Different shades of ‘neutrality’: Arab Gulf NGO responses to Syrian refugees in northern Lebanon

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Introduction

This chapter explores different forms of humanitarian-assistance provision to refugees living in northern Lebanon and argues that aid provision cannot be explained by what is commonly known as a binary between ‘apolitical humanitarianism’ and ‘political humanitarianism’. The Dunantist approach to humanitarianism maintains that actors must conceal their political aims and intentions, and present themselves as holding no contextual interests (De Chaine, 2002: 363). However, it has often been assumed that it is impossible for state and non-state aid providers from ‘the Global South’ to uphold the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality – that is, respectively, the principles of responding according to people’s needs and of not taking sides in a conflict in order to make decisions independently (Mačák, 2015: 161).

In this chapter, I do not aim to trace whether it is empirically feasible or impossible to maintain neutrality and impartiality in the provision of aid in crisis situations. Instead, I specifically seek to question what neutrality – even when employed as a rhetorical device – is able to engender at a societal level and in relations between aid actors and recipients in contexts of crisis management. To do so, I first show how different humanitarian models are based on nuanced understandings and practices of neutrality in northern Lebanon. In this framework, I mark out the peculiarity of what I call a form of ‘political realism’ embraced by Arab Gulf-funded NGOs in Lebanon. I argue that political realism unravels different shades of the neutrality mantra, which, in turn, is far from merely being the vessel of ‘Northern’ humanitarianism.
To investigate the nuanced character of what Mark Cutts (1998: 7) refers to as ‘operational neutrality’—that is, the attempt made by NGOs to enhance a perception of neutrality—in areas of humanitarian intervention, I draw on the aftermath of the July 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel, and the arrival of Syrian refugees in the villages of Akkar (a region in North Lebanon). Between 2011 and 2013, I conducted in-depth interviews and participant observation with Syrian refugees who had fled violence and political persecution in Syria. I also draw upon ethnographic research that I conducted with two groups of aid workers and NGO leaders. The first group included representatives of secular local and international NGOs: the Lebanese Amel Association, UNHCR, the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Danish Refugee Council. The second comprised representatives of Arab Gulf-funded NGOs overtly inspired by Islamic values, even though not all are officially registered as ‘faith-based organizations’: the Kuwaiti Association, the Qatari Initiative and the Saudi Taiba. At the time of fieldwork, all of these NGOs predominantly provided food, shelter, medical assistance and education in North Lebanon. Different Arab Gulf countries pursue diversified politics of aid in the region: in this chapter, I discuss their politics in relation to their own neutrality discourse and practices. All names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

I start by demonstrating that the principle of neutrality not only plays a different role across different models of implementing humanitarian action but is also differently conceived of by various stakeholders. Departing from Jonathan Darling’s definition of depoliticization (2014: 74)—that is, a set of tendencies and alliances that produces and maintains particular perceptual orientations—I aim to illustrate how Geneva-born humanitarianism, in the northern-Lebanese context, seeks to produce depoliticization as an actual condition for beneficiaries, which can better guarantee refugees’ survival and their recovery from crisis. In contrast, Arab Gulf NGOs are viewed as adopting the framework of neutrality in order to produce a specific process of politicization, yet with means that are considered to be internationally accountable.

Analysing neutrality on the ground: Beyond the logic of failures and successes

An expanding body of literature highlights the extent to which politics and religion have intertwined in various ways throughout the history of humanitarianism (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011; Zaman, 2012; Ager and
Ager, 2015; Carpi and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020). When war-affected people identify themselves as members of faith communities, they often tend to express their aims and motivations for responding to displacement through the use of religious language – which secular donors may associate with a religious agenda (Kraft and Smith, 2019). With religion being seen as a particularly powerful marker of identity in the crisis discourse (Wagenvoorde, 2017), secular Northern humanitarians often assume that faith-based acts of assistance are ill-placed to implement humanitarian neutrality and impartiality (Ferris, 2011). However, concern over promoting ideologies and world views to beneficiaries through the provision of aid is not limited to religious groups, since secular donors may also exercise their power over local communities (Lynch and Schwartz, 2016: 6–7, cited in Kraft and Smith, 2019: 39) or may believe in a civilizing mission vis-à-vis the people whom they assist.

