donor *states* which are not members of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee, while major lacunae remain regarding the plurality of humanitarian responses developed by low- and medium-GDP states, including, but not restricted to, financial transfers and material donations. Furthermore, although commentators have recognized the increasing contribution of NGOs and civil society movements from the global South in the humanitarian sphere, with Engeland claiming that the growth in these civil society movements in Southern societies “is probably the single most important trend in global efforts to combat poverty and conflict” (2011: xxi), the humanitarian responses initiated by Southern civil society networks and displaced populations themselves have also largely remained unexplored.

Indeed, in terms of substantive investigation or analysis, there remains a relative paucity of academic research in the domain of South-South humanitarianism, notwithstanding several important contributions such as the recent Special Issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* on faith-based humanitarianism in contexts of forced displacement (edited by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011) and a 2012 special edition of *Globalizations* focusing on forms of humanitarian and peacekeeping initiatives emanating from the global South (also Bornstein, 2012). A current Humanitarian Policy Group project is also underway, entitled “A Global

³ During the aforementioned international workshop, Simone Haysom referred to this core number of Northern institutions as the “relief elite” and argued that the oligopoly these institutions hold on the “humanitarian” label has practical, as well as theoretical, implications: these actors use the humanitarian principles as a rhetorical tool to assert themselves as a “distinct market niche” (Haysom 2012, quoted in Pacitto 2012: 6).

⁴ Thanks are due to Tom Scott-Smith for stressing this point.

History of Modern Humanitarian Action,” which seeks to examine both Northern and Southern humanitarian histories as a whole (Davey 2012a: 4). The largely uncharted domain of South-South responses to forced displacement in studies of humanitarian action nevertheless provides an excellent opportunity to build upon these recent academic contributions in order to engage with and effectively substantiate Barnett’s contention that: “We live in a world of humanitarianisms, not humanitarianism” (2011: 10).

Humanitarianism deconstructed: a critical approach to the “humanitarian” label

According to Davey, there is now a widespread acknowledgement of the significant role of “new” donors and NGOs in the humanitarian enterprise, including as a result of the increasing visibility of “non-traditional,” Southern humanitarian donor states such as China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and India (i.e. Harmer and Cotterell 2009; Binder et al 2010). Davey concedes, however that “there is a fear that ‘non-Western’ groups may not subscribe to the principles underpinning the formal system, and may have a misguided understanding of what it is to be ‘humanitarian’” (Davey 2012a: 2). Within this view, also posited by Ferris (2011), there is no attempt to consider the historical origins upon which the humanitarian label is founded or the extent to which common, formalized understandings of what constitutes “humanitarian” responses are embedded within Northern practices and systems of knowledge. Slim’s analysis of the oligopoly held by NGO humanitarians on the concept of humanitarian action as “something they want everyone to value and enjoy but which only they are allowed to do” (Slim 2003, in Barnett and Weiss 2011: 14), and Haysom’s critique of the predominance of what she refers to as the Northern “relief elite” (2012), are especially pertinent in this regard. Indeed, while different actors have invoked the term “humanitarian” across diverse spheres, the formal system’s tendency to reject these diverse initiatives as “political” or “ideological”, rather than “humanitarian”, is demonstrative of the institutional dominance and legitimization of one particular vision of humanitarianism. Limiting the definition to such a narrow field of inquiry so as to exclude expressions of compassion that do not fall within the strictly delimited ICRC conception of “humanitarian” is thus to pursue an agenda fraught with Northern bias.

A prime opportunity therefore emerges to problematize Northern appropriations of the humanitarian label, and to enrich and expand popular understandings of the concept through engagement with responses to humanitarian crises located beyond the international organizational structure. As Reiff argues, “...every concept of humanitarianism, like every concept of what it means to be fully human, has a history and, more important, a historical context that we ignore at our peril” (2002: 67). In overlooking the values and experiences of actors and communities whose conception of “humanitarian” action falls outside of the dominant Northern framework (Davey 2012a: 4), we inevitably fail to grasp the complexity and contested nature of the term, and how it is evolving over time and space.

On the one hand, it is important to note that the validity, and indeed the analytical integrity of an expanded use of the “humanitarian” label may itself be critiqued; the term, in its modern meaning, was concretized in mid-19th Century Europe, emerging from the moral ideals developed during the Enlightenment period and namely from the cosmopolitan principle of a shared “humanity” irrespective of social and cultural characteristics. As such, trying to incorporate pluralist expressions of compassion into this term may remain open to contention. Indeed, Calhoun argues that humanitarian action is “quintessentially cosmopolitan” as it represents an effort to relieve the suffering of strangers (2008: 73). However, multi-lingual analyses tracing the origins and evolving usages of equivalent

constructs used in languages such as Arabic and Chinese, as undertaken by the Humanitarian Policy Group research project, demonstrate the heterogeneous historical and etymological roots of *the term* “humanitarianism” around the world, thereby critiquing the assumption that *the term* humanitarianism has exclusively Northern philosophical origins (see for example Davies 2012 and Davey 2012b). A multi-lingual, cross-cultural approach therefore highlights that although “the term” may have become part of the “archive of knowledge” (following Foucault) produced and reproduced in a particular hegemonic region and an interconnected set of European languages, alternative labels and concepts have existed and evolved across time and space. Rather than reproducing the assumption that “humanitarianism” as a term has one, exclusive etymology, it becomes necessary to trace how and why this Northern appropriation of the term “humanitarianism” has come to be taken for granted and institutionalized in contemporary systems of knowledge and practice in this field.

In addition, dominant conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism, considered as the philosophical bedrock to humanitarianism, must also be critically addressed. Most commonly associated with the Stoics, Pauline Christianity and Enlightenment thinkers like Immanuel Kant (Vaughan-Williams 2007: 107), prevailing theories of cosmopolitanism remain embedded within an explicitly Northern religious and philosophical lineage. In an earlier publication focused not on humanitarianism but on the concept of cosmopolitanism more broadly, Calhoun offers a critique of the way in which the political theory of cosmopolitanism is “left lacking a strong account of solidarity” which he attributes to the liberal opposition to communitarianism (2002: 871). He concedes that this conception of cosmopolitanism is deeply embedded within a Northern view of the world (ibid: 873). What is most pertinent in Calhoun’s argument is that he advocates a cosmopolitan conception of citizenship as multiple and layered, encompassing an array of complex connections, but maintains that it is nevertheless necessary to “complement the liberal idea of rights with a stronger sense of what binds people to one another” (ibid: 881). While this argument in no way requires an acceptance of illiberal nationalisms or religious “fundamentalisms,” it finds merit in the idea that both of these forms of community, and indeed many others, are not just foundations upon which xenophobia and persecution are bred, and can also be sources of solidarity and care for strangers (Calhoun 2002: 893). This idea is potentially significant when considering responses to displacement emanating from sources that do not necessarily share the Northern liberal tradition, and thus do not conform to the “humanitarian” principles based upon this tradition.

