Humanitarianism: Keywords

Humanitarianism

Keywords

Edited by

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BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

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Innocence

Calls for humanitarian interventions are often based on the urgent need to protect "innocent lives" (i.e. civilians under attack, refugees, trafficked victims, and—especially—vulnerable children). In a recent report, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, CEO of Save the Children and former Prime Minister of Denmark, made a passionate plea to stop the suffering of children affected by war: "These children have seen and experienced things no child ever should: their homes burnt, their families killed and their *innocence* stolen" (Save the Children International 2018).

As a moral and ethical concept, innocence refers to the absence of guilt, moral wrongdoing, and responsibility. Either as a sinless, pre-fall, Garden-of-Eden condition in Judeo-Christian theology or as the pre-social "state of nature" in modern Enlightenment philosophy, the notion of innocence that historically shapes humanitarian sensitivity designates an apolitical status of "epistemic and moral purity" (Ticktin 2017: 578), uncorrupted and uncontaminated by power, and best epitomized by children. Addressing children's suffering through the trope of "stolen innocence," humanitarianism can thus claim to operate beyond political logics.

Questioning the cross-cultural universality of the concept and its supposed apolitical character, critical social scientists have argued that the humanitarian mobilization of innocence produces profoundly political consequences as it sets oversimplifying dichotomic boundaries between "the innocent" and "the guilty" and establishes ethnocentric hierarchies of moral deservingness between "differently innocent" victims (Fassin 2010). During the 2015 European

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migration reception crisis, for instance, children and (pregnant) women were granted priority access to humanitarian protection as archetypical figures of innocence in the West. Some male migrants purposely made themselves seriously injured or sick to qualify as defenseless and innocent (enough) for protection, while boatmen were assigned the position of ruthless, cold-blooded "human traffickers"—though many of them may be family members, friends, or part of migrant communities in a similar situation to the migrants themselves (Ticktin 2015).

Similarly, not all children are considered equally innocent, and the dividing line between innocence and culpability can be blurred, creating contradictions. The massive involvement of children as combatants in conflict zones, from Somalia to Myanmar, from Yemen to Syria, has scandalously contaminated the purity of childhood innocence and generated moral panic. At the end of the civil war in Sierra Leone (1991–2002), major humanitarian organizations lobbied to prevent any child perpetrator below 18 years of age from being prosecuted or punished for war crimes in the country's United Nations special court. As a result, former child soldiers were inserted in socio-rehabilitation programs, including special schools, vocational training, and child protection structures. This generated a widespread sense of injustice among those survivors who saw the killers of their family members—who were now recategorized as innocent victims—being granted greater access to the limited postwar development funds (Rosen 2007).

Humanitarian organizations' own "innocence"—namely their neutrality, impartiality, and independence from the "corrupted realm" of politics—is also increasingly challenged by the inescapable necessity to interact, negotiate, and mingle with a plurality of political actors in complex emergencies. Aid agencies involved in peace-keeping operations or post-disaster reconstructions have to cooperate with national governments and military forces, while subcontracting to other non-governmental organizations and local organizations to deliver services. In fact, providing relief to afflicted victims does not occur in a political vacuum (Weiss 2007) and, despite official rhetoric, it often forces humanitarians to act outside the framework of innocence.

Giuseppe Bolotta

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Innovation

In November 2009, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance held an innovation fair introducing the notion of innovation as a key category within the humanitarian system (Betts and Bloom 2014). Since then, innovation has been the subject and focus of attention in the humanitarian policy agenda, within and across organizations. Additionally, special funds and partnerships, so-called "innovation units," have been developed by several United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, governments, the military, and businesses (UNHCR 2015; McDonald et al. 2017). Although the notion itself remains poorly understood in many international debates (Bloom and Betts 2013) and its "meaning and value remain contested" (Betts and Bloom 2014: 5), humanitarian innovation has been embraced as a strategic concern for organizations and the humanitarian field as a whole (Scriven 2016). Broadly put, humanitarian innovation refers to "a means of adaptation and improvement through finding and scaling solutions to problems, in the forms of products, processes or wider business models" (Betts and Bloom 2014: 5) with the aim of transforming the operations, management, methods, and partnerships of organizations (Scriven 2016).

The emerging discussion about the term draws mainly on the traditional understandings and models from management theory (Scriven 2016). While the concept of "novation" first appeared in the 13th century as a legal category signifying imitation, it later developed into the term "innovation," which endorses "the concept of a new idea being scaled over time" (Godin quoted in Bloom and Betts 2013: 5). In the first studies that treated innovation as an independent subject of analysis, it was correlated with theories of diffusion, the manner by which ideas are adopted by people, and with business management,

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