In this context, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) uphold different shades of neutrality, and yet the diverse ways in which neutrality plays out in INGO and NGO responses has received scant attention from scholars or even humanitarian peers. Indeed, throughout my interviews with aid workers it transpired that, except for practitioners who neglect or oppose the official ideologies of the NGOs for which they work in war-affected areas, political neutrality and impartiality are often regarded as implementable and desirable on a practical level – or even as the only possible way to conduct humanitarian work in what are known as ‘complex emergencies’. Several events in humanitarian history, however, have demonstrated that not all international humanitarian agencies intend to or do in fact remain apolitical on the ground.

Among the most telling examples, in 1994 the medical NGO, Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, MSF), took a clear stance in the Rwandan genocide by denouncing the French Government’s continued support of the Hutu regime (Groves, 2008). Similarly, and more recently, emergency food aid to Syria has unintentionally assisted the Assad regime by channelling most assistance through government-approved organizations. As a result, according to some experts (Martínez and Eng, 2015), foreign donors have helped Bashar Al-Assad’s regime to fulfill the function of welfare provider and to pursue its military efforts by reducing expenditure on food distribution.

In such circumstances, neutrality turns into mere public rhetoric or the metaphysical ideal of philanthropists who purport to be neutral and impartial in their interventions. Nonetheless, the neutrality discourse does more than that. For instance, it can provide the foundations for negotiation between different warring parties, since the principles of
impartiality and neutrality can, on the level of diplomacy, be compatible with conflict resolution.

Following the genealogy of international assistance, neutrality and humanitarianism have intertwined in the following two ways (Duffield, 2014). According to advocates of so-called ‘apolitical’ or ‘prophetic’ humanitarianism – which rests on the prophecy of rescuing lives and alleviating human suffering at any cost (Duffield, 2014: 76–82) – assistance must be seen as just and ethical in itself. Conversely, since the 1990s, according to proponents of a ‘political’ or ‘new’ humanitarianism, the just and ethical have, rather, become an outcome of assistance: this implies that the most just or ethical course of action may be withdrawing from providing aid. In essence, by refraining from supporting any side in a conflict, humanitarianism has gradually become an arm of politics and governance: yet another force to transform social order and public spaces. In this framework, some aid providers regard relief as the sole and ultimate end (when assistance is approached as ‘prophetic’), while ‘new humanitarians’ (Duffield, 2014: 75) view aid as an instrument to promote social justice and rights.

Although such a relationship between humanitarianism and politics seems to be twofold, the tension does not merely lie between those actors who want to eradicate the underlying causes that make their beneficiaries vulnerable and those who limit their actions to alleviate human suffering. ‘Operational neutrality’ (Cutts, 1998: 7) is one of the factors that can reveal a much more complex picture of humanitarian neutrality than hitherto appreciated. It highlights how politics is discussed in humanitarian language and how it is also entangled in humanitarian practices. Specifically, operational neutrality aims to enhance our very perception of dealing with a neutral actor, rather than aiming to adopt neutrality in a deceiving manner as a standalone modality of aid management and policymaking.

It should be noted that the lines between NGO official ideologies and the ways in which aid workers imagine humanitarian neutrality remain blurred. While international NGO workers act through the values of neutrality and impartiality – using them as a personal and professional drive and an aspiration tool – INGOs’ neutrality politics vary considerably. While INGOs’ neutrality rhetoric is mostly assumed to secure access to local beneficiaries by gaining the trust of local authorities and building up self-legitimacy, there is a common belief that Arab Gulf NGOs merely use neutrality to cloak political competition with a moral aura. Furthermore, NGOs that are (or are assumed to be) inspired by
Islamic – and, more generally, religious – values are often believed to have an inherently problematic relationship with neutrality (Ferris, 2011: 618).

