



## Humanitarianism as civic practice? Humanity, politics and humanitarian activism

Henry Radice

To cite this article: Henry Radice (2022) Humanitarianism as civic practice? Humanity, politics and humanitarian activism, Journal of Civil Society, 18:2, 142-160, DOI: [10.1080/17448689.2022.2121296](https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2022.2121296)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2022.2121296>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 11 Oct 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 63



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Humanitarianism as civic practice? Humanity, politics and humanitarian activism

Henry Radice

LSE IDEAS, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

## ABSTRACT



This article explores the intersection between civic activism and humanitarian action, two sets of practices which, in conflict settings, involve protecting life, supporting people's ability to survive, and upholding dignity. Yet the logics that govern professionalized humanitarianism sometimes limit or work against the kinds of civic activism and political agency that enable resistance to powerful conflict dynamics. This article elaborates a concept of humanitarian activism that recasts the humanitarian encounter as a problem of political estrangement, to be overcome through a recognition of the political agency of humanitarians' interlocutors. The starting point of humanitarian action in all its guises should be to see the human in the other, but it should also accept that humanity is political in both its construction and realization. The humanity of the other must be honoured, among other things, through the support of the other's political voice through civic engagements in the fora relevant to those goals of protecting life and dignity. As contemporary conflict fuels itself by dehumanizing and depoliticizing, so must humanitarian activists situate themselves against both these dynamics, materially and discursively, from the level of local activism to global humanitarian funding flows, to open up genuine humanitarian space for change.

## KEYWORDS

Humanitarianism; activism; politics; agency; civic

## Introduction

This article explores the intersection between humanitarianism, broadly understood, and civic activism in conflict affected-settings. Civic practices are diverse, vernacular, and intersect with a myriad of other political practices, ideologies and identities. In conflict settings, many such practices involve humanitarian dimensions such as the saving of life or the upholding of ideas of human dignity. However, humanitarianism and civicness arguably also sit in tension, for civic activism represents by definition a purposeful political engagement with one's context, while humanitarian action is generally defined in contrast to particularistic political commitments. I reject this divide, arguing that a more openly political account of humanitarianism, once taken beyond the relatively

**CONTACT** Henry Radice  [h.radice@lse.ac.uk](mailto:h.radice@lse.ac.uk)  LSE IDEAS, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

commonplace (if still sometimes reluctant) acknowledgment that humanitarian action has political consequences, prompts us to engage with precisely this intersection.

In the first section, I argue that the work that many civic activists do in conflict is humanitarian, and fully including them within the humanitarian conversation both adds to the nuance of that conversation when it comes to the real politics of humanitarianism on the ground, and offers openings for the institutions of global humanitarianism to make good on their promises of localization by taking seriously the agency and voice of non-conventional humanitarian activists.

In the second section I try to show how the intersection between humanitarianism and civic agency provides us with an interesting lens through which to reassess and redefine the humanitarian problem in conflict. If humanitarian needs come about through a deficit of political agency, then humanitarianism ought better to contribute to remedying that deficit.

And in the third and last section I argue more broadly that, once the notion of separation from politics has been rejected on the basis above, the idea of humanitarianism can itself become a form of civic intervention, whether discursive or material, based on contextualized reassertions of an idea of humanity in opposition to performative denials of that very idea by the agents and drivers of conflict.

## **The Promise of Civicism and the Problem of Humanitarian Gatekeeping**

Those who make things work, who enable dignified survival amidst conflict do so in multiple, diverse ways, whether they are teachers speaking past the exclusions and hierarchies of sectarianism, doctors sticking to protocols of triage on the basis of the most urgent medical need, or judges remaining uncorrupted against substantial pressures. There are municipalities that find it more appropriate to provide basic services to all rather than auction them to the highest bidder. In non-conflict settings, their actions might well sit comfortably within the everyday understandings of normal professional or political conduct. In contemporary violent conflict settings, where the possibilities and constraints of normality are of quite a different order, such actions take on the characteristics of activism, representing, however humbly, a transformational agenda. This section explores the contours of civic activism in conflict, arguing that much of it either represents forms of humanitarian action, contributes to a more humane politics, or presents openings for other humanitarian actors.

Civic engagements represent commitments or attachments to a particular place, institution, or practice – civicism exists in relation to a specific context for its enactment. But these commitments sit within broader conceptualisations of the public good – their particularity always invokes a broader set of ideas and values, often (though not necessarily) seen as of universal applicability. A volunteer at a local library is offering a substantial and enduring practical commitment to a particular place, and their selection of books will reflect their perception of the needs and interests of their community, but underwriting their civic engagement is an underlying assumption that libraries are of value more generally.

My argument in this section is that the forms of civic activism that we might also describe as forms of humanitarian activism are those that are underwritten, in a significant way, by a notion of, and concern for, common humanity and/or human dignity.

Since such notions are routinely trampled on amidst conflict, we should take an expansive view of the forms of civic activism in conflict-affected settings that might usefully be seen as humanitarian.

But the problem arises of the reluctance to see them as humanitarian. As such, the section considers the problem of humanitarian gatekeeping. As Hilhorst and Jansen put it, 'humanitarian situations are not blank slates to be occupied by lone agencies, but are shaped by social negotiations over inclusion and exclusion' (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010, p. 1133). The section examines specifically the obstacles that hinder the consideration of civic activists as humanitarian actors.

Two objections to the idea of linking civic action to humanitarianism suggest themselves here. A first possible objection is that humanitarianism risks becoming a theory of everything not actively fuelling conflict, and diluting its usefulness and meaning. There is no straightforward resolution to this, since it arguably is a humanitarian act to mitigate or end violent conflict, since violent conflict is so inimical to any plausible notion of human wellbeing. There is a well-established debate about whether the scope of humanitarianism should encompass root causes or merely symptoms. But on a practical level, I wish to focus on civic engagements in which a concern for some idea of basic human dignity is, if not explicit, then at least not far beneath the surface, and of obvious relevance to the character of the engagement. So to slightly disaggregate the analogy suggested above: a university or library managing to function amidst conflict is obviously a civic achievement, less so a humanitarian one in an analytically useful sense, even if both institutions have a broader humanitarian value that we might cherish, and which is, it should be said, amplified by the culturally destructive context of conflict. In contrast, action that might seem highly embedded in civic institutions takes on a directly relevant humanitarian character when the concern for life or dignity gains salience through conflict: acts of mutual aid, medical care, legal activism, among others, may all fall into this category.

The second immediate objection is that of irrelevance. If someone is engaging in 'thick' civic action, why draw out the 'thin' humanitarian component? What makes the additional characterization of civic action as humanitarian more than an interesting intellectual exercise?

