The "Need to Be There": North-South Encounters and Imaginations in the Humanitarian Economy

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Introduction

This chapter explores North-South encounters and mutual imaginations within humanitarian economies, a term I use to refer to the organised systems of assistance provision that address people affected by war and rely on their own repertory of values and norms. Based on the research I conducted in northern Lebanon (Akkar) and Beirut's southern suburbs (Dahiye[i]) between 2011 and 2013, it advances a critical reflection on the tension that exists between the philanthropic spirit of the humanitarian system as it is implemented in the "global South" (Butt 2002) and local and refugee responses to what I call "Southism". The Southist intent of the Northern humanitarian system to care for, rescue, upgrade, and assist Southern settings[ii] – and that, as I will discuss later, partially transcends physical geographies - combines personal affection with necessity, and collective compassion with professional aspirations. In this sense, I use the notion of Southism in a way that resonates with the "monumentalisation of the margins" (Spivak 1999, p. 170), which crystallises needs and areas of need in the global South while powerfully acknowledging the good intentionality of humanitarian workers. As such, I propose Southism both as a concept and a mode of analysis which indicates a structural *relationship* between different sets of providers and beneficiaries, rather than a mere act of assisting the South with a philanthropic spirit. Specifically, Southism, as a mode of analysis, is underpinned by a preconception of the South as disempowered and incapable, while cementing the "global South" as the key symbolic capital of Northern empowerment, accountability, and capability. To some extent, I think of Southism as a peculiar configuration of Orientalism (Said 1978). By departing from Said's theory - which aimed to capture the history and character of Western attitudes, ideologies and imaginations towards the East - and by further problematizing West-East/North-South political geographies, I draw on Southism to enhance our

understandings of the power differences that underpin and characterise relationships between providers and recipients. In an effort to expand longstanding debates on the paternalistic compassionism of humanitarianism (Arendt 1994; Barnett, 2011), as will be evident, I refer to the humanitarian way of dealing with otherness. As such, I argue that Southism does not merely make the global South, or Southern elements in the North, its special *place* – as Said does with the Orient – but it is, rather, employed by Northern and Southern actors to reassert, solidify, and legitimise the Northern humanitarian presence and actions.

I am, of course, far from the first researcher to advance considerations on the hegemonic culture of aid provision and the diverse responses of beneficiaries to such hegemony. Nevertheless, a close analysis of how such North-South relations and imaginations are reproduced in the specific context of these two Lebanese settings opens up further avenues of inquiry - as well as concerns – into hard-to-die humanitarian hierarchies. The humanitarian approaches to thinking about and assisting the needy that I discuss here have to do with disparate sides of the world. The global humanitarian lifestyle I aim to explore is about social class, economic status, and the freedom to move inside vulnerable areas and opt for educational and professional migration. From a conceptual perspective, this analysis strives towards a geography-free interpretation of Southism. While passports and nationalities still prove their efficaciousness in times of risk, my interpretation focuses on the identification of comfort zones, which protect lifeworlds, ease, and privilege across passports. The hegemonic culture which underpins the "NGOisation" of postcolonial settings (Ferguson 1994, Fischer 1997, Schuller 2012) is a discourse theory that, on the one hand, can sometimes be adopted regardless of the geographic context of its primary subjects; and, on the other, can unearth the organisational and individual ethics of international and local practitioners in approaching southern settings affected by crisis. This conceptual, geography-free approach is functional to contextually articulate the "too-easy West-and-the-rest polarisations sometimes rampant in colonial and postcolonial discourse studies," which rather end up legitimating by reversal the (both northern and southern) colonial attitude itself (Spivak 1999, p. 39). In other words, from an exclusively conceptual perspective, when I talk of humanitarian Southism there can be no "outside".

Nonetheless, my analysis limits itself to showing some of the moral and material

implications of Southism. After all, the feelings, intentions, and aspirations which often underlie the humanitarian career (Malkki 2015) make such Southism not a matter which can be straightforwardly addressed in the short term. More specifically, what I have chosen to label as "humanitarian Southism" is an analytical framework that makes it possible to investigate humanitarian actors' tendency to believe that, whenever a new emergency breaks out, Lebanon – like other "fragile states" (Fayyad 2008) - would collapse without their help. Within the framework of my field research in Dahiye and the villages of Akkar, it is possible to analyse the behavioural pattern of the international humanitarian apparatus, in which both local and international practitioners work.

