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‘The Politics of Humanitarianism brings together some of best scholars among the few still in the business of social critique. It offers the reader a catalogue of political, economic, cultural, legal and military stories that the “humanitarian” logo attempts to confuse. This is a rare book – an uncensored critique of the corporate marketing of humanitarianism. Readers will be among the few with the cultural instruments to denounce the negative impacts of humanitarianism against humanity.’

Ugo Mattei, Distinguished Professor of Law and Alfred and Hanna Fromm Chair in International and Comparative Law, University of California, Hastings College of the Law, San Francisco. Co-author of *Plunder: When the Rule of Law is Illegal* (2008) and *The Ecology of Law* (2015).

THE POLITICS OF HUMANITARIANISM

Power, Ideology and Aid

Edited by
ANTONIO DE LAURI

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Antonio De Lauri

Humanitarianism Ltd

Since the mid-nineteenth century at least (see for example Barnett 2011; Barnett and Weiss 2011), humanitarian intervention has increasingly become the dominant instrument framing protection, aid and democratization at the global level. This process accelerated considerably after World War II and even more so in the wake of the Cold War, when the stability of the nation-state became visibly undermined (yet with a re-invigorated capacity to produce ‘outcasts’; see Hoffmann q.v.), making room for new forms of (private and humanitarian) sovereignty. From the very beginning, the impressive volume of humanitarian interventions worldwide has been accompanied by a certain dose of idolatry and blind trust in its ostensibly salvific goals, to the point that nowadays humanitarian intervention is deservedly described as humanitarianism – whereby the suffix ‘-ism’ embodies a whole set of beliefs, practices, categories, discourses and procedures. Alongside the successful diffusion of humanitarian actions there have also been doubts and concerns (particularly from the perspective of the social sciences), which however have barely scratched the surface of the ideological armour of humanitarianism. To be sure, more than a unanimous and permanently defined system, humanitarianism may be seen as an ethos, as a political mode of controlling territories and lives and governing international relations. Humanitarianism consists of theories and practices, ideologies and contradictions, movements for change and conservatism. By bringing together different approaches and positionings – with varying degrees of tension amongst them – the chapters in this book mirror to some extent this non-univocal nature of humanitarianism. And yet, the book’s main goal is to question structural

dilemmas, hidden intentions and dramatic implications of what appears to be the *Humanitarianism Limited* enterprise. The quasi-metaphorical use of 'limited' in this context is useful for representing the form of governance and power embodied by humanitarianism, in which the limited liability of humanitarian agents serves the function of glorifying their declared intentions while at the same time freeing them of any culpability regarding the implications of their interventions.¹ Limited liability also seems appropriately to depict the position of 'humanitarian supporters', whose proxy humanitarianism implies a process of de-responsibilization through acts of charity. Hence the ritualized declarations of presumed neutrality on the part of humanitarian organizations, whose bureaucratic and standardized procedures are more a reflection of mechanisms of estrangement than of full responsibility for the outcomes of humanitarian action. Nonetheless, this volume does not only analyse the consequentialist dimension of humanitarianism. The authors, in fact, go beyond the logic of cause and effect, for humanitarian actions simply consist of a response to a specific crisis. By addressing the shift from mode of thought to actual power, the book reflects on the very world-making and constitutive force of humanitarianism: not only a product of our era, but also the 'producer' of a specific form of humanity.²

Who is in need of humanitarianism?

The end of humanitarianism, to use a formula that appeals to academics (see the end of history, the end of law, the end of human rights, etc.³), does not seem to be very close. Indeed, as shown in several contexts from Afghanistan to Yemen, from Haiti to the Democratic Republic of Congo, humanitarianism is actually in quite good health – and critical implications aside, this in itself reveals that the human condition is going through a dramatic stage. Already in the second half of the twentieth century, humanitarianism had begun to appear as a sort of 'next page' not only in the history of the nation-state and international relations, but also – at a deeper level – in the reconfiguration of human relations (with a monopoly on the definition of concepts such as aid, solidarity, need, etc.). Coherently with this, Mariella Pandolfi and Phillip Rousseau argue that the humanitarian impulse was intended to be 'an effective and organized answer to global *pietas*, offering to cater for the needs of the suffering and downtrodden – ever more represented in the hyper-mediated context of the second half of the twentieth century'. Yet, the changing character of humanitarianism opens the door to less than totally predictable future developments. Antonio Donini has recently observed that