One reason is the powerful political economy of global humanitarianism: being recognized as a humanitarian actor can be crucial in terms of receiving, or being seen as a plausible recipient of agency, finance, or power, by those who already wield humanitarian power (Fast & Bennett, 2020, p. 12; Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010, pp. 1133–1134). Currently, the localization agenda within professional humanitarianism purports to want to decentralize power. But the risks of isomorphism are great. The civic/humanitarian nexus offers a way to identify sources of humanitarian agency that do not necessarily mimic the established conventions of powerful humanitarian institutions, fostering a genuine humanitarian conversation in which those living in conflict and acting to mitigate its excesses can both speak and be heard.

A second reason is that however well global humanitarianism 'localises' itself, many of the structural problems arising from the realities of humanitarian governance, particularly the depoliticizing intractability of humanitarian unaccountability, remain. A better understanding of the overlap between humanitarianism and civic action speaks to the possibility of a humanitarianism that does not depoliticize, but rather tries to enhance the political agency of those it encounters.

Concluding a recent account of his own organization's humanitarian field practices in the Syrian conflict during the period 2011–2018, Hakim Khaldi, from Médecins Sans Frontières' (MSF's) Paris Operations Department, shifts the lens:

the Syrians were and remain in the forefront of the country's relief effort. Through charitable organisations (most of which existed before the conflict), informal aid networks, new institutions born of the rebellion and the initiatives of organisations formed by the Syrian diaspora, endogenous solidarity significantly outweighs international relief efforts. (Khaldi, 2020, p. 56)

This reminder that MSF's activities were supplemental to more embedded relief activities acknowledges a common pattern in conflict. The very idea of 'first' response implies a degree of geographical and possibly social proximity (Fast & Bennett, 2020, p. 10). But first responders are not just holding the fort until the cavalry arrives. They are part of what Khaldi helpfully terms 'endogenous solidarity'. Part of my argument here is that such responses of endogenous solidarity should have definitional heft within the humanitarian conversation.

While it is now relatively commonplace to note that though the vast majority of those who work for humanitarian organizations are local citizens, they are still generally portrayed as recipients, rather than co-producers of humanitarian identity. Once the discussion goes beyond those on the payroll of familiar, international humanitarian agencies, labels such as 'intermediaries', 'fixers', 'brokers' or 'gatekeepers' tend to be applied to those exerting agency within the humanitarian arena, pre-empting claims they might have to the label 'humanitarian' (though there may often be other reasons why that label would be inappropriate). Fechter and Schwittay note the tendency of international agencies to either ignore first responders or relegate them to the status of 'second-class aid workers' (Fechter & Schwittay, 2019, p. 1772).

Yet these exclusions, and these practices of labelling, remind us that those international agencies are themselves, at both micro and macro levels, brokers, gatekeepers and intermediaries of access to humanitarian aid.

In theory, this gatekeeping by international humanitarians is regulated by the notion that there is a set of core humanitarian principles, notably in this instance the principle of impartiality. But international humanitarians are embedded in specific global and local political economies of both finance and attention, and as such the practical application of these principles is at every level of action a matter of negotiation. Triage, or selection, is inherent to humanitarian action (Redfield, 2008). In the absence of a completely shared understanding, both amongst those affected and between them and international humanitarians, of what the humanitarian requirements of a particular situation are and entail, the experience of humanitarian assistance is likely often to feel brokered. Can those structurally in charge of opening or closing doors really resist the charge of gatekeeping?

As such, it is vital to engage with the agency of 'local' intermediaries as potentially constituting forms of humanitarian action, even if not immediately legible as such to those external to the situation. That is not to say that on balance particular intermediaries or 'civic' activists may not ultimately be found to be fuelling the dynamics of conflict more than they are upholding notions of human dignity. But the calculations they make about when to go with or against the grain of the political economy of conflict (e.g., through bribes or aid diversion), in order to pursue often complicated civic or humanitarian

ends, are not, in the final analysis, inherently different in potential ethical validity from those rehearsed in more fluent humanitarian vernaculars in the better examples of international humanitarians' own discussions of whether, when, and how to compromise on core humanitarian principles (MSF is exemplary in this respect, devoting time and resources to reflection and self-interrogation) (Magone et al., 2011).

One aspect of this is the way in which the language of tragedy, of sacrifice, a sort of vernacular of high priesthood, applies to international humanitarians in relation to their exercise of agency, including, encompassing and explaining their errors, misdeeds, and limitations (Hopgood, 2009; Redfield, 2008). Certainly the ascription of the register of the tragic to the practice of humanitarian is appropriate to the endeavour (de Waal, 2010). But how then to articulate the experiences and compromises of those living in those contexts, in which degrees of tragedy, in its proper sense of every action available involving a moral wrong of some sort (rather than something just being very sad), are woven into the fabric of everyday life. For them, finding a way, within the humanitarian conversation, to talk about their civic and humanitarian agency without resorting to the extremes of exhibiting humanitarian 'purity' (the saints) or having been captured or corrupted by the political marketplace or the siren calls of identity politics (the sinners).

The typical absence of such a discursive space creates and reproduces particular humanitarian hierarchies and blindspots. James' recent study of Congolese employees of MSF in North Kivu perfectly illustrates this problem. She brilliantly brings out the different ways in which the situatedness of Congolese employees, their access to particular identities, histories and vernaculars are functionally essential to the safe and effective conduct of MSF's action in North Kivu, while at the same time limiting and curtailing those employees' access to the 'neutral' and 'impartial' vantage point associated with foreignness and from which MSF tends to make decisions (James, 2020). She describes some Congolese staff's reluctance to disclose military backgrounds on the basis that it would be viewed with suspicion, in contrast to the military backgrounds of many international staff (James, 2020, p. 36). Whether or not these staff's concerns were well-founded, it is a telling insight: for internationals, despite humanitarianism's positionality in relation to conflict, having a military history (quite common in professional international humanitarianism) is not a barrier to humanitarian identity, nor to the voice at the table that comes with that identity. But for those embedded in conflict, whose military histories may well have been much less at their own discretion, the exercise of agency in the direction of humanitarian action, arguably a more significant and risky choice, is obscured by the very fact of feeling one might have to gloss over the experiences and choices behind it. The erasure, or mistrust of their agency disempowers the 'local' staff within the humanitarian arena.

