

Resilience Humanitarianism

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Although **humanitarianism** is a broad term that encompasses different interpretations and practices of aid, so-called classical humanitarianism (Hilhorst 2018), whose meaning and principles of action were created in Western liberal countries, is associated with action in emergency situations. These situations mainly involve the intervention of international organizations and their characteristic standardization of humanitarian work (Hilhorst 2018). Apart from clearly distinguishing “crisis” from “normal” situations, the classical paradigm of humanitarian action exacerbates and reproduces the asymmetric power relationship between those who provide aid and victims, creating the image of the ideal victim: passive, helpless and obedient. This is one of the principle reasons why humanitarianism has been considerably criticized in the literature (cf. Malkki 1996; Harrell-Bond 2002; Fassin 2012).

The classical paradigm dominated the field of humanitarian work until the end of the 20th century; however, in recent decades it has been gradually and partially replaced by a paradigm that Dorothea Hilhorst (2018) calls “resilience humanitarianism.” One of the most important factors, but not the only one, that prompted this transformation are the more robust connections between development agencies, i.e. organizations involved in designing and managing political and economic processes in post-war and post-crisis environments, and organizations providing aid in immediate crises. More precisely, the approach and scope of these two groups are more connected, which ultimately leads to developing a new approach to humanitarianism aimed at shifting the focus to the people who receive aid and encouraging them to become resilient and become more independent. Given that, since the beginnings of its modern, liberal variant (cf. Barnett 2011, Rozakou 2020), humanitarianism has been embroiled in disputes on the role and purpose of humanitarian organizations, instead of dividing it into classic humanitarianism and resilience humanitarianism, it is more apt to discuss directions and ideas that most often overlap, and whose application depends on conditions, type of organization, context, etc. (Hilhorst 2018).

Along with the work of development and humanitarian organizations being more connected, the creation of this new variant of humanitarianism – which Mark Duffield (2019) calls post-humanitarianism, highlighting how it is conditioned by information technologies – was influenced by a change in the perception of crises and crisis management. Unlike the earlier interpretation of crisis as something located outside society, in late-stage capitalism, crises are starting to be interpreted as an integral part of everyday life. The techniques used for managing these situations are moved to the level of individuals, and priority is given to developing internal resilience, adaptability and elasticity in order to successfully anticipate risks, accept changes and recover from suffering (Duffield 2012 and 2019).

As stated by Hilhorst (2018), the increasing continuity between “crisis” and “normality” can also be found in UN reports, which begin to perceive crisis as a new normality. For instance, the world humanitarian summit held in 2016 emphasized the importance of combining humanitarian action with development and peace-building programs, while the Global Compact on Refugees (2018) – in an effort to provide a framework of possible solutions and methods for managing “refugee crises” – noted the importance of encouraging resilience in persons seeking/receiving protection, as well as the possibility of finding solutions in local contexts and in so-called third countries (Hilhorst 2018: 6). In addition to the fact that the Global Compact on Refugees (2018), as well as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018), encourages the externalization of migration policies, by promoting the independence of refugees it directly or indirectly calls upon neoliberal imperatives, such as self-entrepreneurship, which place responsibility for dealing with perilous and extraordinary circumstances, the immediate quality of life, and even the realization of refugee status, on the person in search of protection.

This “post-social humanitarian regime” (Duffield 2019: 19) is a consequence of a wider social situation and does not only refer to the structures of managing precarious, displaced, irregularized and other populations. General uncertainty, suspense and disintegration of the social sphere (Rose 1996) – primarily the collapse of publicly available and free social, healthcare and educational services – are becoming common aspects of contemporary society, even norms that determine the possibilities of personal and professional activity. In this context, everyone is expected to improve their capacities in terms of resilience, adaptability and elasticity in order to become resistant to crisis situations. The imperative of the “entrepreneurial self” (Bröckling 2016) contributes to the normalization of extraordinary situations by steering individuals and populations to persistent improvement, with constant risk prediction and adaptation to uncertain professional and life circumstances. In this sense, the goals of humanitarianism are no longer aimed at controlling emergency situations, but at optimizing the behavior of

populations and individuals affected by them (Duffield 2019: 21).

In addition to Mark Duffield, the term post-humanitarianism is also used by Lillie Chouliaraki (2013 and 2021) in her analysis of media reporting on humanitarian issues. She notes the transformation of scenes of “the pain of others” (Sontag 2005) – a kind of photorealism that was previously used to elicit sympathy among viewers/readers – into scenes of self-sacrificing humanitarians, idealistic donors who serve as moral role models for citizens of the global north. Shifting attention from the pain of others to the “western actor” is a consequence of the so-called sympathy fatigue and skepticism that occurs with constant exposure to “iconographies of suffering” (Chouliaraki 2021: 424). However, by focusing on the activities and responsiveness of western actors, the post-humanitarian representation only deepened the gap between “helpers” and “victims” (“us” and “them”), and transformed the earlier “morality of pity” into the individualized morality of the postmodern citizen, which continues to obfuscate structural causes of suffering (Chouliaraki 2021: 426).

When looking at the practices of the refugee regime, patterns of post-humanitarianism can be seen in the integration activities of local and international organizations. In an interview conducted as part of dissertation research (Pozniak 2022), one interlocutor, in charge of the integration of persons under international protection at that time, referred to the difficulties in “adjusting the viewpoints” of persons who received international protection without questioning the very concept of integration, nor the assumption that refugees should adapt to the system, and not the other way around:

This was a really demanding job, not as much in contact with them, but rather in adjusting their viewpoints and perception of the system of the Republic of Croatia. In other words, integration. They came here to integrate. I had to correct them in certain codes, but the biggest problem I had was with domestic institutions.

In addition to equating integration to “correcting” the behavior of persons under international protection, this fragment illustrates the complex relationship between the normalization of the image of obedient and adaptable refugees and the criticism of the missing and/or deficient state and local infrastructure that was a factor in the work of this employee. During the conversation, the same interlocutor stated that he knew that his words might sound “callous,” but that this was an “operating mode” that had helped him overcome the difficult moments that come with humanitarian work. He also added:

Another thing, these people are pretty much, by nature, inert and not really interested in working on a regular basis, like eight hours a day. These are people who are used to a casual lifestyle, used to the fact that time is absolutely irrelevant. There have been several situations where they would be hired, but they said they had various diseases. If they get a job, they lose their welfare rights, they lose the right to housing and become an even bigger local problem.

From his criticism of the resourcefulness of refugees, such as retaining the right to social assistance by avoiding work, we can infer that this worker tried to encourage the self-realization of refugees as obedient, but self-responsible subjects. Thus, it seems as though the goal of post-humanitarian integration is the creation of a diligent and obedient workforce that is independent, proactive and resilient to the extent set by support programs: seemingly flexible, but still disciplined, humble and grateful in the optimal use of its capacities. Therefore, unless they are combined with diligence and obedience, resourcefulness and proactivity (preferred characteristics of the neoliberal subject), paradoxically, do not fit the profile of the ideal victim.

Resilience humanitarianism did not, therefore, reject the idea of passive and obedient victims, but added new characteristics to the existing image. The habitus of the ideal refugee now includes the ambivalent figure of a disciplined but resilient refugee who establishes an optimal balance between passivity and proactivity, helplessness and the imperative of the entrepreneurial self.

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