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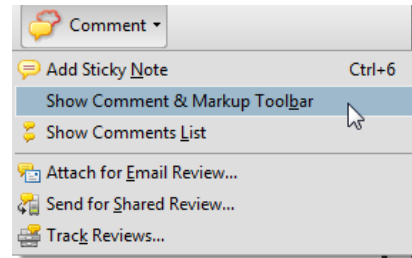
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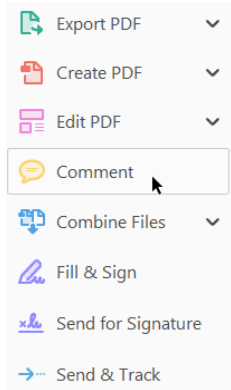
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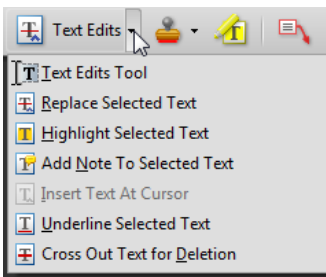The toolbar shown below will then be displayed along the top.

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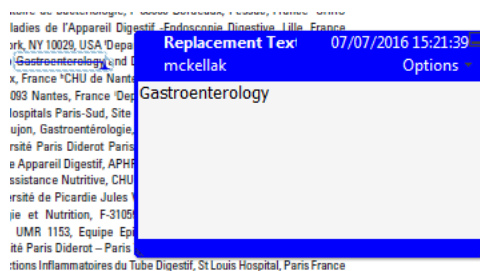
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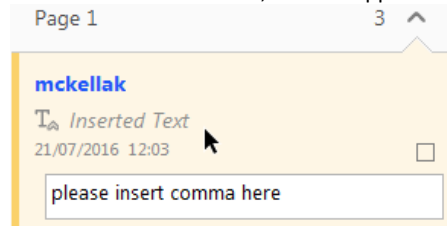
AQ2

ESTELLA CARPI   No change

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This article focuses on Syrian-refugee self-reliance and humanitarian efforts meant to foster it in Halba, northern Lebanon. I argue, first, that humanitarian livelihood programming is 'neo-cosmetic', as the skills refugees acquire through humanitarian programmes turn out to be little more than a cosmetic accessory. While the humanitarian apparatus deliberately limits its action in order not to challenge host economies, the acquired skills do not practically enhance refugees' possibility to be employed. Instead, refugee self-reliance is reconfigured as the 'inter-ethnic promotion of host stability'. Relatedly, I propose that the aim of implementing social cohesion in multi-ethnic areas reveals a new ethnicization of care within the humanitarian system. Within this framework, the citizen practice of running hardware stores on a permanent basis coexists with the temporariness of refugee livelihood practices. Lastly, I rethink social membership in a refugee–host setting by adopting a practice-based approach to the research subjects in an effort to challenge the ethnic definitions of social groups and other pre-established forms of belonging.

Keywords: Social cohesion, Lebanon, humanitarianism, refugee livelihoods, host stability, self-reliance

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AQ3

The Syrian-refugee Influx: Halba as a New Terrain for Self-reliance Strategies

Since the late 1990s, the global refugee regime has shifted from a 'care and maintenance' approach to refugee support towards self-reliance and resilient livelihoods in humanitarian programming (UNHCR 2005). This approach focuses in particular on urban environments where refugees are expected to provide for themselves in host societies, even when locals are unable to achieve this (Meyer 2006). The disconnect between refugees' experiences of livelihoods programming and the official discourse of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-borne Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS) has been widely documented by experts and scholars (Chambers

Towards a Neo-cosmetic Humanitarianism

AQ1

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1986; Black 1994; Whitaker 1999; Meyer 2006). While receiving countries, often in the cradle of Northern-led aid agencies, are believed to survive and thrive on the basis of multiple dependencies and mass consumption patterns, refugees and the urban poor are burdened with the expectation of developing adaptive self-reliance within the confines of basic needs (Duffield 2010: 65–66). The official UNHCR definition of self-reliance[1] includes different scales of human ability to cope (e.g. community, individual and household). However, my study shows that SRS-driven humanitarian programmes currently fail to capture pre-existing networks of mutual support and assistance. Based on common practices, such networks unearth a peculiar configuration of social belonging, disentangled from ethnic and religious categories. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies thus tend to not capitalize on pre-existing multi-scale mechanisms of self-reliance but rather put in place uncontextualized parallel strategies aimed at enhancing local and refugee livelihoods.

In this article, I examine refugees' actual experiences of humanitarian livelihood practices. I examine today's role of humanitarian-promoted self-reliance in southern settings affected by the crisis, namely in Halba, the capital of the historically deprived northern Lebanese region of Akkar. Defining ethnicity as a political marker of national belonging and identity (Smith 1981), I consider the only two major ethnic groups who inhabit Halba today: Lebanese residents and Syrian refugees. While I distance myself from adhering to nationality driven conceptions of ethnicity, I examine them to reflect how humanitarianism practically operates on the ground: tackling (predominantly Arab) neighbouring demographic groups as though they were different ethnicities that need to reconcile, and disregarding continuities and dissimilarities across their social classes and political backgrounds. In this vein, I inquire into the ways in which humanitarian practices bring into existence and tackle ethnic communities in a bid to build cohesion and stability within the receiving society.

In light of this, I put forth a three-fold definition of 'neo-cosmetic', which can illuminate the politics behind deliberately limited effects of current livelihood programmes in an already constrained economy. Notably, in this context, the stability of the 'host' state is promoted among Lebanese and Syrian nationals. Conceptualizing current humanitarianism in northern Lebanon as 'neo-cosmetic', I examine how the act of promoting refugee self-reliance moralizes the geopolitical interests of the receiving state, while humanitarian agencies guarantee their own survival in prolonged crisis settings.