Furthermore, there are problems with the typical bases on which the agency of local actors tends to be excluded from consideration as potentially humanitarian agency. First, the perception, and in some cases existence of corrupt practices among those working at a local level. Corruption is inimical both to the exercise of humanitarian principles, and precisely something that civic commitments tend to define themselves against. Yet, where forms of corruption are systemic, purity is hard to achieve. But more importantly, as Hugo Slim notes, 'much about the way they [international organisations] work seems equally corrupt, especially to people looking on from national organisations.' (Slim, 2021). Looking from the ground up, the recycling of many humanitarian funds into

Northern lives and institutions can quite reasonably appear to be a quasi-corrupt privatization of public goods. It can certainly appear, to civic activists, as very un-civic. As such, although of course a fundamental problem of contemporary conflict, corruption cannot be a trump card to be played in favour of top-down understandings of what constitutes humanitarian action.

Slim's argument also opens up the question of embeddedness as disqualifier for humanitarian identity, as problematised above through the example of military backgrounds. While patronage politics are another systemic problem in many contemporary conflicts, and so the embeddedness of individuals in those systems can qualify their agency *qua* humanitarians, the problem of double standards arises again. Slim describes the familiar life trajectories of Masters-holding international humanitarian bureaucrats, noting that they 'seem to use a system of patronage for people in their wider social group' (Slim, 2021). There is an odd echo at play here between conflict analysts' increasing understanding of the socio-political imbrications of corruption and identity politics that drive contemporary conflict (Kaldor & de Waal, 2020), against which humanitarianism must necessarily position itself, and the way that actually existing humanitarian action can sometimes appear to those on the receiving end. The nature of the financial flows and the forms of identity-based patronage at stake are very different, and crucially immeasurably less violent. But they can also contribute to the depoliticizing and stripping of agency from those they encounter, even as they attempt to help, rather than harm them.

This is where the perspective of those engaged in endogenous solidarity and civic activism provides a useful corrective. Yet how do 'we' recognize, engage and include 'them'? Perhaps, rather than reproduce the mistake of seeing the matter in terms of fixed roles and identities, we should look to the question of political agency, its relationship to humanitarian action, and from that vantage point suggest examples of civic humanitarianism in action, which contrast with the sector's tendency towards civic humanitarian inaction.

## Political Agency and Humanitarian Action

Acute humanitarian need in conflict-affected contexts is usually a consequence of the (often deliberate and engineered by conflict entrepreneurs) detachment of notions of humanity from ideas of political agency. Recent work suggests that the contemporary interplay of the violent marketization of politics and exclusivist identity politics is particularly pernicious in this regard (Kaldor & de Waal, 2020). The human stripped of their political subjectivity is stripped of a part of their humanity. Importantly, a part of their humanity that enables individual and collective survival, self-protection and, in better circumstances, flourishing. The humanitarian gaze can also strip, depoliticize, if and when it fails to 'see' the human as political animal. This is why the intersection between humanitarianism and civicness is so crucial. The lens of civicness, of the exercise of political agency that reflects, perhaps not the status of citizenship itself, but an idea of citizenship, can serve to correct humanitarian myopia or astigmatism.

It is, of course, but one way of seeing, and one that should be understood in relation to well-established critiques of how humanitarianism often fails to see, and depoliticizes (Campbell, 1998; Malkki, 1996). These critiques, revealing the paucity or absence of the political subjectivity that humanitarianism apprehends in its encounters, developed

alongside work that traced the devastating consequences of humanitarians ignoring the work of accountability, and the forms of politics that might pre-empt or alleviate humanitarian predicaments (de Waal, 1997).<sup>ti</sup>

The ‘humanitarian international’, to borrow the phrase de Waal coined at the time, is now vastly expanded, and is neither homogenous nor insensitive of such charges. As these critiques permeated the sector many technical improvements were made (de Waal, 2017). Furthermore, many working within the sector, with the caveats about their positionality suggested by the previous section, understand in a nuanced way the dynamics of conflict and the importance of political agency. But the conceptual contours of the political problem need further definition if humanitarianism is structurally to move beyond the tendency of humanitarian governance to depoliticize, and to find ways to simultaneously remain true to its purpose, embrace a positive account of its political role in conflict contexts, and most, importantly, foreground and uphold the political subjectivity of those threatened by conflict.

Few now argue that humanitarian action is, in any analytically meaningful sense, apolitical. Yet it is also the case that humanitarians are still reluctant to see their endeavour as a mode of politics that might beneficially be acknowledged and embraced. Indeed, as Hilhorst and Jansen note, the charge of politics can sometimes be further instrumentalised and deployed as a way of excluding another from the humanitarian arena (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010, p. 1134). To reverse this dynamic, the multilayered relationship between humanitarianism and politics needs to be better understood.

Miriam Ticktin makes ‘a distinction between *politics* and *the political* – that is, while politics is a set of practices by which order is created and maintained, the political refers to the disruption of an established order’. She invites us to focus on ‘emergent spaces of the political, particularly in an era when so much space is taken by a politics of humanity that focuses on care and rescue, serving to reproduce the social order, not to challenge it.’ (Ticktin, 2011b, p. 251).

The question thus arises of how humanitarianisms of different sorts can locate such spaces in conflict, and engage in them in such a way as to promote forms of order based on civiness. But in doing so, humanitarianism also needs to understand its own role in creating, participating in or regulating orders in conflict. The literature on humanitarian governance suggests that, for the reasons briefly outlined above, the orders created by humanitarian power are not necessarily characterized by civiness (Fassin, 2012). They might require disruption, including by other humanitarian actors, or at least redirection.

This potential passes through the political subjectivity, and latent political agency, of those whom humanitarians seek to help. For their humanity to be understood as including political agency, and not essentialised as something prior to politics or apolitical, humanitarians need to think of them in a politically situated manner, as citizens of sorts.

Humanitarians often employ the notion of ‘humanitarian space’ to frame the material and discursive context of their action. As powerful, albeit limited, actors in conflict-affected arenas, international humanitarian actors have often found themselves exercising the functions of governance. The most extreme, and in some respects caricatural critique of humanitarian governance is that humanitarian power often reduces the objects of its ‘beneficence’ to ‘bare life’ (Agamben, 1998). When the richness and complexity of one’s own humanity is unquestioned, whilst the humanity of the other to be saved is



reduced to its physical embodiment, the space for their political agency becomes suppressed by humanitarian biopolitics. This argument has sometimes been pushed to somewhat absurd extremes, but some of its stylized insights relate to more nuanced critiques.