The chapter draws on in-depth interviews and extensive participant observation carried out between September 2011 and November 2013 in Beirut's Dahiye area - namely the districts of Borj al-Barajneh, Choueifat, Haret Hreik, al-Ghobeiry, ash-Shiyyah, al-Mreije and Hadath - and the Akkar villages of al-'Abdeh, Bebnin, al-Bahsa, Bellanet al-Hisa, Wadi Khaled, and the town of Halba. In Dahiye I interviewed 17 Shiite families and 25 individuals. I also conducted interviews with 68 practitioners working in non-governmental organisations (NGOs)[iii] which, in the aftermath of the Israel-Lebanon 2006 war, had collaborated with representatives of the Lebanese Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, and with Dahiye's municipalities. In Akkar, I interviewed 43 humanitarian practitioners working in NGOs and UN agencies,[iv] and 140 Syrian individuals who had relocated from Syria to different villages in North Lebanon.

I selected my research interlocutors on a day-to-day basis, and I resorted to chain sampling (also known as 'snowballing') to recruit interviewees: in essence, my first participants suggested the names of acquaintances to help me identify new interviewees. I used to meet with them in informally organised settings, especially in private houses and local cafés. Despite my fluency in the local dialect and my compliance with the local behavioural culture, I embodied the international community to the eyes of my interlocutors in two main ways: as an international researcher looking at crisis in Dahiye, and as an activist ethnographer in Akkar, where I engaged in self-started acts of aid provision, and I volunteered in a Syrian committee assisting refugee newcomers.

Using the discursive strategy of Southism, in this chapter I intend to discuss the encounters and the imaginations that characterise the Lebanese humanitarian economy. While encounters indicate material human processes that can promptly be evidenced, imaginations refer to collective discourses and perceptions, which, implying rational thinking and theorisation, for the sake of an accurate epistemology, still need to be differentiated from encounters. Therefore, encounters and imaginations cut across the everyday realities of both refugees and aid providers. I firstly unfold North-South actual encounters by adopting two analytical categories: The "epistemic failure" of humanitarian workers who lack fine-grained knowledge of the targeted area, including the local language, customs and history; and the "material discrimination" within the humanitarian organisation of labour, which sets pay-scales, individual safety measures and professional accountability in different ways based on the nationality of its members of staff.

The chapter then proceeds to examine the mutual imaginations of beneficiaries and providers within the humanitarian economy, by primarily tackling three themes. First, "humanitarian tourism", which is locally generalised as the international approach *par excellence* to areas of contemporary Lebanon that are exposed to cyclical outbursts of violence. Second, humanitarianism's "politics of blame," that burdens the local society with the "structural sin" (Bhaskar 2000) of preventing successful foreign interventions. Third, the Southern moral and political expectations placed on the global North, which are here translated into the way in which Syrian refugees imagine the so-called international community and its actions. This chapter addresses these articulated North-South dynamics, which shape and are shaped by the humanitarian economy.

North-South Humanitarian encounters

The concept of Southism that I seek to advance in this chapter tends to embrace various segments of the international community and Lebanon's globalised middle class, who are increasingly employed in humanitarian organisations due to the governmental imperative of enhancing local employment in the response to domestic and regional crises. In the wake of neoliberal "job creation" (Hanieh 2015, p. 133) and with the increasing professionalisation of humanitarian assistance provision, both local and international NGO workers typically move from one organisation to another with diverse frequency, changing tasks inside the same organisation or moving across

regions, either within Lebanon or elsewhere. These factors render nationality an important variant as long as it is able to problematise humanitarian recruitment policies and professional ethics. Indeed, it goes without saying that, through a process of NGOisation and professionalisation of philanthropy - as some scholars have already noticed (Mac Ginty and Hamieh 2010; Mercer and Green 2013) -, local humanitarian workers *also* develop a hegemonic culture with respect to the "needy". This therefore becomes a culturally nuanced *habitus* of hegemonic provision, a *habitus* that is composed of a shared sense of epistemic superiority: knowing more about domestic vulnerability and systematic solutions than ordinary citizens or than the crisis-affected people themselves. It is also composed of moral self-legitimisation, in assisting and voicing those individuals who, allegedly, can only *be assisted* and *be given a voice* (Arendt 1958, Agamben 1998, Pandolfi 2000).

