

Special Issue: Southern Responses to Displacement – Editors' Introduction

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In December 2023, the South African government – a country that fought for and won its own freedom from apartheid and colonial occupation – brought a ground-breaking genocide case against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), seeking and being granted provisional measures to uphold ‘the right of the Palestinians in Gaza to be protected from acts of genocide’ (ICJ Order 2024: §54). Throughout this process, Southern¹ and postcolonial states have sought to hold hegemonic states and institutions accountable for committing and/or being complicit in the most serious of crimes under international law. In turn, headlines around the world announced the end of the ‘Western-led world order’ (Callamard, 2024; *The Economist*, 2024; Islam, 2024; *The Jordan Times*, 2024; Mansour, 2024; Takahashi, 2024) as around the globe, politicians, academics, directors of international, national and local human rights organisations, as well as civil society networks, have highlighted the underlying hypocrisy and violence of a ‘rules-based’ order founded and led by Western states which perpetuates colonial systems of oppression and exploitation and systematically fails to uphold the rights of peoples affected by occupation, conflict, mass displacement and dispossession. Highly visible and audible on a global stage, states from across the global South have been recognised as diplomatic leaders at the United Nations (UN), and elsewhere, seeking a permanent ceasefire and compliance with the ICJ’s Interim Orders, with resolutions drafted inter alios) by Algeria, Ecuador, Guyana, Japan,² Malta, Mozambique, Republic of Korea and Sierra Leone in March 2024 – Namibia submitting interventions in relation to the South African case brought before the ICJ (on the latter, see Mhaka, 2024) – and signing resolutions passed by the Non-Aligned Movement, the

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League (on different African states’ roles in relation to the ICJ case, see Diallo, 2024).

South–South Solidarity in Context

While the very concept and contours of the ‘South’ remain contested (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley, 2018), such acts and actors have often been explicitly positioned as embodying powerful processes of anti-colonial, South–South solidarity, and have rightly been identified as enacting an explicit challenge to the hegemonic ‘world order’ and to the ‘West’/‘global North’. Nonetheless, it is essential to view these processes, and this moment, not as an exception or a paradigm shift per se, but rather as part of a long history of ‘Southern responses’ to ‘humanitarian crises’ and crises of protection (Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011, 2015a, 2019a, 2021; Diallo, 2024; Rao, 2024; Billaud and De Lauri, 2024).³ Indeed, in spite of the continued common usage of terms such as ‘the international system’ and ‘the international humanitarian community’ (to which we return below), as if describing fixed and internally coherent frames of reference (Telford and Cosgrave, 2007), it is increasingly recognised that a plurality of ‘systems’, and a plurality of ‘international communities of response’, exist and have long existed (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019a). In effect, alongside academics, policymakers and practitioners interrogating, critiquing and resisting who is identified with, included in, or excluded from the hegemonic ‘world system’, researchers have also been probing why, and with what effect, ‘non-hegemonic’ responders to conflict, humanitarian and disaster situations have systematically been erased from the normative



history of humanitarianism (Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013; Davey and Scriven, 2015; Sezgin and Dijkzeul, 2015; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015a, 2019a, 2019b; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2016). Such studies note that there is a plurality of ‘orders’ in our multipolar world, and that “the” (normative, Northern-led) “international humanitarian community” is only one of a plurality of “international communities of response”, some of which work with, and others explicitly against, “the” hegemonic Northern-led humanitarian system’ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019a: S36, 2019b). It is in this regard that this special issue – guest edited by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Estella Carpi – takes as its starting point the plurality of ‘communities of response’ to conflict and displacement.⁴

This is a plurality that is clearly demonstrated in the names of the hospitals systematically attacked and destroyed – as part of its attacks on Gaza’s broader civilian infrastructure – by the Israeli forces across the Gaza Strip since October 2023. With 31 of 36 hospitals across Gaza having been destroyed or damaged by May 2024, the names of some of these medical institutions remind us of the long history of international cooperation led by countries and communities from across the global South in support of occupied, displaced and dispossessed Palestinians in Gaza:

- Al-Helal Emirati Maternity Hospital, Rafah (funded by the United Arab Emirates (UAE));
- two Jordanian military field hospitals (one inaugurated in 2009 and the second established in Khan Younis in late November 2023);⁵
- the Indonesia Hospital Gaza City (funded by Indonesia’s Medical Emergency Rescue Committee);⁶
- the Turkish–Palestinian Friendship Hospital, Gaza City (built and equipped by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency); and
- the Dar Essalaam Hospital⁷ (funded inter alios by Qatar Red Crescent, Muslim Care-Malaysia Society, Al-Taawon, Partners International Medical Aid-South Africa, Palestine International Medical Aid, Patients Helping Fund Society-Kuwait, Human Appeal International-UAE, Zakat Committee for Islamic Advocacy for the Palestinian People, and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development).