These address the encounter between forms of humanitarian governance and the experience of precarity, and they all point to forms of humanitarianism unwilling or unable to recognize and centre in their action the agency of the other in overcoming their precarity. For example, Miriam Ticktin and Didier Fassin's accounts of the governance of precarity and the uses of 'humanitarian reason' to rationalize and govern spaces of exception in the normal practice of democratic citizenship, set out the problem in a manner that suggests a difference of scale, rather than kind, with the governance of precarity in more explicitly labelled humanitarian spaces such as refugee camps (Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011a). In the latter, the logics of the provision of particular kinds of services inevitably trump modalities of political self-expression or organization. More generally, we see the mismatch between the parameters of much humanitarian action and the forms of political empowerment and accountability needed to prevent, survive or prosecute the perpetration of the kinds of cruelty or indifference that enable humanitarian crisis (de Waal, 1997, 2017).

All these share the problem of the 'humanitarian' agent seeing their interlocutor as something less than, or perhaps other than, the bearer of the kind of quasi-citizenship, the performance of which has been identified as central to the sustenance and promotion of civiness. Evers notes the way in which civiness 'tends to be associated with the state, citizenry, and citizenship, the degree to which people identify themselves as citizens, or, vice versa, the degree to which public state institutions reach out to individuals as citizens', and we could add here, other forms of public authorities such as those either constituted by or participated in by humanitarian actors (Evers, 2009, pp. 241–242). Countering this requires a different understanding of the political possibilities inherent in humanitarian action amidst conflict.

Heath Cabot, in her account of the intermingling precariousities of refugees in Greece and the more disadvantaged among their Greek neighbours, engages an idea of 'humanitarian citizenship' to encompass their increasingly shared, but ultimately second-class, form of political subjectivity (Cabot, 2019). As such, there is risk that the nature of the political order in which humanitarians participate limits the potential of the notion of citizen, rather than the latter serving as a basis on which to disrupt and hold accountable the former. However, within the confines of this subjectivity, we might ask whether new forms of solidarity might emerge. David Campbell reminds us of Foucault's point that 'we are all governed and, to that extent, in solidarity' (Campbell, 1998, p. 515).

Ibreck and Seeka's article in this special issue illustrates beautifully the creative solidarity of the governed in relation to overlapping forms of governance, including humanitarian governance, faced by South Sudanese refugees in Cairo. The forms of political agency and solidarity that the refugees are able to mobilize are undoubtedly humanitarian in implication and character, yet come about in spite of, even against, the forms of humanitarian intervention they are touched by (Ibreck & Seeka, 2022).

They are particularly precarious examples of the 'humanitarian citizen', in Cabot's terms, politically located and circumscribed by authoritarian politics and humanitarian governance. Yet they do find ways to challenge and offer resistance to their political

predicament, something that speaks to Isin's idea of citizenship as enactment, wherein 'people perform their right to have rights by asking questions about justice and injustice' (Isin, 2013, p. 22). 'Thinking about citizenship through enactments, we recognise that to be a citizen is to make claims to justice: to call already defined orders, practices and statuses into question.' (Isin, 2013, p. 43).

This recalls Ticktin's definition of the political, cited above, and takes us into the space charted by Sassen in her work deconstructing citizenship and exploring 'the tension between citizenship as a formal legal status and as a normative project or an aspiration' (Sassen, 2003, p. 47). This is of relevance for the thinking about the civic/citizenship nexus in conflict, including in relation to experiences of humanitarian citizenship.

Sassen provides a useful account of this kind of political work or construction. She writes that: 'Under certain conditions, powerlessness can become complex, by which I mean that it contains the possibility of making the political, or making the civic, or making history.' (Sassen, 2011, p. 574). But she makes an important reservation for our purposes:

This then leads me to a second distinction, which contains a critique of the common notion that if something good happens to the powerless it signals empowerment. The notion that powerlessness can become complex can be used to characterize a condition that is not quite empowerment. Powerlessness can be complex even if there is no empowerment. (Sassen, 2011, p. 574)

Ibreck and Seeka's case study illustrates this well. The refugees are often unable to overcome the obstacles that shatter their lives and hopes on a recurring basis. But their acts add complexity to their deficit of power and gesture towards the possibility of enacting citizenship, even if only a relatively impoverished concept of humanitarian citizenship (Ibreck & Seeka, 2022).

If we understand in this way the workings of political agency and the possibility of political subjectivity for those living in humanitarian crisis, what do those on the other side of the humanitarian encounter need to do to support them, rather than fuelling disempowering modes of governance?

Here, I argue that the core obstacle is that of political estrangement within and beyond the humanitarian encounter. I focus on political estrangement and the figure of the political stranger, a way of recasting the idea of the distant stranger typically conceived to be the interlocutor of the putative humanitarian actor. The idea of the distant stranger has been, rightly, critiqued for its othering and depoliticizing consequences. Yet in a humanitarian encounter – where one starts off safe, the other threatened; one has power, the other not; one seeks to help, the other requires help – forms of distance and estrangement are undoubtedly structural to the situation. One party, at least in that moment, has the political power to exert agency over their own survival, the other does not. The plight of the political stranger is that they are excluded, or their voice silenced within, the political conversation or context relevant to their dignified survival. 'Dignified' not in an essentialist sense but rather as a contextually specific way of referring to meaningful human life beyond mere survival, as defined by the people in question. In focusing on the gap between what humanitarians typically can offer, and the political problem that led to the need they address, the idea of the 'political stranger' also allows that putative humanitarian and their interlocutor can often be co-nationals or even neighbours, the

distance between them being a gulf in political agency, in a sense similar to Ulrich Beck's idea of the 'bureaucratic' stranger (Beck, 1996). As such, it also challenges the international/local dichotomy.

This formulation opens up new, potentially less othering ways of thinking about the emergence of humanitarian encounters. Humanitarian action need not take place 'out there', but can take place much closer to home if the circumstances have rendered one's neighbour a 'political stranger', however familiar they might be in other regards. This centres within humanitarian history and practice humanitarian action not necessarily defined by the interventions of 'heroic' outsiders, whether in the context of overlooked humanitarian histories or in well-documented cases such as acts of rescue during the Holocaust by neighbours or co-nationals (prominent within the humanitarian imaginary but arguably at odds with its conventional definitions and taxonomies). In the latter case, the common humanity of one's neighbour came to the fore alongside and within other ties that while remaining meaningful for both parties, no longer provided protection to the latter (Monroe, 2004). This account also suggests plenty of spaces within rich, stable democracies where humanitarian encounters flourish in the gaps (intentionally created or not) within welfare systems (cf. the exponential rise in food bank use and provision within the UK since 2010). And importantly, as we will return to in detail in the next section, it allows us fully to internalize 'local', sometimes sporadic humanitarian acts as generative of humanitarian identity, and interwoven with particular, lived, political subjectivities.

