There is no future in humanitarianism. Emergency, temporality and protracted displacement.

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Abstract

The humanitarian system and people living with and in long-term refugee situations envisage the future differently. In this article, I explore different notions of the future that may be found in humanitarian policies and among humanitarian workers. With particular reference to understandings of emergency, crisis and ethics in humanitarianism, I discuss ways in which the future is understood and practiced by humanitarian actors working in situations of protracted displacement. Analysing the policy context for Syrian refugees in Jordan in the context of the 'humanitarian reason' which tends to separate between biological and biographical lives, I identify how the future and past are separated from the present in a process that decontextualizes forced migrants both temporally and spatially. I show how humanitarian work is bound by its temporariness: it is relief and life saving. In most cases, however, humanitarian operations last much longer than anticipated. When humanitarian workers become embedded in the local context and come to know the people they assist, they feel responsibility for a shared future and may challenge – through their practices – the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. Thus, through focusing on what humanitarian workers do, we may be able to identify practices that challenge currently accepted humanitarian ethics. By way of conclusion, and supported by feminist discussions of temporality and the ethics of care, I suggest some possible ways of integrating a concept of the future into humanitarianism.

Keywords:

Humanitarianism, protracted crises, humanitarian workers, temporality, ethics, future

Syrian refugees in Jordan

Ingress: Stuck in the present?

"Being stuck" is a spatio-temporal notion that implies that the future aspired to cannot be reached, that an undesirable situation or location cannot be escaped. It indicates temporal, social and geographical stillness. I have tried several times to use the title "stuck in the present" when writing to understand the situation in which people in protracted displacement find themselves. But every time I work on the expression of "being stuck", it becomes clear that the people, whose experiences and practices I am writing about, are not entirely stuck. The term does not quite work. We need to respect that people in protracted displacement often feel stuck: they are stuck in a status of being displaced or stuck in a war zone without the ability to escape, they feel stuck because they cannot develop their lives, stuck because they cannot control their future and because the future they often dream of is located in the past. However, while acknowledging this experience, and analysing its consequences, there is always some kind of movement in people's lives. There may be geographical movement; there may be social movement, or mobility, which could see people moving to a better or a worse condition; people find ways of moving on, and even though they do not move on, there are changes in their lives. Being stuck is entangled with a number of other processes of transformation, movement and volatility, and I always end up modifying and deleting stuck from the title. So too with this article. I started with the notion of "stuck" aiming to look at how the humanitarian system's spatio-temporal policies of (im)mobility in urban protracted displacement fixes people. However, in the article I have ended up showing how humanitarian workers negotiate a humanitarian system in which they work and also feel stuck and the consequences that the system has for enabling possible futures. My focus thus shifts to what understandings of temporality the experience of being stuck may derive from, and how we can integrate a more explicit time-dimension in humanitarian work.

The themes I explore in this article come out of previous work on attempting to integrate a time-perspective on protracted displacement (Brun 2015; 2016; Horst and Grabska 2015), on why the notion of "limbo" is problematic when conceptualising protracted displacement (Brun and Fàbos 2015), and work on ethics in action research and humanitarian work in the context of crises (Brun 2009, Brun and Attanapola 2015; Brun and Lund 2010). I have previously analysed how "hope" allows for everyday practices and future time to come together (Brun 2015). Hope as I understand it here, represents engagements with the future in a context of protracted displacement (Kleist and Jansen, this issue). Having a future or working towards a future indicates the presence of hope as generative of action - a temporal sense of potential (Brun, 2015; see

also Sliwinski, this issue). In this paper, I address hope through how the 'future' is dealt with and partly made irrelevant in much of current humanitarian practices. I engage with the role of the future in humanitarianism by exploring how the humanitarian system works with protracted displacement and civilians who feel stuck. I address the limits of temporality in the current ethical positions available to humanitarian workers. In order to engage with temporality in humanitarianism, I apply a feminist notion of temporality inspired by Hannah Arendt (1958) and Simone de Beauvoir (1952/1988) that, I suggest, enable a possible link between future and ethics of care. A feminist ethics of care allows for insights into how practices on the ground in protracted situations of displacement represent alternatives to the ethical register available in the canon of the humanitarian system.