In addition to acknowledging, of course, that these countries and organisations have diverse official and unofficial motivations, do not fall ‘straightforwardly’ into the category of ‘global South’ or indeed wish to be labelled as ‘Southern’ per se, it is equally the case that these state and non-state actors have not been working in *isolation* from actors from across the global North. Building on a long-standing official tradition of support

and solidarity between states that identify themselves or are identified by others as members of the global South, BRICS (Brazil–Russia–India–China–South Africa) and/or the Non-Aligned Movement (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015a; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley, 2018; Rao, 2024), South Africa has been supported in its legal case against Israel before the ICJ not only by Southern and postcolonial countries including Nicaragua, Colombia, Turkey,⁸ Libya, Egypt, Maldives, Mexico, Chile and Cuba, but also by Slovenia (the first European country to formally join the case in January 2024), Ireland, Belgium and Spain (UNRIC (United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe), 2024). Equally, the funders of the above-mentioned Dar Essalaam Hospital also included the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as well as European organisations and initiatives such as Wilde Ganzen, Vriheid Voorr Palestina-Holland and Stichting Palestina Fonds-Nederland, indicating the wide range of actors from the South and North alike who have often worked together to provide displaced and dispossessed people with access to key rights. Even in cases where one state is the figurehead whose name is borne following the establishment of a hospital, this has often taken place in partnership with major international organisations, with an *intertwining* of funding, institutional and programmatic approaches such as that witnessed in the case of the Jordanian military field hospitals, constructed and led by the Jordanian Royal Medical Services while being supported through donations from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Direct Relief to provide medical infrastructure and care to Palestinians in Gaza.⁹

In turn, the medical professionals working at such hospitals include an equally diverse community of medics. First and foremost, the vast majority of clinicians therein are multiply displaced Gazan Palestinian professionals themselves: Palestinian refugees and internally displaced people who have been caring for other displaced Palestinians. Many of these doctors have been educated within Gaza and the broader region, such as Dr Abdelrahman Abu Shawish (who graduated from Gaza’s Azhar University) and Dr Alaa Kassab (who was educated in Cairo);¹⁰ they also include Palestinians such as Dr Fayez Abed, who graduated from Cuba’s Latin American School of Medicine in 2020 (Prensa Latina, 2023)¹¹ as part of Cuba’s historic medical scholarship programme for students from across the global South (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010, 2015a), and Dr Musa Abdul Khaliq, who graduated from medical school in Ukraine in 2023 as part of a longer history of Palestinian doctors educated in the countries of the former USSR¹² (Al Jazeera English, 2024; Fiddian-

Qasmiyeh, 2015a: 82). Palestinian doctors in Gaza have, in turn, been working alongside international medical humanitarian volunteers from around the world affiliated with the above-mentioned institutions and organisations: these include three Indonesian medical humanitarian volunteers with the Medical Emergency Rescue Committee (MER-C) working at the Indonesia Hospital who were ‘trapped’ inside Gaza as it was hermetically sealed in October 2023 and who decided to remain when ‘the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs [helped to] evacuate Indonesian citizens from Gaza’ (Llewellyn, 2023), to ‘stay inside Gaza because [they were needed] to take care of the humanitarian work’ before new medical teams could gain access (People’s Health Dispatch, 2023).

‘Local responders’ – Palestinians and non-Palestinians alike – who were already based in Gaza, have been joined by rotating medical teams as and when they have been permitted to cross the border, including members of the Palestinian diaspora, such as the British-Palestinian reconstructive surgeon Dr Ghassan Abu-Sitta, as well as volunteer doctors from countries including (in alphabetical order) Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Jordan and Pakistan.¹³ At risk of bombardment and at times desperately awaiting their own evacuation as hospitals have come under attack – too often to become the sites of mass graves – these doctors have typically been embedded within emergency medical teams which also demonstrate the intertwining of ‘Southern’ and ‘Northern’ institutions, such as Malaysian doctors working with Mercy Malaysia Emergency Medical Team¹⁴ under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO), and Jordanian doctors not only working for the Jordanian field hospitals but also travelling, for instance, as part of medical teams established by the International Rescue Committee and Medical Aid for Palestinians (Rédaction Africanews, 2024; Elayyan, 2024). Such teams have, of course, also included medics who hold European and North American nationalities and who have high profile personas in the public sphere, having often volunteered in Gaza, the West Bank and the Palestinian refugee camps across the region over the course of several decades (Haj-Hassan *et al.*, 2014; Algendy, 2024; Kossaify, 2024). Dozens of doctors travelling from countries of the global North to work in Gaza – such as Dr Fozia Alvi, Dr Yipeng Ge, Dr Yasser Khan, Dr Zaher Sahloul and Dr Abdo Algendy – themselves have personal and familial histories which position them as members of minoritised communities in the North, echoing academic arguments that, while the term ‘South’ is itself contested, there are arguably multiple Souths in the world, including ‘Souths’ (and Southern voices) within powerful metropolises in the North, as well as

multiple Souths within multiple peripheries (Connell, 2007; Sheppard and Nagar, 2004).