Moreover, in this framework, material privileges and epistemic authority tacitly grant professional accountability, knowledge and prestige to international staff members (also see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh in this volume). The latter's "resource-hungry lifestyle" (Spivak 1999, p. 6) has been defined as "socially light and materially heavy" (Redfield 2012, p. 360), that is scarcely engaged with local history's legacies and relationships, but demanding a substantial return for their mission while living more uncomfortably than they could, or even somehow endangering their lives. To a certain measure, hence, social and material gravity (Redfield 2012) acquire different degrees through nationality. I keep these important considerations in mind while I turn to discuss the specificities of how epistemic failure and material discrimination play out on the ground.

Epistemic failure
Epistemic failure implies a lack of or insufficient local knowledge, that is the language, customs and history of the area of intervention. Scholars and practitioners have long noticed that, most of the time, epistemic accountability is exclusively attributed to international humanitarian actors (Anderson 1999, Polman 2011, Redfield 2012, Mercer and Green 2013), while aid recipients simply allow the former to gain understanding but cannot explain things themselves. Also, during my personal field experience in Lebanon, humanitarian providers often suggested that I should never have trusted the words of local beneficiaries if I had wanted to conduct rigorous

scientific research in the field. This dynamic is reminiscent of the Arendtian binary of biographic and biological lives, according to which the world would become divided up into voiceless victims on the one hand and people who can witness, narrate, and better explain the lives of such victims on the other (Arendt 1958). By this token, an international practitioner[v] who had worked in a Beirut war-affected zone in the summer of 2006 affirmed:

> "Local NGOs in Lebanon are all family run and tribal-like, whereas we don't have clan ties with anyone, and therefore the internationals are the only ones who have the ability to become accountable among people without having to bargain something for something else."

Nevertheless, my field research shows that NGO and UN workers were highly dissatisfied with a lack of institutional coordination and consequent overlapping projects. Self-criticism was not missing in their accounts, which conveyed how bad coordination actually was largely due to their own scarce knowledge of the context of intervention, having no possibilities of acquiring it whilst carrying out their daily tasks (which already require extra working hours). The high turnover of staff, moreover, leads to relying on inexperienced staff over the course of time.

Likewise, my fieldwork indicates that most local and international practitioners were scarcely aware about the previous projects that had been conducted by their own organisation, and about funding sources and policies, domestic and international regulations, and local customs. INGOs and UN agencies usually justify the lack of contextual knowledge with the request for technical skilfulness that is universally applicable regardless of local specificities. The frequently observed lack of contextual knowledge among international humanitarian environments is, rather, valued as a guarantee of moral detachment and impartiality in contexts of conflict (Prendergast 1996). In addition to the technocratic criteria of recruitment, a reason behind such an epistemic failure is surely physical distance. In this regard, an international practitioner[vi] working for an NGO in an Akkar town contended in our interview that: "We all work in the same building: INGOs and UN agencies. I mean… it looks like an ivory tower: We're totally out of people's reach." Even though humanitarian workers in Lebanon generally do not lead an in-compound life [vii] – unlike countries like

Afghanistan, Nigeria, and South Sudan – humanitarian lifeworlds are still protected and preserved through softer forms of "physical bunkerisation" (Duffield 2015, p. S85), which, in turn, hamper the development of contextual knowledge.

Material discrimination
The second type of encounter that I illustrate here is material discrimination. Material discrimination sets pay-scales, individual safety measures, and capacities to move, specifically according to the nationality of humanitarian staff members. This leads to the internal reproduction of hierarchical relationships - identifiable as North and South - within the humanitarian economy.

In the interviews I conducted in Dahiye and Akkar, regional humanitarian workers – mostly Lebanese locals or people coming from other Arab countries - often highlighted the disadvantageous pay-scales that they were doomed to receive at work, even when possessing more than one passport, or being dual citizens of both a Northern and a Southern country. According to the interviews, the policies of some NGOs institutionalise material discrimination by allocating payments to cover the rent of international staff members only. Generally, neither regional nor local staff affirmed they had their rent paid by their employer, and only few of them affirmed that they benefitted from a small house allowance.

Whilst NGOs tended to exclusively deploy local staff in the field for security reasons – a policy, moreover, which sometimes exposes them to actual risk – their mobility remained limited, and their privileged lifestyle poorly protected and unguaranteed. Locals, unlike international workers, affirmed they could move with difficulty from one organisation to another, in an environment where professional mobility, as already stated, is highly rewarded. Another example for this stunted local mobility is provided by the possibility of being evacuated in times of actual crisis or global risk, as proved in September 2013 when there were indications that the United States might intervene in Syria to topple the Assad regime: I remember that Beirut was emptied in two days. NGO branches across the country had been shut down, NGO international staff were all called to Beirut to be ready to be evacuated if needed. In the meantime, local staff had to return to and remain in their unsafe lifeworlds.