The article is based on insights from many years of researching protracted displacement, interviewing staff in humanitarian agencies and a project on knowledge gaps in the humanitarian sector which involved interviews with humanitarian workers employed by Norwegian humanitarian organisations (Brun and Attanapola 2015). In addition, field visits to Jordan in November 2015 and in February 2015 enabled interviews and conversations with staff in humanitarian organisations working with Syrian refugees. Secondary material provided by humanitarian organisations and available online has been an important source for the analyses that follow.

Humanitarian categories tend to fix people in particular places and social positions. Many scholars have written about how the categories become statuses that work to restrict people's abilities to social and geographical mobility (Malkki 1992; Hyndman and Giles 2011; Brun 2016). Humanitarian action primarily aims for temporary solutions that tend to make people stuck in a humanitarian system for years. People affected by conflict make life by navigating the uncertainty and volatility of a conflictual situation (Lubkeman 2008, Vigh 2008). Surviving in the present and planning for a future represent a clashing of temporalities in a context where the humanitarian system and people living in and with crisis (conflict, disaster, displacement) envisage futures differently. I discuss the ways in which there is little room for thinking about futures in the current humanitarian system. Widely discussed in development-studies and in anthropology of development projects, temporality has been explored to a lesser extent within humanitarian studies, and much less so than the analysis of the spatial implications of humanitarian categories and practices. The urgency inherent in humanitarian work has been taken for granted, or related to debates on linking relief and development, and more recent critical work on resilience (Bailey and Barbelet 2014; Cavelty et al. 2015). To understand the spatio-temporal politics of

humanitarianism in urban protracted displacement, I engage with ways in which temporality and the future is understood when producing knowledge about Syrian refugees in Jordan. With a grounding in feminist discussions of temporality and ethics of care and with the insights from how humanitarian workers negotiate the humanitarian system of which they are a part, I suggest how a humanitarian system bound by universalism and strict humanitarian principles needs to take a more flexible and localised approach in protracted situations of displacement in order to expand its ethical register and enable a future for people assisted by the humanitarian system.

Humanitarianism, humanitarian governance, humanitarian reason

Saving and protecting the lives of people affected by conflict and crisis is a fundamentally necessary and worthwhile activity. Humanitarian action is a safety net for the most vulnerable in times of disaster, whether man-made or not. As such, it deserves to be protected and nurtured despite its obvious limitations and imperfections. At the same time, before one gets carried away by unrealistic expectations, it is useful to start unscrambling the multiple realities that hide behind the benevolent façade of humanitarianism (Donini 2010, S221).

I consider the humanitarian system to be the actors that are linked in some functional ways to each other across multiple scales to constitute the local/global humanitarian architecture (ALNAP 2015). It is a set of institutions, but it could also be understood to be a business and an industry that employs hundreds of thousands of individuals and in which actors compete for market share (Donini 2010).

The humanitarian system is as much about biopolitcs as geopolitics and geopolitics is often reduced to biopolitics (Minca 2006; Fassin 2012, 2013a, b; Hyndman 2012). In this context, it is possible to understand humanitarianism as governed by "humanitarian reason" which Fassin (2013a, 37) defines as the "principle under which moral sentiments enter the political sphere. It underlies what may be called a humanitarian government, that is, a way of governing on this principle". Humanitarianism, according to Fassin (2013a), is both rational and emotional. It is rational in its application of universal principles and emotional as expressed through the concerns through which people feel the obligation of *saving strangers*.

The emphasis on professionalization of the humanitarian system in recent years, has led to increasing universalising ideas through more institutionalisation and standardisation. For example, the humanitarian imperative and the ethical principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence as formulated in the IFRC/ICRC charter (IFRC/ICRC no date) have become a common vocabulary for the people working in the system. Although the principles are problematized (Leader 2000), they are seen as important and continue to be basic guidelines for the work conducted in crisis settings. Moreover, the humanitarian system does to a large extent exclude local communities and life-saving activities that do not conform to the Western humanitarian canon (Hammond 2008; Donini 2010). Donini (2010) shows that zakat (a form of almsgiving in Islam), remittances or contributions from communities in the Global South do not make it to international statistics of official development assistance.

