Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The International Spectator

Italian Journal of International Affairs

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rspe20

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To cite this article: Daniela Nascimento & José Manuel Pureza (25 Mar 2024): Refugees as Entrepreneurs? A Challenge to HDP Programmes, The International Spectator, DOI: 10.1080/03932729.2024.2326215

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2326215

Published online: 25 Mar 2024.

THE INTERNATIONAL SPECTATOR
https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2326215

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Refugees as Entrepreneurs? A Challenge to HDP Programmes

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ABSTRACT

Protracted refugee situations in territories of war or natural hazards challenge the logic of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus that inspires liberal humanitarianism. The organised expression of that nexus is the so-called 'integrated approach' in which humanitarian aid, development aid and peacebuilding are intertwined in missions aimed at promoting a durable peace. The experiences of camps for Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Jordan and of South Sudanese and Congolese refugees in Uganda question some basic assumptions of the HDP programmes. In the last two decades, the policies adopted in these locations show a two-fold reconfiguration of the HDP liberal programme: first, the aim of containing humanitarian crises locally, in the peripheries, thereby preventing their adverse effects spreading to the core of the international system; second, a focus on refugees' capacity to become more resilient and entrepreneurial in order to overcome their vulnerable condition. Overall, this so-called neoliberal approach to humanitarianism with its focus on containment and individual entrepreneurship-inspired resilience has moved away from its liberal configuration as part of a systemic reconfiguration of local social fabric.

KEYWORDS

HDP; refugees; humanitarianism; resilience; containment

The dominant narrative about the evolution of humanitarianism – both as a discourse and as a practice – aims at overcoming the classical-Dunantist perspective[1] through 'new humanitarianism', a liberal politicised formula which has prevailed since the end of the Cold War (Barnett 2007). However, the most recent developments in the humanitarian field demand a more nuanced approach to the so-called new humanitarianism and to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDP) at its core. First, because one model of humanitarianism has not been replaced by another. The several decades of humanitarianism preceding Dunant were marked by a programme of action extending far beyond immediate relief for victims with the broader aim of profound social transformation, as witnessed in the fight against slavery or inhumane forms of penal treatment. Indeed, Michael Barnett (2007, 40) illustrates how the two cultures of

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[1]Referring to the model of humanitarian action put in motion by Henri Dunant in the 1860s and which led to the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross. This paradigm is based on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, and conceives humanitarian aid as relief-oriented to save lives in immediate risk.

humanitarianism – referred to as "emergency humanitarianism" and "alchemist humanitarianism" – not only coexist but also contradict the idea of a linear evolution of humanitarian practice. According to Barnett, it is truly two cultures, two branches, and not two successive periods (the 'new' after the 'old') that are at stake here. The emergency branch focuses on ensuring relief for lives in immediate danger, eschewing politics as its field of action. The alchemist branch frames life-saving action within the resolution of deep and structural causes of suffering and victimisation, assuming politics is necessary or even convenient for humanitarian action. Given the existence of these two overlapping approaches, it is incorrect to place the birth of the alchemist branch in the late 20th century, replacing the earlier classical humanitarianism. In fact, this approach emerged at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, expressing a firm belief in the possibility of human and social transformation rooted in both Christianity and secular enlightenment. It engaged in public actions to change living conditions, with significant social, economic and cultural impact at that time. This included campaigns for the universalisation of basic education, the abolition of slavery and against child labour and poverty. As Barnett concludes, there is "a connection between early-nineteenth-century abolitionists, the late-nineteenth-century missionary movements, the mid-twentieth-century development agencies, and the early-twenty-first-century peacebuilding programs" (Ibid).

Secondly, and building on the relevant literature (Ilcan 2015; Chandler and Reid 2016; Hilhorst *et al.* 2019; Bargués and Schmidt 2021), we argue that humanitarianism has seen the emergence of a new *paradigm*, the neoliberal one. This is characterised by a neoliberal ideological critique of the dominant liberal expansionist approach. It rejects the determinant role of states and other actors from the Global North in the design and implementation of concrete humanitarian-development programmes, aimed at radical redrawing of the whole social fabric in the turbulent peripheries, with all its colonial and imperial echoes. Instead, the neoliberal paradigm of humanitarianism prioritises the containment of the crises of the periphery, preventing the spread of its effects to the centre (humanitarianism of containment) as its strategic objective and therefore focusing on building victims' capacity to be entrepreneurs of their own way out of victim condition (resilience humanitarianism). In this article, we first analyse the theoretical and ideological changes involved in this neoliberal paradigm of humanitarianism, in comparison with the previous liberal canon. Its adoption of containment and resilience as its guiding principles had a significant impact, not only on the way the HPD nexus is conceptualised but also in how it is implemented through concrete policies and actions. In a second part, we focus on the policies adopted to address and respond to protracted refugee situations to test this transformation of humanitarian action. We argue that policies adopted in refugee camps for Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Jordan and for South Sudanese and Congolese refugees in Uganda embody the centrality of self-reliance which is the crucial feature of neoliberal humanitarianism, particularly in the last two decades. In the third section, we identify the strengths and weaknesses of this approach by assessing the results of these resilience-oriented policies in both responding to the extreme vulnerability of refugee populations and overcoming the dependency syndrome often associated to humanitarian action.