Context

Northern Lebanon has severe poverty and the country's worst unemployment rates. Out of a total population of 1.1 million people, 708,000 live below the poverty line: 341,000 deprived Lebanese, over 266,000 Syrian refugees, 88,000 Palestine refugees and almost 12,000 Lebanese returnees (OCHA 2016).

Akkar's families, whose average size is 4.7 individuals (higher than the national average), constitute nearly 20.5 per cent of the entire Lebanese population and maintain a traditional socio-cultural structure (Abi-Habib Khoury 2012: 25).

5   Northern Lebanon was one of the primary destinations for Syrians fleeing violence and persecution. Following the escalation of the conflict in 2011, Syrian nationals poured into this area in their capacity as refugee newcomers or erstwhile migrant workers who found themselves in a new condition of refugeehood. In this context, humanitarian agencies initially intervened to
10   assist only Syrian refugees, despite the region's chronic long-standing neglect by the state and NGOs. Especially since 2013, when the Syrian crisis became acute, international humanitarian agencies began conducting several livelihood programmes by adopting the UNHCR policy of building refugee self-reliance over time. Self-reliance and livelihood programmes, in this frame-
15   work, become a framework for understanding how people have or build their access to resources, services and rights granted or denied to particular groups (Yiftachel and Yacobi 2003), especially in crisis-stricken settings.

Methodology

My research methodology initially adopted an actor-oriented definition of the
20   'humanitarian arena' (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010), by embracing the idea of a humanitarian space in which some actors are involved at different levels in market-related activities (e.g. sale, consumption, bargains, etc.) and humanitarian work. To explore humanitarian action and urban refugee self-reliance in markets, I depart from the 'theoretical perspective' of humanitarian actors
25   (Bakewell 2008), who base and design their programmes on the identity categories of refugee and migrant guests, humanitarians and local citizens.

In data collection and analysis, I adopt a practice-based approach by drawing on practice theory (Spaargaren *et al.* 2016), according to which social dynamics and social facts are analysed as *practices* rather than
30   values and normative patterns (Lizardo 2009: 714). The practice approach is aimed at identifying the trajectories and the interconnections between human practices, and raise the issue of ethnic and religious belongings in the form of well-bounded beneficiary categories. Dropping ethnic and religious definitions of market subjects, in this sense, entails transformative po-
35   tential vis-à-vis the identity politics that normally dominate the humanitarian understanding of needs and resolutions in crisis-affected settings.

While the fieldwork data used for this article was collected between February and March 2017, this study is located in the framework of the author's seven-year research experience on humanitarian programmes in
40   the Akkar region. Over one month, I drew on the fine-grained knowledge of the city by local intellectuals—specifically a historian, a writer and a poet—in the effort to rebuild the city's economic history, which is rarely tackled in academic texts. However, my main field companions were

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Halba's local residents and Syrian refugees. I carried out participant obser-
vation and walking interviews (Evans and Jones 2011) with four local resi-
dents in an effort to corroborate the intimate meaning of their accounts by
physically connecting them to the spatiality of Halba's political economy and
5   Syria's former control over the region. Public spaces prompted personal
memories, as well as the choice of route (Jones *et al.* 2008). This was not
feasible with urban refugees, who, most of the time, felt uncomfortable or
even unsafe in outdoor spaces. In-depth interviews and participant observa-
tions were instead conducted with five Syrian refugees, mixed with regard to
10   their gender and beneficiary status in a bid to guarantee representativeness of
my interviewees. However, my analysis has not considered how these vari-
ables differently shaped personal perceptions. People who have long resided
in Halba were preferred in the participant recruitment process. I personally
observed and participated in people's everyday coping practices (as will
15   become evident, this included at times economic and monetary practices,
and at times social arrangements to make ends meet).

Finally, in-depth interviews and participant observation were conducted
with six local aid workers from five international non-governmental organ-
izations (INGOs): the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)-Akkar
20   Network for Development partnership (three interviewees), Save the
Children Lebanon (one interviewee), the International Rescue Committee
(one interviewee) and the Danish Refugee Council (one interviewee). The
INGOs that were selected for the study are currently conducting livelihood
programmes in Halba (mostly vocational training, small-scale income-gener-
25   ating activities and cash-for-work/service/product projects). Thus, I chose to
interview aid workers who are simultaneously operators in livelihood pro-
grammes and everyday local market actors.

The one-month time frame for fieldwork did not provide me with sufficient
time to observe how beneficiaries experienced and responded to the tempor-
30   ary nature of such livelihood programmes on a continual basis. Such pro-
grammes in Halba normally run for three months. Consequently, in one
month, I spoke to people who had already completed a project or were
engaged in it at the time of the fieldwork. While the timeline thus posed
constraints to assessing what livelihoods programmes did and did not
35   change in the individual's broader life framework, it allowed me to meet
refugees who had already completed previous livelihood programmes and
enabled me to identify continuities and dissimilarities across past and present
coping mechanisms and survival tactics.

The Re-territorialization of the 'Syrian Occupation' in Halba

40   On a cold morning in late February, a local intellectual told me: 'Halba is
neither a village nor a city' (*wa la qariye wa la medine*). Halba's society is still
resting on the rural social hierarchies and relationships characterizing the
surrounding hamlets. Halba's economic importance derived from its

delete and replace with: recounted to me the history of Halba as "neither…"

intermediary position between Homs in Syria and Tripoli in Lebanon and
from being the main market for the surrounding villages (Zakhour 2005: 24).
After Lebanon obtained independence from France (1946), Halba largely lost
its commercial importance due to the improvement of transport between the
northern city of Tripoli and the Akkar region. However, it remained one of
the main junctions in this region (Zakhour 2005: 25).