Over the past 20 years [humanitarianism] has functioned for many young and not so young people in the North as a kind of last (Western) frontier. In this it has been similar to the human rights movement. It was a mobiliser of energy. It gave meaning to people and functioned as a substitute for 'revolution' and other 'isms' of the past. Success came at its own peril because like its human rights cousin, humanitarianism emerged largely in confrontation with power. Now, it seems to have shifted from being a powerful discourse to a form of power. The humanitarian enterprise has thus crossed the threshold of power, even if most humanitarians are loathe to admit it. (Donini 2010)

However, can we really affirm that humanitarianism emerged in confrontation with power? If we do not settle for a definition of power that reduces it to its 'institutional' dimension, it becomes easier to recognize that, on the contrary, humanitarianism emerged largely in association with power. The genealogy of 'humanitarian attitude' takes us back to ancient times and, in an even more powerful manner, to the civilizing goals of Christian missions and colonial projects, abolitionist movements, the hegemonic diffusion of the democratic nation-state model, and the US's attempts to establish itself as world leader (see Grande; Nader and Savinar; Pandolfi and Rousseau; Quaretta, in this volume; see also Barnett 2011 and Minn 2007).

The dependency between the Global South and North is two-way: although dependent on foreign aid, several countries in the Global South significantly contribute to the prosperity of the Global North via interest payments,⁴ subcontracts, exploitation of resources, labour force, etc. But while in the North we are used to hearing how much people in the Global South are in need of humanitarian intervention and aid, we less often hear how much the Global North is in need of delivering it. This aspect assumes specific relevance within the current historical conjuncture of radical changes in world equilibrium.⁵ In fact, although humanitarianism seems to be in good health, it is not possible to foresee all the future consequences of the political struggles and economic challenges of today. I now briefly address four key elements of humanitarianism, clearly interdependent, which can help us to identify what it is – for now – that keeps humanitarianism in good health and also to formulate a more mindful answer to the question, 'Who is in need of humanitarianism?'

Proxy humanitarianism

The first element concerns the sympathy that many intellectuals (from conservative to left-wing), artists and celebrities have for proxy

humanitarianism. This form of humanitarianism is fuelled by certain myths and beliefs, such as the undeniable advantage of a universal and inflexible idea of progress and development, the merciful work of humanitarian operators, the ease with which we can solve the world's problems ('donate now to save children's lives', as many campaigns exhort), the glorification of positive science as the only possible way of exploring human nature and emancipating humans, etc. Understanding the ambiguities connected with these processes – though pertinent – is not enough to evoke the 'poisoned gift'.⁶ In order to endorse humanitarian myths and beliefs, a number of protagonists rush onto the scene. These are the so-called 'ambassadors', who are required to fulfil at least two main functions: (1) to remind their compatriots that the best possible way of life is that which they enjoy at home (primarily in Europe and the United States); and (2) to show the 'underdeveloped' that, if they want to improve their living conditions, they need to embrace a different model of life: that promoted by humanitarian agencies. Ambassadors are, to all intents and purposes, global super models. The aim, however, is not to sell clothes, but to sell a way of life.⁷ To some degree, proxy humanitarianism is the antithesis of compassion, the opposite of intimacy. As such, it is not only a very easy remedy for soothing the conscience, it is also an anaesthetic for empathy and responsibility (hence 'limited liability'). As pointed out by Chouliaraki,

while action remains in the hands of few, it is the millions who watch at a distance who confer upon it its true legitimacy. It is this arrangement of separation, often but not always between the West and the developing world, that tends to organize the social relationships of humanitarianism around a theatrical conception of politics. Rather than inviting these publics to engage in direct action, [...] theatrical politics encourages us to engage in images and stories about action, and thereby enables us to imagine ourselves as citizens who can act at a distance, by speaking out (through protest or petition) and by paying (through donation) in the name of a moral cause. (2012: 2)