A brief note on methodology. The main purpose of this article is to address the conceptual changes in the humanitarian discourse and practice from the liberal to the neoliberal paradigm. Therefore, the article draws on the relevant literature that analyses

the main characteristics of both new liberal humanitarianism and the neoliberal-inspired humanitarianism of containment and resilience. Actually, besides the difference in terms of practices, with motives as practical as reducing financial burdens or the political costs of long external interventions and deep intrusion into the social, economic, and cultural reality of conflict or disaster-stricken territories, the main difference between the HPD nexus and neoliberal humanitarianism is their theoretical frameworks. This has been the focus of much of the recent literature on humanitarianism, both in theoretical terms and in terms of examining specific case studies that express this model (Ilcan 2015; Hilhorst *et al.* 2019; Panter-Brick 2021). This article aligns itself with this trend of analysis. In this sense, we aim to consider the primary theoretical impact of neoliberalism on the HPD nexus in order to grasp the ideological pillars of what we consider to be a new culture of humanitarianism, distinct from the two studied by Barnett. This conceptual debate has important repercussions for policies designed to protect especially vulnerable populations. It is certainly not a coincidence that the literature on neoliberal humanitarianism pays special attention to refugee camps. These spaces are, in fact, laboratories for containment and resilience policies that transcend the often-criticised colonial-biased paternalism HPD policies, and instead prioritise self-reliance conceived in individual terms rather than as a result of the transformation of social and economic structures in the territories from which these people originate. In the last decades, this orientation has been emphasised by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNHCR) in order to find lasting solutions to protracted situations involving refugees and displaced people (Eggerman *et al.* 2023, 2). In this article, we chose two cases of refugee camps where these policies are referred to as post-HPD humanitarianism experiences. Our selection followed a clear criterion: Uganda and Jordan are consistently cited as model countries for refugee reception and as pioneers in adopting novel policies. On the other hand, we wanted to consider particularly relevant cases of protracted refugee situations. Undoubtedly, the Jordanian camps for Syrian and Palestinian refugees, as well as the Ugandan camps for refugees from South Sudan and the Congo, are perhaps the most well-known examples of the transformation of temporary shelter into lasting permanence. We do not intend to conduct a detailed ethnography of the day-to-day life of refugee camps in Jordan and Uganda. Instead, we have focused our analysis on reports concerning specifically the adoption, in those camps, of policies having individual self-reliance as their main goal – the *modus operandi* of neoliberal humanitarianism.

From classical to liberal, from liberal to neoliberal

Ever since the beginning of the 1990s, it has become clear how both the discourse and practice of humanitarianism have undergone a profound transformation. This transformation involved a substantial expansion of the humanitarian mandate and embracing assumptions on both the political nature of humanitarian action and the critical reading of its supposedly inherent neutrality, breaking with the traditional tenets of Dunantist humanitarianism. That said, how this transformation is perceived is far from linear. On the one hand, a hegemonic narrative of this process can be identified. It justifies the emergence of a post-Dunantist understanding of what humanitarian action should be by invoking changes in international conflict, namely the dominance of the so-called

'complex political emergencies' and 'new wars' occurring in 'failed states' (Kaldor 1999; Duffield 2001). According to this perspective, those post-Cold War scenarios exposed the limitations and difficulties of responses underpinned by traditional and classical assumptions and rendered humanitarian action based on principles such as neutrality, impartiality and humanity unsustainable or even unacceptable. New humanitarianism – the verbal designation of humanitarian action and discourse aligned with the liberal programme that seeks to overcome the inadequacies of Dunantist humanitarianism – starts from the belief that the humanitarian work of saving lives and alleviating suffering in the short-term is no longer sufficient in and of itself. Instead, this should be regarded as the first step of a longer process that ultimately creates the conditions for people to live independently. This approach presupposes a series of political, economic, institutional and social interventions in the medium and longer-term (Fox 2001; Macrae 2002; Barnett 2005; Benavides 2009; Pérez de Armiño and Zirion 2010; Nascimento 2015). Therefore, this new vision of humanitarian action progressively challenges the hegemony of classical Dunantist philosophy and openly assumes politicisation, selectivity and conditionality as requirements for sustainable impact.