In the winter of 2017, with a population of 27,000 local inhabitants, Halba
had some 17,000 urban refugees.[2] These Syrian nationals, who mostly fled
Syria between 2011 and 2014, tend to reside in informal settlements on plots
of land next to roads or rent out apartments. Most refugees living in Halba
used to live in Syrian cities. On average, they now pay 100 USD per month
to rent *makhazen* (rehabilitated depots)—agglomerations of very tiny and
humid apartments that generally contain up to 10 families. Most of the refu-
gees who opted for accommodations other than rehabilitated depots and
UNHCR shelters have pre-existing networks in the region that they relied
on to look for better housing solutions.

At present, Syrian nationals in Halba occupy a similar position as they did
previously in the Akkar economy by providing menial labour in gardening,
construction, cleaning and agriculture—the sectors in which they are formally
allowed to work.[3] Prior to the crisis, Syrian migrant workers were mostly
young or middle-aged men (Chalcraft 2006, 2009), often providing seasonal
labour in Lebanon before returning to Syria, where their families lived and
where services and everyday resources were more affordable. When the con-
flict broke out in Syria in the spring of 2011, some of these migrant workers
brought their families to Lebanon. The local economy of Akkar, therefore,
became a new refuge for refugee women, youth and children. The sociological
features of the local workforce and its costs, which mostly vary according to
the age of the labourer, have therefore changed considerably over the past
seven years.

While, on the whole, Akkar is surely a historically 'oppressed and forgotten
area' (*mantaqa mazlume w mahrume*; and often baptized as *yatime*, an 'or-
phan' region of its own central state), the impact of forced migration changes
considerably according to the specific context. Due to the unprecedented
humanitarian presence in Akkar following the influxes of Syrian refugees,
large segments of the middle and upper classes have become wealthier
(Ashkar 2015), the available workforce is cheaper and the humanitarian pres-
ence has produced a new market demand. As a result, poorer classes have
borne the brunt of most of the economic pressure following the arrival of
Syrian refugees. Major pressure was felt in the agricultural sector. By con-
trast, owners of properties and rental agencies have seen more international
investment because humanitarian agencies rent out cars and apartments to
conduct their programmes *in loco*. Yet, despite the Syrian-refugee influx's
socio-economic impact on Akkar, the daily narrative of generalized depriv-
ation has the effect of viewing local vulnerabilities as homogenous.

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Both local residents and urban refugees describe Halba as a city of
ta'aiyush ('co-existence'): a city for all, where confessional identity politics
has less room than in other areas of Akkar or Lebanon on the whole.
Local inhabitants highlight the presence of different political parties.
Nonetheless, before April 2005, when the Syrian troops withdrew from
Lebanon, the Syrian government's opponents were not allowed to open pol-
itical party branches.[4]

This idea of local harmony contrasts with the local unease of living with
refugees, as they embody the historical spectre of the *Pax Syriana*, which, at
a local level, is mostly perceived as the Syrian 'occupation' of Lebanon
(1976–2005). Most of the Akkaris now perceive themselves as victims of an
occupation whose history is still unwritten (Carpi 2017). This has tangible
effects on local Syrian–Lebanese relations today. For instance, the *mukhtar*—
local state official—I interviewed expressed his desire to introduce curfews for
Syrian men to avoid sexual harassment at night time. 'I used to be stopped in
the street by the Syrian army in early 2000. We are entitled to enact security
measures against the refugees now,' he told me. A Lebanese resident also
recounted that there used to be more mixed marriages between Lebanese and
Syrian nationals prior to the 2011 crisis, but now 'the perception of having
them here really changed. They are no longer migrant labourers with habits
similar to ours, they remind us of the neighbouring crisis'.[5]

These narratives suggest new local attitudes towards Syrian nationals as
they have 'become' protracted refugees. If the refugees in Akkar are an un-
avoidable spectre of what has locally been experienced as the 'Syrian occu-
pation' of Lebanon, those who fled the government's shelling from 2011
onwards are still identified with the regime that controlled Lebanon and
shaped its politics from 1976 to 2005, inevitably reminding local people of
the past deprivation and oppression of their own region. In this sense, the
refugees have become 'unintentional (mobile) monuments' (Bevan 2007: 176)
of past wounds. Akkaris still offer a tangible sense of the geography of the
'Syrian protection' (*wikala suriyya*), mentioning the statues of Basel and
Hafez al-Asad, checkpoints and celebratory street names, all of which were
removed immediately after Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon. In Waleed's
memories,[6] for example, the main street used to be called Basel al-Asad
Street before 2005, in honour of the current Syrian president's brother. He
still recalls the square where there were checkpoints and where soldiers used
to stop local people and control all movement. Halba, at that time, was
already one of the main hubs in Akkar and the Syrian regime forbade com-
mercial activities outside of its control during this time. Locally, the stifling of
the economic flourishing of Akkar is still often attributed to the Syrian
regime.[7] Local residents commonly mention the fact that Syrian nationals,
who used to oppress them in the capacity of soldiers or competitors on the
labour market, can now leave for Europe much more easily than they can,
thanks to their refugee status. A Lebanese resident finds such a legal differ-
entiation unfair because 'What is happening in Syria also happened to us'.[8]

Delete "therefore" and the two commas

As the quotes above illustrate, the practices of humanitarian agencies, therefore, take place in an environment where Syrian refugees are marked out as *other* to the local residents. The enactment of curfews and bans targeting Syrian nationals (As-Saadi 2014; El Helou 2014; Carpi *et al*. 2016) have largely contributed to making the Syrian an 'other' despite the long-standing economic, family and cultural ties that have long since bound the two countries.

Hardware and Agriculture Tools Shops: A Collective Practice of Homemaking

Nowadays, Halba's marketplace can only be seen at the small city's main intersection: small restaurants and cafeterias, one or two mobile shops and a few hair-dressing shops. The affluence of local and international humanitarian workers—potential consumers—over the past six years has had little impact on the local market but is much more visible in villages and cities in northern Lebanon, where a slightly larger variety of entertainment venues is now on offer. The World Food Programme (WFP) grants 27 USD per family member per month to Syrian refugees in Halba, which is generally spent on food and basic needs alone.