Geopolitical uncertainty was able to mark an uncomfortable line between Northerners and Southerners within the humanitarian economy. Dahiye's internally displaced people and refugees significantly expressed their resentment towards local professionals, who are allowed easy access to international (resourceful) networks and who had come to represent the only "local good governance" (Mercer and Green 2013, p. 113) foreign governments aspire to work with. This exacerbated the moral divide across local and refugee social classes. Furthermore, Lebanese regulations allowing the employment of only a fixed and small number of Lebanon's Palestinian refugees and Syrian nationals in the local staff of humanitarian organisations ended up ethnicising such a class divide.

Humanitarian imaginations

I now adopt "humanitarian Southism" as a framework of analysis to explore the mutual imaginations that providers and humanitarian workers produce within the humanitarian economy. First, I will disclose a form of local disaffection, which I call "humanitarian tourism". Second, I will examine the humanitarian politics of blame on local structures and cultural mentality. Third, I will unfold the refugee discourse around the "betrayal" of the international community, which stands in contrast to the humanitarian-claimed "need to be there". Indeed, the humanitarian actors operating in several of Akkar's villages used to stress their idea of *being* necessary in the particular area. They considered their intervention to be self-legitimised by their supposedly neutral and impartial intervention. An international NGO employee[viii] working in an Akkar village expressed the need to be there as follows:

> "We *have to* be there, since local people, particularly if affiliated with other religious groups, won't do anything for other communities. There would simply be a huge void in the places in which we're currently intervening. Moreover, social services here are corrupt and weak… We cannot really change what historically has been the cancer of this region."

This statement supports the conviction that if those positions were not covered by an allegedly impartial Western practitioner, they would never be taken by a large number of local – or, more broadly, Middle Eastern - humanitarians, who certainly would not want to challenge their system of values and beliefs by taking part in such a social

endeavour. In some cases, international NGO workers were specifically referring to the idea that a Christian Lebanese national would not feel safe or at ease working among Sunni Syrians who have more sizeably relocated to the Sunni villages in Akkar. Thus, most of the NGO and UN workers I interviewed spoke in terms of "Churchillian responsibility" (Spivak 2004) – that is, the self-legitimated right to intervene, vested as a moral duty towards the assisted - rather than their own *right* to work there; therefore, they rarely recognised how their job was simply a way to earn a living, and, at times, even earning it with several additional privileges.

I will now proceed to discuss the specificities of the local imaginations around humanitarian tourism in Beirut's Dahiye, the politics of blame of the humanitarian system, and the discourse which voices the expectations of Syrian refugees towards the international community in Akkar's villages, which also constitutes a peculiar politics of blame.

Humanitarian tourism
With the hindsight of in-depth interviews and participant observation in Dahiye from 2011 to 2013, locally displaced people who benefitted from humanitarian assistance at the time of the Israel-Lebanon war of July 2006 pointed to the international humanitarian system's "touristic" approach by describing the international humanitarian worker as '*aber sabil*: a "passer-by". Likewise, local NGOs[ix] highlighted the "humanitarian scandal" that occurred when the UNDP and some staff from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) left Lebanon because it was believed that Israel would destroy Hezbollah within three days. Beyond the distress caused by war itself, this perception among the locals of multiple forms of "humanitarian tourism" increased the sense of uncertainty in Dahiye.

My fieldwork showed how Dahiye's war-affected population had grown to mistrust, and hold different levels of hostility towards, the "international community" (*al-mujtama' ad-duwali*), who had allegedly rushed over to rescue them in 2006 in the wake of the Israeli aviation's attacks. A press release in the Lebanese newspaper *al-Akhbar*[x] reported that tonnes of emergency relief tools due to be supplied by the UNHCR – including mattresses and aid kits – were burned by the agency before being distributed, as they had been spoiled because of inadequate protection whilst in storage.

The 'fire episode' was compared to the "smell of corruption" (*raihat al-fasad*) at the Lebanese government's High Relief Commission and the utter unreliability of the UN staff who, from a local perspective, did not actually care about people's safety.