My aim here is not to delegitimize all kinds of humanitarian action by ascribing to it mere political motivations. Instead, I intend to highlight the fact that these diverse – yet shared – humanitarian discourses of neutrality have not yet led local and international, secular and religious NGOs to achieve a common ground of communication and a deeper form of mutual knowledge.

The multi-purposed survival of ‘prophetic humanitarianism’: Neutrality as an imperative ideal

While viewing Lebanon as a chessboard on which identity politics defines geographical and demographic spaces, specific factors bias the conditionality of aid provision and the implementation of neutrality and impartiality agendas. These factors include the provider’s geographical location, the political origin of funding sources, the way in which funding is channelled and allocated, and the political orientation of humanitarian staff.

In this section, I provide different examples from local and international NGOs throughout Lebanon to show the diverse strategies that are employed to uphold standards of neutrality, while resorting to different understandings and configurations of neutrality. In spite of the ideological variety of NGOs’ original manifestos, most of the INGOs that I interviewed in Akkar seek to uphold neutrality standards by refusing to address beneficiaries who are in some way involved with the political parties at war, and instead search for the ‘ideal refugee’ (following Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010) who epitomizes the expectations of donors and aid providers.

Among the few large-sized local NGOs operating in the area, some have branches in different political spaces. For example, Amel Association, while not operating in northern Lebanon, used to have a branch in ‘Arsal (Beqaa Valley), where one of the informal bases of the Free Syrian Army (opposing the Syrian Government) was said to be located. At the same time, this NGO had a large branch in Haret Hreik, known as the urban heart of the Lebanese political party Hezbollah, which is the major local ruler and an ally of the Syrian regime. In our interview, Amel representatives often referred to the political diversity that exists in its territories of intervention in order to promote its accomplished strategies of ‘political neutrality’. In contrast, Arab Gulf donors
have largely funded the post-2006 reconstruction of Hezbollah-led South Lebanon (Barakat and Zyck, 2010), but they generally have not established branches in the south of the country.

Financial independence also constitutes one of the main avenues to obtaining operational neutrality. With regard to this aspect, an NGO worker from the Qatari Initiative operating in Wadi Khaled (Akkar) argued that ‘Unlike other NGOs, Qatar does not need to get money from anyone else. This allows the government as well as our NGO to make its own choices.’ In a similar vein, the Norwegian Refugee Council does not accept funds from the US Government for reasons of ‘political sensitivity’; however, it welcomes financial support from other foreign governments – especially the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), which aims to provide aid and civil protection. In turn, the latter seeks financial independence so as to not depend on the finances of UN agencies.

In sum, neutrality can be defined as an enhanced moral status gained by being funded by either NGOs or Islamic charities rather than by foreign governments, which would be too openly political. As a further example, the Lebanese leader of the Tripoli-based Kuwaiti Association highlighted the association’s financial independence from Kuwaiti politics, ‘as [its] funding comes from NGOs that are located in Kuwait City rather than the Kuwaiti government’.

INGOs in Akkar also pursue operational neutrality by avoiding cash-in-hand policies and by providing payments to house owners to host refugees for a limited period of time. Contrary to such politics of neutrality, which imply cash restrictions for beneficiaries – also including several Arab Gulf donors – the Saudi Taiba, previously located in Halba, overtly embraced political and pragmatic realism by directly giving cash to refugees. Cash-in-hand programmes are considered to be a quick – although temporary – path to self-reliance, which has only recently been recognized as a dignity tool worldwide (Lehmann and Masterson, 2014; Harvey and Bailey, 2015: 2). Adopted in the first instance by the Saudi NGO in Akkar, cash-in-hand programmes are now increasingly promoted across the broader framework of international aid providers working on livelihoods in Lebanon.