The bridging of the gap of political estrangement entails the foregrounding of notion of common humanity as something valuable and deserving of protection, embedded within particular identities and solidarities. But seeing the human, is necessary but not sufficient to engaging fully with the other qua political animal. The bridge of humanity thrown across the abyss may lead to only temporary shelter from the immediate threat, and the condition of political stranger can easily be perpetuated and even reinforced by humanitarian action. Notions of humanity can be both bridge and barrier at once. This lies at the heart of the problems of humanitarian governance and explains why understanding the predicament is crucial to conceptualizing its remedy.

The upshot of this redescription of the humanitarian problem is twofold. First, it frames the problem for conventional humanitarian actors in a way that suggests a way forward: how can they rethink their provision of humanitarian aid in such a way as it contributes to the enhancement of the political agency of their interlocutors to secure their own dignified survival? The political agency in question may be directed towards a range of actors and structures, including humanitarians themselves. A humanitarianism that seeks to bridge, rather than maintain, political distance, would be one that presented the potential to avoid some of the alienation it produces, as well as some of the more visceral forms of harm it engenders or fails to prevent. This includes literally distancing spatial practices as identified in the literature on the bunkerisation of aid, in which both social and political distance is built in (Duffield, 2010; Smirl, 2015). These harms may include perpetuating the problem of political estrangement itself by 'keeping strangers politically distant, cared for but not equal' (Pallister-Wilkins, 2018). As powerful actors in the humanitarian arena, profession humanitarians have a key role in the discursive framing of the situation, as noted by Feldman: 'Through its work of naming—naming refugees, nonrefugees, victims, etc.—humanitarianism helps

define political actors, though these are often political actors without a clear political status.’ (Feldman, 2012, p. 157)

Second, it invites us to bring those that are already doing this work, yet not considered part of the humanitarian enterprise, into the picture, and to think through the parameters of their action qua humanitarian action. It suggests we look at emergent patterns of solidarity or care that suggest forms of citizenship might be emerging. As Bornstein notes in her ethnographic study of everyday humanitarianism in New Delhi:

the fleeting impulse to assist those who are suffering and in need may be institutionalized, ritualized, and made a regular and required act. In such settings, social relations that mediate expectations of the gift transform the gift into an entitlement. (Bornstein, 2012, p. 171)

This kind of dynamic suggests a pathway towards civicism that may transcend some of the disempowering contingencies of charity. Or, to return to Evers’ terms: from civility to civicism – he notes that ‘Civicness is the quality of institutions, organizations, procedures, to stimulate, reproduce, and cultivate civility.’ (Evers, 2009, p. 242).

The literature on everyday humanitarianism goes some of the way in incorporating a broader variety of considerations. In thinking of how to approach the everyday, we can draw on Mac Ginty’s account of everyday peace:

concerned with phenomena hidden in plain view; events that are apparently ordinary but, given the conflict-affected context, are extraordinary. To play with Hannah Arendt’s phrase, the article is interested in the banality of civility or the everyday and familiar social practices that constitute life in the workplace, the neighbourhood, the park, the shop and the bar. (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 552)

This involves looking in a granular way at the everyday practices of conventionally recognized humanitarian actors (Sutton, 2018). But going beyond these actors, we need to identify those ‘banally civil’ humanitarian acts that uphold ideas of a shared human experience. Lisa Ann Richey describes everyday humanitarianism as

a broad set of emotions and practices *both* in the everyday lives of citizens/consumers as they engage in humanitarian practices outside of the formal structures of humanitarian actions *and* in the quotidian practices of humanitarian actors within the increasingly complex parameters of the international humanitarian system. (Richey, 2018, p. 626)

But, simultaneously, we need to retain the capacity to recognize and include both what is extraordinary among the everyday, as well as that which is simply extraordinary. The perception of a shared humanity is built on a spectrum of activity that runs from the acts of toleration and co-existence mapped by Mac Ginty, through the more deliberate, active practices of cooperation, help, kindness, through to more extreme acts of rescue, most extraordinarily those which entail an existential risk to the rescuer themselves. Those who risked their lives to protect their Jewish neighbours during the Holocaust may have often seen their own actions as normal (Monroe, 2004), but a broader perspective shows that unfortunately that was far from the case.

One of the most useful contributions of this literature is the redescription of humanitarian space as an arena, open to a multiplicity of agents and acts. Hilhorst and Jansen have ‘approached humanitarian space as a socially negotiated arena and explored the way in which actors employ the *idea* of humanitarian space to further their projects and ambitions.’ (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010, p. 1136). In a sense the task is then to

understand under what circumstances the humanitarian arena might produce civicism. But, drawing on the point raised above, we should embrace the diversity of types of humanitarian arena: for instance, these include justice activism as well as aid delivery, but also everyday acts of co-existence that allow for the persistence of ideas of a shared humanity.

The challenge of humanitarianism as civic activism is to make that perception politically weighty: contesting narratives and practices that dehumanize, but also creating space for the political agency of individuals to define and articulate their own basic humanity and protection needs in the public sphere. After all, humanitarians find themselves speaking and acting for others – they have a power of voice to share.

Put like that, it is clear that those helping to give voice may not primarily be found amongst powerful international organizations, but rather amongst those engaging in acts of humanitarian solidarity at a much closer to the ground. This suggests a task to the more powerful actors of reimagining their endeavour and interlocutors. If the current prevailing social imaginaries that underpin humanitarian action (Calhoun, 2008, 2010) produce certain kinds of power dynamics and frame the resulting political relationships in particular ways, then how can we reimagine and redescribe them? Can we use stories of cases in which, rather than standing aside or in the way of the political agency of those on the receiving end of humanitarian action, putative humanitarians are able to stand alongside in solidarity or support the expression of that agency. Are these the circumstances likely to produce civicism and diminish political estrangement?

As Liisa Malkki writes: ‘How humanitarian needs and challenges are imagined is important. Often there are ways of making them *be*, and, then, of making them *not be*.’ (Malkki, 2015, p. 14). She later concludes:

one must recognize that a certain kind of power resides in objects and practices repeatedly and habitually dismissed as “the mere.” And insofar as every power implies a kind of politics, I here insist on the importance and potency of what I term *imaginative politics*. (Malkki, 2015, p. 205)

This reimagining can and should take place at every level of analysis, from the ground-level of the everyday, where the voices of unconventional actors and activists should be heard within the humanitarian conversation, to the global, where the political consequences of counter-humanitarian discourses need to be revealed, at the same time as articulating more clearly the political implications of humanitarian processes and engagements. The imaginaries humanitarians embody can stifle the agency of others, since agency represents, among other things, our imagination of possible futures (Fowler, 2010).