In this meagre marketplace, Halba's local residents open shops selling a combination of hardware, tyre, carpentry and garden tools. These shops of hardware and agriculture tools (*mahalet khardawet w adawet zira'iyye*) are seen as a guarantee that their ownership is local: 'There's no Syrian refugee or migrant that ever opened such shops in the area. They normally work in this sector as occasional assistants ….[9] At the beginning, during the war, there were only two or three shops like this,'[10] affirmed Hadi. 'It eventually became the biggest business in Halba.' Many shops are owned by Lebanese who used to live in Tripoli[11] and then decided to go back to their village in Akkar during the 1975–90 Lebanese civil war, since traders used to deal with 'fewer political issues'[12] in villages when they wanted to open a shop.

Many other shop owners have personal stories of past mobility and economic migration, especially during the years of the civil war, when, as some locals recall, Syrian nationals used to work in such hardware shops in greater numbers. Waleed migrated to Baghdad to work as a waiter for one year before he decided to return to Lebanon and inherit his father's shop, which is still located close to Halba's roundabout. Hadi, likewise, migrated to Venezuela, where he ran an apparel shop for 11 years. When, in 1986, he decided to go back to Lebanon to give his children the same education that he had, he preferred opening a shop of hardware and agriculture tools:

As in this sector you don't need to keep up with fashions: Models never change, and you don't need to throw out older items. It's easier and less costly. In Halba, I couldn't sell apparel as I did in Venezuela …. People here are poor and don't prioritise that. This is an easier job, and there are no official regulations.[13]

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Similarly, Waleed affirmed that he would never renovate his shop, as 'looking too posh and expensive is a deterrent for most clients'.[14]

Iron tools and cattle items, such as cow and horse saddles, used to be mostly imported from Syrian cities before the conflict, especially from Hama and Salamiyye. Waleed used to travel between Syria and Lebanon for business transactions on a daily basis before inheriting his father's shop. Now, Syrian nationals or Akkaris from Alawite-majority villages, which generally have better connections with the Syrian regime, are the only ones to be trusted for business activities between Syria and Lebanon. Despite the Syrian conflict and the decrease in imports in the Dabbusiyye–'Abbudiye border region, the business volume in the hardware shops has not changed. The cost of products in Lebanon, however, has soared, making self-reliance a pipedream for both locals and Syrian refugees.

A temporal dimension now creates a division between Syrian nationals who ran these hardware shops years back and Akkari returnees. From a local perspective, Syrians have always been considered entitled to provide temporary labour in Akkar, as they used to do in the capacity of migrant workers prior to the Syrian conflict. Throughout the twentieth century, Syrians mostly provided seasonal work, with neither the intention nor the social comfort to create a proper Syrian community in Lebanon by bringing their families with them and expanding their perspectives of resettlement. The return of the Lebanese migrant and his exclusiveness in the entitlement to own hardware shops contrast with the impossibility for Syrian nationals to cultivate a sense of personal stability in Lebanon. In other words, refugees experience a sense of 'permanent temporariness' (Yiftachel 2009: 89–90). In this sense, the local refusal to have Syrian nationals in the same job positions as the Lebanese not only indicates the typical rejection of sharing life and welfare with newcomers, but also points to a struggle over the other's temporal horizons. This temporal tension between refugees and hosts, meeting with the increasingly long-term perspective of the humanitarian system (traditionally thought as temporary and short-term action), gives rise to a double clash of temporalities, for which self-reliant Syrian nationals in the Akkar region would be considered as threats. While refugees seek to expand their temporal perspectives in Akkar (mostly due to a lack of other options), local residents struggle over their exclusive right to return to, live and proliferate in Halba with no temporal restrictions.

The labour of Lebanese returnees in Halba's hardware shops is locally experienced as a collective act meant to morally and economically monopolize a commercial activity. It also illustrates the interface between human experiences of migration—in this specific case, between Lebanon, Venezuela and Iraq—and historical trajectories of socio-economic practices. Hardware shops in the Halba public space mark an assertive collective form of home-making to which refugees are not entitled. In other words, running hardware shops in Halba becomes the local signifier of national legitimacy to claim the home and implement comfortable patterns of social order. I view these

practices of homemaking and order-making as a local response to what I call 'inter-ethnic promotion of host stability' on the humanitarian agenda, which may also be applicable in countries other than Lebanon: it boosts long-term local safety in a context where refugees do not hold a legal status, works towards regional security and curbs migration flows towards the Global North.

Self-reliance as Inter-ethnic Promotion of Host Stability

While the idea of human security shifted the focus from the state to the individual (Large and Sisk 2007; UNTFHS 2009), the mission to save lives and alleviate suffering during protracted crises entails the idea of a future built on the goal of making individuals self-reliant. In this framework, the currently popular vision of resilient livelihoods fits neo-liberal models of governance. In the same vein, the latest scholarly 'agentification' trend, which intends to re-consign agency to refugees in the wake of a long-standing process of de-humanization, de-subjectivization and de-historicization (Arendt 1958; Agamben 1998; Pandolfi 2008), corroborates the neo-liberal frame of individual responsibility. If old forms of romanticizing poverty denied agency to the poor (Simone 2008), the current language of resilient livelihoods embodies its new form, where the protracted nature of refugee crises produces the *need to* attribute agency to refugees due to the shortage of resources and the 'financial aims of the northern donor community' (Easton-Calabria and Omata 2018: 9). Drawing on these considerations, I will illustrate how the skills refugees acquire through humanitarian programmes inevitably end up being little more than a cosmetic accessory. While the humanitarian apparatus deliberately limits its action in order not to challenge host economies, the acquired skills do not practically enhance the refugees' possibility to be employed in a current and historically constrained economy, and turn instead into personal frustration.