A further avenue through which international aid providers pursue operational neutrality is by hiring humanitarian staff who supposedly hold different political opinions and orientations. Indeed, the majority of the secular INGO representatives whom I interviewed in Akkar in 2012 and 2013 stated that a small number of their workers tend to support
the Syrian regime. However, they specified that all NGO workers are expected – and, indeed, requested – not to share their own political opinions in the workplace, in order to comply with apolitical humanitarianism.

In the framework of the presence of Syrian refugees in Akkar’s villages since 2011, beneficiaries do not view neutrality as a key behavioural value but rather as hypocritical in nature. In spite of different NGOs embodying differing approaches to neutrality, beneficiaries develop their own understanding of neutrality – within which their emotional and political reactions emerge. For instance, homogeneous forms of NGO neutrality discourses are perceived on the local level as a tacit strategy to uphold the legitimacy of the Assad regime – and thus, as part of a system that does not intend to eradicate the very source of the conflict and generalized violence. This also resonates in the words of a Syrian refugee interviewee:

They [the staff of an INGO in Halba] said their role is not taking sides when I asked for medication. I have a maimed hand, as you can see … I was fighting in the Free Syrian Army. That’s why they don’t want to help me. It’s because they still want Bashar [al-Assad] to be my president! This is the bitter truth.

Aside from political neutrality being unrealistic in the encounter between humanitarian action and conflict processes, in this chapter I seek to question whether NGOs are able to use operational neutrality to provide a ground for future negotiations and rapprochements between warring parties or even to manage antagonism between humanitarian counterparts. Against this backdrop, what have NGOs’ apolitical rhetoric and operational neutrality produced on a societal level within refugee and local communities in the villages of Akkar? Distress and increased fear and anxiety within the refugee community were often the response to such a ‘discrepancy between environmental pressures and organisational culture’ (Barnett, 2005: 728). The words of Ahmed, a Syrian refugee relocated to the rural hamlet of Belanet al-Hisa, are meaningful in this regard: ‘We don’t want food and shelter to survive in Lebanon; we want you to help us to stop all this.’ This invocation directly undermines the cornerstones of ‘minimalist’ humanitarian neutrality (Weiss, 1999), which never sides with the crisis-stricken victims but merely seeks to heal them and which, despite an evolution towards ‘political humanitarianism’, still predominate in the contemporary philosophy of humanitarian-aid provision.
Political realism as a complex form of ‘new humanitarianism’

Scholars have noticed the depoliticization of Muslim NGOs’ work in recent years, in all likelihood as a result of NGOs being under pressure to adopt less overtly religious approaches to humanitarian endeavours (Wigger, 2005). In the ongoing Syrian humanitarian situation, while most INGOs still resort to operational neutrality as a way of cultivating international accountability, the representatives of NGOs funded by Arab Gulf countries whom I interviewed in Halba (Akkar) and the Lebanese city of Tripoli in 2012 and 2013 openly declared that they have started programmes that aim to support Syrian political opponents fleeing into Lebanon, thereby assuming a ‘maximalist’ stance (Weiss, 1999). More specifically, the Saudi Islamic organization Taiba and the Kuwaiti Association claimed to have been the first to establish systematic assistance programmes for refugees (from April 2011 onwards), and also the first to intervene to assist the war-stricken during the July 2006 war that Israel waged against Lebanon and, in particular, the country’s Hezbollah-held areas.

This elucidation is meaningful due to the antithetical political stance of Arab Gulf countries on this matter: the Israel–Lebanon conflict was mainly experienced–Hezbollah leading the so-called March 8 Alliance, which has long supported the Syrian regime’s presence in Lebanon (1976–2005) and inside Syria during the Syrian conflict (2011–). Likewise, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, currently at odds with each other in regional politics, both fund the ‘Coalition of Charitable Organisations’ (I’tilaf al-Jam’iyyat al-Khairiyiyat al-Khairiyiyat) (Schmelter, 2019: 6), which coordinates the majority of Islamic local NGOs in Lebanon.