Humanitarian reason has become part of our way of making politics, nationally and internationally. It may be obvious that humanitarianism is embedded in politics, but many analysts continue to deny this link (Fassin 2013a) and there is still an unresolved tension between ethics and politics. A well known reference is Agamben's (1998) notion of "bare life" which may be used as an example, where renunciation of politics is a reduction to bare life. Identifying bare life as an outcome of humanitarianism may be meant as a critique. However, as Fassin (2013a) shows, from other perspectives the renunciation of politics is considered positive, because it indicates that humanitarianism is devoid of politics and that the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence are followed. A major challenge that I identify here is the inflexibility that this standardised and professionalised system has created – a system that does not sufficiently cater for contextual differences and for the ways in which needs change over time during a protracted crisis.

Urban refugees and the application of humanitarian reason in Jordan

Syrian refugees in Jordan

The Syrian refugee crisis is entering its fifth year and has become a protracted refugee situation (Loescher and Milner 2005; Brun and Fabos 2015). As of mid-February 2016 there were 637,626 Syrian refugees in Jordan (UNHCR 2016a) the majority of whom came before 2014 (Amnesty International 2015). The current citizen-population of the country is 6.6 million (Ghazal 2016). Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, but according to UNHCR, the Jordanian government refers to Syrians as

refugees (UNHCR 2016b). However, the government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for assistance and protection of refugees in Jordan. It is the UNHCR that registers Syrian refugees, and I return to this exercise later. Out of the Syrian refugees who have registered, an estimated 82% live outside camps and mostly in urban areas UNHCR (UNHCR 2016a). According to a report by Amnesty International (2016), 86% of Syrians refugees residing in Jordan live below the poverty line.

Jordan is a markedly urbanised country and refugees and migrants from neighbouring countries and further afield in the Middle East have been an important driver of urbanisation (Pavanello and Haysom 2012). Most notably, these groups are Jordanians of Palestinian decent and ex-Gazans who came in 1948 and 1967, Iraqi refugees who came mainly as a result of the second Gulf War in 2003, Egyptian guest workers as well as asylum seekers from Somalia, South Sudan and to some extent Eritrea. The rapid urbanisation of the country has created pressure on urban infrastructure. Inadequate water and sanitation systems, limited access to health services and public transport are all causing challenges for the urban residents.

Nearly one third of the Syrian refugees outside camps were registered in Amman Governorate (32%) and over one quarter in Irbid Governorate (29%) (UNHCR 2015). *Where* they live is determined by both financial means but also networks and family relations, some of whom were people who came before the war. UNHCR (2014) estimates that 52% of a household's income is from humanitarian assistance, 27% from work, 13% from family and friends and 8% from remittances. There is a trend of decreasing humanitarian assistance and increasing income from work among the Syrian refugees in Jordan.

Up to March 2016, Syrian refugees – like all other immigrants in the country – are allowed to work with a work permit, but less than 1% of the refugees had obtained this permit (ILO 2015). Most refugees work informally and illegally, under precarious circumstances. If they are caught working illegally, they may be imprisoned, sent to a camp or some have even been deported (Carrion 2015). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) found that Syrian refugees are willing to accept lower wages and harsher working conditions than nationals. It is important to emphasise that even before the Syrian refugees arrived, there was a number of labour market challenges in Jordan with high national unemployment, dependency on low wage and foreign labour, which has left the country unable to meet its nationals' economic opportunity needs (ILO 2015). The World Food Programme has supported the Syrian refugees with food

through electronic and paper vouchers. Due to lack of funds over the summer of 2015, they had to reduce food distribution to a minimum, which is believed to have contributed to more Syrians returning to Syria than coming into Jordan.

Syrian refugees in urban areas mainly rent their dwellings. Because of the difficulty in accessing work, and especially when the savings they brought with them from Syria run out, many people find it very difficult to pay their rent. There is not much documentation about the movement-patterns of urban Syrian refugees, but humanitarian staff working in urban areas confirm that the refugees they assist move residence frequently in order to find cheaper places to stay or for employment. Urban Syrian refugees in Jordan, and urban refugees generally, are often invisible and mobile which causes difficulties establishing reliable information about the group and presents obstacles for assistance to reach them (Fabos and Kibreab 2007).