The support and assistance that Akkari society alone provided to the first arrivals from Syria in 2011 were already encounters between long-standing self-reliant subjects: Both Syrian refugees—fleeing war, impoverishment and persecutions—and Lebanese Akkaris were in fact faced with the need to deal with economic hardships, state repression and state neglect, respectively. Today, humanitarian livelihood programmes are inscribed in a framework of compensatory mechanisms meant to address the frictions caused in Akkar by a previous ethnocratic system of provision (Carpi 2017). Local economic vulnerability and poor infrastructures in Akkar were in fact internationally recognized only when the Syrian-refugee crisis became protracted and INGOs activated belated compensatory aid and service provision to both locals and refugees as a biopolitical strategy of containing local discontent and forced migrants (Duffield 2008: 149–151) within the Middle East region. With protracted displacement, the humanitarian apparatus associated multi-ethnic, refugee–host co-existence with the risk of regional instability.

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Self-reliance here has come to be employed by humanitarian agencies as a back-route to achieving social cohesion and stability.

   Among the interviewees, those who identified themselves as relatively self-reliant subjects were those who could capitalize on previous resources and acquaintances, such as connections with their current landowner. In most cases, however, even Syrian returnees who went back to Akkar after the beginning of the conflict had no resources and social capital to rely on, even though some of them already previously worked or were even born in the region. Most of the refugees I interviewed approached the concept of self-reliance in terms of economic resilience and self-sufficiency. This was reflected in the Arabic translation of humanitarian self-reliance as 'self-sufficiency' (*iktifa' adh-dhat*), merely referred to as self-based economic sustainability. On the whole, refugees considered self-sufficiency as neither achievable nor conceivable in the Lebanese context. Most of the refugees affirmed their dependence on NGO support and the remittances of relatives who resettled in other host countries to better sustain themselves; on the other hand, some incur debt, accept exploitation or advance promises of payment in order to survive.

   In particular, the refugee economy in Halba revolves around food vouchers, which the refugees often have to sell in order to purchase goods that have become more expensive than everyday food but are not included in the WFP list (among the items mentioned most often were shampoo, nappies and other toiletry items). In the context of this study, I met no refugee saying that they work on a regular basis or earn a salary that entirely allows them to pay for their living. This data is confirmed by the extremely small number of beneficiaries who have been employed after benefitting from a livelihood programme according to an aid worker.[15] The number shrinks even further in the formal sector.

   According to the local humanitarian workers I interviewed, self-reliance aims to measure the impact of humanitarian intervention and the levels of dependency on external support over time. The importance of this category emphasizes the need to make sources of livelihoods 'resilient' in the context of a chronic crisis. Nevertheless, the Arabic linguistic genealogy of the conception of 'livelihoods' reveals how much broader the scope of humanitarian action has become, enlarging the meaning from *masdar rizq/mawrid rizq* ('source of sustenance/living') to a more general *tahsin sobol al-'ayish* ('betterment of ways of living'). In the following sections, I seek to show how self-reliance, in this framework, is aimed at serving the public good, turning into the inter-ethnic promotion of host stability.

   I attended chocolate-making training financed by the European Union and UNICEF over four weeks. Chocolate making has become a success story in the Syrian-refugee diaspora and this business success is now known with the motto 'peace by chocolate'.[16] The workshop took place in Halba twice a week over the course of three months and was managed by the local NGO Akkar Network for Development (AND),[17] which runs several livelihood

programmes in the Akkar region in partnership with INGOs. According to the aid workers,[18] chocolate making was not a proposal based on a market-skills-gap analysis but created on the basis of available resources. Among the nine trainees, there were six Syrian women and three Lebanese women who had their transport expenses covered to reach the AND branch and who suffered from very similar economic vulnerabilities. Most of the attendees learned about the workshop through their neighbours, the school of their children (which sponsored it), the driver of an NGO who used to drive previous beneficiaries to the same workshop and through relatives who also wanted to attend. As a result, the vast majority of the Syrian-refugee women who attended were from the same region in Syria. In more detail, I will refer to the interviews conducted with three Syrian-refugee women and a Lebanese woman who were attending a livelihood programme, one Syrian-refugee man with no access to livelihood programmes due to physical imparity and one Syrian-refugee man, who previously benefitted from a cash-for-work programme.

Similar to Duffield's 'cooperative integration' (2010: 156), external aid, by addressing both national groups, is increasingly used to reach the overarching goal and shared aim of bringing different groups together. The attendance of Syrians and Lebanese, albeit in uneven numbers, conveyed this apparent desire from the NGO's side to create a new social membership—that of a worker in the chocolate-making sector. Insofar as the goal of livelihood programming becomes social cohesion and stability, the livelihood agenda translates into an inter-ethnic promotion of host stability, as refugees are invited to be proactive in fostering security processes. On the other hand, according to the refugees and the local residents I interviewed, such an inter-ethnic strategy of teaching skills, at times, was locally perceived as causing further job competition and fuelling inter-group conflicts.

The beneficiaries' expectations of the livelihood programmes were quite diverse and ranged from the desire or the need to find a job to approaching the workshop as a mere leisure activity. This was largely due to their recognition that, in the end, Akkar's economy will not guarantee them a place on the labour market and their awareness of the legal constraints for refugees in Lebanon. Most of the time, the kind of labour that beneficiaries envisioned was home-based and small-scale, aimed at mere survival or contributing to the family income (i.e. by selling chocolates to neighbours). In sum, the chocolate-making activity was approached as a potential way to get some income but was not envisioned as the leading financial means of support in the household. Refugees in particular approached the training as a leisure activity, a way 'to meet other people', 'to not be locked in the house all day' and to fill the day with a new activity. Significantly, all of the Lebanese women who attended the chocolate-making workshop used to work in the past and had lost their job for different reasons. Therefore, unemployment was the factor that led them to participate. Indeed, unlike Syrian nationals, poor Lebanese residents do not generally deal with legal constraints and tend

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to approach livelihood programmes as future job opportunities and humanitarian providers as temp agencies. These significant findings lead to the following analysis of the neo-cosmetic dimension that humanitarian livelihood programmes assume when dealing with refugees.