During our interviews, most of the beneficiaries of international and local NGOs expressed their desire for politically engaged and consequence-focused humanitarianism, such as clear-cut acts of support and advocacy that go beyond the mere provision of medical relief and social assistance. In other words, the only desire expressed by the beneficiaries whom I interviewed is that humanitarian actors help them renormalize their lives through international solidarity and action. Notwithstanding, this is commonly believed to come at the expense of a blatantly biased selection of beneficiaries.

The Gulf-funded NGOs that I researched in Akkar and Tripoli were explicit in their intention of providing relief to Syrians in order to support the anti-regime cause, therefore backing the Syrian opposition and bearing witness to the refugees’ suffering. This form of humanitarianism
was considered to be openly partisan, and, as such, it was harshly crit-
icized by international and local NGO workers. Political humanitarian-
ism is rooted in – and acts on – the grounds of practical and political
consequences, and is still perceived as the antithesis of Geneva-born
international neutrality, which is often deemed the worldwide upholder
of good governance par excellence in times of conflict. This form of ‘new’
humanitarianism relies on realistic ways of operating – namely, by rec-
ognizing its own active role in crises – and it even elevates what I call
‘political realism’ – which here involves taking the victims’ side – to a
moral standard.

However, by diplomatically complying with either apolitical or
political humanitarianism, secular and faith-based NGOs in northern
Lebanon still mobilize their morality as a way in which to either counter
or support the political agendas of other (in)formal actors. To provide an
example, the July 2006 war became an opportunity for state and non-
state actors alike to gain international as well as regional accountability
by supporting the reconstruction efforts of the Hezbollah-led March 8
coalition across Lebanon. Similarly, the aid providers commonly known
to be close to the opposing March 14 coalition, which was led by Saad
Hariri’s al-Mustaqbal party, are now believed to be the political entity
most heavily involved in the provision of aid to Syrians because of their
political aim of toppling Assad’s regime in Syria. According to members
of the March 14-oriented NGOs whom I interviewed – mostly funded
by Arab Gulf countries – the political realism of providing assistance in
situations of conflict and displacement is not only unavoidable but also
morally desirable.

Such an overt politicization of aid is, however, legitimized by decla-
rations of good intentionality on the basis of philanthropic acts. Indeed,
in this hybrid scenario, which is neither exclusively apolitical nor polit-
cal, aid is adopted as a quick strategy to show or discard the impartial
humaneness of certain political parties, confessional groups or NGOs
close to the so-called March 14 Alliance. Providers who embrace political
realism, like the representatives of the Arab Gulf NGOs whom I inter-
viewed, generally do not disguise their political agenda but, as outlined
above, hasten to point out that they do not merely intervene in line with
political interests. Consequently, the ambivalence generated by their
layered rhetoric and clear-cut stance regarding intervention compli-
cates the notion of humanitarian neutrality, therefore wavering between
apparent ‘prophetic/apolitical humanitarianism’ and ‘new/political
humanitarianism’.
In the contemporary proliferation of humanitarian programmes in Lebanon, the political seems to be accepted as long as it is exhibited with its moral face. Local politics, experienced as a constant source of instability and immorality, is a common historical denominator. As such, politics in Lebanon paradoxically constitutes a historical problem that needs to be fought and defeated, but that can scarcely be changed.