The ideological and geopolitical background of new humanitarianism was the so-called 'liberal peace', one of the most important narratives produced by and in support of contemporary globalisation. According to Oliver Richmond (2004, 131), "globalization has been presented both as a solution to conflicts through the promotion of liberalization, democratization, development, human rights, and free trade — as the concept of liberal peace prescribes — and as an agent of hegemony, domination of the economy, Western norms, and actors over others". Liberal peace, as a central instrument of this relationship between conflict resolution and globalisation, has at its centre what the same author calls the "mantra of economic and political liberalization" (Richmond 2005, 57), a reconstruction of states and societies on the periphery following a pattern that consists of a *mix* of formal self-determination, liberal democracy, neoliberal economic reform, human rights and balance between state security and human security. The HPD nexus is therefore a major component of the liberal peace programme that has presided over all war-torn territories.

This new humanitarianism and the role it gives to the HPD nexus became hegemonic during the 1990s, when the triumph of liberal democracy in the Cold War was reinforced by the gradual imposition of international interventionism that used the rhetoric of liberal values – such as humanitarianism, democracy or human rights – to legitimise its aim of global transformation. From Cambodia to Angola, Kosovo, East Timor or Afghanistan, the common denominator for international interventions became the universal understanding that peace is a result of liberal governance and a liberal economy. This idea was strengthened by the standardisation of both institutional models and the practices of sovereign states ('good governance'). In truth, however, liberal peace was brought about by different forms of external intervention, marked by conditionalities to peace-building missions, thought of as "an experiment involving the transposition of Western models of social, political and economic organization to war-torn countries as a way of controlling civil conflicts: in other words, pacification through political and economic liberalization" (Paris 1997, 55).

Still, the narrative surrounding the new humanitarianism – its emergence as a response to an alleged endogenous chaos on the peripheries of the world-system,

the need to articulate and coordinate humanitarian action with the policies of post-conflict reconstruction and the structural transformation of the societies in question – is far from being undisputed. A relevant critical approach to liberal peace views it as a contemporary version of the old colonialist *mission civilisatrice*.[2] From this perspective, new humanitarianism is seen as an expression of 'coloniality'. It reflects and promotes a reconfiguration of the dominant centre over the unstable peripheries, either through the shaping of institutions and policies or even through the use of force ('humanitarian intervention' or 'responsibility to protect') (Duffield 2001; Chandler 2006; 2010). Indeed, analysing and understanding humanitarianism by focusing only on compassion and ignoring coloniality and capitalism (Gordon and Donini 2015, 106) leads to an ideological distortion of what new humanitarianism really is. The core of this ideological construction is the fiction of a supra-historical nature of the duty to intervene to alleviate the suffering of distant peoples. The coloniality of the discourse of the universal nature of humanitarianism is, in our view, manifest. At its core is a vision of the periphery as a place of political, economic and institutional chaos. The periphery is identified as the *locus* of the failure of modernity, materialised in the fragility, sometimes extreme, of the state condition and the inevitability of uncontrolled conflicts founded on cultures of violence and supported by global networks of informal economies. According to this perspective, the centre of the world-system aims to effectively manage the structural causes of conflicts by preventing the bankruptcy of states and supporting the reconstruction of so-called failed states in order to foster a stable international environment. In doing so, the new humanitarianism is an element of first importance. This approach also entails two dimensions that complement each other which are relevant to our discussion. The first is the silencing of the populations and political structures of the periphery. In the turbulent periphery, there are victims and perpetrators of chaos and violence, but no agency or initiative. Local populations are represented as passive recipients of assistance and without the capacity to govern themselves. States, in turn, are represented as fragile or even failed because they do not replicate with institutional and political certainty the Western-modernity statehood.

Overall, new humanitarianism tends to lend a benign face to the programme of liberal peace and, more generally, to the coloniality of the relationship between the centre and periphery of the world-system in our time. But this appearance of benignity does not hide the growing instrumentalisation of humanitarian arguments to legitimise interventions in the periphery. Furthermore, the reform of humanitarianism from its classical Dunantist approach to the centrality of the conceptual and practical HPD nexus, is a profoundly contradictory and dialectical process. Within the humanitarian movement, criticism of the implementation of HPD policies has led to heated debates and the far-reaching practical reorientations that are taking place and far from settled. The background to this is a new dispute over hegemony, between the liberal expansionist project and the neoliberal discipline of the peripheries. While standardised HPD policies as expressions of a global liberal programme tend to transform the peripheries, the neoliberal paradigm of humanitarianism abandons those explicit intrusive forms of externally led programmes and

[2]Related to "the colonial-era belief that the European imperial powers had a duty to 'civilize' their overseas possessions. Modern peacekeepers have abandoned the archaic language of 'civilized' versus 'uncivilized', but they nevertheless appear to act upon the belief that one model of domestic governance – liberal market democracy – is superior to all others" (Newman *et al.* 2001).

adopts the political form of "empire-in-denial" according to David Chandler (2006). In his words,

> empire is in denial not because it is not regulating sufficiently (in fact there is far more regulatory control associated with development aid, trade, and institutional relations than at any time before) but rather because the political decision-making power of elites seeks to camouflage itself in non-political, therapeutic, or merely technical ways (11).