Parekh offers an important critique of Northern assumptions of the universality of liberal individualism, asserting that liberalism “abstracts the person from all his or her ‘contingent’ and ‘external’ relations” (1992: 162), while simultaneously accepting that certain human rights enjoy a broad cross-cultural consensus. In turn, Oman asserts that “it is...evidence of an ideological predisposition that inclines those influenced by this tradition to ‘negatively hallucinate’ the omnipresent role of human community in our lives,” a predisposition that remains at odds with the self-understandings of many prevailing traditions of Southern cultures (1996: 527). Post-development theorists Esteva and Prakash (1997) astutely engage with Rene Dubos’ famous slogan, “think globally, act locally” to argue that the slogan rejects the illusion of partaking in global action and emphasizes the importance of local action. They assert that “ordinary people lack the centralized power required for ‘global action’” (1997: 278), simultaneously arguing for a transformation of Dubos’ slogan, and the substitution of “global thinking” with “local thinking”. In challenging the notion of the universality of human rights, a genre closely associated and interlinked with humanitarianism, they highlight that

many ordinary people and radical thinkers reject this global vision of rights as an imposition of the specific interests and vision of the North (1997: 285). This imposition of an individualistic system of rights, according to Esteva and Prakash, echoing Parekh's argument, threatens to "dissolv[e] the very foundations of cultures which are organized around the notions of communal obligations, commitment and service" (1997: 282). Recognizing the insights emerging from diverse systems of knowledge across both the global North and global South, therefore, prompts us to engage with the "local", moving beyond the highly institutionalized and Northern-led international humanitarian regime to consider "Other" forms of humanitarian action, from the micro-level upwards. This is not to ignore the importance of global processes in shaping the local, but to assert that a more comprehensive engagement with the "local" is essential in order to begin to address the Northern biases inherent to academic theorizations of humanitarianism. Postmodernism has succeeded in fostering respect for the value of difference, and the concurrence of "an ethnocentric universalism and an insular cultural relativism" does not result in "an either-or choice" (Oman 1996: 528).

Expressions of compassion borne from a sense of communal solidarity should therefore not be discredited a priori as a partisan phenomenon unfit to be conceptualized as humanitarian. Indeed as Calhoun reminds us, it can even be argued that *within* the cosmopolitan ideal is respect for cultural diversity and the idea of multiple and overlapping solidarities, including, but by no means limited to the idea of a global solidarity (2002: 893).

Critiquing the critical: writing the "Other" into humanitarian discourse

Post-development critics such as Kothari "have argued that development is a 'neo-colonial' project that reproduces global inequalities and maintains the dominance of the South, through global capitalist expansion, by the North" (2005: 48). However, one of Brigg's critiques of post-development literature is that through its oppositional and colonialist formulations, post-development serves to maintain the notion that power originates from and operates through a unidirectional and intentional historical entity, that is, "the West." This, for Brigg, is problematic not least because it is inadequate in addressing the "multidimensionality of social and political relations ... which led to the formulation of the development project," but also because it ascribes agency wholly and exclusively to the West (2002: 424). He contends that to argue, as Sachs does, that "the 'Other' has vanished with development" (1992: 2, in Brigg 2002: 425) and to focus on the hegemony of development, actually has the effect of "writ[ing] the 'Others' – Third World people – out of history in a similar way to discourses that are more commonly targeted as Eurocentric" (Brigg 2002: 425).

While Brigg offers this critique in order to advance an explicitly Foucauldian analysis of the power dynamics of development, these arguments can also be more generally applied to critical theorizations of humanitarianism which, despite their critical standpoint, nevertheless risk writing the "Others" out of the history of humanitarian action. A case in point would be Agier's damning critique of humanitarian projects, which he describes as "the left hand of empire" (2010: 29). For Agier, the humanitarian regime forms part of a "global police" which exercises control during crises in the global South as part of an imperialist politics of "containment" (2010: 29-30), characterizing humanitarianism as a form of totalitarianism, in which a consensus is forged such that "there is no longer any excess or outside party whose disruptive voice would threaten the consensus" (2010: 31). This homogenized system is represented as "humanity," and is a bounded and complete representation in which no "other" is permitted. Borrowing from Brigg's critique of post-development, however, this

analysis and its dual insistence on the hegemony of humanitarianism and the idea of humanitarianism as a unidirectional and intentional force through which power operates, serves both to ignore the “multidimensionality of social and political relations” that make up humanitarian responses, and to effectively write alternative or “Other” forms of humanitarian response out of history.

While critical academic engagement with Northern humanitarianism is vital, in this form it does little to address the hegemony it purports to reject. To engage with South-South humanitarian responses in all their diversity is therefore to attempt to write the “Other” into the history of humanitarianism, to critique the processes through which “Other” actors and “Other” modes of action have been footnoted in the hegemonic archive of knowledge (following Derrida and Foucault respectively), and to move beyond the assumption that the only conceivable form of humanitarian action is that which serves the neo-imperial politics of the “empire” as part of a global network of control. This has the result of recognizing Southern actors’ agency and capacity for agency, instead of considering the South as a wholly passive and dominated entity. A horizontal expansion of academic inquiry to encompass South-South humanitarian responses therefore has the potential to challenge and enrich critical interpretations of humanitarian action, which, despite their critical nature, remain focused on the Northern system.

Despite advocating an increased focus on Southern initiatives, it is essential to note the extent to which South-South humanitarian initiatives are often situated within a highly complex web of humanitarian action, with, for example, local Southern NGOs relying on funding or support from international Northern-funded humanitarian organizations. Indeed, many humanitarian actors originating from the global South have strong links with the formalized institutional regime, with reports identifying some 2,800 national NGOs working in collaboration with one or more of the institutions that make up the formal international humanitarian system through partnership agreements (ALNAP 2012, in Davey 2012a: 1). Wallace et al. (2006) elucidate this in their study of aid relationships between NGOs and their donors, illustrating through diverse case studies the extent to which the behavior of Southern organizations is bound by the funding conditionalities of international NGOs and donors. The resulting relationship, according to the authors, is one of dependence, submission and increasingly uniform behavior on the part of Southern NGOs (Scott-Villiers 2007). The interconnection of such organizations further problematizes the idea of “South-South” assistance and highlights the often blurred lines between what constitutes “Southern” and “Northern” assistance. This arguably poses methodological and analytical challenges when examining local initiatives without an understanding of how global processes affect local responses. These interconnections must therefore be considered when assessing the extent to which South-South humanitarian initiatives challenge, or complement, Northern-led humanitarianism.

Forced displacement and the assistance/protection dichotomy

Responses to forced displacement are arguably situated at the intersection of assistance and protection in the humanitarian world. Acute situations of displacement such as the current (2011-2013) Syrian crisis, and indeed most influxes at the moment of displacement, require an emergency humanitarian response. At this stage in the process, it is indeed humanitarian, “life-saving” assistance that is necessary. However, as is evident from the number of protracted refugee situations in the world, temporary assistance schemes are not always adequate in dealing with issues of displacement. With displacement being an enduring feature

in the lives of millions of people – “In 2011, there were 7 million refugees, *the highest figure in 10 years*, and 27 million internally displaced persons, living in protracted displacement, in 25 different countries” (Edwards 2012: 3, emphasis added) – the nature of the response shifts from one simply of assistance, to one of a complex system of protection. Especially in refugee situations, an entire body of international law is geared towards the “protection” of refugees, and, indeed, the entire refugee regime has been said to be based on the concept of surrogacy: providing protection when a person’s state is unwilling or unable to do so (Hathaway 1991). As Ferris argues:

When protection is defined as ‘all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law),’ (ICRC, Strengthening Protection in War: A Search for Professional Standards, 2001) then measures of school enrollment or infant mortality can be used as indicators of protection (Ferris 2011: 124-5).

Although Ferris maintains a specific and culturally-contingent view of protection in considering it within the schema of international law, the notion that protection can encompass a broad range of initiatives including those aimed at addressing the root causes of suffering is an important point in considering the scope of activities that can be conceptualized as “humanitarian.”