In their chapter, Billaud and De Lauri extend the theatricality of humanitarianism to the very sphere of intervention, pointing to the promise of normalization that accompanies the so-called reconstruction of Afghanistan. In her reflection on the management of refugees, Sophia Hoffmann similarly notes that it is generally taken for granted 'that refugees require intervention, and some form of correction, in order to lead "normal" lives'. One of the leitmotifs of the chapters in this volume is precisely the tension between the

ordinary and the extra-ordinary, between 'the perennialised existence of the state of exception' (Pandolfi and Rousseau q.v.) – or protracted relief/crisis/emergency (Hoffmann q.v.; Lewis q.v.) – and the 'radicalization of normality' (Billaud and De Lauri q.v.). Proxy humanitarianism is impregnated with such a tension – insofar as it is primarily justified by an idea of emergency, urgency for development or progress, but only with a view to attaining an illusory and aggressive promise of normality: the normality that will be imposed on *others* in order to model the world according to specific patterns. Normality here also takes on a medical connotation and is constructed in opposition to an idea of abnormality that includes the psychopathological deficits attributed to the person considered unable to design a world of his or her own (de Martino 1977). Via a semantic transposition, this idea of abnormality is extended from the individual to collectivities: to populations or nations considered not yet ready to govern themselves, embrace democracy, implement a rule of law system, or achieve civilized standards of life. In the eyes of 'supporters at a distance', humanitarianism is thus the cure for all these forms of abnormality.

The migration of experts

The second element is related to the fact that humanitarianism functions as an employment outlet for a huge number of graduates and professionals from donor countries. James Petras argued that 'The NGOs world-wide have become the latest vehicle for upward mobility for the ambitious educated classes' (1999: 430). Anybody who works or carries out research in war or post-war countries, or in post-disaster contexts, can be witness to the large-scale movement of 'experts' in the employ of the humanitarian industry: engineers, architects, doctors, nurses, lawyers, agronomists, analysts, project managers, accounting managers, consultants, researchers, IT specialists, security staff, and so on, not to mention the military.⁸ Most humanitarian workers (with or without borders) receive a far higher salary than they could command with the same skills in their home country. In reality, this is a mass migration movement from the donor countries to the Global South, that is driven by economic factors – and thus, is something that is difficult to do without, particularly in the context of the present-day economic crisis and consequent severe unemployment in the West. Indeed, the political economy of NGOs (Choudry and Kapoor 2013; Wallace 2003) and international institutions is closely connected to the wild-market model typifying today's world economy. Nonetheless, while mainstream media produce daily narratives of multitudes of people invading the Global North – a sort of schizophrenic view that alternates the 'immobility' of the populations of the Global South with their constant movement toward the North – no attention

whatsoever is paid to the significant movement of humanitarian-professionals towards the South, with its manifold consequences such as the creation of parallel economic systems, increases in the cost of primary goods, exacerbation of the gap between those involved in humanitarianism and those excluded, and so forth.

Humanitarian power to manipulate categories (Quaretta q.v.) leads to certain groups of people being classified as migrants, and other groups as experts. Obviously this is not the only reason why such a distinction is so widely accepted, but it is in line with the fact that expertise is both essentially interactional and relentlessly ideological, entailing the affirmation of hierarchies of value that legitimate specific ways of recognizing someone as 'expert' (Carr 2010).⁹ In a sense, the distinction between experts and migrants reflects, at a different level, the asymmetrical power relations between donor and so-called developing countries.

Humanitarian business

The third element specifically refers to the huge business that revolves around humanitarianism, with the related circuits of dependence, looting, corruption and clientelism that this feeds at the local level. The harsh critical perspective proposed by James Petras in 1999 already convincingly outlined the impact of the NGOs' subcontract sector on political and economic agendas at both the local and international level, with the result of compounding inequalities between social classes in the places where projects are implemented. The sizeable phenomenon of humanitarian business is currently most appreciable in Afghanistan. A 2008 ACBAR report states:

international assistance constitutes around 90% of all public expenditure in the country [...] Reconstruction assistance is a fraction of military spending. Since 2001 the United States has appropriated \$127 billion for the war in Afghanistan and the US military is currently spending nearly \$100 million a day in the country, some \$36 billion a year. [...] Since 2001 some \$25 billion has been spent on security-related assistance to Afghanistan, such as building Afghan security forces. Donors have committed to spending the same amount on reconstruction and development, yet some leading donors have failed to fulfil little more than half of their aid commitments. Thus, there is an aid shortfall of some \$10 billion – equivalent to thirty times the annual national education budget. Just \$15 billion in aid has so far been spent, of which it is estimated a staggering 40% has returned to donor countries in corporate profits and consultant salaries.