The internationalisation of the governance of the peripheries goes hand in hand with the refusal of countries at the centre of the world-system to take direct responsibility for the results of these peace-building processes. 'Partnerships', 'national strategies', 'local *empowerment*' – the terminology shows that current practices of global neoliberal governance have moved away from the logic of a traditional empire and liberal imperialism. This adjustment to the way neoliberal governance operates in the peripheries – from a direct application of political and economic formulas sanctioned by donors and their institutions to an investment in the creation of local capacities in order to reproduce these formulas without direct tutelage from the countries of the centre – had clear repercussions on the objectives set for humanitarian action. Without losing the ambition to act on the root causes of conflicts and social fragility, the humanitarianism of the 21st century has been increasingly guided by the goal of containing both vulnerable populations and the factors of their vulnerability inside their 'natural' borders to prevent turbulent effects (security, economic, health, etc.) on the centre of the world-system.

According to Antonio Donini (2010, 3), containment is the "third soul" of humanitarianism. The previous liberal connection between humanitarian action and peacebuilding and development policies is also linked to development, security and containment (DSC), in the sense that it is not possible to have development or security without containing the mobility of 'underdeveloped life'. Humanitarianism as an instrument of containment thus integrates the list of "various interventions and technologies that seek to restrict or manage the circulation of incomplete and therefore potentially threatening life" (Duffield 2008, 146). Michel Agier (2003) summarises this project in especially impressive terms: "in a context in which some kind of war is in constant preparation, the compassion and care offered by humanitarian projects belong to a policy of containment of poor countries and migratory flows originating in areas that are politically, socially and ecologically fragile". The critique of a neutral and minimalist humanitarian action and the contradictions of the liberal new humanitarianism have been superseded by an increasingly *in situ* protection of populations affected by wars or natural catastrophes, confining them to their devastated territories and preventing any spillover effect to the centre of the world system. This new focus of the humanitarian action in the containment of the turbulent peripheries is a reaction to the material and political costs of the over-involvement of Global North countries in the processes of structural transformation included in the DCS agenda. Mitigating *in situ* the effects of disasters and conflicts and empowering local actors to be responsible for driving this process and the construction dynamics that follow, is significantly more bearable for the rich societies of the Global North. This strategy of containment is legitimised by holding those population accountable for their own autonomy. Notably, the articulation of such containment and of the strategies aimed at improving the capacities of contained populations tends to be represented – both by donors and by displaced people – as a

coherent approach. In fact, the integration of initiatives for local empowerment and capacity building provides a minimum of legitimacy to the strategies of containment which otherwise would be ethically and politically refused. The answer of neoliberal humanitarianism to the notion that there are societies – and, within them, social groups – more vulnerable to natural or manmade catastrophes and crises, is an investment in the resilience of these societies and social groups and reveals the other face of this humanitarianism of restraint: the humanitarianism of resilience. Indeed, as Mark Duffield (2013, 56) states, "disaster management has moved from saving lives to supporting livelihoods", adding that "[i]nstead of ensuring relief as such, it has shifted to the promotion of response strategies and market access; changed to support for individual choice and collective self-help".

The key reference of the humanitarianism of containment is, therefore, 'resilience' and the main instrument for its promotion is 'capacity-building' of local agents. In neoliberal jargon, resilience means the capacity of especially vulnerable individuals or groups to prevent crises and equip themselves with the appropriate capacities to respond to persistent episodes of crisis (Oppenheimer *et al.* 2021, 590). This notion of resilience, which sees it as a kind of activation of a body's immune system in the face of the aggression of pathogenic factors, has two defining focuses: first, the importance given to the development of capacities of prevention, adaptation and transformation in the face of crises and disasters (Panter-Brick 2021, 362); second, the centrality of the individual as the holder of these capacities, in the sense that the responsibility for identifying and solving social problems is transferred from the state to the individual (Schmidt 2015, 408).

To conclude, there are both elements of continuity and change between the two policies – HPD (humanitarianism-peace-development) and DSC (development-security-containment) – that give meaning to humanitarian action. In both, the goal of achieving autonomy for individuals and social groups affected by wars is central. However, they differ in the way they approach this autonomy (structural transformations in HPD, individual entrepreneurship in DSC).