In turn, where possible, ‘Northern’ organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) have established clinics within still-operational hospitals born as embodiments of South–South solidarity; for instance, an MSF clinic was established within the Indonesia Hospital in Rafah in mid-December 2023 (MSF, 2024a), illustrating the ways that Northern and Southern institutions have sought to work together to not only provide life-saving support, but also actively challenge the status quo.¹⁵ Given the scale of destruction, some states have sought to find ways to provide *new* clinical infrastructure, although such initiatives have continued to be blocked by the Israeli state – for instance, in late 2023/early 2024, Indonesia sent a hospital ship with aid for Gaza in the hope that it would not only be able to deliver much needed medical supplies upon its arrival at the Egyptian port of Al-Arish via the Egyptian Red Crescent, but also eventually be granted permission for the ship itself to operate as a field hospital off Gaza’s coastline itself (VOA News, 2024; Malufti, 2024). As such initiatives continue to be blocked, it is clear that the humanitarian aid that has been prevented by the Israel forces from entering the Gaza Strip for months on end – in ongoing violation of the ICJ’s Interim Orders – include medical and food supplies provided by not only the UN, European Union (EU) and Northern-led international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), but also by states such as Indonesia, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Rwanda, Turkey, Tunisia and the UAE (Al Jazeera, 2023; Reuters, 2024), as well as by NGOs, faith-based groups, local and transnational civil society networks and diaspora organisations established, funded and led by citizens, migrants and refugees from around the world. Indeed, where Gazan Palestinian doctors have been working in situ with the support of volunteer Palestinian doctors from the diaspora, it is equally the case that Palestinian refugees from camps such as Baddawi camp in North Lebanon have collected funds and supported aid drives in yet another iteration of what can variously be denominated ‘diaspora humanitarianism’ or ‘refugee-refugee humanitarianism’ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2020b).¹⁶

As suggested above, these differently positioned actors have been working to *challenge* hegemonic systems, and at times they have worked *together* across in different ways and in different capacities, including as donors, funders, subcontractors, institutional partners and colleagues. As we have seen in Gaza (and elsewhere around the world), beyond or perhaps precisely in light of this multiplicity of ‘responders’, there are also a plurality of (unofficial and official) motivations and *principles* underpinning responses to mass displacement, some of

which overtly challenge the status quo while others seek to solidify existing systems (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019a). These include the principles of solidarity and a common political struggle for self-determination and decolonisation (as articulated by post-Apartheid South Africa) on the one hand, and on the other, demands (as articulated by many international agencies, organisations, European states and lawyers¹⁷) for the ‘international humanitarian principles’ of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence to be equally and consistently applied in Gaza to protect and uphold ‘the system’ in the face of the above-mentioned accusations of racialised double standards and hypocrisy.

Notably, European and North American representatives of the very UN agencies and NGOs that have been extensively critiqued over the past decades for their complicity with White saviourism, neocolonial and neoliberal humanitarianisms (Benton, 2017; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018; Pallister-Wilkins, 2018) have also been at the forefront of vocally opposing the genocidal violence in Gaza, demanding an immediate ceasefire and seeking sustainable political solutions rather than funding for palliative humanitarian sticking-plasters (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh *et al.*, 2024). This is not to romanticise either the roles of the UN or NGOs which have demanded the consistent application of ‘international humanitarian principles’, or ‘Southern’ states or civil society networks drawing on discourses and principles of solidarity, mutual aid and decolonisation while, of course, also having other ideological, political and diplomatic motivations of their own.¹⁸ Indeed, just as we must acknowledge the roles played by different actors from the so-called global North in these processes, it is equally the case that not all ‘Southern’ states, let alone all citizens of southern ‘solidarity states’, have been active in solidarity movements or committed to such principles, as Diallo (2024) reminds us with regards to the complex positions and motivations of different African states and as Roy and Quirk (2024) discuss with regards to the limits of South African civil society and university students’ ‘solidarity’ in spite of the South African state’s global leadership in this area. Nonetheless, in archiving some of the roles played by a plurality of actors across the globe in support of Palestinians’ rights in Gaza – which we do as a means to adding to the extensive work that Palestinians in Gaza and in the diaspora themselves have been undertaking in documenting the crimes to which they are being subjected, as well as their extensive work as first responders across critical domains (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2024) – the aim above has been to highlight some of the many articulations and practices of Southern responses to displacement while recognising, precisely, the extent to which such actors do not exist or work in

isolation from one another, and that Southern-responses are not necessarily enacted in an antagonistic manner, *contra* Northern-led initiatives. Tracing the extent to which these are histories and systems that are intertwined – not merely existing in parallel – is arguably essential to create the more radical paradigm shift that is required for more just and equitable forms of responding to displacement writ large.