In absolute terms, the US is by far the largest donor, contributing one-third of all aid since 2001. Other major donors are: Japan, the UK, the European Commission (EC), the World Bank (WB), Germany and Canada; the relative contributions of The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden also are substantial. France and Spain, however, have made scant bilateral contributions since 2001 of just \$80 million and \$26 million. [...] In 2006 the then director of the World Bank in Kabul estimated that 35–40% of aid was ‘badly spent’ and that ‘the wastage of aid is sky-high: there is real looting going on, mainly by private enterprises. It is a scandal’. Afghanistan’s biggest donor, USAID, allocates close to half of its funds to five large US contractors in the country and it is clear that substantial amounts of aid continue to be absorbed in corporate profits. According to the US-based Centre for Public Integrity, the US government has awarded major contracts in Afghanistan, some worth hundreds of millions of dollars, to, inter alia, KBR, the Louis Berger Group, Chemonics International, Bearing Point and Dyncorp International. (Waldman 2008)

As of more recently the reconstruction scene appears even more impressive (Bilmes 2013; Brinkley 2013). Furthermore, if we shift the lens from the Afghan case to the global scale, it almost becomes a truism to affirm that humanitarian action is the tip of the iceberg of a broader transnational industry based on the ‘benevolent values of our moral culture’ (Asad 2013). Laura Nader and Robin Savinar emphasize this aspect by addressing the interdependence of power holders and ‘humanitarian-for-profit ideologies’. In the same tenor, Elisabetta Grande focuses on the perverse implications of women’s rights discourses and actions, concluding that: ‘It would appear crucial for enthusiasts of women’s rights discourse to become aware of the risks connected with the fostering of such a “*humonetarian*” message, dressed up in humanitarian language.’

In line with this, Alexandra Lewis observes that

humanitarian donors are also involved in highly politicised interventions in Yemen. The United States of America, which contributed US \$18 million to Yemen in 2010 (Global Humanitarian Assistance 2013), has commissioned wide-scale counter-terrorism programming that is immensely unpopular in the South, and faces allegations by Wikileaks of secret bombings and other devastating military campaigns (Booth and Black 2010). The United Kingdom, which contributed US \$16 million in 2010 (Global Humanitarian

Assistance 2013), is involved in an intrusive and security-centric stabilisation strategy under the auspices of the Stabilisation Unit, and is also taking the lead in European Union police training and reform in Yemen.

The political and economic interests of donor countries, particularly in relation to security (Olsen, Carstensen and Høyen 2003), are the main factors at work in creating (or protracting) the *need for intervention*. In many contexts, humanitarian agencies are seen as an extension of the military and political agendas of donor countries (Abiew 2012; Pandolfi and Rousseau q.v.). Furthermore, by creating the conditions for the suspension of sovereignty, the proliferation of humanitarian actions feeds the growing phenomenon of privatized military industry (Mandel 2002; Singer 2003).

Hierarchies

The fourth element consists of humanitarianism's implicit reification of a hierarchical perception of human beings. Beyond geopolitical strategies, a certain hierarchical order is guaranteed through more nuanced geocultural (Wallerstein 1991) performances such as the global circulation of cultural, legal and political models. As Billaud and De Lauri argue, humanitarianism as a form of utopia plays a crucial role in determining a global understanding of what is human, good, normal. It has been noted for example that the perception that human lives¹⁰ have different exchange values on the market of death – depending on whether they are the lives of 'civilized' or 'uncivilized' people – is not only very common in liberal democracies: it is functional to a specific hierarchical world order (Asad 2007). Although humanitarian publicity and policy do not explicitly reiterate such a hierarchical perception of life and death, what happens on the ground where NGOs and international organizations operate shows quite a different side of the coin. Due to their culturalist approach, humanitarian agents tend to connect the social problems of a group or population to its cultural habits and pre-modern attitudes, and this is particularly true when women's rights discourses (Grande q.v.; see also Abu-Lughod 2013) and children's innocence (Quaretta q.v.) are involved. The broader discursive production associated with this approach generates a form of humanitarian culturalism that permeates both military and civil interventions. It is worth reporting an example: in a speech delivered at the University of Milan-Bicocca in December 2010, a decorated Lieutenant-Colonel of the Arma dei Carabinieri spoke for about an hour of his past missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of his words were worrying. For the purposes of my argument here, what came closest to the idea of humanitarian