The widespread local perception of dealing with opportunistic war tourists, which I observed, speaks to the historical framework of the Beirut southern peripheries. Dahiye has long had an image of urban wreckage and massive destruction, deprivation and misery. The area suffers from external stereotyping and neglect (Harb 1995 and 2006, Deeb 2006) and has nearly always drawn the interest of outsiders during times of emergency and displacement. Social responsiveness to a "touristic" international humanitarian industry in 2006 seemed to lead locals to show greater entitlement in claiming that particular territory as theirs during both war and peacetime. This action clearly counters the international aid industry's temporary exploitation of war-affected areas. "Westerners are all tourists, even if they've spent 30 years in this country", said the leader of a prominent local NGO.[xi] "We've instead been taking care of Lebanon since 1976, the beginning of the civil war!"

The endemic mistrust towards the international aid industry was similarly expressed by a local resident[xii] from ash-Shiyyah, who told me: "Nothing dies if it comes from the inside. Corruption and exploitation increase because of the presence of foreigners here." In response, international humanitarian workers imagined local society in Lebanon as an unchangeable and reified realm. Thinking about local immutability in a way that exists independently from the actual effects of humanitarian work, international humanitarians tended to portray the local factors as inherently failing and weak.

This mistrust of international workers and the broader anti-northern imaginary came to a head during the July 2006 war after being encoded in the social ethics of the major Lebanese Shiite party Hezbollah, the *de facto* ruler of the majority of Dahiye's municipalities. The UN and the US government were often mentioned as "the real criminals" and "the people who have always lied", [xiii] while *Al Jazeera* [xiv] was denounced as a Southern medium cowardly complying with Northern politics. Likewise, *Al-Akhbar* journalist Rajana Hammiye [xv] expressed contempt about the ephemerality of the UN's commitment to dealing with Dahiye's tragedy as follows:

"Their visit lasted just for fifty minutes with the leaders of all municipalities."

Owing to the locally-defined INGO voyeuristic and touristic approach to the psychological grievances of war-stricken populations, local residents seemed to relate to Northern-funded reconstruction with resentment and suspicion, despite the official rhetoric boasting an unprecedented level and mode of North-South collaboration.[xvi] The local perception of the fleeting nature of international humanitarian assistance stands in stark contrast to the local way of facing misadventure with a spirit of positivistic normalcy. The affected people's identification with and belonging to their territory also emphasise that Northern interference was unwelcomed, and recalls how thin the line sometimes is between perceived occupation and what is just called assistance,[xvii] in spite of the benefits it might bring. The fact that Dahiye was the birthplace of many social workers was meaningful as a way to uphold local pride in the postwar reconstruction and humanitarian efforts. In this regard, a local social worker[xviii] in postwar Dahiye stated the following:

> "The majority of the staff here has grown up in the neighbourhood. I'm a child of this district myself (*ana bint al-manta'a*). We personally know our beneficiaries; we recognise their faces in the street. That is something a foreign NGO can't do."

Similarly, a governmental social worker[xix] observed: "Most of the people who sought shelter in this office during the July war were all acquaintances or already our beneficiaries". In turn, a member[xx] of the Choueifat Council in Dahiye mentioned the moral importance of social work precisely if one was born and bred in the area: "In this municipality, in fact, we're all local members." The same attitude of pride and heroism in remaining and providing services for members of their own community was also expressed by the deputy mayor of al-Ghobeiry's municipality[xxi] in Dahiye, who supports the common spirit of assistance and territorial belonging of all the members of the Union of Dahiye's Municipalities (*Ittihad al-baladiyyat fy'd-Dahiye al-Janubiyye*). These accounts point to the local configuration of Northern-led interventions, which frames humanitarianism as an ephemeral and opportunistic routine business.

The politics of blame

While conducting research in Akkar's villages, it became apparent that INGOs frequently adopted the rhetoric of the "politics of blame" (Antze and Lambek 1996, p. XXII) to explain why projects were not succeeding: they blamed donors, local cultural mentality and structures, or evil warlords. Most of the international humanitarian workers I interviewed believed that their programmes were not responsible for deepening the divisions between emergency areas and chronically marginalised spaces. In this scenario, where no one seems to have the capacity to change things, the providers disengage from the consequences of humanitarian assistance – although self-legitimised by the very humanitarian reason (Duffield 2001, Fassin 2012) of doing good unconditionally.