Beyond recognising the financial, material and personnel ties that lead to a more-than-institutional *inter-twining* of Northern and Southern responses to displacement, which has by now been extensively documented (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2016),¹⁹ it is important to maintain a critical focus on not only *who* is responding, but also *why*, *how* and *with what effect* – that is to say, to engage with the *principles*, *power dynamics* and potential *outcomes* of such responses – in addition to whose analytical perspectives and critical insights are recognised and prioritised as forms of knowledge about these processes.²⁰ For instance, at times, specific principles historically associated with the non-aligned movement and both de-colonial and anti-colonial movements have been embodied and enacted by actors from states and institutions historically positioned as ‘hegemonic’ (such as the EU’s mobilisation of the principle of ‘solidarity’ in its responses to asylum-seekers precisely to exclude racialised minorities from its territory), while at other times, historically marginalised and excluded people and communities have articulated and enacted their responses through reference to neoliberal concepts and frameworks such as ‘service-delivery’ and ‘empowerment’. Indeed, as recognised by the contributors to this special issue and the broader literature we collectively build upon, such concepts have often been mobilised by ‘non-hegemonic’ responders precisely in order to render their actions legible, visible and acceptable when trying to secure funding to support their ongoing work (Carpi, 2018, 2023; Carpi and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020a, 2020b). As we and our community of contributors discuss throughout this special issue, while there is a plurality of international systems, and multiple modes and principles of responding to the needs and rights of displaced people, it is equally the case that there are also multiple risks (and critiques) of co-optation, instrumentalisation and the dilution of inherently political modes of action (required to redress inherently political and ideological systems of oppression and exploitation) into metaphors (Tuck and Yang, 2012) and to bureaucratic tick box exercises. For instance, since 2015, the so-called ‘localisation of aid’ agenda has been championed as a more ethical way of working for Western-founded agencies and INGOs following the establishment of the UN Sustainable

Development Goals. However, the localisation of aid ultimately remains tokenistic insofar as Southern partners managing programmes on the ground typically neither own nor manage the funding themselves. Nonetheless, Southern actors within the main areas of intervention remain the key local gatekeepers, data collectors and field operators for Western-funded organisations, developing different ways of navigating their relationships with hegemonic agencies and organisations accordingly. Indeed, the *risks* of co-optation and instrumentalisation are themselves challenged and alternative modes of action and of responding to the world are developed on multiple levels, including by people who have been displaced themselves.

Overview of the Special Issue

While opening this introduction with reference to a range of contemporary and historical Southern-led responses to occupation, genocidal violence and mass displacement in Gaza, this special issue has its formal roots in a long-standing research agenda that has been examining Southern-led responses to displacement writ large; this agenda has simultaneously interrogated multiple histories, meanings and mobilisations of the label, concept and positionality of ‘the South’ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015a, 2018, 2020a; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley, 2018), and sought to critically trace multiple meanings, models and practices of ‘responses’ which may, or may not, traditionally have been conceptualised ‘as’ forms of humanitarianism by different actors (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016a, 2016b, 2019a, 2019b). By centralising displaced people’s own responses to displacement and more-than-displacement²¹ as well as their conceptualisations, experiences and representations of different ‘responses’ enacted on their behalf by (and with) actors from ‘the global South’²² – ranging from individual and mutual acts of ‘care’ and solidarity on the neighbourhood level to local, national and transnational programmes and initiatives such as Cuba’s South–South education programme for refugees referred to above – this broader research agenda contributes to ongoing debates vis-à-vis non-hegemonic humanitarianisms (in the plural), including those often framed under the remit of ‘decolonising aid’ and wide-ranging efforts to provide meaningful alternatives to institutionalised approaches to humanitarianism per se.