Towards a Neo-cosmetic Humanitarianism

According to the aid workers I interviewed, among livelihood programmes, cash-for-work programmes have neither engendered significant changes on the local economy nor meaningfully managed to support refugee self-reliance mechanisms. However, such programmes are ripe with side effects, having in fact helped to improve the Akkar landscape and environment, such as the coast-cleaning project from al-'Abdeh to 'Arida (northern border-crossing with Syria). The short time frame of the livelihood programmes is mentioned as the first problematic factor inhibiting a long-term and sizeable effect on Halba's local market.

'Abdallah[19] benefitted from an international cash-for-work (CfW) programme in Halba, meant to clean the city in agreement with the municipality. The programme included three Lebanese and nine Syrians, and ran for a total of 30 days over a period of three months, with those participating receiving a salary of nearly 20 USD (35,000 Lebanese Lira (LL)) per day. To reach Halba with his wife and three children through the 'Arsal border-crossing, 'Abdallah bribed the Jabhat an-Nusra armed group (the current Haiy'at Tahrir ash-Sham) to negotiate their passage with the Syrian regime. Their relocation to Halba cost them a fortune. 'Abdallah's family needs to pay approximately 23 USD (35,000 LL) for electricity on a monthly basis, 33 USD (50,000 LL) to rent the land for their tent and further costs for transport to the village of Qobaiyat, which has the only nearby hospital falling under UNHCR-run health care. In addition, every winter, they need to pay to replace shelter material and tarpaulins to make their home weather-resistant. Even though 'Abdallah's family receives food vouchers from the UNHCR (now through an e-card), they remain unable to pay for nappies, as they cost approximately 30 USD (45,000 LL) per month:

> I can do only light work now because I got injured here in Lebanon—[showing a deep wound on his left arm]—so the cleaning work programme was the best option for me. Three months after the CfW, however, my life returned to the way it used to be before. I used to be a driver in Syria, and I wish I could do the same job here. My driving licence remained in my house under shelling. It would be too costly to purchase a new one in Lebanon.

Apart from the temporary nature of the job opportunity he was given, 'Abdallah confirms the finding that cash provides a sense of normality in everyday life (Bailey and Harvey 2015). His relatives in 'Amman, after remaining stuck in a buffer desert land strip at the Jordanian border—called 'the berm'—with no access to water and food, were able to send them money

via Western Union from time to time. His brother was recently injured at work and has no insurance covering medical expenses for treatment. As a consequence, 'Abdallah has not been paying the rent for three months and now fears eviction. 'Our self-sufficiency means leading an indoor life and consuming as little as possible.'[20] As in the case of the chocolate-making workshop, CfW beneficiaries are allowed to enrol in these programmes once a year due to the larger numbers of aspiring workers and trainees. No follow-up stage is, however, included in these programmes, such as renting a property where chocolate makers can make and sell their products, to help them turn from merely being employable into actual employees.

In this scenario, as specified by all of the local aid providers I interviewed, 'humanitarian livelihood programming has a deliberately modest effect'[21]: in fact, radical forms of self-reliance or 'radical autonomy' (Duffield 2010: 68) would endanger the humanitarian–host state relationship and therefore result in being undesirable. Should humanitarianism be conceived of as serving geopolitical power, it simultaneously provides 'cosmetic comfort to gloss over its harsh realities' (Hoffman and Weiss 2018: 35) and 'cover[s] up the ugly face of colonialism' (Chakrabarti 1988: 565). In other words, in the wake of cosmetic humanitarianism used to define diplomatic choices of government coalitions as a way of sugar-coating states' political and economic interests (Minear 2002: 86), current humanitarianism—aware of the unrealistic character of self-reliance—continues to promote it while assuming a neo-cosmetic configuration. Still disguising its primary compliance with state interests, this reconfiguration can be explained as three-fold: first, neo-cosmetic humanitarianism explicitly aims to create cohesion among social groups as an inherently positive sociological act, in the attempt to achieve regional and global stability. Second, implementing neo-cosmetic humanitarianism also means that INGOs and United Nations agencies—traditionally started to meet immediate needs in times of crisis—tend to stay in the aftermath of wars to keep their access to local populations and uphold the donors' accountability in view of future wars (Belloni 2005). In this sense, humanitarian agencies, during protracted crisis, stop prioritizing urgent refugee needs and cater to their own survival in the area of intervention, thereby striving for the stability of the host as a *sine qua non* condition to remain. Third, when working in economic settings where there are no official refugees, work is allowed in a small number of sectors. Temporal permanence needs to be negotiated, as neo-cosmetic humanitarianism intends to leave the international community with the feeling that, despite such structural constraints, 'all of the possible is being done'[22] and that the humanitarian system adapts to contextual specificities while leaving its foundational structures unchanged. I will now illustrate how neo-cosmetic humanitarianism develops through individual-based programmes and ethnocratic identity politics—both of which, far beyond the structural constraints of Akkar's market, render the humanitarian livelihood agenda largely ineffective.

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Self-reliance as a Household-scaled Objective

The humanitarian metrics developed to measure self-reliance among the addressed communities are often decontextualized. In order for such metrics to provide meaningful information, they need to become context-driven (Singh-Peterson and Underhill 2017). In Halba, most of the livelihood programmes were designed to be individual-focused, scarcely reflecting the multi-scalar dimension that self-reliance processes acquire in everyday life. In this sense, such programmes barely reflect the highly contextual community's capacities for adaptation and transformation.

Findings show that financial management in Halba's everyday life is conducted per household rather than on the basis of family ties: among the refugees, indeed, cousins and siblings do not necessarily support each other. Even though humanitarian initiatives—such as UNHCR programmes—currently tend to provide large families with special allowance in Lebanon and beyond,[23] they still adopt an individualized approach by assessing vulnerability on the basis of the number of family members.