Schemes such as the Cuban educational scholarship initiative for refugees outlined in section 4 may not be considered under the traditional rubric of assistance, but can be understood as forming part of this wider humanitarian “protection” category in contexts of forced displacement. With humanitarian actors increasingly aiming to incorporate protection into their work (Ferris 2011: 270), the two categories are becoming progressively interconnected, although in the case of refugees they have arguably always been so.

An extensive proportion of academic work on the history of responses to refugees and forced migrants has also focused on the development and functioning of the institutionalized international regime (see for example Betts et al. 2011; Betts 2009), and has thus, similar to humanitarian studies, sidelined “Other” forms of refugee assistance and protection in the history of humanitarian responses to refugees. Southern responses to processes of forced migration have, however, been widely researched in the field of refugee and forced migration studies, despite seldom being conceptualized as examples of humanitarian action per se (see for example Jacobsen 1996; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010, 2011a, 2012a). Equally, analyses of Southern state practices with regards to displacement have largely focused on Southern states as “host states,” prioritizing political and legal analyses of the nature of their domestic responses, rather than as “humanitarian actors” as a whole, or “donor states” more specifically. The significant role of Southern “donor” states in certain contexts of forced displacement will be elucidated throughout the case studies, presenting an area of inquiry in need of further investigation. Much of the critical literature on international responses to refugees has focused on the idea of a “politics of containment” and control as the ulterior aims of the international refugee regime (for instance Chimni 1998). Like much of the post-development literature and Agier’s critical contribution to humanitarian theory, Hyndman links specific practices of managing the displaced and “constellations of post-colonial power” (2000: 118). Engagement with South-South humanitarian responses to forced displacement and the concept of post-colonial humanitarian actors therefore also has the possibility to

enrich historical and critical analyses of refugee assistance and protection and to promote an understanding of these actors' agency.

In response to the theoretical arguments outlined above, the following two sections provide a broad-ranging overview of the different types of South-South humanitarian response to forced displacement, with the aim of demonstrating both the heterogeneity of "Southern" modes of humanitarian response, and the need for future research in this field.

3 South-South emergency humanitarian assistance in contexts of forced displacement

The following presentation of the provision of South-South emergency humanitarian assistance in contexts of forced displacement offers a multi-level examination of Southern initiatives, ranging from international and regional responses (through the examples of ASEAN, OIC and AHA), Southern state responses, and local responses from the household level upwards. Such an overview elucidates some of the different ways in which different Southern actors are engaged in humanitarian action in contexts of forced displacement. In so doing, we do not intend to develop a comprehensive analysis of the cases but rather to present a wide-ranging, diverse set of examples of South-South assistance and to suggest how some of these examples may intersect with existing theory in order to stimulate ideas for further research.

Regional and international response mechanisms

In May 2008, a Category 4 cyclone hit Myanmar,⁵ affecting 2.4 million people and leaving an estimated 140,000 people dead or missing (Marr 2010). In the aftermath of the event, Myanmar's citizens contributed to the relief effort by delivering emergency supplies to the cyclone-affected areas. Local faith communities, monasteries, and churches were pivotal to such grassroots community assistance, and aid organizations and NGOs already operating in the affected regions collected information on the damage and the needs of those affected. In contrast, NGOs and UN agencies that were not previously present in the affected areas were denied access, largely as a result of the tense relationship between Myanmar and many Western democracies during the last 20 years. The task therefore fell to the regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to convince Myanmar, one of its member states, to provide access for humanitarian relief efforts. Despite initial resistance to foreign involvement, Myanmar agreed on an ASEAN-led mechanism upon assurances that assistance provided through ASEAN would not be "politicized" (Marr 2010; also Cook 2010). These events are a clear example of an instance in which Western humanitarian organizations, despite their purportedly "apolitical" and "neutral" character, are by no means always perceived as such by other actors. ASEAN's success in negotiating and reaching an agreement with the government of Myanmar demonstrates the privileged position that Southern actors may hold in certain geopolitical contexts.

⁵ The name Myanmar is used here and below in line with the UN's official recognition of the Union of Myanmar. However, the name Burma continues to be widely used by other actors, including the United States, British and Canadian governments.

In the African context, the African Union's Peace and Security Council is responsible for the "management of catastrophes and humanitarian actions," having replaced its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity's Central Organ of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution, in 2003. This regional body is in turn complemented by African Humanitarian Action (AHA), a non-governmental organization which provides emergency assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and local communities across the continent, in addition to addressing "protection in the widest sense of the term as demonstrated by [its] relief and recovery activities" (AHA 2012a). Launched in 1994 in response to the atrocities of the Rwandan genocide, AHA is UNHCR's "largest indigenous partner" in Africa and also works closely with the African Union and other humanitarian actors (AHA 2012b). As such, both the ASEAN response to the cyclone in Myanmar and the work of AHA have been based around coordination and cooperation with UN agencies and international institutions.

In turn, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), an inter-governmental organization with 57 member states across four continents, also has a specialized institution, the Islamic Committee for the International Crescent, which was established in 1977 and is mandated to "[help] alleviate the sufferings caused by natural disaster and war" in particular through the provision of medical assistance. Since 2008, the OIC has had its own humanitarian affairs department, which both implements humanitarian aid on behalf of the OIC in different countries and, as in the case of ASEAN, engages in policy making and dialogue facilitation, for instance among humanitarian NGOs in OIC member states (Binder et al. 2010). At the end of 2011, the OIC contributed to the humanitarian efforts following Storm Washi in the Philippines (OIC 2011), a disaster that resulted in the displacement of 285,000 people from their homes (UNHCR 2011). The OIC has also been granted access by the government of Myanmar to provide "necessary assistance" to the displaced and persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority (OIC 2012). This, and the ASEAN example above, resonates with Six's research (2009) on Southern development actors and their capacity, as such, to hold a distinct place in the global landscape. In an era where rhetoric around "shrinking humanitarian space" is ever-present, the "privileged access" afforded to certain Southern organizations demands further inquiry by academics and practitioners alike. The OIC also coordinates with, rather than explicitly competes against, the United Nations. However, the OIC has simultaneously actively presented itself in a way that rejects the adoption of principles that have been enshrined within the Northern regime.

One example of such is the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights. Originally drafted in 1990, the Cairo Declaration attempted to establish a set of human rights compatible with the teachings of Islam, and specifically with Shari'ah law (Kayaoğlu 2012). Although references to the Cairo Declaration have now been removed from the 2008 revised Charter of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, elements within the Charter continue to demonstrate the distinct character and values of the community that it purports to represent. For example, the Charter calls for member states to reaffirm support for the rights of *peoples*, as stipulated in the UN Charter, thereby clearly placing an emphasis on communal, rather than individual rights. This resonates with some of the critical academic literature on development. The idea that human rights represent a specific, Northern vision of the world that is not necessarily reflective of the prevailing values of Southern cultural communities – which as Esteva and Prakash note, may be based rather around "the notions of communal obligations, commitment and service" (1997: 278) – gains pertinence when we see it manifest itself in the principles that underpin Southern institutions such as the OIC.

A further stipulation of the Charter is “to enhance and strengthen the bond of unity and solidarity among the Muslim peoples and Member States.” As Davey argues, “for some Islamic organizations, humanitarian action is an expression of solidarity with other Muslims and is part of a broader effort to defend the Islamic community (the *ummah*) from outside threats” (2012a: 4). Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan discuss the Islamic charitable tradition of *zakat* (the giving of alms), stating that it is often understood that the recipients of *zakat* must be Muslims. Although this proposition is frequently rebutted and other interpretations extend the concept to encompass the non-Muslim poor, the fact that there is a stated theological foundation for partialist assistance in the Islamic tradition exposes the non-universal nature of what is seen to be one of the core principles of humanitarianism. Here, notions of “solidarity” and “community” correspond with a particular religious identity: Islam. However these concepts, that are manifest in many different forms and on a variety of scales, resonate throughout several of the case studies and will be further engaged with below.