In particular, the special issue is both part of but also seeks to broaden the conversations developed throughout a research project which has, since 2017, been exploring why, how and with what effect ‘Southern’ states, civil society networks, members of ‘host communities’ and different groups of refugees have

responded to support displaced people from Syria who have been living in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey since 2011. Indeed, emergency aid programmes were rapidly implemented by humanitarian agencies and donor states from the global North in 2011, with these programmes complemented and at times challenged by responses developed by actors from the global South. These include the ‘host’ states of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, in addition to so-called ‘non-traditional’ donors including Gulf states and the Arab League. While the roles played by such ‘host’ and ‘donor’ states themselves have by now received extensive academic attention (on Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Kuwait’s roles prior to 2011, see Harmer and Cotterrell, 2005; Barakat and Zyck, 2010; Binder *et al.*, 2010), it is only more recently that scholarship has dwelt on the civil society groups that commentators soon acknowledged were in fact among the most significant actors supporting Syrian internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. This includes Syria’s own local civil society and Syrian diaspora groups in delivering aid to displaced people both within and outside of Syria (Turkmani *et al.*, 2014; Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015; Sezgin, 2016); Lebanese, Jordanian and Turkish citizens providing food and shelter to refugees from Syria (IRIN, 2012; Gatten and Alabaster, 2012); the support offered by protracted Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to refugees fleeing Syria, including Syrians, Palestinians, Kurds and Iraqis (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015b); and the assistance and spiritual support that local faith communities and faith-based organisations in Jordan and Lebanon have offered to refugees from Syria who have sought sanctuary in those countries (Elnakib and Ager, 2015), including Syrian faith leaders themselves (see Carpi and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020b; Carpi, 2023).

While that project has analysed Southern-led responses to displacement specifically *from Syria*, including through drawing into conversation processes which Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has elsewhere conceptualised as forms of ‘refugees-hosting-refugees’, ‘refugee-refugee humanitarianism’, internationalist and solidarity-based responses, ‘faith-based humanitarianism’ and ‘South–South humanitarianism’ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2018, 2019a, 2019b), this special issue brings together four academic papers and two critical reflections presented in a 2023 workshop and a related closed symposium whose participants represented multiple historical, geographical and epistemological perspectives to collectively explore the future of humanitarian practice and research, including how to go beyond the institutionalised fetishisation of ‘decolonising’ humanitarianism and refugee-related research.²³ Reflecting a multi-scalar approach – including international and national, regional and

transregional responses, as well as 'local' responses by people labelled as 'refugees', 'citizens' and 'hosts' on municipal, neighbourhood and camp-based levels – the articles, together, explore forms of response which are often posited as 'alternatives' to Northern-led 'humanitarianism'. Providing critical insights into the mobilisation and contestation of key concepts used both in the preceding paragraphs and in the broader academic and policy literature – including 'the South', 'empowerment', 'solidarity', 'volunteer', 'refugee' and 'host' – the contributions centralise the perspectives and conceptualisations of people who have personal and/or family experiences of processes of displacement and dispossession, both in their capacities as 'responders', 'recipients', or 'non-recipients' of such initiatives, and as people who are engaging critically with the meaning and practices of 'humanitarianism', including as researchers and scholars.

Following this introduction, Estella Carpi and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh examine the position of Brazil as a responder to conflict-induced displacement from Syria. Brazil has both indirectly supported 'emergency and crisis' refugee response as a donor supporting pre-existing programmes and organisations in the region, and also expanded upon its leading role in the *regionally* focused 'Solidarity Resettlement Programme' for Latin American refugees, by developing a *transregional* resettlement programme for refugees from the Middle East. Demonstrating the complexities of labelling states as 'Southern', Carpi and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh start by tracing the changing political and discursive relationship between Brazil and 'the South' and 'South–South cooperation' over time, before analysing the case of Brazil's resettlement programme for Syrian refugees between 2019 and 2022 (during Bolsonaro's mandate). Through exploring Syrian applicants' own conceptualisations of resettlement, and their imaginaries of Brazil and its position in their futures, the article concludes that, while it is often presented as such, 'offering resettlement to Brazil should not be viewed as an *alternative* to the provision of aid, not least because different forms of aid remain key to people's survival *after* relocation' (Carpi and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, in this issue, emphasis in original). Overall, the article advances our understanding of how initiatives for refugees developed by an erstwhile self-proclaimed leader of the 'global South' 'are understood, contested and/or welcomed', both by state representatives and people seeking resettlement alike.