culturalism in this military officer's outlook were statements such as: 'We have taught the Afghans to wash themselves with soap', 'They're good people, but they need to be kept under control', 'Our goal there is to normalize the country', 'Afghanistan is in some ways like Europe 100 years ago', 'Afghan culture is not good for women.' This kind of language is not only used by military personnel, but also by NGO workers, international observers and activists. A persistently evolutionist conception of human societies is the basis for this humanitarian culturalism, which combines the essentializing inclination of culturalist approaches with the developmentalist character of humanitarianism, and which publicly frames *pretexts* (Nader and Savinar q.v.; Lewis q.v.) for interventions and action plans.

In March 2008, I was living a short distance from the Provincial Office in Kabul. One morning, as usual, news of a bombing attack was doing the rounds of the city. There was talk of at least nine dead and dozens injured. What struck me that day was the conversation I had with Karim, an Afghan employee of a French NGO. When I told him of the attack he replied: 'Those who do these things are not Muslims.' But it was actually what he added a little later that made the strongest impression on me: 'Anyhow, the dead are all Afghans.' He thought that I would be reassured by this. 'Why do you think that is important?' I asked, and he then hinted: 'We are all human beings, but...'. He said nothing more, and we were silent for a few minutes. Maybe what was passing through his mind was that some of us are more human than others, or that even in the face of death humans are not really all equal. Karim took it for granted that my first concern would be for the possible involvement of my own countrymen or other Europeans. This was not the case for me. But in the face of such a painful and politically connotated event, the complicity and intimacy that had arisen between us over time were suddenly in danger of being undermined. Shortly afterwards, while sharing a few almonds left over from the day before and drinking black tea, we had the opportunity to clarify our respective positions. I then translated for Karim, as best I could, into a mix of English and Dari, a poem in Neapolitan dialect that my father used to recite to me when I was a child. Written by Antonio de Curtis, alias Totò, the poem ('A livella') narrates the story of a man who gets locked into a cemetery. While walking around, he notes the difference between the tomb of a rich Marquis and that of a poor street cleaner. Suddenly the protagonist finds himself observing the nobleman and the street cleaner having a heated conversation in front of him. The Marquis wants the street cleaner to move to another tomb as he cannot bear to spend the whole of eternity beside a miserable wretch. The street cleaner begs forgiveness, but says that it is not his fault because his wife was responsible for his burial.

As the conversation develops, the street cleaner loses patience with the Marquis's arrogance, and then concludes:

'A morte 'o ssaje ched' 'e?..è una livella.
 'Nu rre,'nu magistrato,'nu grand'ommo,
 trasenno stu canciello ha fatt'o punto
 c'ha perzo tutto, 'a vita e pure 'o nomme:
 tu nu t'hè fatto ancora chistu cunto?
 Perciò, stamme a ssentì. . .nun fa' 'o restivo,
 suppuorteme vicino-che te 'mporta?
 Sti ppagliacciate 'e ffanno sulo 'e vive:
 nuje simmo serie. . .appartenimmo à morte!

In prose: death is a leveller. Even a king, a judge or a great man, once they have entered this gate, lose everything, their lives and even their names. So, listen to me, don't be reluctant, bear with me, what do you care? Only the living do these antics. We are serious, we belong to death.