### **Humanitarian Action as Civic Practice?**

This section will explore a range of different manifestations of humanitarian civicism, from immediate acts of rescue, to more sustained, more explicitly political action. The empirical starting point here is not to ask the question of who identifies as a humanitarian, but rather who is engaging in activity that sees past those cleavages that are weaponised by conflict entrepreneurs and nourish counter-humanitarian narratives with dehumanizing consequences, both perpetuating exclusivist identity politics and

devaluing particular human lives in such a way as to further enable the depredations of logics of the political marketplace and exclusivist identity politics (Kaldor & de Waal, 2020).

Introducing their special issue on ‘citizen aid’, Fechter and Schwittay note the potential of ‘informal humanitarianisms’ to reveal claims relating to ‘solidarity, activism, governmentality and resistance, to more broadly conceived ideas of shared humanity and social justice’ (Fechter & Schwittay, 2019, pp. 1772–1773).

Here, I will use the loose term humanitarian activists, with the intention of capturing the work of individuals whose action is informed by a perception of shared humanity and a refusal to tolerate the politics of dehumanization, but who are also, as part of their activism, involved in the creation or perpetuation of more humane forms of politics, whether in the shape of practical initiatives or merely through setting an example that runs counter to dominant narratives or discourses.

Humanitarian activists bring together the categories of humanitarianism and civicness, in a way that disrupts the distinctions that even politically astute professional humanitarians often make. For instance, in his Nobel acceptance speech on behalf of MSF, James Orbinski referred to the ‘ethic of refusal’ animating their action (‘It will not allow any moral political failure or injustice to be sanitized or cleansed of its meaning.’), but shied away from the responsibilities of ‘the political’ (Orbinski, 1999). Arguably, this is both a narrow reading of the notion of politics (as articulated by Ticktin in the previous section), but also a luxury unavailable to actors enmeshed in the politics of their situation (as outlined in the first section), whose own ‘ethic of refusal’ must necessarily take the form of political engagement. Crucially, they may themselves be both providers and recipients of aid (Feldman, 2012, p. 157). This insight, in particular, is crucial to deconstructing the inherently othering parameters of the humanitarian encounter. As suggested in the first section, to define such actors out of the humanitarian story on this basis would be a profound mistake, not least because they are both often the first responders, and are the first witnesses to dehumanizing projects, and thus enable us to see suffering humanity.

Much humanitarian action does take the form of very visceral, immediate responses to human suffering. Seeing the humanity of the other is both a precondition for meaningful humanitarian action and for that action to contribute politically to the fostering of civicness. Importantly, though, the former is necessary but not sufficient for the latter.

In her work on the rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, Kristen Renwick Monroe finds consistently that their ‘perception of a shared humanity triggered a sense of relationship to the other that then made the suffering of another a concern for the rescuers’ (Monroe, 2004, p. 236). As she notes: ‘The rescuers’ categorization schema seemed to be one in which all people could exhibit individual and group difference but also could still be placed into the common category of human being. This common category took on a superordinate moral status in which all people deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.’ (Monroe, 2004, p. 235). One of the rescuers, Otto, notes that on his medal from Yad Vashem is a version of the Talmudic (and Qur’anic) saying ‘Whoever saves one life, it is as if he saved the entire world’ (Monroe, 2004, p. 88).

This worldview is of course explicitly embraced and articulated by professional humanitarians, but it is also recognizable in the behaviour of non-traditional humanitarian actors and first responders. Sometimes, this is quite explicit. For instance, famously

the White Helmets adopted a version of the saying above – ‘To save a life is to save all of humanity’ – as a prominent slogan (Al Saleh, 2018). Less well-publicized humanitarian actors within Syria are also guided by a similar perspective, the starting point of which is inherently counter-sectarian. In a conflict characterized by dynamics of sectarianization (Hadaya, 2020), humanitarian neutrality and impartiality represent a particular form of politics, suggestive of alternative political orderings.

As such, seeing the human both motivates, via the humanitarian impulse, the initial humanitarian response, but also contributes to the persistence of worldviews that might nourish discourses and narratives not driven by sectarian logics. Indeed, Otto, when asked whether his Resistance work was political or humanitarian, made clear that it was both and connected it elsewhere to an outlook he described as ‘cosmopolitan’ (Monroe, 2004, pp. 93–95), while Knud, another rescuer, located his action within an idea of being Danish (Monroe, 2004, p. 180). Much political thought would seek to divide Otto and Knud on that basis. Instead, what unites them is perhaps more significant: their ability to see the human and the crucial relevance of this to their view of what their political context ought to look like.

This dynamic is recognizable in Rachel Ibreck’s eloquent account of creative and resilient forms of legal activism on the margins in South Sudan, where activists respond to concrete injustices and violations, expressing ‘shared values and commitments to humanity, to the nation, and to their particular communities, drawing on a multicultural blend of conceptions of rights and law’ (Ibreck, 2019, p. 181).

The combination of the two frames of (vernacular) humanitarianism and civicness arguably captures well what links these actors, without doing injustice to their particular experiences and perspectives. The commonality is not just conceptual, since Ibreck shows us how they are sometimes able to work together on this terrain to create at least occasional breathing spaces, to create initiatives or associations more-or-less functioning according to logics of civicness, and more generally to sustain the availability to others of models of political action that do not accept the instrumentalist and exclusivist logics that dominate the political landscape of South Sudan. Her conclusion that the legal activists ‘help some people to survive in the present, and they edge the system incrementally towards justice in the future’, is a perfect encapsulation of why it is helpful to think of the categories of humanitarianism and civicness together (Ibreck, 2019, p. 210).

Similarly, a recent report outlining a humanitarian agenda for South Sudan gives valuable pointers as to where we should look for vernacular humanitarian activism and echoes these findings, noting the importance of local champions, humanitarian activists and other civic actors who offer the promise of building ‘resilience among conflict-affected populations’, but are often missed by the funding structures of international humanitarian actors or narrow definitions of civil society (Deng, 2018, p. 8). It highlights the role of humanitarianism within the education sector as a driver of civicness, citing the work of Thomas and Chan who invite us ‘to identify more positive spaces where civic values still have relevance’, ‘spaces for hope’ such as churches, schools, universities and health centres as examples (Deng, 2018, p. 9; Thomas & Chan, 2017, pp. 6–7). Thomas and Chan note that ‘teachers and students have worked together to support civic and human values and youth aspirations’ (Thomas & Chan, 2017, p. 7). Such spaces often benefit from existing structures, value-sets, or solidarities that provide scripts that can be used to enable this kind of civic humanitarian activism.