Humanitarian workers, by adopting this politics of blame, often reciprocated people's mistrust towards them, a dynamic which gradually pushes the former to walk away from their own obligations to extend their outreach and properly tailor their projects to the local context. In this vein, humanitarian workers related several episodes in which their beneficiaries tended to lie *because of* their greed. For instance, a humanitarian worker living in an Akkar village affirmed:[xxii]

> "Beneficiaries always say that nothing is provided to them, or also that we are corrupt. They don't understand when we simply lack the resources to implement a project properly… Don't believe them when they tell you this; they'd go on and on to complain about anything on Earth. Some of them speak in the name of greed, not grievance."

The corrupt central state and the confessional structure of Lebanese society – where parliamentary seats and governmental roles are allocated on a religious community basis - were usually blamed to justify the aid apparatus's shortcomings. Such a politics of blame was functionally adopted to respond to the Akkar environment, where the distribution of aid to Syrian refugee newcomers antagonised the long-neglected Lebanese among whom they live at present. This point harks back to the aid industry's "culture of justification" (Terry 2002, p. 229) when facing failure.

As mentioned earlier, practitioners' "humanitarian Southism" certainly does not come without an element of self-criticism but deepens practitioners' scepticism about the

humanitarian practice itself. Many practitioner interviewees in the Akkar villages expressed scepticism about the positive results of the projects they were working on, including in terms of practical changes, long-term sustainability, territorial development and organisational approaches to the areas of intervention. Notwithstanding such self-criticism, which counters the epistemic failure explained above, humanitarian workers tended to make a rigorous distinction between their personal scepticism about the material results of their work, and their good intentions, as though the latter could almost "redeem" them from having approached or assessed the territories of intervention inappropriately. The humanitarian politics of blame that I have illustrated thus far, to a certain extent, conveys the moral solipsism of humanitarian action in the everyday life of Akkar's villages, while also suggesting that the origin of technical failure is largely situated in the provision-reception "moral economy" of humanitarianism (Fassin 2005, p. 365).

Syrian refugees and the international community
Between 2011 and 2013, in the Akkar villages, Syrian refugeehood seemed to become a synonym with international abandonment. This refugee discourse is a revealing form of geopolitical imagination in response to Southism. The continuation of the Syrian conflict was, at that stage, largely attributed to the inaction of the international actors – here international politicians – who, as the majority of the refugees I interviewed pointed out, *had* intervened in Iraq and Libya.

Most of the Syrian refugees I interviewed highlighted that aid providers tended to misinterpret the Syrian conflict and expressed their concerns that the aid industry would soon turn into a reconciliation industry that misrepresents their cultural values and social system. This suggests that some of the refugees were already formulating their thinking on how the post-emergency reconciliation would deal with the Syrian political crisis (on diverse Southern approaches to conflict and reconciliation see Daley, this volume). In this vein, the humanitarian presence was locally perceived as a for-profit enterprise trying to attract as much funding as possible, in which humanist values become market gains of reconstruction and relief projects (Potvin 2013, p. 8).

Until early 2013, 95 per cent of the refugee interviewees mentioned "revolution" (*thawra*) to refer to the events in Syria, as mostly coming from the political opposition

majority areas. Hence, Syrian refugee women and men used to vent their frustration over the western media's depiction of the Syrian conflict as a "civil war" (*harb ahliyye*) when it was mainly militias that were fighting each other. The media narratives therefore played a large role in the refugee discourse around the international community in Lebanon. A Syrian refugee[xxiii] originally from ar-Raqqa and based in Bebnin at the time of our interview, showed how the warring parts – the government, its allies, and the variegated opposition - were often incorrectly represented as having the same means. Similarly, another Syrian refugee from Afamia[xxiv] voiced his rejection of the same dominant northern narratives by stating that Syrians were not buying weapons *for the purpose of* fighting each other, but rather of liberating the country.

In all of this, humanitarian organisations were increasingly portraying the conflict as a religiously-motivated one, and some of aid recipients were resentful of the way in which they were dealt with. From the refugees' perspective, aid providers should instead be able to distinguish between root and proximate causes of conflict (Anderson 1999, p. 70) when addressing refugees' problems and designing projects. By this token, a Syrian refugee,[xxv] originally from the countryside of Deir ez-Zor, said he feels unrepresented when he watches the news on TV, and he expressed a sense of being betrayed by the international community. "Betrayal" is a term that I often heard in the refugees' campsites to refer to a part of the Syrian population that remained loyal to the regime and, above all, to the international community, "with whom we'll also need to reconcile", as noted by a Syrian refugee woman[xxvi] in an Akkar village. In this sense, the "international community's betrayal" (*khianet al-mujtamaʿ ad-duwali*) in Akkar consists of the decision to remain politically detached from the Syrian events while parading humanitarian support. Another Syrian refugee woman,[xxvii] from Homs, similarly argued: "The West and a part of Syrian society have betrayed [us]; that's the only reason why we're still dying everywhere".