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Mohammad,[24] originally from Aleppo (northern Syria), has been in Halba for four years. He used to be a tiler before the war but now suffers from a slipped disc and is unable to work. Mohammad's sister is a widow and is raising her four children. Mohammad's family, his sister and her three kids live together to support each other. His sister receives help from local charities to take care of her children. Both families sell the WFP food vouchers (27 USD per month per member of the household) in order to pay rent (130 USD with electricity bills included). Being 11 household members in total, they can sell 297 USD of vouchers per month to Lebanese neighbours, who crave to receive financial support for everyday shopping expenses. Mohammad specified: 'We're able to save some money to get cheap food, but the rent needs much more. With no work, there is no alternative.' Self-reliance, in this case, is household-oriented rather than being an individual or a family unity-oriented way of coping and producing self-sustainability. This demonstrates that the international humanitarian promotion of individual-centred economic practices and livelihood models are those with which both refugee and local populations have difficulty identifying

But—as the UNHCR definition suggests—is the humanitarian apparatus actually interested in fostering self-reliant subjects by designing scale-sensitive programmes, which contextually take into account the family, individual, community or household-based nature of self-reliance? My field interviews with humanitarian workers show that self-reliance is rather conceived as a means to achieve social cohesion and stability, rather than a goal per se. In this scenario, market-based solutions are particularly popular, and labour-market regulations and institutions are seen as key to underpinning collective efforts, cooperation and a sense of sameness and social belonging (Dimeglio *et al.* 2013: 758). Therefore, humanitarian agencies strive for economic

homogeneity in the labour market as a guarantee for social cohesion and, in turn, security.

The humanitarian SRS, moreover, can be considered falling outside of the rights-based framework, as it does not involve any legal change (Wilson 2010:
5   109). On the one hand, guaranteeing survival and livelihoods for all is a growing need to meet the global concern of securitization in refugee–host societies, which validates market-based activities and, ideally, economic success as an efficient back-route to social cohesion and stability (Lundborg 2013; Blocher and Gulati 2016). On the other, livelihood programmes are
10 unsuccessful, given that preserving the Akkar region's gendered and ethnicized labour market (by creating opportunities for home-based labour for women and menial labour for the rural and urban poor) is a priority to preserve social order and leave local power structures unchallenged. In not producing any substantial economic change either at a collective or at an
15 individual level, livelihood programmes corroborate neo-cosmetic forms of humanitarianism.

Challenging Pre-packaged Identities through a Practice-based Approach

Although the search for and management of resources are generally more difficult for refugees (given that they normally have weaker connections and
20 networks to build on with respect to locals), Syrian refugees and poor Lebanese citizens face the same cost of living and, particularly in the case of poorer classes, receive nearly the same salary. In this context, there is frequent mutual support as well as services between refugees and local residents, which too often have gone unheeded in NGO and scholarly reports.
25 This demonstrates the importance of challenging pre-packed identities as perceived by humanitarians and instead developing a deeper understanding of how identities blur through shared practices.

A further example is provided by the everyday practice of car sharing, which I witnessed in one of Halba's surrounding villages. Car sharing
30 turned out to be a relatively common practice among Syrians and Lebanese residents who reside in the Akkar region, which is poorly served in terms of means of public transport. Indeed, some low-income Syrian and Lebanese families cannot afford to have their own car. During my prolonged stays in Akkar, I knew of Syrian and Lebanese families who had purchased
35 second-hand cars and shared the costs of using and maintaining them or had even shared the purchase costs. Such collective practices contradict the predominant narrative of social 'inter-ethnic' tensions and are signs of pre-existent self-sufficiency mechanisms. In this scenario, international programmes to enhance local livelihoods ignore and therefore cannot support such local ar-
40 rangements. It is meaningful that I identified the car-sharing practice as a local regular pattern only seven years after developing close familiarity with this specific area of the Akkar region. In-depth knowledge of local everyday life is instead considered an unneeded luxury within humanitarian agencies,

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where the high turnover of staff hampers the process of familiarization with local settings. Yet, this time is needed to capture and support such pre-existing local practices and networks—and challenge the perception that international humanitarian aid engenders the *first* encounter and collaboration between Lebanese residents and Syrian nationals.

Such mutual livelihoods arrangements, here classified as socio-economic practices, are aimed at supporting both families, beyond their ethnic identities. Hence, ethnic identity in this case does not succeed in capturing clearly distinct tactics of survival, which, in the settings illustrated, instead form a wide network of mutual support and negotiations. The practice-based approach (described in the methodology section) is a powerful tool to unfold how social membership and economic status are not ethnically defined. First, eschewing the language of culture-oriented values and norms allows the grouping of people on the basis of *what they actually do* rather than who they supposedly are and how they supposedly feel in the host environment. Second, although the aim is to transcend boundary categories by observing common or dissimilar socio-economic practices, such emerging categories relate to the larger contexts as collective groups rather than individuals (Warde 2014), confronting the orthodox demographics of the humanitarian system. As seen, looking at practice-arrangement bundles and their historical development permits teasing out actual social memberships in humanitarian thinking. Indeed, refugees typically need to respond to assistance regimes' criteria of eligibility by waving their identity flags in order to qualify for food, health, education services, resettlement or even the right to move. The practice-based approach, in this context, creates room to redefine a more authentic epistemology of needs and assistance regimes.