Ibreck's legal activists' experiences show us that humanitarian ideas of a shared humanity cannot be detached from individuals' particular experiences, affiliations and solidarities. It is their very embeddedness that gives them their power and their potential to, in Sassen's terms, make powerlessness complex and create presence for those who are, in my terms, political stranger. This is not to say that these particular worldviews are disconnected from broader discussions about rights, citizenship, humanity, etc., but rather that they co-constitute each other. As the legal activists show, the latter can provide invaluable intellectual and practical resources to enrich and enhance their action. The activists also provide a nuanced and more hopeful response to the critiques of those like Hopgood who see in the project of international human rights a failure to reflect people's real life experiences of struggle (Hopgood, 2013).

In other words, humanitarian activists come to the humanitarian encounter motivated by particular, socially and politically constructed ideas of the human, and they act within that encounter on that basis. The point where humanitarian activism can foster civiness and limit the problems of humanitarian governance is where that work of social and political construction continues in and through the humanitarian encounter, on the basis of mutuality. That is, with an openness to the agency, agency that is inherently political, of the other.

It is also not the case that those involved explicitly think, at least at first, of their action as political. The 'volunteer humanitarianism' described by Elisa Sandri, drawing on her fieldwork in the Calais 'Jungle', characterized by its geographical proximity and creative and improvisatory nature, i.e., reminiscent in several respects of Ibreck's activists, is seen by those who engage in it as different from politics at first, before they find themselves increasingly drawn into the political dimensions of the situation they are concerned with. They do not necessarily start as activists, but they often end up as such (Sandri, 2018).

Sandri notes that her work challenges the idea of humanitarian neutrality as an absence of political positioning (Sandri, 2018, p. 66). Instead, drawing on ethnographic literature on humanitarianism, she locates it as a particular, negative form of politics, a different kind of 'politics of refusal' perhaps, to go back to Orbinski's terminology evoked above.

In this sense, the idea of neutrality can be doubly unhelpful, as useful and important as the discourse of neutrality can be in distinguishing one from those actively engaged in conflict. Slim has recently highlighted the importance of what he terms 'activist humanitarianism' (I slightly prefer 'humanitarian activist' because it centres the full civic activism of these individuals) in contrast to 'neutral humanitarianism' (Slim, 2020b). He offers case studies suggesting the rich possibilities of this approach (Slim, 2020a).

The powerful intersection, generative of both humanitarian and civic outcomes, between lived experience, perceptions of shared humanity, and different types of solidarity importantly includes responses centring gendered experiences of conflict. In the Syrian context, Jana Krause and Cynthia Enloe, in their work on the 'Women Lead to Peace Summit' that preceded the Geneva II Syria talks in 2014, write of the activists they interviewed that:

All Syrian women activists at the summit were determined that women would not be passive, no matter what the obstacles to participating in the peace process were. They



also encouraged their audience of international media and agencies not to reduce Syrian women to mere victims despite the rising level of sexual violence and kidnapping of women in the war. Syrian women, in all their diversity, are people who have a stake in the direction that their country will take; they are people with skills, expertise and knowledge. Syrian women are citizens. (Krause & Enloe, 2015, p. 331)

They are countering the problematic discourses not only of direct parties to the conflict but also those of putative allies who may nevertheless fall into the stereotypes Miriam Ticktin skewers in her work cited above on the ‘gendered human of humanitarianism’ (Ticktin, 2011b). Some of these women’s activism took the form of explicitly humanitarian work in the more conventional, if non-institutionalised senses, such as working to negotiate humanitarian pauses, but more broadly, their work here also represents a form of humanitarian activism that invites us to see Syrian women as fully human in their diversity, allows us to see them as political agents, and finally as citizens, even if the reality of that citizenship amidst conflict is aspirational.

## Conclusion

In this article I have used the term humanitarian activist to refer to the combination of humanitarianism and civic agency. The experiences of humanitarian activists suggest that their action contributes to civicness in a very practical sense. The ways in which they act are inextricably linked to ideas of how their immediate political context might be improved. They tend to reject narratives and practices that render certain lives purely expendable, and in so doing model ways of doing politics that provide alternatives to the counter-humanitarian logics and discourses that characterize today’s intractable conflicts (as well as many scenarios of humanitarian need in contexts not directly affected by conflict, e.g., responses to asylum). The intersection between humanitarianism and civicness, especially when it is grounded in individuals’ lived experience, is a powerful starting point for thinking about dynamics of political change. If well-intentioned attempts to cede power such as the current localization move within professionalized humanitarianism are to succeed, it is vital that they understand this intersection and find creative ways of supporting a broader range of civic-minded humanitarian activists. This involves listening to and engaging with their accounts of how they counter injustice or violations of human dignity without worrying too much about whether their story fits ‘humanitarianism’ or ‘human rights’ as codified at a global level. But rather learning lessons about the politics of combating dehumanization in modest, contextually specific ways, and of starting to build upon them more humane political arrangements.

## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the Reviewers, Editor-in-Chief and Mary Kaldor for extremely helpful suggestions.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This article was supported by the Conflict Research Programme, led by the London School of Economics and Political Science, and funded by UK aid from the UK government through the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office [grant number GB-1-204428]. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