South-South state-level responses to the Haitian earthquake

The relief efforts following the January 2010 Haitian earthquake in which 1.5 million people were displaced from their homes (Bradley 2012) are a prominent example of the increasingly important roles played by Southern states in the global humanitarian field, including inter- and intra-regional initiatives. While Southern responses to the Haitian earthquake and the 2005 South-East Asian tsunami have received relatively more academic attention than contexts of conflict-induced displacement (e.g. Cook 2010; Benthall 2008), this example nonetheless demonstrates the need for more detailed and comparative academic analysis to foster a better understanding of South-South emergency humanitarian responses to diverse contexts of disaster-induced displacement on the one hand, and to assess the nature of, and different levels of academic attention to disaster- and conflict-induced displacement on the other. In the context of South-East Asian, Eurasian and Middle Eastern responses to the Haitian earthquake, a plane carrying Chinese soldiers and relief supplies led the humanitarian response, landing two days after the event (AFP 2010). Al Jazeera reported in January 2010 that China had pledged \$4.4 million in aid to Haiti, simultaneously documenting that Taiwan had sent \$5 million in humanitarian aid to Haiti, which is one of only a handful of countries with diplomatic ties to Taiwan (Aljazeera 2010).

In turn, Qatar was also among the states providing relief in the wake of the disaster (Van Wassenhove 2010), with charities from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) also playing a significant role, including the Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation and Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Humanitarian and Charity Establishment both providing emergency relief supplies. Since August 2010, UAE charity Dubai Cares, in partnership with CARE, has been providing assistance to children affected by the earthquake in Haiti. The program focuses on both immediate assistance as well as longer-term rehabilitation efforts in the education sector (Dubai Cares 2012b).

Focus: Brazil’s role in the Haitian earthquake response

The response from the Caribbean and Central and South America, and especially Brazil, which has led the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) since 2004, has been particularly significant. As with the response of Dubai Cares, the Venezuelan, Cuban, and Brazilian responses blur the boundary between assistance and rehabilitation, mirroring the general trend within the international humanitarian industry, as observed by Ferris (2011), which has seen the increasing involvement of humanitarian agencies in protection initiatives. A 2012 report from the Embassy of Venezuela to the United States of America stated that

immediately after the earthquake, Venezuela sent 400 personnel to establish camps for internally displaced people in five towns, and continued throughout 2010 and 2011 to provide material assistance and medical aid to affected persons on the island. The report declared that Venezuela has pledged \$2.4 billion in aid over six years and continues to support Haiti by sending doctors, building wells, and offering agricultural support (Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the U.S. 2012). In turn, in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, Cuba sent more than 350 members of its Henry Reeve Emergency Response Medical Brigade, in addition to the 344 Cuban doctors already working in Haiti (see below) (Kirk and Kirk, 2010), and the Brazilian government is participating in a healthcare initiative supported through the Brazil-Cuba-Haiti Tripartite Commission and the South-South Cooperation Project. The initiative, financially supported by Brazil with Cuba providing human resources and medical expertise (Gorry 2011), will provide vaccinations against measles, rubella, and polio for over 2 million children in Haiti (Government of Brazil 2012).

Brancoli and Thomaz discuss the discourse surrounding Brazilian involvement in the humanitarian response to the 2010 earthquake detailed above, arguing that “Brazil usually presents itself as an international actor that is able to truly understand the humanitarian challenges faced by the majority of countries from across the global South” (Brancoli and Thomaz 2012). They cite Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff as saying “We are ready to cooperate with our brother and sister countries in the developing world” (Rousseff 2011). These concepts of “mutual South-South understanding” have been consistently employed by the Brazilian government when discussing their actions in Haiti. What Brancoli and Thomaz refer to as Brazil’s “discourses of solidarity,” reinforced through the use of the label “Southern” as a specific identity marker, allow diverse states to identify with a shared “Southern” community based on certain perceived shared attributes.⁶ In this context, the invocation of the label “Southern” by the Brazilian government can also serve as an example of how the label itself can hold political capital and can be used as an indicator of solidarity between post-colonial states.

These discursive affirmations of solidarity between states must also be analyzed cautiously, however, as an acknowledgement of the diversity of the global South requires us to consider the relative position held by different Southern states when discussing solidarist rhetoric such as this. Brazil, as an emerging economic and political force in the global arena, does not occupy the same global position as Haiti, one of the poorest states in the world with a recent history of political instability. The use of such discourse, therefore, must also be considered in terms of the strategic objectives it serves for relatively stronger states like Brazil, who could be searching to further consolidate their newly-established authority in the global political sphere *vis-à-vis* other powerful global actors. Declarations of solidarity must not, therefore, be accepted without a critical analysis of how, why, and to what ends such a discourse is being used.

Southern responses to the Arab Spring displacements from the regional to household levels

The popular uprisings that swept across North Africa and the Middle East from the end of 2010 were characterized by significant upheaval, including major episodes of displacement. Regime changes in Tunisia and Egypt, and the civil conflict in Libya caused more than a million people to flee to neighboring countries (UNHCR 2012), with the number of refugees escaping from the ongoing Syrian conflict having exceeded 1.6 million in June 2013 (UNHCR 2013). The significant role played by Southern actors at a multitude of levels has been one of

the key features of the response to these processes of forced migration. Some of these initiatives have adopted the “apolitical” identity of formal international humanitarian organizations, while others, including groups affiliated with the opposition Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, retain a highly politicized character. Notions of solidarity and brotherhood were also a distinctive feature to some aspects of the relief efforts, a selection of which are outlined below.

Focus: Southern state and civil society responses to Libyan refugees’ displacement

Following the 2011 Libya crisis, the Government of the UAE, together with the Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Humanitarian Foundation, the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Humanitarian and Charity Establishment, the Red Crescent Authority, and the Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation, were a significant presence in the relief efforts. These organisations coordinated their approaches, operating under the banner of the “UAE unified relief team,” inter alia, establishing camps for displaced persons on the Libya-Tunisia and the Libya-Egypt borders, providing health care and medical equipment, and distributing food and non-food items (OCFA 2012). This example has the potential to raise questions relating to critical assumptions that the development of refugee camps represents a manifestation of neo-colonial control and containment, prompting an examination of the motivations underpinning Southern states’ decisions to establish refugee camps rather than deploy other modes of response.

While governmental institutions had stopped functioning, and security and policing were largely absent in the south-east of Tunisia, community efforts played a significant part in the safe passage and accommodation of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the violence in Libya (Hoffman 2012). As is often the case in displacement contexts, members of local communities were the first actors to provide material assistance in different ways and in different contexts to Libyans arriving at the Tunisian border: for instance, after UAE established the first refugee camp in Tunisia, 13km from the Libyan border, members of the local community worked as volunteers in the camp setting, some Libyan refugees were hosted by Tunisian families, and one person in each town was allocated to collect keys for empty housing, with communities collectively cleaning and refurnishing these homes to provide shelter for Libyan refugees. In the early stages of the influx, Libyans and Tunisians expressed sentiments of solidarity: a handwritten banner hung over a main street of one town read “Welcome to our Libyan brothers” (ibid: 13). Relations did, however, become more strained both as stocks of basic necessities began to dwindle, and as increasing numbers of pro-Gaddafi supporters and army defectors were displaced into Tunisia following the National Transitional Council’s seizure of Tripoli: “It was increasingly difficult to tell which refugees were on which side of the conflict, but Tunisian communities continued to hold the neutral stance of humanitarian groups – they offered food and housing to those in need” (ibid). Again, notions of solidarity resonate within this micro-level response to displacement, demonstrating how perceptions of a shared identity, this time based upon cultural and geographical proximity, can produce a common bond that invokes positive obligations towards strangers. Hosting is not a new phenomenon in contexts of displacement. Indeed, Nicholson’s research on hosting in the historical context of Albania, details how Albanian communities hosted displaced populations in the years following Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire (2012).