The moral indictment that I recorded among refugees whom I encountered in northern Lebanon over the years was primarily directed against the "international community", which I also represented to their eyes in my capacity as an academic researcher. The distance between the territory of intervention and the territory in which decisions are made and where discussions take place, due to the Northern origin of humanitarian

orthodoxy, cannot but reproduce North-South power relationships and imaginaries (also see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, this volume).

In the same vein, in the eyes of the refugees, Islamophobia was the Northern lens to read the refugee South, which led the international community to misrepresent the Syrian conflict. For instance, a Syrian refugee man[xxviii] said that the international community fears abstract forms of Islam and draws an arbitrary line between an extremist, "terrorist" Islam, and a "moderate" Islam that could be acceptable to the West: "The international community believes that *we* need to learn from the outside what humanity (*insaniye*) and reconciliation (*musalaha*) mean." He therefore expressed his frustration that the international community limited itself to providing aid, which epitomises their "modern conscience given an alibi" (Rieff 2002, p. 96). The humanitarian operations were in fact viewed as a surrogate for the international community's political inaction: such a moderate form of support was theorised as a way of compensating for not having taken a clear stance in the Syrian conflict and not having supported the popular uprising. This assistential but apolitical form of Southism was locally rejected through the contestation of the international community's inaction.

The Southist "need to be there"

By way of conclusion, there is a complex and changing interspace between locals and internationals, which, in discussing Southism, still marks the importance of passports and nationality. As discussed above, foreign aid providers in Dahiye and Akkar often stressed their "need to be there", thus suggesting that locals would be unable to do what the international actors do because locals would not be able to replace internationals in areas where they would not feel politically - and religiously - comfortable. The words of an international humanitarian worker[xxix] in al-Qobaiyat (Akkar) postulate a Lebanon that, without international aid providers, would face even greater hardships: "Local people don't want to work in places that don't territorialise their own community, and, as a result, wouldn't act in neutral ways when facing issues that should be dealt with in a merely 'humane' way." The implicit way of rendering "humane" synonymous with "neutral" and "apolitical", and the perspective of feeling politically impartial and materially necessary for the South, were not exclusive to internationals. Similarly, the international humanitarian workers interviewed believed that, without external "therapeutic intervention" (Pupavac 2004), social changes would engender higher

levels of domestic violence and instability. From this perspective, the only alleviation of daily grievance in the addressed territories is predominantly *owed to* international humanitarian operations. Such a logical implication does not seem to take into account that any external intervention, even if "humanitarian," tends to reduce territorial and historical self-esteem to a certain extent (Harb 2006) and triggers the inner feeling that suffering can only be alleviated from the outside.

The widespread belief that humanitarian neutrality is solidly tied up in the official legitimacy of international interventionism – and that the international aid providers are deemed mostly capable of upholding such neutrality – contribute to the North-South imaginary that the local is inherently weak and needs to be managed from the outside and therapeuticised. Against this backdrop, Southerners, in response to provision, reconfigure humanitarian presence and action in terms of political solidarity.

With the double risk of diluting and unlearning 'the Souths' in a stigmatised single 'North,' scholars have generally identified a monolithic humanitarian "common culture" as a mere expression of "the humanitarian international" (Sen 1981). Nevertheless, I have argued that Southism should be de-geographicised as a more complex discourse instrument, since local providers increasingly adopt the role of trustworthy partners for foreign aid providers, temporarily blurring separation lines that re-emerge as highly significant in times of actual risk. International humanitarian workers usually cooperate with locals to secure indigenous guidance and localise their work.[xxx] In addition, there is a deliberate form of cooperation with local partners to make visible the external effort to respect local specificities and desires, as if such cooperation could ever be a guarantee for overarching neutrality, transparency and professional honesty. However, as shown, local participation is not necessarily a guarantee for "subaltern" knowledge (Spivak 1999). We therefore need a flexible geography of Southism, which disappears when irrelevant and re-emerges when able to unfold the *ad hoc* performative roles of nationality.