Containment and resilience in protracted refugee situations

Among the different conditions of serious vulnerability to which neoliberal humanitarianism is called to respond, protracted refugee situations are unquestionably one of the most relevant. We use these contexts to test the efficacy of the alleged added capacity of the neoliberal formula to overcome both the crucial factors of vulnerability and the 'dependency syndrome' found in the liberal-inspired new humanitarianism. In the governance of refugee camps, the importance given to programmes aimed at promoting entrepreneurial culture and, through it, the self-sufficiency of the refugee population, is a very important indicator of the aforementioned change from an interventionist humanitarianism to the humanitarianism of containment and resilience. Training programmes implemented, over the last two decades, in camps for Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Jordan – such as Za'atari – or for refugees from South Sudan or the Democratic Republic of Congo in Uganda, for example, provide clear evidence of this change in humanitarian action, by seeking and promoting alternative ways of life for these especially vulnerable populations.

Refugee camps have been the functional and spatial reference of humanitarianism since at least the 1960s. But the logic of the camps – their role, their internal management,

their relationship with the outside society and economy – has undergone significant changes in the last two decades. Refugee camps, which appeared first as temporary spaces for warehousing people during conflict, gradually became permanent homes for the huge numbers of people fleeing war and persecution at home and facing growing restrictions on refugees entering the Global North. For these people, the refugee camps created since the 1970s and the 1980s became 'durable solutions' rather than voluntary repatriation, local integration or third-country resettlement as advocated by states and NGOs. In protracted conditions like those, what was firstly envisaged as 'exceptional' became the new normal with the dividing line between crisis and normality becoming blurred, since normality, in those cases, is essentially crisis-in-permanence.

In these contexts, humanitarian action ceased to be conceived according to the traditional perspective of meeting survival needs in huge warehouse spaces and instead demanding initiatives to enable refugees to meet their own needs independently within a context of an active community. The UNHCR gradually shifted its mandate from assisting these persons to promoting their self-reliance and empowerment (UNHCR 2006, 6). In Suzan Ilcan's and Kim Rygiel's (2015, 338) words,

> through resilience humanitarianism, the camp is viewed as a more permanent space of settlement with the prospect of developing community and more entrepreneurial populations. Rather than the Agambenian-inspired understanding of the camps as abject spaces of bare life, they are being reimagined as spaces which can produce neoliberal camp subjects. Under neoliberal government, these resilient subjects reconfigure the image of the refugee away from a political subject with a right to have rights and toward that of an enterprising subjectivity resident in a transformed camp space.

The key to neoliberal refugee policies is to overcome the 'dependency syndrome' and the construction of new actors in charge of their own destiny, "subjects who learn to develop skills and virtues such as localized industriousness and a positive outlook on life, make the most of their difficult situation, and accept the reality of their confinement in the camp" (342). This change gives the camps an ambiguous and contradictory nature: on one hand, they play a crucial role in the bio-political control of huge numbers of fleeing people; on the other, they are spaces of self-organisation, where refugees take different kinds of initiatives to gain physical, economic and social autonomy in the present and for the future. "What characterizes these places is the coming together of the governmentality of humanitarian regimes including public service delivery, the politics and regulations of host countries, and the gradual assertion of refugee communities, that challenge the official camp leadership and its laws, norms and practices" (Jansen 2016).

We now look to the experiences of Syrian refugees in Jordan and of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda as expressions of this mixed approach between the neoliberal culture of resilience and new forms of citizenship – "campzenship", as Nando Sigona (2015, 2) suggestively calls it – within the framework of refugee camps as spaces of humanitarian governance.

The case of Uganda

Uganda is the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, currently accommodating over 1.5 million refugees and asylum-seekers (UNHCR 2023). Massive numbers of fleeing

people come mostly from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, putting particular pressure on the northwest part of the country where several camps have acquired gigantic dimensions in terms of area and numbers of refugees. The camps at Adjumani (219,361 persons), Madi Okollo & Terego (222,030 persons), and Yumbe (197,577 persons)[3] are the most relevant. But the massive influx of refugees has also targeted Kampala, currently hosting 145,000 persons. Uganda is often referred as "a pioneer of a resilience and self-reliance approach for refugees" (Schiltz *et al.* 2019, 39), and of having "an extremely progressive policy" for refugees (Herbert and Idris 2018, 2). The origins of this orientation date back to the 1980s, with the first experiments of granting refugees land and access to basic social services within the framework of the 'Refugee Aid and Development Approach'. In 1999, the 'Self-Reliance Strategy', a joint initiative of the Government of Uganda and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, was adopted. Among its main objectives was to bridge the relief-development gap. According to Tania Kaiser (2005, 355), the adoption of the 'Self-Reliance Strategy' was founded on the promise of a set of benefits, including the reduction of costs inherent to traditional assistance programmes, the opportunity to enforce sustainable development policies in refugee hosting regions and the empowerment of refugees allowing them to autonomously manage their own lives. The 'Uganda Refugee Act' (2006) and the 'Refugee Regulations' (2009-10) reinforced the 'Self-Reliance Strategy', enshrining the refugee's right to work and the freedom to settle, to move within the country and to live in the local community rather than in settlements. In the last few years, Uganda adopted the 'Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework', formally launched in 2017, which combined humanitarian assistance with development-oriented policies like the 'Refugee and Host Populations Framework' (ReHope) covering five main areas: health, education, sustainable energy, environment and livelihoods. Also, the inclusion of refugees in both the 'National Development Plan' and in district development plans increases the benefits from national and local policies aimed at building resilience through adequate skills training, livelihood initiatives and inclusion in the labour market, either formal or informal.