Conclusion

In the orthodox perspective of long-term displacement, refugees have historically produced the need to internationally label receiving societies as 'hosts', which therefore receive public acknowledgement for their protracted hospitality. In contrast, the Halba experience shows that the formal humanitarian response to crisis—via livelihood programmes—has encouraged Lebanese returnees to reconfigure previous Syrian migrants as refugees, in a bid to reclaim their home. While Syrian migrant workers used to run hardware shops before 2011, in the wake of the official response to the crisis, they started being homogenously portrayed as 'refugees' whose presence needs to be temporary. In this context, safeguarding the home comes into play as a societal strategy of local self-determination. Owning and running shops of hardware material and agriculture tools are collective practices of homemaking that have allowed the Akkari 'hosts' to reinvent their relationship with the Syrians' presence. The existential divide between Lebanese returnees and Syrian refugees in their respective ability and lack of ability to develop long-term perspectives in Halba plays a role in negotiating territorial permanence.

Paradoxically, those who are not legally entitled to settle down are officially expected to become self-reliant.

In this framework, the timid humanitarian attempt to produce workers does not adopt refugee self-reliance and economic prosperity as primary ob-
5 jectives. Instead, promoting the enhancement of citizen and refugee partici-
pation in local markets is a means to foster social cohesion and avoid tensions. Humanitarian livelihood programmes in Halba do not intend to really affect the local market. In other words, they 'keep the poor in place' (Simone 2008: 186). As a result, refugee beneficiaries—the aspiring self-reliant
10 subjects—increasingly view livelihood programmes as leisure activities, while poor Lebanese view these programmes as a means to become employed in the future. The awareness that Akkar's economy is structurally unable to provide refugees with opportunities leads refugees to approach livelihood programmes with a feeling of resignation or worse.
15 Against this backdrop, neo-cosmetic humanitarianism provides accessories of survival without intending to challenge the acceptability threshold of host states. This reality opens up important avenues of inquiry regarding situations in which individuals are provided with new skills that they are aware they will be unlikely to use to generate income. Due to their structure,
20 humanitarian programmes are unable to capture more articulated and blended forms of social memberships, which, as seen, stem from common practices and mutual support although within hierarchical and pseudo-feudal local economies.

At a local level, the humanitarian livelihood approach harkens back to the
25 core of the humanitarian reason (Weizman 2011; Fassin 2012)—guaranteeing basic services and resources. The humanitarian focus is increasingly on social stability and co-existence. The humanitarian system anticipates tensions in ethnically hybrid contexts and acts with the purpose of achieving social stability, even while aid and service provision is decreasingly considered along
30 ethnic or religious lines and instead becomes area-focused. Whilst a geography—rather than an ethnic and religious politics—of vulnerability finally emerges, humanitarian self-reliance deliberately becomes a social-cohesion regime that remains ethnocratic, as it presumes that stability is endangered in areas where different ethnic groups share the same space. By the same
35 token, this regime presumes the endemic homogeneity of ethnic groups and the definition of social membership along ethnic lines. As a result, a new ethnicization of care grows out of such agendas.

In this context, refugees are invited to participate in the process of making host societies cohesive and stable through the promotion of inter-ethnic pro-
40 grammes. The mistakes of the ethnocentric approach therefore lie in ignoring—and, at times, determining rather than acknowledging—practice-defined social memberships and in treating social cohesion and stability as identity-based. This results in the humanitarian misconception of self-reliance, as it is only considered in its individual-based form. Embracing a

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practice-based approach for social inquiries therefore becomes an urgent tool of thinking, analysis and practical intervention.

The ethnocratic character of the humanitarian logic echoes its neglect of household-scaled forms of everyday coping, pre-existing inter-ethnic practices (such as car sharing) and the promotion of accessory learning that in no way challenges the geopolitical order in which displacement takes place. Individual-focused recipes of self-reliance emerge as a social-cohesion regime aimed at alleviating tensions, while the very humanitarian intent assumes a neo-cosmetic character. It sugar-coats geopolitical interests and prolongs its presence in crisis-affected settings—while endeavouring to produce far-sighted stability at the expense of the population it purportedly serves.

replace "its" with "the humanitarian"

1. For more details, see http://www.unhcr.org/44bf3e252.html. *Note 1: Last accessed on September 14, 2019*
2. This data has been collected from the local municipality (23 February 2017, Halba).
3. The following illustrates how volatile Lebanese policies are with respect to Syrian work in Lebanon: https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/14/lebanon-new-refugee-policy-step-forward. *Note 3: Last accessed on September 14, 2019*
4. Interview with local *mukhtar*—local government official. Halba, 8 March 2017.
5. Interview with local resident. Halba, 15 February 2017.
6. Interview with Waleed, a local resident. Halba, 20 February 2017.
7. It is in this vein that the unlikely reopening of Qiliyaat Airport on the Akkar coast, according to most of the interviewees, would boost the local economy and challenge the Syrian regime's desire of a forcedly immobile economy in Lebanon. The reopening of the airport, which was shut down at the end of the civil war, today symbolizes to some locals the potential development of the whole Akkar region.
8. Informal conversation between the author and a local resident. Halba, 9 March 2017.
9. Interview with Hadi. Halba, 6 March 2017.
10. Interview with Hadi. Halba, 6 March 2017.
11. The city of Tripoli was caught up in the fight and the Tawhid brigade used to threaten people in the city.
12. Interview with Hadi. Halba, 6 March 2017.
13. Interview with Hadi. Halba, 6 March 2017.
14. Interview with Waleed. Halba, 21 February 2017.
15. Interview with aid worker. Halba, 18 February 2017.
16. 'Sweet Success: How the Haddads Went from Refugees to Employers in 1 Year', *CBC News*, 7 January 2017.
17. UNDP affirmed it had set up a laboratory for chocolate making in Akkar, but no local resident or aid worker was aware of this or of where exactly the place was located. Halba, 28 February 2017.
18. Halba, 24 February and 6 March 2017.
19. Halba, 8 March 2017.
20. Halba, 8 March 2017.
21. Halba, February and March 2017.
22. Interview with an aid provider. Halba, 2 March 2017.

23. See for example http://help.unhcr.org/greece/living-in-greece/access-to-welfare/.
24. Halba, 9 March 2017.

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