## References

- Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign power and bare life* (D. Heller-Roazen, Trans.). Stanford University Press (Original work published 1995).
- Al Saleh, R. (2018, February 22). My staff are trying to save lives in the rubble of Ghouta. Who will help us? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/22/ghouta-syrians-starvation-bombing>
- Beck, U. (1996). How neighbors become Jews: The political construction of the stranger in an age of reflexive modernity. *Constellations*, 2(3), 378–396. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8675.1996.tb00036.x>
- Bornstein, E. (2012). *Disquieting gifts: Humanitarianism in New Delhi*. Stanford University Press.
- Cabot, H. (2019). The European refugee crisis and humanitarian citizenship in Greece. *Ethnos*, 84(5), 747–771. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2018.1529693>
- Calhoun, C. (2008). The imperative to reduce suffering: Charity, progress, and emergencies in the field of humanitarian action. In M. Barnett & T. G. Weiss (Eds.), *Humanitarianism in question: Politics, power, ethics* (pp. 73–97). Cornell University Press.
- Calhoun, C. (2010). *The idea of emergency: Humanitarian action and global (dis)order* (D. Fassin & M. Pandolfi, Eds.), (pp. 29–58). Zone Books.
- Campbell, D. (1998). Why fight: Humanitarianism, principles, and post-structuralism. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 27(3), 497–521. <http://mil.sagepub.com> <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298980270031001>
- Deng, D. (Ed.). (2018). *The politics of humanitarianism: Perspectives from South Sudan*. London School of Economics.
- de Waal, A. (1997). *Famine crimes: Politics and the disaster relief industry in Africa*. J. Currey.
- de Waal, A. (2010). The humanitarians' tragedy: Escapable and inescapable cruelties. *Disasters*, 34(s2), S130–S137. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7717.2010.01149.x>
- de Waal, A. (2017). *Mass starvation: The history and future of famine*. Polity.
- Duffield, M. (2010). Risk-management and the fortified aid compound: Everyday life in post-interventionary society. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 4(4), 453–474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502971003700993>
- Evers, A. (2009). Civicness and civility: Their meanings for social services. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 20(3), 239–259. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-009-9088-x>
- Fassin, D. (2012). *Humanitarian reason: A moral history of the present*. University of California Press.
- Fast, L., & Bennett, C. (2020). *From the ground up: It's about time for local humanitarian action (HPG Report)*. Overseas Development Institute.
- Fechter, A.-M., & Schwittay, A. (2019). Citizen aid: Grassroots interventions in development and humanitarianism. *Third World Quarterly*, 40(10), 1769–1780. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1656062>
- Feldman, I. (2012). The humanitarian condition: Palestinian refugees and the politics of living. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 3(2), 155–172. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2012.0017>
- Fowler, A. (2010). Civic agency. In H. K. Anheier & S. Toepler (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of civil society* (pp. 150–155). Springer.
- Hadaya, S. (2020). Sectarianisation in Syria: The disintegration of a popular struggle. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 20(5), 607–629. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2020.1833520>

- Hilhorst, D., & Jansen, B. J. (2010). Humanitarian space as arena: A perspective on the everyday politics of Aid. *Development and Change*, 41(6), 1117–1139. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01673.x>
- Hopgood, S. (2009). Moral authority, modernity and the politics of the sacred. *European Journal of International Relations*, 15(2), 229–255. <http://ejt.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/15/2/229> <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066109103138>
- Hopgood, S. (2013). *The endtimes of human rights*. Cornell University Press.
- Ibreck, R. (2019). *South Sudan's injustice system: Law and activism on the frontline*. Zed Books.
- Ibreck, R., & Seeka, A. (2022). Civicness in exile: The solidarities and struggles of south Sudanese refugees in Cairo. *Journal of Civil Society*, 18(2), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2022.2068628>
- Isin, E. F. (2013). Claiming European citizenship. In E. F. Isin & M. Saward (Eds.), *Enacting European citizenship* (pp. 19–46). Cambridge University Press.
- James, M. (2020). Who can sing the song of MSF? *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs*, 2(2), 31–39. <https://doi.org/10.7227/JHA.041>
- Kaldor, M., & de Waal, A. (2020). Identity formation and the political marketplace. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 20(5), 519–538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2020.1833519>
- Khalidi, H. (2020). Humanitarian field practices in the context of the Syrian conflict from 2011 to 2018. *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs*, 2(2), 48–57. <https://doi.org/10.7227/JHA.043>
- Krause, J., & Enloe, C. (2015). A wealth of expertise and lived experience. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 17(2), 328–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2015.1014256>
- Mac Ginty, R. (2014). Everyday peace: Bottom-up and local agency in conflict-affected societies. *Security Dialogue*, 45(6), 548–564. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614550899>
- Magone, C., Neuman, M., & Weissman, F. (Eds.). (2011). *Humanitarian negotiations revealed: The MSF experience*. Hurst & Company.
- Malkki, L. H. (1996). Speechless emissaries: Refugees, humanitarianism, and dehistoricization. *Cultural Anthropology*, 11(3), 377–404. <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1996.11.3.02a00050>
- Malkki, L. H. (2015). *The need to help: The domestic arts of international humanitarianism*. Duke University Press.
- Monroe, K. R. (2004). *The hand of compassion: Portraits of moral choice during the holocaust*. Princeton University Press.
- Orbinski, J. (1999, December 10). Nobel Lecture. [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1999/msf-lecture.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1999/msf-lecture.html)
- Pallister-Wilkins, P. (2018). Hotspots and the geographies of humanitarianism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 0(0), 0263775818754884. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775818754884>
- Redfield, P. (2008). Sacrifice, triage, and global humanitarianism. In M. Barnett & T. G. Weiss (Eds.), *Humanitarianism In question: Politics, power, ethics* (pp. 196–214). Cornell University Press.
- Richey, L. A. (2018). Conceptualizing “everyday humanitarianism”: Ethics, affects, and practices of contemporary global helping. *New Political Science*, 40(4), 625–639. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2018.1528538>
- Sandri, E. (2018). ‘Volunteer humanitarianism’: Volunteers and humanitarian aid in the jungle refugee camp of calais. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(1), 65–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1352467>
- Sassen, S. (2003). The repositioning of citizenship: Emergent subjects and spaces for politics. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(2), 41–66. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2003.0028>
- Sassen, S. (2011). The global street: Making the political. *Globalizations*, 8(5), 573–579. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2011.622458>
- Slim, H. (2020a, September 22). Look back and learn: Notable humanitarians who took sides. *The New Humanitarian*. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2020/09/22/humanitarians-who-took-sides>

- Slim, H. (2020b, August 27). You don't have to be neutral to be a good humanitarian. *The New Humanitarian*. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2020/08/27/humanitarianprinciples-neutrality>
- Slim, H. (2021, January 14). Corruption and the localisation of humanitarian action. *Humanitarian Practice Network*. <https://odihpn.org/blog/corruption-and-the-localisation-of-humanitarianaction/>
- Smirl, L. (2015). *Spaces of aid: How cars, compounds and hotels shape humanitarianism*. Zed Books.
- Sutton, R. (2018). The “phantom local” and the everyday distinction practices of humanitarian actors in war: A socio-legal perspective. *New Political Science*, 40(4), 640–657. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2018.1528061>
- Thomas, E., & Chan, N. (2017). South Sudan: Wrong turn at the crossroads? *Humanitarian Exchange* (68), 5–7.
- Ticktin, M. (2011a). *Casualties of care: Immigration and the politics of humanitarianism in France*. University of California Press.
- Ticktin, M. (2011b). The gendered human of humanitarianism: Medicalising and politicising sexual violence. *Gender & History*, 23(2), 250–265. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2011.01637.x>