Karim pointedly observed: 'I like this poem. [...] A person's name is very important, but it is not only with death that you can lose it. I came back from Pakistan in 2002. For my family I was Karim, but for the NGOs I was a returnee. Before that I was a refugee. My name never mattered.' This feeling of having being 'neutralized' and 'homogenized' by humanitarian categories is common in contexts such as that of contemporary Afghanistan.¹¹ Then Karim argued:

There's no equality between people. Our passports say something about us; actually they say many things about us. We Afghans are all proud of being Afghans. But honestly I see it as a reaction more than anything else.

The more you are excluded, forced to the global margins – Karim implied – the more you have to be proud in order to survive.

Critique of humanitarianism

The chapters in this book taken as a whole provide a comprehensive critique of the humanitarian realm, without however relying on a merely unilateral argument. To a certain extent both humanitarians and scholars are potentially

attracted by reductionist magnets. For humanitarian actors this often translates into the practice of reifying the image of the ‘good poor’, the defenceless victim who is eternally in need of help – whose existence is therefore thinkable only within the helper-victim relationship. Elisabetta Grande (q.v.) addresses this point arguing that

By construing as an extreme violation of women’s dignity certain practices accepted by non-Western women out of a sense of belonging, duty, caring for and responsibility to others, and of participation in community life, women’s rights discourses frame non-Western women as in need of protection every time they make choices as relational individuals.

For scholars, reductionism can be the outcome of an inflexible ‘systemic explanation’, which provides a compelling alternative to humanitarian vehemence. Such explanations may offer convincing arguments against humanitarianism but, at the same time, they risk blurring the complex and inconsistent ways in which people – both those who ‘deliver’ aid and those who ‘receive’ it – articulate their choices and lives. The responsibilities and initiatives of individual people, with their virtues and their vices, tend to vanish within the systemic explanation and what remains is only the shadow of lived experience. At the other extreme, lies the risk of hypersubjectivism, which produces a regression in our attitude toward the other, a drastic decrease in the importance of concepts such as belonging, relationship, interdependence. Beyond systemic explanation and hypersubjectivism lies the ‘critical gaze’ inspiring this volume. Through a multidisciplinary and multifocal perspective, this critical gaze functions as an interpretative filter for the multiple intentions of the actors in humanitarian landscapes, the complex relationship between values (what humanitarian action is intended to be) and practices (what happens ‘on the ground’), the global forces that over-determine social and political realms at the local level, the ways in which states and social groups react to humanitarian action, the ways in which the subjects of humanitarian intervention are influenced/governed by different epistemologies/applications of international law, missionary aims, attempts at normalizing, etc. In this book, the authors throw light on these aspects by unpacking the legal, political and ideological architecture of humanitarianism. To some extent the chapters in this volume point up the ‘grand’ narrative underpinning humanitarian interventions, and while they reflect the plural nature of humanitarianism, they also insist on its utopian and self-reproducing search-for-legitimacy – see, for instance, the chapter of Billaud and De Lauri.

I wish to stress here the difference between criticism and critique.¹² As Wendy Brown has reminded us, ‘critique remains distinguished from criticism for much of modernity and especially for Kant and Marx, who distanced themselves respectively from “criticasters”, and “critical critics”’.¹³ And even though the fact remains that critique seems to intrinsically ‘carry a tacit presumption of reason’s capacity to unveil error’ (ibid.), the distinction between criticism and critique is based on a further difference. While I see criticism as reiterating a counter-discourse, critique is stimulated by a generative force.¹⁴ Criticism can also be functional to the reproduction of power, to the extent that a certain level of criticism is what makes a hierarchical order legitimate – if criticism were not allowed, this order would appear to be totalitarian as a matter of course. Critique, on the contrary, produces ways of imagining the world.

Critique is clearly part and parcel of humanitarianism, yet it is a ‘qualitative posture’ never identical to itself. Its scope is continuously being reformulated. Rather than meta-historical, critique is fully immersed in the time it belongs to. For this reason ‘grounded critical analyses’ (Choudry and Kapoor 2013) of humanitarianism¹⁵ are crucial in order to combine vigilant self-reflexivity (Kapoor 2008; see also Kennedy 2004) with the multiplicity of cultural and political instances raised by humanitarian policy. As a means of imagining the world in *other ways*,¹⁶ critique is necessarily linked to public consciousness. In an extension of the reflections of Biehl and McKay, it is possible to argue that critique is a means of repopulating the public imagination (2012: 1224) and is therefore needed to animate moral dialectics: ultimately, it is a propensity to avoid both oversimplifications (Nader and Savinar q.v.) and ‘hierarchies of truth’ – based on the assumption that human plurality does not necessarily have to be reduced to homogenized (and normalized) cultural settings. Located at the intersection of different disciplines, such an understanding of critique meets the need to transcend disciplinarity, or to put it differently, to oppose the tendency towards that form of intellectual myopia that is present-day hyperspecialism. For instance, the combination of critical attitudes in law, anthropology and politics that this book condenses, contributes to an international debate that may not be reduced to a single disciplinary approach.