However, despite the fact that hosting has been a feature of human responses to displacement for many years, due to its location beyond the realm of formalized organizations, it has

remained largely invisible to humanitarian theorists. The household, and work or services performed within the “home,” have traditionally been conceptualized in Northern thought as constituting the “feminine” private sphere. Action carried out within this spatially and socially delimited realm have typically not been understood to hold the same value as those undertaken within the “masculine” public sphere. Recognizing the fact that these micro-level responses are situated beyond the public sphere could provide some insight into understanding why community hosting has remained overlooked in studies of humanitarianism. Along with understanding the Northern biases inherent to existing work on humanitarianism, it is also important for future research to consider how gender biases have informed the development of dominant modes of thought and have privileged the study of formalized institutions situated within the public sphere whilst simultaneously neglecting humanitarian action, or refusing to value such action located beyond that sphere.⁶ Community responses to the displacement of Syrian refugees as a result of the ongoing conflict within that country have also been highly significant across neighboring states, and will be explored below.

Focus: Southern state and civil society responses to Syrian refugees’ displacement

With reference to Syrian refugees, the provision of relief from countries as diverse as China and Albania has been reported (China Daily 2012; Likmeta 2012), with the Chinese Foreign Ministry announcing its donation of 30 million yuan (\$4.76 million) to aid Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan in a press release in August 2012 (China Daily 2012). At the inter-state level, the Arab League has pledged \$100m in aid to Syrian refugees (Gulf Times 2012). Arab states’ responses to the region’s humanitarian crises have been highly significant, ranging from reports of Morocco sending aid convoys comprising the resources for a field hospital in Jordan (Aujourd’hui Le Maroc 2012), to the Qatar Charity providing food and non-food aid and medical assistance to Syrian refugees both in Lebanese border areas and in Jordan. It has also provided help with rent and health services in Jordan (Gulf Times 2012). As with the Haitian example, South-South state responses to displacement arising from the Arab Spring demonstrate the importance of analyzing the role played by Southern states as “donors” in contexts of displacement, and not simply as “hosts.” Just as important, such an analysis must be placed in a historical context, given the evidence which suggests that this is not an explicitly “new” phenomena. Indeed, the origins of contemporary Gulf state donorship can be traced to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, with the “front-line states” in the conflict which were most affected by the displacement of large numbers of Palestinians, specifically Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, being the primary recipients of this humanitarian aid (Porter 1986, in Barakat and Zyck 2010: 13).

Although the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO) has been charged by the Jordanian government with coordinating the aid response to the influx of Syrian refugees (IRIN 2012), the Integrated Regional Information Networks have reported that it is arguably civil society groups that have played the largest role in responding to the Syrian refugee influx. In addition to the preexisting Syrian community in Jordan providing a significant source of support, some Jordanian landlords have also reportedly allowed Syrian refugees to stay free of charge (IRIN 2012). Faith-based Muslim organizations are also playing a significant role in

⁶ This is in line with feminist methodologies seeking to expose and correct the inherent masculine bias in the social sciences that informs concepts and methods within the discipline (Hekman 2007).

Jordan, including the Syria Women's Organization,⁷ which has registered new arrivals in Amman and provided them with essential items, and the Islamic Charity Centre Society – reportedly linked to the Muslim Brotherhood – which has registered refugees and distributed aid in the border regions (IRIN 2012). According to RFI, reporting from the Jordanian town of Mafraq, aid is coordinated by the civil society umbrella group the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organisation and distributed to refugees in Mafraq via three organisations; Latine, Al Kitab wal Sunnah, and Merkez Islami – the latter of which is connected to the opposition Muslim Brotherhood (RFI 2012). In Lebanon, national newspaper *The Daily Star* has reported the development of grassroots initiatives to “fill the gaps” in relief efforts for Syrian refugees, despite the presence of dozens of international NGOs as well as the government's Higher Relief Committee (Gatten and Alabaster 2012).

The state, NGO, civil society, and individual responses to the mass displacement following the recent upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) highlight the need to critically assess the historical and cultural context of humanitarian responses by state and non-state actors alike, including recognition of the influence of Islamic traditions of asylum, protection, and charity which are by now well documented by academics and practitioners alike (inter alia, see Turk's 2008 and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's 2011 edited collections; Guterres 2012). Indeed, although an extensive body of literature explores faith-based *state* responses to displacement, including in particular a plethora of studies of Gulf state-led *Islamic faith-based humanitarianism* post-9/11 (i.e. Barakat and Zyck, 2010; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003), “the protection of both migrants and refugees has been universally and unequivocally regarded as a moral and legal obligation, *not only by states and governments, but also by individuals and civil society*” (Abd al-Rahim 2008: 15, emphasis added). Investigating the different traditions of asylum and charity in Southern cultures and societies, and the historical contexts of the multiple “humanitarianisms” functioning in the contemporary world could provide significant insight into the motivations behind both state and non-state responses to forced displacement in Southern societies.

Humanitarian refugees at the Thai-Myanmar border

In the context of the protracted Myanmar refugee situation, characterized by over 100,000 refugees living in refugee camps and settlements along the Thai-Myanmar border since the 1980s, an extensive range of services, welfare, and relief continues to be provided by highly active Karen Christian refugees on both sides of the border. In addition to providing assistance to refugees in the camps, Karen refugees frequently re-enter Myanmar's border zone as “soldiers-medics-missionaries” (Horstmann 2011), accessing an area known to be largely inaccessible to international humanitarian NGOs. This multifaceted project of evangelization, assistance, and reconstruction, according to Horstmann, is “fuelled by global alliances with American Christian churches (see Wuthnow 2009), South Korean Pentecostals, and international advocacy networks” (2011:515).

Many Christian refugees use their institutional resources in Thailand to actively support IDPs in Myanmar's Karen state by re-entering the territory to perform humanitarian operations there. Examples include the Karen Baptist Convention, which assists both refugees at the border and IDPs in Myanmar, and the Karenni Social and Welfare Centre which works in coordination with the Thailand Burma Border Consortium and the Burma Relief Centre to

⁷ Syria Women's Organization was established in 2006 by the children of Syrians who had themselves fled the state repression of the Muslim Brotherhood's revolt in 1982.

provide emergency relief and training and to document human rights abuses. Since its inception in 1998, Back Pack Health Worker Team has recruited and trained health workers from displaced communities, working from Mae Sot, a Thai border town that serves as a base for Myanmar refugee groups. Those recruited are trained by technical experts from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and the American NGO, Global Access Health Program, subsequently travelling into Myanmar by foot in order to provide medical assistance to displaced communities there (BBC 2011).