Complementing Carpi and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's focus on refugees' own conceptualisations of resettlement in Brazil and their desires for a better future, the subsequent three research articles in turn dwell in detail on the ways that people who have been displaced respond to their

own situations and those of others, offering three critical interventions into the emerging literatures on refugee-refugee humanitarianism and alternatives to Northern-led responses to displacement. In the second research article, Şule Can explores the case of Syrian refugee women working together with Turkish citizens and representatives of the Adana Metropolitan Municipality (Turkey) in the Meryem Women's Cooperative, which Can identifies and examines as an alternative to 'project-based' responses designed and implemented on their behalf. In so doing, Can develops a comparative examination of approaches developed under the influence of Northern actors and principles and the ways that local, refugee-led initiatives provide a space for intimate encounters and forms of relatedness characterised by mutuality and solidarity. Can notes that 'women's empowerment' is one concept which is mobilised by international, national and local responders alike in the context of initiatives officially designed to support Syrian refugees in Turkey, with such initiatives fulfilling funders' aims without changing refugees' actual access to rights or livelihoods (and often re-producing different forms of vulnerability among displaced people); in contrast to such forms of response, the cooperative, which brings together residents of Adana who hold different legal statuses, identities and positionalities, demonstrates and centralises both the agency and priorities of women ('refugees' and 'hosts' alike), positing the potentialities of 'solidarity' as an underpinning principle, process and outcome.

Where Syrian refugees – as well as their Turkish colleagues – benefit both socially and economically, from the Meryem Women's Cooperative in Adana, in the third article, Matt Baillie Smith, Frank Ahimbisibwe, Robert Turyamureeba and Bianca Fadel critically examine the meaning, practices and broader implications of 'volunteering' among refugee youth in Uganda, positioning this as one form of 'refugee-led responses' to displacement while simultaneously questioning the 'political economies of volunteering and their relationships to precarity and inequality', not only in the Ugandan context, but also in Southern responses to displacement more broadly (Baillie Smith *et al.*, in this issue) noting that extensive attention has been given to 'international volunteers' travelling *to* the global South, the authors instead focus on refugees' own responses within and beyond their communities in exile (including in refugee settlements and in cities), thereby centralising the ways that people who have been displaced are providers of 'knowledge, expertise and capacities' (Baillie Smith *et al.*, in this issue). By documenting the experiences and reflections of young people from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Somalia who have been engaged in different

forms of ‘volunteering’ in Uganda – whether unrewarded or ultimately as part of low-cost labour systems – the article traces the ways that volunteers are both positioned within, but also engage beyond, humanitarian institutions and structures as people who develop and enact systems of meaning, sociality and solidarity during their interactions with other displaced people and with Ugandan residents alike.

In the fourth article, Rawan Arar maintains our focus on the multifaceted roles played by displaced people in responding to the needs and rights of other refugees – including the perspectives of a Palestinian-Jordanian humanitarian professional working with Syrian refugees in Jordan – while carefully dismantling what she calls the ‘humanitarian fiction’ underpinning the refugee-host binary and in particular the concept of ‘the host’ (Arar, in this issue). Noting its multi-scalar yet uneven application as a concept and both a policy and political frame – Jordan is conceptualised and arguably instrumentalised as a ‘host state’, for instance, while Gaza is not recognised as a ‘host’ space ‘even though [in 2023] refugees comprise about 70 per cent of the territory’s population (see [Arar and FitzGerald, 2023](#))’ – Arar brings us into the lives and conceptualisations of people whose personal and familial experiences lead them, and us as readers, to interrogate the implications of labelling processes and systems of knowledge production which artificially categorise people and places and simultaneously frame and require international responses accordingly. In highlighting the empirical disjuncture between policy categories created in and by the global North and lived experiences of displacement/hosting, Arar in turn points to the impacts of ‘humanitarian fictions’, which ultimately undermine rather than uphold refugees’ rights around the world.

In addition to offering empirical contributions to research in this field through the lens of Southern responses to displacement, the special issue as a whole thus contributes to conceptual debates pertaining to meanings and practices of ‘humanitarianism’ and cognate terms, processes and frames, as well as to ongoing debates pertaining to the politics of research ‘in’ and ‘about’ the so-called global South in ways which are attentive to, but also engage critically with, commitments to ‘decolonising aid’ and ‘decolonising research’ alike. With regards to the latter, the final two contributions in the issue – by Jessica Oddy and Marwan Adinsa and by Yousif M. Qasmiyeh – powerfully critique and seek to go beyond the contemporary trend (some would say fetishisation) of ‘decolonising’ humanitarianism and research, noting that the invocation of ‘decolonisation’ in these contexts is often tokenistic rather than offering meaningful engagement with the plurality of ways of knowing and being in, and responding to, the world.