In essence, Arab Gulf-promoted humanitarianism drops neutrality as a moral standard while making the political moral. Furthermore, it indicates different shades of operational neutrality. Diverting attention from the successes and failures of humanitarian neutrality, the Geneva-born international humanitarian agencies aspire to be held accountable by their beneficiaries by embracing impartiality and asserting political neutrality. Conversely, Arab Gulf-funded NGOs overtly share their political aims while ensuring that their own practices are not perceived by their beneficiaries and other aid actors as neutral. However, at the same time, Arab Gulf-funded NGOs still present their intentions for providing aid as unconditionally humane. As an example, while the Qatari Initiative remarks that its present work in the Syrian crisis is comparable with the assistance that they provided in the July 2006 war, it still acknowledges that the way in which they allocate aid provision normally reflects Qatar’s foreign policy:

Hezbollah’s victory in the July war and an eventually successful regime change in Syria would represent two opposing regional scenarios. We intervened in both cases. Yet Qatar implements its humanitarian practices independently of political circumstances. However, it’s normal that aid provision seeks to further the foreign policy of any state: at the time of the July war, Qatar needed to play a greater role in regional politics. At present, in the capacity of an established political actor, it would rather pursue goals that better suit its own domestic politics [my emphasis].

In summary, advocates of political realism in Akkar’s villages consider humanitarianism to be a distinct and valuable form of politics, according to which the very ideology of political neutrality is unethical and impeachable. Although they can still be defined as ‘solidarists’ (Weiss, 1999), identifying totally with the victims and conveying their own political projects through assistance to the latter, they cannot be classified simplistically under the banner of ‘new humanitarianism’ (Prendergast, 1996: 42). In fact, these NGOs resort to more complex forms of neutrality discourses: while they aim to prevent external perceptions of dealing
with a neutral actor in order for their practices to be deemed successful, they still resort to the rhetoric of impartial humaneness and neutrality to moralize their politics and to negotiate their own place within the arena of international aid. Arab Gulf-funded NGOs in Akkar instead reject operational neutrality in managing their political relations with beneficiaries, while mostly operating outside of the UN coordination system and rarely looking for partnerships. They likewise protect specific social groups in order to accommodate their own local politics of resource allocation.

It is by now evident that moral demands have increasingly populated the international and domestic political space. The ethical configuration of politics and the political character of humanitarian action are now widely recognized. Nevertheless, it is still worth researching how the interaction between ethics and politics impacts on Lebanese – and, in this case, Syrian – society. While the beneficiary, representing the ideal polity of the provider, becomes an a priori deserving member of humanity in ‘prophetic humanitarianism’, the beneficiary is recognized as ‘human’ only when adhering to a specific political partisanship in ‘political realism’. On the one hand, prophetic humanitarianism deprives the victim subject of any political dimension and expects them to be apolitical. On the other, political realism expects the subject to be filled with social and political motivations that best correspond to its own primary purpose – which is, however, conveyed as humane to the wider public. Both tendencies, while showing an apparent polarization of humanitarian action, try to preserve the sociopolitical order that suits the desire to survive as a successful humanitarian actor.

**Imperative neutrality and political realism: Effects on the ground?**

While contemporary humanitarian accounts show that apolitical humanitarianism is seen internationally as the norm for a large segment of INGOs in Lebanon and worldwide, Arab Gulf-funded NGOs seem to pursue political advocacy through aid provision. My interviewees have, however, emphasized how the latter explicitly aim to support the cause embodied by displaced Syrians while seeking to rhetorically ‘humanize’ their political agendas.

NGOs close to the two major political orientations in Lebanon – identified above as the March 8 and March 14 coalitions, in place since 2005 – increasingly promote their moral intentions of serving humanity through aid provision. Predominant attempts to ‘humanize’ politics
enable humanitarian and political actors to enhance their accountability in international and regional politics. Nevertheless, such attempts remain ineffective before the widespread domestic disaffection of political and religious institutions in Lebanon. If neutrality is universally proven to endure as a strong rhetoric with which to campaign for humaneness and morality, it has so far failed as a device in crisis management, being unable to enhance coordination and effectiveness on the ground. Furthermore, it has brought no benefit in relation to regional protracted political failures, which underlie Lebanon’s increasingly protracted emergencies.