Uganda's refugee policy tends to emphasise the centrality of a self-reliance approach and its focus on preventing the dependency syndrome and its development of refugees' independence. Marina Mastrorillo *et al.* (2022, 4) identify three core elements that individualise Uganda's policy:

> first, its regulatory framework grants refugees the ability to work and decide on their place of residence. Second, its assistance model allocates plots of land to refugees to cultivate within their rural settlements. Third, it encourages refugee-host interaction through integrated social service provision and market access, allowing refugees to positively contribute not only to their own welfare, but also to Uganda's economic and social development.

This can be seen as the materialisation of HDP programmes' underlying assumptions. The achievement of a resilient condition is therefore entrusted mainly to the allocation of land plots in rural areas that are supposed to ensure not only the minimum conditions for sustaining life but also to create conditions for the beginning of an autonomous trajectory via the inclusion in rural markets through selling of surplus crops or in

[3]Numbers of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as of 31 January 20024 (UNHCR 2024).

trade or small industry activities. This land-based model responds to both the fact that the great majority of refugees originally lived on subsistence agriculture and the fact that agriculture corresponds to roughly a quarter of the country's GDP and employs two-thirds of its active population. It is therefore understandable that the goal of the 'Refugee Livelihoods and Resilience Sector Strategy for 2022-2025' is for refugees and host communities in refugee hosting districts to live peacefully and progressively attain self-reliance in a conducive environment by 2025. For this purpose, the strategy assumes two complementary outcomes. First, that "refugees and host communities in refugee hosting districts generate sufficient agricultural production to attain self-reliance", something that is to be achieved, according to the document, through increased agricultural land used by refugees, improved agricultural productivity and improved access to produce markets (Government of Uganda 2023). The reverse side of this emphasis on refugees' self-reliance and entrepreneurial approach to self-help is the extremely narrow role attributed to humanitarian aid, almost limited to emergency livelihood support. It is a sort of circular narrative: since the strategic objective is self-reliance, humanitarian aid programmes become irrelevant, and the automatic consequence is underfunding; since the programmes are underfunded, self-help becomes not only a strategic goal but mostly the only possible way.

In any case, figures concerning the success of self-reliance policies in Uganda reveal a clear deficit: only 42 per cent of refugees have access to land for autonomous agriculture activities, and the average dimension of the land plots attributed to refugees is 0.6 acres, clearly below the minimum necessary for self-sufficiency. On the other hand, the urban lives of refugees settled in Kampala are lived in slums and in undertaking extremely precarious activities. True, the 'Refugee Livelihoods and Resilience Sector Strategy' establishes that refugees and host communities in refugee hosting districts and urban areas receive sufficient income for employment or entrepreneurship to attain self-reliance, and this approach is increasing both the number of refugees with viable enterprises and the number of refugees with decent work (Government of Uganda 2023). But these formulae have little to do with reality and sound like wishful thinking. In fact, for urban refugees living in Kampala, the official resilience discourse contrasts sharply with their everyday struggle for survival. For them, the entrepreneurial culture is little more than a synonym for confinement in informal and low-level activities (Bernstein and Okello 2007, 47-50).

The case of Jordan

Several authors (Kimmelman 2014; Dalal 2015; Picker and Pasquetti 2015) emphasise the urbanisation of originally massive temporary warehouse spaces as a complex dynamic, made of both physical and socio-economic transformations that reconfigure the nature of the camps and their role in the lives of the people settled there. Al Za'atari camp, in Jordan, is seen as a major example of camps becoming potential urban incubators. Michael Kimmelman (2014) refers to the building of "an informal city, a sudden do-it-yourself metropolis […] with the emergence of neighbourhoods, gentrification, a growing economy and, under the circumstances, something approaching normalcy".