Indeed, as international responses to the ongoing displacement of Palestinians across Gaza and the West Bank acutely show, decolonisation is not, in fact, merely a metaphor, but a matter of politics and practice across a multitude of domains and terrains; the latter, as Jessica Oddy and Marwan Adinsa note is literally the case, since decolonisation ‘as a political project, is deeply connected to land repatriation’ for ‘Indigenous people in settler colonial’ contexts (Oddy and Adinsa, in this issue, citing [Tuck and Yang, 2012](#)). As Oddy and Adinsa explore in their contribution, while there is a reality and ongoing risk for the co-optation and instrumentalisation of decolonial discourse by hegemonic institutions (i.e. through DEI initiatives and neoliberal projects to ‘decolonise the curriculum’), there is also significant potential for a meaningful application of this discourse and the implementation of ‘just methods’ committed to social justice in current and future humanitarian practice and research alike. This entails, *inter alia*, unpacking rather than further ‘contribut[ing] to the entrenchment of North/South binaries’ (Oddy and Adinsa, in this issue, citing [Marchais et al., 2020](#)), and challenging inequalities both in payment and in the power relations between people who are being researched and those undertaking the research. In addition to rejecting Eurocentrism (Oddy and Adinsa, in this issue, citing [Rodney, 2019/1969](#)), this entails recognising and learning from historically marginalised and oppressed groups, centralising solidarity and reciprocity and transcending tokenistic gestures in the process.

Such dynamics and concerns about research in displacement situations are also explored by Yousif M. Qasmiyeh in the final intervention, drawing this special issue to a close while holding the door open for future conversations. Bringing together scholarly insights and poetry, and ‘writing from the dual position of the *researched* and *researcher*’, Qasmiyeh explores “who writes the archive”, and what position and role refugees themselves/ourselves embody in relation to processes of researching and documenting (archiving) displacement’ (Qasmiyeh, in this issue). Retaining and reinscribing many of the threads that run through this special issue, Qasmiyeh starts from the ‘point that refugees are active participants in the archive (not merely a trace therein), playing a pivotal role in determining what is deemed significant and worthy of inclusion,’ including as refugees not only responding to their own situations and those of others in material terms, but who also revert their critical gazes ‘upon the researcher [...], the journalist, the humanitarian worker’ (Qasmiyeh, in this issue). In so doing, there is both ‘*co-production* of knowledge and a *co-sharing* as well, where the refugee is not just the interviewee or just the quotable, the person who features at times in transience, but also the analyst,

the critical thinker, the theorist' (Qasmiyeh, in this issue, emphasis in original) Far from a 'uni-writing' (Qasmiyeh, 2020, emphasis in original) or the claim that only refugees (or, by extrapolation, actors from across the global South) have the right to write, archive or otherwise respond, such an approach recognises the intertwined nature of different actors' responses to displacement across time and space: an intertwining of narratives, of practices and politics and the potential intertwining of solidarities and commitments for a better future.

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Notes

- 1 The broader research project that this special issue is part of, 'Analysing South–South Humanitarian Responses to Displacement from Syria', is critically examining the multiple meanings and relationalities of 'the South', rather than reifying the terms 'global North' and 'global South'. A range of emic and etic classifications related to 'the South' have variously been developed and applied on the basis, inter alia, of particular readings of a state's geographical location, of its relative position as a (formerly) colonised territory or colonising power, and/or

to encompass 'countries that have been marginalised in the international political and economic system' (Medie and Kang, 2018: 37–8); other scholars argue that rather than being 'either static or purely defined through reference to physical territories and demarcations' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley, 2018: 3), 'the South' should be conceptualised as 'a metaphor' that 'represents the embeddedness of knowledge in relations of power' (Parel, 2018: 32, following Connell, 2007 and Santos, 2014; also see McEwan, 2009). Conceptualisations of countries as 'Northern' or 'Southern' are engaged with further in Carpi and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh in this issue; for more detailed discussion and analysis of the application of the notion of 'the South', and of diverse modes of definition and typologies vis-à-vis the 'global South', see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2015a, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2023), Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley (2018) and Carpi (2018, 2022).

- 2 On Japan's position 'beyond the North–South impasse' see Insebayeva (2023).
- 3 In turn, Slaughter (2018) maintains that formerly colonised states played a key role in shaping human rights frameworks from the birth of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Indeed, in another context, Mbembe maintains that the Western archive is 'neither monolithic, nor the exclusive property of the West', since, he argues, 'Africa and its diaspora decisively contributed to its making and should legitimately make foundational claims on it' (Mbembe, 2015: 24; as discussed in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2023: 60). By extension, rather than positioning formerly colonised states as acting from the periphery or in an antagonistic manner, 'the South' has a foundational role, and thus has foundational claims upon international rights and legal frameworks (also see Billaud and De Lauri, 2024 on 'the Third World' and international law in the context of Gaza).
- 4 The following discussion of 'Southern responses' to the unfolding genocide in Gaza is based on Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2025).
- 5 See Omari (2023).
- 6 This Committee was established by medical students from the University of Indonesia in 2011 – see Benamara (2016).
- 7 See <https://assalamhospital.com/en/about-hos> (accessed 1 October 2024).
- 8 On Turkey's and Mexico's position with regards to 'the global South', see Haug (2021); on Turkey's inclusion/exclusion in BRICS, see Bacik (2013) and Öni and Kutlay (2013).
- 9 See IOM-Jordan (2024).
- 10 See Humaid (2023).
- 11 Between 1974 and 2024, about 1,500 Palestinians, including a large number of doctors, have benefited