Since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, both the prophetic and the overtly partisan NGO-ization of northern Lebanon have contributed to the political polarization of the country, through which the crisis has been misleadingly understood and approached. On the one hand, the neutral language developed by international actors – while supposedly bringing in ‘good governance’ without the aim of changing societies – ends up preserving the mistrusted political elites in Lebanon. On the other hand, partisan language inherently fosters and supports the cause of the social groups to whom it is addressed, who, in turn, must reflect the provider’s political expectations and desires in order to be assisted.

Operational neutrality is often believed to positively contribute to peace negotiations or the avoidance of conflict but, as my fieldwork has shown, it has instead exacerbated people’s mistrust of Lebanese institutions. Thus far, neutrality has seemed to be failing as a diplomatic instrument intended to expedite peace through aid provision in Lebanon’s crises: it is, instead, employed in moral campaigns as a further political token of conflict and competition between international, regional and local actors. The widespread politicization of aid and the humanization of politics that I have traced above question Lebanon’s political scenario as an arena of bipolar power circuits – simplified as the pro-Assad March 8 and the anti-Assad March 14 coalitions – that variously enact political competition along with competition over ethical values.

**Conclusion**

Humanitarian and political actors in northern Lebanon adopt diverse strategies to bring humanity into politics and politics into humanitarianism. While prophetic/apolitical humanitarianism has traditionally been opposed to new/political humanitarianism, the Lebanese scenario of humanitarian provision appears far more hybrid and muddled than this binary model suggests. As illustrated in this chapter, international
humanitarian actors deal in different ways with the recognition of their political consequences on the ground. Furthermore, Arab Gulf-funded NGOs adopt hybrid strategies of neutrality, seemingly complying with the Global North’s standards of humanitarianism while simultaneously embracing political realism. As much as neutrality, the idea of ‘being human’ is used as a token of accountability by all humanitarian actors, while mostly secular – and mostly ‘Northern’ – actors have remained the ones that define what the very paradigms of humanitarian neutrality are.

Such a symbiosis of ethics and politics makes it challenging to identify the fluctuating dynamics of rapprochement between different political actors in Lebanon. The variegated prism of neutrality therefore gives birth to a hybrid arena of political competition that, by becoming moral, goes far beyond the simplistic binaries of Lebanese political tactics of power, accountability and survival.

Notes

1. Henry Dunant was the founder of the Red Cross, a movement marked by neutrality and independence from governments. In modern humanitarianism, it is held that relief provision and politics should remain separate.
2. For a discussion – from the perspective of international and national law and migration policy – of how states justify and enact (non-)responses in humanitarian settings, see Wilde (this volume).
3. For analyses of refugees’ encounters with diverse actors – including refugees of different nationalities and host governments – elsewhere in Lebanon, see the contributions in this volume by Qasmiyeh, Maqusi, and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh.
4. Skype conversation with Juliano Fiori, Head of the Humanitarian Affairs Team at Save the Children UK, 28 April 2017.
5. On the different strategies used by INGOs to promote support for LGBTI asylum seekers in the UK, see Raboin (this volume).
6. Interview with a staff member, 3 January 2013.
7. Interview conducted in Tripoli, Lebanon, 18 December 2012.
8. The Norwegian Refugee Council also receives funds from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is, in turn, financed by Australia, Japan, the Arab Gulf, the US and the EU. Interview with the Program Support Manager in Lebanon, Beirut, 21 November 2012.
10. Interview with Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and UNHCR, al-Qobaiyat, February 2013.
11. Interview conducted on 14 December 2012.
15. The March 8 and March 14 coalitions took their names from the dates of the demonstrations organized in 2005, which were respectively in support of and in opposition to the Syrian Army’s presence in Lebanon. The so-called Pax Syriana, indeed, was supposedly meant to ensure the endurance of peace in Lebanon after the Ta’ef Agreements that concluded the Lebanese Civil War (1975–89/90).
16. Interview conducted in Tripoli, Lebanon, 18 December 2012.
References