Built in 2012 in a desert area near the Syrian border, Al Za'atari was designed to host no more than 20,000 refugees, mostly Syrians and Palestinians. However, immediately

after it was opened, the population increased to more than double that figure. According to the UNHCR, after a peak of more than 150,000 persons in 2013, the camp population stabilised to around 80,000 refugees, with its current number being 83,800 (UNHCR 2022). Al Za'atari was initially conceived as a space of containment and isolation, where refugees were strictly prohibited from exiting the camp or from working or taking part in any economic activity. Its spatial organisation was also an expression of its supposed temporary function: refugee shelters were limited to tents and eventually caravans in symmetrical rows; the use of concrete or cement was prohibited as well as the installation of electricity sources. Suraina Pasha (2020, 250) identifies "a loosely de facto revolt" that took place in the first months of the camp's existence as the trigger of a combined struggle for urbanism, civic rights and economic independence. The most relevant demands were an end to the isolationist policy and the improvement of the conditions of the camp. The unauthorised departure of more than 150,000 refugees from the camp to neighbouring Jordanian cities radically challenged the former rule, showing that it was unforceable. Moreover, refugees themselves reconfigured the internal geography of the camp using tribal criteria to create neighbourhoods; they started using cement and other solid materials to soften extreme heat and cold living temperatures; they also started tapping electrical supply for their shelters. These dynamics of informal, self-organising urbanisation had an impact on the culture of the camp that went well beyond the strictly physical dimension of those changes. Indeed, the beginning of an entrepreneurial market-oriented culture resulted in a flourishing economic life. Two remarkable examples of this process must be highlighted. The first was the traditional market, the *souq*. Pasha (251) notes that a global monthly revenue of USD 14 million was produced from more than 1400 stalls selling food, groceries, clothing and jewellery. The reinvestment of this income in economic activities not only inside the camp but also with external actors (namely from neighbouring cities) reinforced the market-driven source of autonomy and resilience of this camp's refugee population. The second example is an iconic one: the name 'Shams Élysées' (an appropriation of the Parisian Champs Élysées mixed with the Arabic name for Syria, 'Sham') was given to the camp's main street lined with shops. Two complementary propellants of entrepreneurialism and resilience should be mentioned. The first is cash transfers and cash-for-work programmes, implemented for the performance of different basic tasks in the camp, like waste picking and recycling. The second case, which is often combined with this first, is incentive-based volunteering programmes run by humanitarian organisations (OXFAM 2020) which offer a very significant number of professional opportunities for refugees with different skill levels and covering several sectors of activity. Apart from this involvement in professional activities, incentive-based programmes operate as cash distributors, injecting money into the camp's households and eventually its whole economy.

All these dynamics can be read as the materialisation of the neoliberal conceptual framework that proposes resilience and self-reliance as the solution to the passive dependency of humanitarian aid. Still, a critical assessment of the reality of Al Za'atari is needed. As Pasha (2020, 255) underlines, "empowerment […] appears to be a largely aspirational goal". The permanence of a large number of active humanitarian organisations in the camp as guarantors of the basic needs of life for everyone, the limits of access to adequate job opportunities, the power asymmetries resulting from the informality of parallel economy, the deficit of basic civil rights in the relation between refugees and

governance structures in the camp – these are all signs of the disparity between the resilience discourse and the material conditions of the great majority of the refugee population in Al Za'atari.

Conclusion: Benignity and hidden strategies

There are implicit strategies lying behind both liberal and neoliberal versions of humanitarianism that need to be critically understood. The former aims to control and stabilise peripheral geographies through policies and instruments that openly exert hegemony. The latter transfers the responsibility for overcoming a condition of existential vulnerability to the victims themselves. Undoubtedly the new humanitarianism of the 1990s became imbued with a sense of liberal triumphalism which, as we have seen, conceived humanitarian action as part of a set of liberal-driven devices aimed at reshaping from the outside, societies and states at the turbulent periphery of the international system. By acknowledging that these three areas are naturally interconnected and present in most of today's crises, the HDP nexus has increasingly been recognised as an important and dominant framework for addressing complex emergencies and achieving more sustainable outcomes (Oelke and Scherer 2022). But a critical reading of this approach underlines its strategical role within the liberal peace programme as the hegemonic model for controlling and stabilising the turbulent peripheries of the world system. The reconfigured neoliberal humanitarianism moved from the HPD strategy to the humanitarianism of containment and resilience – what we called DSC (development-security-containment) humanitarianism. This new approach acknowledges the agency and strengths of affected populations, moving away from a purely aid-driven model towards one that promotes self-reliance and empowerment. By focusing on resilience, neoliberal humanitarian efforts aim to create sustainable solutions that go beyond immediate relief and address the underlying vulnerabilities that led to repeated crises under the HDP nexus. However, significant shortcomings may result from this approach, especially since it serves the neoliberal humanitarianism agenda that deliberately overemphasises individual and community resilience at the expense of holding governments or other powerful actors accountable for their role in creating or exacerbating vulnerabilities, and shifts the burden of responsibility from those with power and resources to the most vulnerable and marginalised populations (Chandler and Reid 2016; Kaufmann 2013, 61). Basma Hajir *et al.* (2021, 2) identify a critical tendency in "sociological research circles concerned with conflict-affected and fragile contexts", in which the concept of resilience "is usually challenged in the name of solidarity, liberty and commitments to social-structural change" and for whom "discourses of resilience reflect an enthusiasm for perpetuating the status quo and leaving oppressive structures unchanged", besides which, according to these critics, the discourse of resilience is often used as an excuse to withdraw international resources and funding in order to render local populations 'responsible'. By being promoted and used as a form of neoliberal governance, this approach means the most vulnerable must deal with the impact of crises without adequate support from broader societal structures. What we underline here is that even though neoliberal humanitarianism is represented as a benign form of interventionism – namely for its focus on empowering local populations affected by wars or natural hazards – it is in fact a form of biopolitics aimed at controlling huge flows of moving people and preserving