The notion of refugees acting as the providers of humanitarian assistance for members of their own community and other displaced populations⁸ in some respects represents the ultimate paradox with regards to Northern assumptions of the roles of different stakeholders in the humanitarian arena. Indeed, the ascription of “victimhood” and “passivity” onto refugees in humanitarian circles has been extensively critiqued in the refugee studies literature, with Hyndman analyzing the ways in which refugees are represented in the humanitarian arena as vulnerable and dependent and in need of care from outsiders (2000: 121) and Harrell-Bond’s (1986) seminal publication, *Imposing Aid*, arguing that refugees are rendered docile and dependent *because of* the practices of the humanitarian system, whose main agenda is one of control. The example of Karen refugees coordinating and implementing humanitarian assistance efforts for their own community and other displaced persons, thus directly challenges these presumptions, situating refugees as the providers and coordinators of aid and protection services, whilst simultaneously raising concerns regarding the power imbalances which may characterize the work of those we may refer to as “refugee-evangelists” in contexts of displacement, and the extent to which Karen refugees implement a faith-centred⁹ rather than a universalist approach to humanitarian assistance delivery (also see Ferris 2011).

The high level of interconnectivity between Northern and Southern actors in the Karen case confirms Ferris’ contention that FBOs are “rooted in their local communities and yet have global reach” (Ferris 2005: 325), while concurrently raising questions relating to the dynamics of North-South relations in contexts such as these and the extent to which these initiatives can be conceptualized as “Southern” in nature. The “evangelical” and missionary-inspired approach to humanitarian action adopted by these Christian refugee groups and their international networks undoubtedly comes into conflict with the ICRC’s stated principles, and yet to take these principles as ahistorical and thus to disregard these forms of humanitarian response is to ignore the contingent nature of the term and the temporal specificity of the ICRC’s definition. As Reiff argues with regards to the origins of Western humanitarianism, “Historically ... the treatment of the sick, the insane, and wounded soldiers on the battlefield has largely been the work of religious orders” (2002: 57). These missionaries, who by the middle of the nineteenth century were committed to eradicating slavery, simultaneously promoted the “civilizing” practices thought to run parallel to conquest and imperial domination (Reiff 2002). The persistence of global evangelical networks working in the humanitarian arena (also see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2012b) and the historical connections between humanitarianism and missionaries is itself therefore a valuable point of study,

⁸ Also see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager (2013) regarding the multifaceted roles of local faith communities (including displaced populations and host populations alike) in responding to contexts of forced displacement.

⁹ As noted by Orji, “the faith-centred approach involves FBOs providing support to members of their own faith community first, or, at times, exclusively” (2011: 486).

especially in order to better understand the roles and implications of refugee evangelical humanitarian providers in the global South.

4 South-South humanitarian protection in contexts of forced displacement

As argued previously, forced displacement is situated at the intersection of assistance and protection in the humanitarian world. It is therefore necessary to consider the extent to which Southern actors are engaged not only in assistance activities but also in humanitarian protection initiatives, given that protection is often an integral aspect of displacement response. Southern local- and national-level NGOs are an important example of the ways in which societies in the South have contributed to the protection of refugees. For instance, *L'Office Africain pour le Développement et la Coopération* (OFADEC) is a national Senegalese NGO active in the protection and assistance of refugees, working in partnership with UNHCR on diverse protection issues such as camp management, health and education, and repatriation and have developed both micro-projects for women and agricultural projects for refugees (OFADEC 2007). Southern local NGO and civil society efforts have also been prominent in the promotion of humanitarian protection for displaced populations, and have taken the form of both secular and faith-based initiatives (on the latter, see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager, 2013).

Having addressed a range of assistance activities undertaken by Southern state and non-state actors on a multitude of levels and in a variety of contexts, the following case studies outline examples of South-South protection initiatives for refugees and forced migrants. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this exercise to develop a substantive analysis of these cases, this overview suggests how some of these examples may interact with existing theory, thereby laying the foundations for future research in this field, including Stage Two of the present project.

Local NGOs and refugee community organizations in Cairo

Cairo is home to one of the largest populations of urban refugees in the world, with refugees from countries as diverse as Sudan, Iraq, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Palestine, amongst others, having sought safety in the city (Fiddian 2006; Gozdzik and Walter 2012). Three main organizational layers contribute to the protection of refugees in Cairo: intergovernmental organizations including UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), service providers (most commonly churches or legal aid organizations) and community-based organizations (Grabska 2006; Sadek 2010). Numerous Christian initiatives offer a range of protection and assistance services in Cairo, including those managed by St Andrew's Refugee Services, a Christian faith-based organization which provides both adult and child educational programs, psychosocial services and legal aid for refugees in Cairo, (StARS 2012); Sacred Heart Church, a Roman Catholic Church which serves the Sudanese refugee community in Cairo; and Refuge Egypt, a Christian aid and development organization based at All Saints' Cathedral, a ministry of the Episcopal/Anglican Diocese of Egypt. In addition to hosting worship services for refugees and providing Christian educational programs for Christian refugees, Sacred Heart Church also provides relief, health, educational, income generation,

and social and cultural activities for members of the wider refugee community of all faiths.¹⁰ In turn, Refuge Egypt provides “humanitarian assistance, medical care, education, self-reliance programs, *spiritual guidance*, and encouragement to newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees in Cairo” (Refuge Egypt 2008, emphasis added).

The emphasis that institutions such as these place on providing spiritual support as part of a holistic service to refugee communities gives pertinence to arguments that local faith communities (LFCs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs) can play an important role as sources of social and spiritual capital for displaced groups (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager 2013). Helen Stawski, in her presentation on LFCs and FBOs at the aforementioned 2012 Workshop on South-South Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement, highlighted many actors’ unwillingness to use the “humanitarian” label to describe faith-based initiatives (Stawski 2012). Despite this, Stawski argues, LFCs and FBOs can be important sources of social and spiritual capital for refugees and displaced persons. Further, faith communities are a significant presence at the front line of many humanitarian situations, and faith-based institutions and organizations, because they are rooted within local landscapes, often have privileged access to even the most marginalized communities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager 2013). Unlike more temporary and transient non-local assistance, LFCs and FBOs are also often fixed presences that have intimate connections with the communities they serve, and they thus hold the capacity to develop medium- and long-term programs useful for the development and implementation of durable solutions (ibid; Pacitto 2012).

Stawski concedes that there are contexts in which the “truth claims” of religions are presented in a discriminatory manner towards vulnerable groups and “Other” faith communities, and the potential negative impact of this should not be taken lightly. The fear of proselytization and the possible relationship between religion and faith on the one hand, and power and control on the other, remain significant issues that must be addressed in engaging with faith-based and faith-inspired organizations, be they faith-inspired community organizations like those found in Cairo, evangelical humanitarian relief providers like the Karen refugees, or indeed any other advocacy groups that may have links to powerful institutions.¹¹ It is for this reason that “alternative” humanitarian perspectives should not be unequivocally idealized. Rather, they must themselves be critically assessed and the power dynamics inherent within them must be examined.

South-South protection initiatives and Palestinian refugees

Along with local NGOs, Southern states and Southern international NGOs have also carved a significant place for themselves in the field of refugee protection. Southern responses to the protracted displacement of Palestinians provide a salient example of this. The enduring nature of the Palestinian refugee and IDP situation, whose population includes those displaced as a result of the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars, along with second and third generation Palestinians born in exile, highlights the need to examine humanitarian action holistically.

¹⁰ The church coordinates with the Refugee Inter-Agency Committee, which includes representatives from UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, the International Committee of the Red Cross, embassies of resettlement, and other refugee serving NGOs (Sacred Heart Church, n.d.).

¹¹ This argument was put forward by Jeff Crisp during the international Workshop on South-South Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement convened by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford in October 2012.