In the framework of the humanitarian economy, Northerners currently approach Southerners in two different ways: the first encounter involves the effort to realise a concerted "need to help" which can merge Northern and Southern standards and models of care; the second encounter involves the implementation of this need through a

gradual disengagement from responsibility and donorship (Slaughter and Crisp 2009).

I have also sought to illustrate the ways in which the South projects onto the North its own interpretation of humanitarian provision as an integral part of political solidarity and solutions, which have so far been deemed as insufficient or lacking in both the case of the July 2006 war and the 2011-ongoing Syrian political crisis. In this sense, the humanitarian economy is an inter-relational realm where passports simultaneously hold partial and contextual relevance. This chapter has tried to unfold this relevance in a bid to examine North-South encounters and imaginations and to problematise a range of ethnic and political geographies. The discursive strategy of Southism has here helped to capture the humanitarian lifeworlds and their (actual and imagined) encounters with local and refugee thinking and attitudes.

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[i] Throughout this chapter I have opted to transliterate Arabic terms and names as spoken in the Lebanese dialect terms and names..

[ii] On Northern- and Southern-led humanitarianisms, see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh in this volume, and www.southernresponses.org.

[iii] Among these 68, there were 23 working for faith-based organisations (FBOs) and 45 for secular NGOs; 38 for international NGOs (INGOs) and 30 for local NGOs.

[iv] Among the 43, 17 were working for local and Arab Gulf FBOs, 20 for secular INGOs and 6 for different UN agencies.

[v] Interview conducted with the representative of an international NGO, Beirut, November 9, 2011.

[vi] Interview conducted in al-Qobaiyat, northern Lebanon, on November 30, 2012.

[vii] An exception is made for the UN staff living in Naqura (Lebanese southern border town), where the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) headquarters are located.

[viii] Interview conducted in al-Qobaiyat, northern Lebanon, on December 9, 2012.

ix Interview conducted in Wata al-Mossaitbeh, Beirut, on October 11, 2011.

x Tha'ir Ghandour, *al-Akhbar*, September 13, 2006.

xi Interview conducted in Wata al-Mossaitbeh, Beirut, on October 11, 2011.

xii Interview conducted in ash-Shiyyah, Beirut, on February 3, 2012.

xiii Conversation with a local resident held in Haret Hreik, Beirut, on November 24, 2011.

xiv It is worth noting that *Al Jazeera*, at the time of the July 2006 war, was clearly allied with Lebanon and not with Israel. However, people in Dahiye used to refer to the channel by highlighting its current political attitude: its opposition to Hezbollah and the Axis of Resistance and its support of the Muslim Brotherhood, which became indisputable after the regime change in Egypt.

xv This is a daily Lebanese newspaper generally oriented towards the political March 8 coalition led by Hezbollah. The specific article is dated September 6, 2012, Arabic edition.

xvi Hezbollah's members also embraced this rhetoric to publicly justify international intervention. Interview conducted with the Deputy Mayor of Haret Hreik, Beirut, on October 20, 2011.

xvii French scholar Didier Fassin explained this concept in a speech he delivered at the School of Social Sciences, Institute for Advanced Studies in Paris (April 26, 2012).

xviii Interview conducted with the Municipality of ash-Shiyyah, Beirut, on October 28, 2011.

xix Interview conducted with Naziha Dakroub, Manager of the Social Development Center, Office of the Ministry of Social Affairs, ash-Shiyyah, Beirut, on October 30, 2011.

xx Interview conducted in Choueifat, Beirut, on November 27, 2012.

xxi Interview conducted in al-Ghobeiry, Beirut, on November 26, 2012.

xxii Interview conducted in Halba, northern Lebanon, on November 28, 2012.

xxiii Interview conducted in Bebnin, northern Lebanon, on January 28, 2013.

xxiv Interview conducted in al-'Abdeh, northern Lebanon, on September 29, 2012.

xxv Interview conducted in Halba, northern Lebanon, on January 28, 2013.

xxvi Interview conducted in al-Bahsa, northern Lebanon, on January 28, 2013.

xxvii Interview conducted in al-Bahsa, northern Lebanon, on December 2, 2012.

xxviii Interview conducted in al-'Abdeh, northern Lebanon, on January 28, 2013.

xxix Interview conducted at UNHCR branch, Qobaiyat, northern Lebanon, on December 12, 2012.

xxx Interview conducted with an international humanitarian worker in Forn ash-Shebbak, Beirut, on October 13, 2011.