Humanitarian Industry

Romana Pozniak

Although **humanitarianism** is often associated with individual charity work, organizations and associations for providing aid started to appear in the 19th century with the establishing of charitable societies and philanthropic foundations, and the most significant event in the history of the humanitarian field is the establishment of the International Red Cross in 1863 (Barnett 2011; Taithe 2015). In the context of the establishment of the United Nations and the creation of a legal-normative framework for human rights and humanitarianism in the mid-20th century, humanitarian work was becoming increasingly professional.

In addition to the tendency of Western countries to intervene in war and post-war environments, the spread of liberalism after the Cold War also encouraged the so-called aid industry and its growth in terms of geographical presence, the number of organizations and agencies involved, and funding opportunities (Duffield 2012: 476). The humanitarian sector, which had primarily dealt with crisis situations, expanded its activities to include socioeconomic development, democratization, and even nation-building (Barnett 2005 and 2011).

Increased funding, the proliferation of work done by humanitarian organizations, the projectification of humanitarianism and increasingly strict conditions set by donors for applying and implementing projects are just some of the aspects of the "transformation of humanitarianism" in the 1990s (Barnett 2005). Due to the significant increase in the number of organizations, the specification of activities for new and existing organizations, as well as the development of an entire network of national and international, and for-profit and non-profit actors involved in the organization of humanitarian care in various ways, the academic literature has, since the 2000s, started to discuss this phenomenon in terms of "aid industry," i.e., a business (Duffield 2012; Weiss 2013). In an earlier development phase of this sector, Thomas Haskell warned about the connection between humanitarianism and capitalism (1985). The importance of the relationship between these two phenomena in society is also indicated by the term "disaster capitalism," which refers to the instrumentalization of crises, where private interests are promoted and a transnational capitalist class benefits from other people's suffering (Schuller 2008: 20-21).

Bureaucratization and standardization, as part of the neoliberal operating mode, have led to competition among humanitarian aid organizations. In addition to designing attractive projects to attract donors, organizations began to focus on technocratic solutions for crisis management, typically reserved for the business sector. According to Paolo Cuttitta, the marketization of the process of adopting public policies stems from the "tendency of political actors to obscure the political character of politics and to present policy-making as a neutral, necessary and indisputable process" (2018: 634). This connects the marketization and depoliticization of public policies, and the same logic can be applied to the field of humanitarianism, where the imperative of technocratic problem-solving and the commodification of humanitarian aid contributed to concealing the political goals of donors. In contrast to the assumed politicization, this contributed to the depoliticization of the humanitarian sector, which underscores the fact that humanitarianism is an ambivalent field of activity (cf., e.g., Pozniak 2019).

Part of the humanitarian industry can also be interpreted as a segment of the broader **migration industry**. In the literature, the well-known and empirically and theoretically conceived cooperation between humanitarian and securitarian policies is especially prominent in the relationship between the humanitarian and migration industry (cf., e.g., De Lauri 2018; Pallister-Wilkins 2015 and 2017; Walters 2011). For instance, this relationship is manifested, on the one hand, in national and international investments in technology for the protection of border regimes and, on the other hand, in the neutral attitude of many humanitarian organizations regarding restrictive migration policies, as well as in their indirect involvement in the adoption of the same policies from which migrants seek protection and help.

According to data, for example, from 2017, the humanitarian industry employed around 570,000 people, which is more than a one hundred percent increase when compared to data from 2010, when around 210,000 employees worked in the humanitarian sector (Walker et al. 2010). Although the humanitarian sector employs a large number of local residents, it is a popular international profession for the highly educated Western elite. This includes, as Antonio De Lauri warns, a pronounced migration movement driven by economic factors from the donor countries, i.e. from the Global North, to the **Global South** (2016: 5). While the media mainly focus on migration from the Global South to the Global North, and present an image of an invasion of poor and dangerous residents, the mobility of humanitarians is not widely discussed, nor are its consequences, among which De Lauri includes 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" (2016: 6). In addition, the humanitarian industry encourages precarious work and, despite well-paid jobs, most often offers short-term and/or consulting contracts, which is accompanied by a high turnover rate of employees and collaborators (Roth 2015: 47).

In recent years, the humanitarian sector has seen a significant increase in funding. For instance, Doctors Without Borders quadrupled its annual budget from around 421 million euros in 2004 to 1.6 billion euros in 2019. The financial growth of the humanitarian industry is also evident from the fact that aid allocated to Yemen in 2018 ($5 billion) was more than the total spent on humanitarian assistance worldwide in 1995 ($4.6 billion), or from the increase in the World Food Programme's budget, which in 1997 amounted to $1.2 billion and increased seven times by 2019.

Although the term humanitarian industry was used primarily in critical interpretations of high-ranking organizations and international humanitarian interventions, it can also be applied in local contexts, even for the activities of smaller or local organizations. For instance, the refugee camp opened in **Slavonski Brod** in 2015, during the **corridor** period, employed local people, and some local and international organizations expanded their field of activity, were granted new projects, funds and employees. The former head of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Tvrtko Barun stated that JRS grew from two employees in Croatia to 45 employees in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo in the period 2014-2020. Jobs were also created in other non-governmental organizations, including those that initially operated as independent civic initiatives.

NGO-ization, i.e. the transformation of local humanitarian initiatives into non-governmental organizations, should not be surprising, considering that they are somewhat forced to formalize their activities in order to be able to collect and distribute humanitarian aid due to statutory regulations. This and similar phenomena were discussed in the context of the development of the civil sector in the post-war and post-socialist environment of the 1990s and early 2000s (cf., e.g., Bagić 2006; Baker 2014; Stubbs 2001 and 2012). In order to procure financial and other resources for the salaries of employees, compensation for food and transportation of volunteers, collection of humanitarian aid, and work on the protection of human rights in general, non-governmental organizations are forced to function in accordance with the trends and policies of donors and the non-profit market. By standing in for ruined public services and promoting volunteerism, humanitarian organizations are subject to neoliberal trends and imperatives such as individualization and deinstitutionalization of care, or self-responsibility and the imperative of the entrepreneurial self (cf. Bröckling 2015; Gorz 2015; Muehlebach 2012; Sandri 2018). However, what distinguishes local organizations from established humanitarian agencies is how they practice and articulate the principle of work divided between humanitarian work (which is considered apolitical) and work that is political by nature and for which they practice activism, looking to stand in **solidarity** with people on the move. Although they operate as part of the humanitarian industry, this does not necessarily invalidate the politically engaged stance of certain local organizations, as they can cooperate, and often do, with donors that support distributing humanitarian aid, but also engage in advocacy against, say, **pushbacks**. This position enables their members, volunteers and workers to "repoliticize" (Cuttitta 2018, Sinatti 2019) humanitarianism, to avoid (completely) succumbing to the technocratic nature of the humanitarian business while providing aid, and to approach aid work from a political, and not only humanitarian perspective. Ultimately, this is why we can look at the humanitarian industry as a network of different relationships, positions, practices and actors (private donors, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, states, small and large companies, corporations, foundations and even informal associations) that directly or indirectly includes people of different experience, political and professional positions.

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