- from full scholarships from Cuba (Pineda, 2024); see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2015a).
- 12 Ukraine and Gaza, two places subjected to occupation with dramatically opposing responses from European and North American states, intersect in different ways in Gaza. Notably, the largest community of non-Palestinian residents in Gaza originate from Ukraine (about 1,500 Ukrainians are estimated to have been living in Gaza in 2023), largely as a result of the marriage of Palestinian students from Gaza while completing their medical studies in Ukraine; these Gazans subsequently returned with their Ukrainian spouses and their Palestinian-Ukrainian/Ukrainian-Palestinian children to live and work in Gaza (Allam and Galouchka, 2024). While some Palestinians from Gaza have remained in Ukraine following their graduation (see, for example, the case of Alaa Shabaan Abu Ghali as reported by Kullab, 2024), the majority have returned to work in Gaza (as has also been the case among Cuban-educated Palestinians – see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010, 2015a).
 - 13 See The Palestinian Information Centre (2024), Al Amir (2024), *New Straits Times* (2024a, 2024b) and Rédaction Africanews (2024).
 - 14 Malaysia has a long history of supporting Palestinians in Gaza (as well as in Lebanon), including through scholarships provided by the Malaysian government for Palestinians to study in Malaysia; child sponsorship programmes established in 2010 (the Malaysian Social Research Institute (MSRI), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), received start-up funds from the Gaza Emergency Fund established by Malaysia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in early 2009); and the construction and maintenance of educational and other infrastructure in Jaballia, Gaza (funds raised by the Malaysian Ministry of Education in 2012 were distributed by Malaysian organisation Viva Palestina Malaysia in Gaza – see *New Straits Times*, 2012). Also in Gaza, Malaysian NGO Aman Palestin (established in 2004) has led projects to build orphanages; secured financial support for education; supplied food and medicine; and established a mini clinic and mini supermarket – the latter co-organised by the Malaysia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Idris, 2012). On this longer history of Malaysian support for Palestinians, see Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013: 22–3) and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2022: 73).
 - 15 Noting that the majority of the clinical staff across all medical units in Gaza are Palestinians, irrespective of the origins of either the medics or the hospitals themselves, MSF staff were forced to flee the clinic in February 2024, and both the clinic and the entire hospital were forced to close in May 2024 when threatened with bombardment by the Israel occupying forces. See MSF (2024a, 2024b).
 - 16 As reported to Fiddian-Qasmiyeh by members of the Baddawi camp civil society during online conversations between October 2023 and October 2024.
 - 17 See CIVICUS (2024), BMA (2024) and Ray (2004).
 - 18 The relationship between states' official discourses and narrative framings of solidarity and reciprocity, on the one hand, and, on the other, both official and unofficial motivations (including diplomatic/political ones) and 'recipients' conceptualisations of 'Southern responses' is a dynamic we are exploring through the Southern Responses to Displacement project, and which we have written about elsewhere (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015a, 2019b, 2023; Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013: 15). On narrative framings in Northern and South–South cooperation, see Mawdsley (2018).
 - 19 It is by now widely acknowledged that global processes affect local responses, and the lines between Southern and Northern assistance may be blurred, especially when local Southern NGOs rely on support from Northern organisations (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2016; Carpi, 2018). The papers in this special issue illustrate the importance of critically examining the roles of power and geopolitical positioning in these and other categorisations and linkages.
 - 20 On the politics of knowledge production on humanitarianism and displacement in relation to Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey, see Carpi and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2020a).
 - 21 By responding to 'more-than-displacement' Fiddian-Qasmiyeh refers to situations that compound or create new forms of vulnerabilities, such as refugees' responses to keep themselves and others safe during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020b; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh, 2020).
 - 22 See Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2015a, 2015b, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a).
 - 23 For a full transcript of the roundtable 'Critical Reflections on "Decolonising" Humanitarianism and Refugee-Related Research', available in English, Spanish and Arabic, see <https://southernresponses.org/2022/06/27/critical-reflections-on-decolonising-humanitarianism-and-refugee-related-research-roundtable-event/> (accessed 1 October 2024).

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