Focusing on emergency assistance alone is insufficient to understand the dynamics of humanitarianism in contexts of protracted displacement and it is for this reason that an understanding of longer-term protection initiatives by Southern actors is essential to studies of forced displacement.

In the case of the Palestinian refugees, UAE charity Dubai Cares has worked across Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza in partnership with UNRWA to ensure Palestinian refugee children's access to basic education services and medical care. In partnership with Global Network, Dubai Cares is supporting a deworming campaign for UNRWA school children in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in order to promote and improve their health status, and has distributed Arabic-language books through its partner Scholastic, aiming to improve Palestinian children's school performance by advancing their literacy levels (Dubai Cares 2012a). A wide range of other state and non-state initiatives have supported Palestinian refugee children's and youth's access to primary, secondary and tertiary level educations. For instance, in 2009, the Qatar-based organization Al Fakhoora aimed to promote education in Palestine, and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) accordingly announced the establishment of a comprehensive scholarship program for Palestinian students in Gaza. The first phase of the program was said to provide full higher education scholarships for 100 Palestinians for a period of up to five years (Gulf Times 2009). One example of a longer-standing program aimed at improving educational levels of Palestinians is the scholarship system for Palestinian refugee children and youth offered by Gaddhafi's government beginning in the 1970s to allow Palestinians to complete their education in Libya (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011). It is estimated that before the civil conflict in Libya in 2011, 100 Palestinian students were studying in Libya (ibid).

Focus: Malaysian-Palestinian solidarity and humanitarian protection

Southern states and NGOs outside of the region have also been involved in protection activities targeting Palestinian refugees, including through the provision of scholarships and educational assistance. Malaysia's humanitarian initiatives for Palestinian refugees, for instance, are extensive, although they have remained largely marginalized in academic studies until present.¹² The state of Malaysia has never held diplomatic ties with Israel and has long-supported the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. This is reflected in the state's historic and ongoing commitment to the protection of Palestinians in exile. In January 2013, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak undertook a "humanitarian visit" to Gaza to consolidate Malaysia's "leading role" in the fight for freedom and peace in Palestine and to extend any assistance possible in support of this cause (New Straits Times 2013). Malaysian newspaper, *The New Straits Times*, reported that deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin stated that "Najib's courage and commitment in the *humanitarian mission* to Gaza would inspire the people to continue to uphold the sacred struggle of the Palestinians to free their homeland" (New Straits Times 2013, emphasis added).

As early as 1990, *The New Straits Times* reported that Palestinian refugee children from the Bait Atfal As-Samoud (Home for the Children of the Steadfast) in Lebanon had been invited to visit Malaysia, a visit which was organized through the Malaysian Social Research Institute (MSRI), City Hall, and the Welfare Ministry, and was funded through the sponsorship of

¹² Thanks are due to Y.M. Qasmiyeh for drawing the authors' attention to Malaysia's humanitarian programmes for Palestinian refugees, and in particular those programmes run in Beddawi refugee camp.

Malaysian “foster parents” (New Straits Times 1990). According to the MSRI website, the organization has run a Palestinian sponsorship program since 1988 for Palestinian children living in Lebanese refugee camps, and also provides further assistance in the form of vocational training and medical aid (MSRI 2010a). Indeed, the Malaysian-gifted Learning Centre in Beddawi Palestinian refugee camp in North Lebanon was established in 1990 through funding by the Malaysian Sociological Research Centre, providing educational, financial, social, cultural, and medical assistance to its sponsored families. Demonstrating Malaysia’s commitment to supporting Palestinian refugees’ access to education, the center provides five university scholarships for Palestinian refugee students living in the camp (MRSI 2010b). Many young Palestinians are currently studying within Malaysia’s university system (Pandian, 2008), and some are recipients of scholarships provided by the Malaysian government (The Choice 2012). More recently, Malaysia’s Sponsor a Palestinian Child in Gaza program was launched in 2010, receiving initial start-up funds from the Gaza Emergency Fund established by the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in early 2009. MSRI is one of the NGOs appointed by the Ministry to distribute funds to alleviate the suffering of Gazan refugee children (MRSI 2010c). In 2012 it was reported that the Malaysian Education Ministry had raised RM1.7 million to build and maintain classrooms, laboratories, and other facilities in 11 schools in Jaballia, Gaza; this money had been distributed to Malaysian organization Viva Palestina Malaysia, an NGO established in 2009 supporting the self-determination of Palestine (New Straits Times 2012).

Other Malaysian NGOs have also been prominent in the delivery of humanitarian protection to Palestinian refugees. One such example is Aman Palestin, a Malaysian NGO established in 2004 with three main objectives: to foster Islamic brotherhood,¹³ to preserve the sanctity of the al-Aqsa Mosque, and to raise awareness of the Palestinian cause. Internationally, Aman Palestin has primarily undertaken humanitarian activities in Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon. In Lebanon, Aman Palestin has held a seminar on the future of the Palestinian children in Beirut, made donations to Palestinian orphanages, and introduced a *kafala* (sponsorship system) project to provide assistance to poor Palestinian families. In the context of Gaza, Aman Palestin has also planned a number of socio-development projects to mitigate the impacts of the Israeli blockade, including the construction of new orphanages; securing financial supports for education; supplying food and medicine to particularly vulnerable Palestinians, especially during winter; and setting up a mini clinic and mini supermarket¹⁴ (Idris 2012). In the case of Malaysia, the motivations behind state and non-state support for Palestinian refugees must be investigated separately in order to understand how dynamics of politics, religion, and notions of solidarity and community manifest themselves differently in the case of government and NGOs.

Cuban medical and educational humanitarian program

Aside from the examples given above, other South-South educational scholarships offered to refugees have also been documented in academia and by the media.¹⁵ Cuba, in particular, has a long and rich history of providing scholarships for refugee students from the global South,

¹³ Aman Palestin has organized programs to assist Palestinians such as the “*ziarah*,” or the Islamic brotherhood visit to Lebanon in 2007.

¹⁴ The latter was co-organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.

¹⁵ Other educational initiatives include over 450 scholarships offered to Somali students by the South African organization Somali Refugee Aid Agency (SORAA) in 2011 (Bar-Kulan 2011).

which constitutes part of its medical and educational internationalist program, the details of which will be outlined below. Cuba has 42,000 workers in international collaborations in 103 different countries, of which more than 30,000 are health personnel, including 19,000 physicians. For over 40 years Cuban doctors have practiced abroad, including in a wide range of displacement settings, and Cuban medical schools have concurrently trained foreigners in Cuba itself (Huish and Kirk 2010). Indeed, since the beginning of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, over 40,000 students including citizens, IDPs and refugees alike from across 120 different countries have benefited from the Cuban scholarship program, allowing them to pursue primary, secondary and/or tertiary education in Cuba (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010). A majority of non-Cuban students completing their tertiary studies in Cuba have focused on medical, nursing and dentistry degrees (ibid).¹⁷

With reference to medical internationalism, Cuba's strong medical presence in the wake of the 2010 Haitian earthquake builds upon a long history of Cuba's involvement in providing medical assistance across the Caribbean and Central America from 1998 onwards. That year, Hurricane Georges struck Haiti, leading Cuba to offer significant assistance in the form of a two-pronged approach to health care assistance and development: first, it supplied hundreds of Cuban doctors to the disaster-affected country, and second, it agreed to train Haitian doctors in Cuba, with the view that these doctors would eventually return to their country and replace the Cuban doctors. The first cohort of students commenced their studies in May 1999 at the Latin American School of Medicine, and by 2010, Cuba had trained approximately 550 Haitian doctors. In addition, since 1998, some 6,094 Cuban medical personnel have worked in Haiti (Kirk and Kirk 2010). In the same year (1998), Hurricane Mitch took over 30,000 lives across Central America, with a landfall caused by the storm in Guatemala killing 268 people and displacing 106,000. Working alongside Spanish, US, and Guatemalan relief teams, 19 Cuban doctors provided medical assistance to those affected by the natural disaster. As a result of its extensive experience assisting disaster-affected populations in Central America, in late 1998 the country's Comprehensive Health Program was established to create sustainable models for the deployment of health professionals in remote and underserved areas to improve population health in dozens of countries, beginning with Central America.