asymmetrical power relations between the core and the periphery of the world system that HDP programmes maintained with their liberal narratives. Suzan Ilcan (2015, 336) argues that neoliberal governability breaks with the traditional form of governance of society as a whole and focuses on the activation of "controlled individual choices" and the mobilisation of "new forms of responsible subjects." The resilience pursued by neoliberal humanitarianism, therefore, means transforming the victims into entrepreneurs of their way out of this condition. "Although we cannot change the world, we can survive better by knowing how to adapt" (Joseph 2013, 43): this argument for resilience has had an important impact on changing appearance of humanitarian action in the last two decades.

The protracted refugees' situations in the specific contexts of the Palestinian and Syrian refugee camps in Jordan and of the South Sudanese and Congolese refugee camps in Uganda, are clear illustrations of these limitations and ambiguities. Behind a discourse that fosters resilience lie highly questionable victim-centered initiatives masked as 'empowerment', 'capacity-building' and 'entrepreneurship', with all the limitations and shortcomings this entails, including the inevitable perpetuation of the victim's vulnerability and the lack of truly durable and sustainable solutions.

Therefore, it is in substance and not in form that neoliberal humanitarianism should be critically examined. Some scholars focused on organisational changes. For instance, Paul Currion (2018) contrasts "modular humanitarianism" with "mammoth humanitarianism", or "platform humanitarianism" with "pedestal humanitarianism". On the shift in social sensibility driving humanitarian initiatives Lilie Chouliaraki (2010, 117) speaks of the "technologization of action" and the "de-emotionalization of the cause" as determining what she calls "post-humanitarian sensibility". While unquestionably important dimensions of change, in our view they are not the ones that define the specific profile of humanitarian action, especially in protracted crisis contexts. In the cases of refugee camps in Jordan and Uganda mentioned in this article, what is at stake is a humanitarianism that no longer envisions a simple short-term relief oriented towards the alleviation of suffering or a long-term articulation with peacebuilding and development strategies aimed at establishing structures of justice. Instead, it is a humanitarianism conceived as a durable solution, with a focus on investing in the creation of personal entrepreneurial capacities that ensure active adaptation to crisis contexts as the new normal. Seeing neoliberal humanitarianism as a radical alternative to liberal humanitarianism is a misconception. Both are expressions of hegemonic strategies for disciplining the turbulent peripheries of the world system. However, what remains after criticising the neoliberal orientation of humanitarianism of containment and resilience cannot be nihilism. Philipp Kastner (2020, 383) is right in arguing that "resilience can potentially be redesigned, based on different political and ethical commitments." And, just as for humanitarianism conceived in an HPD aggregation logic, critical reflexivity about the positionality of those involved in planning and implementing proposed interventions is fundamental for humanitarianism conceived in a DSC aggregation logic (Hajir *et al.* 2021, 8).

This attention to the positionality of actors – addressing the question "is the party that seeks to enhance your resilience an insider and an ally […] or is it someone who is unable to relate to your misery and who is actually contributing to your oppression" (9) – opens up space for resilience-as-resistance. As Hajir *et al.* articulate:

> when a regime strives to break your community, your spirit, your humanity, then resilience becomes the sweetest revenge: You try to destroy me, I continue to exist. You try to break us, we continue to thrive. You try to control me, I remain free. You try to strip us of our dignity, we defy you with our beauty and nobility (Ibid.).

On the other hand, any critical reading of neoliberal humanitarianism must make room for dignified resilience, which goes beyond individual capacity to respond to adversity and opposes individual fragility with "collective notions of social justice, social worth, and social responsibility" (Omidian and Panter-Brick 2015, 27). This convergence between resilience-as-resistance and dignified resilience constitutes a counter-hegemonic field; its impact on the conception and implementation of humanitarian action will enable it to help build a genuine pathway towards personal and collective emancipation. Identifying the policies that constitute this field is an important challenge for researchers.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge that this publication is the result of work funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia under the R&I Unit Plurianual Funding Programm Financiamento Plurianual de Unidade I&D (UIDP/50012/2020). The authors would also like to thank Eugenia Baroncelli and Daniela Irrera, who organised this group of articles on "The Triple Nexus and the future of multilateral governance: Rethinking coordination between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts".

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