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Notes

- 1 It is important to note that even when the idea of responsibility is used as a political/ideological principle to justify interventions (e.g., the ‘responsibility to protect’), this does not translate into a consolidated practice of assessing the implications of the intervention itself, with consequent responsibility for ‘what we have done’, as an Italian embassy staff member told me in Kabul in May 2013 referring to what appeared to him as ‘effective democratization of Afghanistan’.
- 2 On the relations among humanity, humanism and humanitarianism see Asad 2013. Historically what has been done ‘in the name of humanity’ has taken a variety of forms including bombing (White 2000) and United Nations intervention (Urquhart 2000). For different perspective, see also Feldman and Ticktin 2010; Todorov 1982.
- 3 See, for example, Allen 2013; Douzinas 2000; Hopgood 2013; Fukuyama 1992; Moyn 2010; Perschbacher and Basset 2004; Pound 1914.
- 4 As an example, in the 1990s, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘about 50 percent of the national budget available to the government was needed to pay the debt to the same international institutions whose loans were used to carry out the structural reforms’ (Quaretta q.v.).
- 5 For a broader discussion see Prashad 2013; Slater 2003; Soederberg 2006.
- 6 On the stratified and polysemic concept of ‘gift’ see Derrida 1991; Kapoor 2008; Laclau 1996; Nguyen 2012; O’Neil 2001; Samuels 2013; Strathern 1988.
- 7 As a consequence, humanitarianism reinforces anachronistic racialized ideas of non-European ‘others’ through categories such as trauma, pathology, abnormality, incapacity, ‘arrested development’ (Khan 2014). Another consequence is the hegemonic universalization of the notion of wellbeing. For a discussion on this category, see Corsin Jimenez 2008; cf. also Jackson 2011. Furthermore, even when implemented in Europe or the United States, humanitarianism maintains the ideological mechanism of imposing ideas such as ‘a normal life’, or a ‘proper model of life’, and so on. See for example Ticktin 2006, 2011.
- 8 On the militarization of humanitarianism, see Pandolfi and Rousseau q.v.
- 9 On expertise see also Kennedy 2005; Mosse 2011; Halme-Tuomisaari 2010.
- 10 For a discussion on the value/sacredness/politics of human life and related ‘humanitarian implications’ see Asad 2013; Fassin 2007, 2009; Redfield 2012; Reid 2011.
- 11 Significantly, in her chapter Sophia Hoffmann shows ‘that the vast majority of humanitarian agencies engaged in refugee management are part and parcel of the politics that produces refugees as outcasts’. On the impact of humanitarian assistance to refugees, see also Lischer 2003.
- 12 For a discussion on the meanings and uses of critique, see for example Asad, Brown, Butler and Mahmood 2009; Butler 2002, 2009; Fassin 2012; Fuenmayor 1990; Jahn 2012; Saar 2010; Schaff 2002; Waggoner 2006.

- 13 In Asad, Brown, Butler and Mahmood 2009: 9.
- 14 For the same reason critique is not to be confused with scepticism, which ‘involves suspension of belief in something, and radical epistemological scepticism involves an attempted – or affected – suspension of belief in everything’ (Sayer 2009: 770).
- 15 See also Kamat 2004; McKay 2012.
- 16 In this perspective, critique itself seems to have a utopian inclination. It is in any case relevant to recognize that these ‘other ways’ of imagining the world, these ‘alternate social worlds’ – to use the words of Lambek – ‘are in some ways more different but less easily distinguishable from our own than we imagine’ (2008: 152).

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