The beneficiaries of Cuba's medical assistance program and its medical training program have included diverse populations from contexts affected by disaster and conflict-induced displacement. For instance, 1,500 scholarships are now available for students from East Timor and Pakistan, countries that received Cuba's Henry Reeve disaster response brigade in 2005 (Huish and Kirk 2010). Amongst the beneficiaries of the broader Cuban scholarship program since the 1970s in particular are a range of refugee populations including Namibian and Sudanese refugees (1,500 Namibian refugee students left Cuba for their newly independent state in 1990, while 300 Sudanese refugees were based in Cuba in 1996); furthermore, several thousand Palestinian refugees (in particular those associated with Marxist aligned resistance groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine) and over 4,000 Sahrawi refugees¹⁶ have graduated from Cuban

¹⁶ Like Palestinian refugees, Sahrawi refugee communities and their political representatives, the Polisario Front, also received support from the Libyan government since the 1970s. This support has included the provision of scholarships enabling Sahrawi refugee children to undertake their education in Libya, with an estimated 900 Sahrawi children and youth studying in Libya at the outbreak of the Libyan civil conflict (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2012a);

universities since the 1970s (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010, 2011b).¹⁷ With reference to the latter, scholarships are allocated to Palestinian students through bilateral agreements with the Palestine Liberation Organization, and to Sahrawi refugees through the Polisario Front (the Sahrawi liberation movement) and the Sahrawi refugee camp-based government (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010), indicating the extent to which such scholarships are deeply connected with Cuba's *solidarity* with the Palestinian and Sahrawi causes.

The long history of Cuban South-South humanitarian responses is exemplary of the fact that state-led humanitarian protection emanating from the global South is far from a novel phenomenon. It demonstrates the dense imbrications between assistance and protection which are an enduring feature of humanitarian responses to those who have been forced to flee their homes, and for whom the protection of their country of origin remains unavailable. Cuba's global position, its economic isolation since the fall of the USSR and its interrelated, longstanding goal of self-sufficiency partly explain Cuban sentiments of solidarity towards exiled communities like the Sahrawis and the Palestinians that are themselves isolated and excluded from much of organized global politics, and who strive for self-determination and self-sufficiency. The principles underpinning Cuba's secular, internationalist approach also reflect the country's broader political ethos, and include José Martí's principle "To share what you have, not to give what is left over" ("*Compartir lo que tienes, no dar lo que te sobra*") (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010). The principle of solidarity underpinning such initiatives may be considered to be a challenge to the demands of "impartial" and "universal" responses, and is demonstrative of yet another facet of the "multiple and overlapping solidarities" existing between individuals and communities. Further, the emphasis placed on self-sufficiency as an element of the Cuban humanitarian program pushes us to reconceptualize the blurred nature between humanitarian and development initiatives.

5 Concluding remarks

This paper has aimed to demonstrate the need for a horizontal and vertical expansion of the field of inquiry in humanitarian studies, seeking to engage in a substantive manner with Barnett's contention that "we live in a world of humanitarianisms, not humanitarianism" (op cit) and to illustrate the ways in which writing the "Other" into humanitarian studies has the potential to both challenge and enrich our understandings of the multiple and overlapping modes through which different actors respond to those affected by contexts of forced displacement. While the enduring influence of the Northern-dominated international regime in the humanitarian arena should not be trivialized, nor should the capacity of Southern stakeholders, including refugees and forcibly displaced persons themselves, to exert agency as actors in the humanitarian sphere. The networks and relationships between Northern and Southern humanitarianisms, as exemplified through the case studies above, are deeply rooted and complex. In many instances, therefore, exploration into Southern humanitarian initiatives

scholarships have also been offered to Sahrawi refugees across Algeria, Syria and Qatar (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010a, 2012b).

¹⁷ UNHCR have also reported on how Cuba's free educational system benefits refugees living in the country. In 2006 there were 697 refugees living in Cuba and assisted by UNHCR. Although refugees in Cuba do not have permission to work, they have access to the free health care and education provided by the Cuban government (UNHCR 2006).

must be coupled with an investigation into these intricate networks in order for these different North-South dynamics to be better understood.

If humanitarianism is said to be birthed from cosmopolitanism, and if we can conceive, like Calhoun (2002) does, of a cosmopolitanism which sees citizenship as multiple and layered, and which balances a liberal idea of rights with a stronger conception of the realities of solidarity and community, then academic legitimacy demands a reconceptualization of the term. To borrow from Oman, the concurrence of “an ethnocentric universalism and an insular cultural relativism” does not result in “an either-or choice” (1996: 528). Within the cosmopolitan ideal is respect for cultural diversity and the idea of multiple and overlapping solidarities, including, but by no means restricted to the idea of a global solidarity (Calhoun 2002: 893). Promoting an understanding of “Other” forms of humanitarianism is not, therefore, to reject the existence or indeed the legitimacy of humanitarianism based upon the notion of global citizenship. However it is to reject the contention that this is the *only* legitimate form of humanitarianism. The concepts of solidarity and community that resonate throughout the case studies explored in this paper echo the ideas of Southern, critical scholars who seek to reaffirm the importance of local communal obligations in opposition to a Northern-conceived universality.

Engagement with the “local” is something which is espoused by many critical Southern scholars who consider a state- and institution-centric approach to reproduce Northern biases and modes of thought. Highlighting humanitarian efforts taking place at the local community and household level, such as the aforementioned hosting of Libyan refugees by Tunisian families, therefore redresses these biases by broadening the scope of inquiry, and by demanding that local “humanitarian” efforts be considered to have the same legitimacy as other modes of humanitarian action. However, these “alternative” humanitarian perspectives or models should not be unequivocally idealized – they must themselves be critically assessed and the complex power dynamics that may be intrinsic to them must be exposed. Rather than offering a critique of the Northern humanitarian regime, this paper has critiqued the assumption that a limited and historically-specific institutional definition of what constitutes humanitarian should be mirrored at the theoretical level. To restrict the area of research in humanitarian studies to organizations purporting to be working under the strict principles laid out by the ICRC is not just fraught with Northern bias, but it also fails to recognize that claims of impartial, apolitical universality can equally be interpreted and understood to be partial, politicized neo-imperialism. The example of Myanmar, given above, clearly demonstrates this. Politics pervades humanitarianism, and not just humanitarianism in the sense of the practices carried out by “humanitarian” organizations; it is interwoven within the fibers of the epithet itself. It is this lexical politics that has for so long footnoted “Other” actors and “Other” modes of action in the study of humanitarianism. A holistic understanding of the complex heterogeneity of humanitarianisms, in the plural, as they are conceptualized across the South, as well as the North, may help us to transcend the institutional and academic privileging of a specific, Northern understanding of the term. Through expanding the use of the humanitarian label we promote a lexical counter-politics that unravels the very fibers of the epithet and what it represents. Broadening the field in this way therefore opens the possibility for new and exciting research trajectories in humanitarian studies, forced migration studies, and beyond.

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