Jordan has moved to an encampment policy to avoid urbanisation, integration, and in order to prevent people from working and competing with Jordanians on the labour market (Turner 2015). Employment, as mentioned above, is a crucial component. It is politically challenging to let Syrians work, particularly when other groups of refugees/guests such as the Palestinian ex-Gazan refugees who arrived in 1967 are prevented from working in many sectors. Employment for the Syrian refugees is thus a complex matter politically – both for national politics and geopolitically – considering the high number of guest workers from other Middle Eastern countries and Jordan's history of managing refugees (Chatelard 2010). The conditions for work and the status of Syrian refugees in Jordan indicate that for the regime, the refugees are in Jordan temporarily and should not integrate. After 5 years, however, this temporariness has become rather permanent.

Jordan and humanitarian reason

In a context where the temporariness becomes so important, it also affects the nature of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian actors operate in Jordan at the behest of the government which presents constraints that are entangled with the humanitarian guidelines and principles. The operation and presence in the country is justified by the notion of humanitarian reason discussed above. Importantly, Jordan has become a humanitarian hub and many international organisations have established their regional offices in the country. Humanitarian reason may thus be understood as a contract between the government and humanitarian organisations for their continued presence in the country. It is in this context of temporariness that the humanitarian workers

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manoeuvre their projects which are restricted to activities that fall within the relief and humanitarian domain: they cannot easily move into activities that could potentially represent more long-term development for Syrian refugees.

In the urban context there are specific challenges. First, humanitarian organisations are assigned neighbourhoods to work in by the government, and provided with beneficiary lists for host populations in order for 30% of the assistance to go to hosts and 70% to the refugees. In many ways this is a good principle because it would help social cohesion and ease the pressure on local authorities in areas coping with a rapid population increase in population. However, the neighbourhood-focus may also be problematic considering organisations' limited funds relative to the urban need. There are few possibilities for dealing with the deeper problems of urban change. While humanitarian organisations do communicate with local government in the neighbourhoods where they work, humanitarian assistance does not really enter into the urban space in ways that could contribute to development for both refugees and their hosts in an urban setting that desperately needs upgrading of infrastructure, housing and employment in a more long term perspective.

Second, humanitarian practitioners represent a very mobile part of the system: they move from crisis to crisis. Many humanitarian workers do not have much experience of urban areas. They may come from rural, camp-based settings and bring with them the experiences from an entirely different context. During the past few years there has been more emphasis on humanitarian work in cities (UNHCR 2009; Harroff-Tavel 2010), but this work has not yet become very well institutionalised nor made operational in a very sophisticated manner. The guidelines for humanitarian workers are thus very general and many of the humanitarian workers I met struggle to redefine their core activities such as shelter, water and sanitation into an urban context.

Third, there is an increasingly strict policy environment in Jordan and protection needs are on the increase among the Syrian refugees, many of whom are in need of clearing up irregularities in their registration documents, as their opportunities in Jordan diminish when papers are not in order. The Jordanian government has become more restrictive in welcoming Syrian refugees and it is possible to identify a significant host fatigue among the Jordanians in late 2015 and early 2016 where Syrians frequently become scapegoats for national challenges that predated the refugee crisis (Francis 2015).

Is there no future in humanitarianism?

Humanitarian reason pays more attention to the biological life of the destitute and unfortunate, the life in the name of which they are given aid, than to their biographical life, the life through which they could, independently, give a meaning to their own existence (Fassin 2012, 254).

Humanitarianism and humanitarian reason has become a powerful social imagery of our time and occupy a key position in the contemporary moral order (Fassin 2012). There is as such no reason to believe that humanitarianism as a governance system and as an imagery will disappear soon. However, when claiming that there is no future in humanitarianism, I point towards the meanings of the future that are available in humanitarianism. As I mentioned above, Fassin (2012) shows that there is more biopolitics than geopolitics in humanitarianism, but still a complex mix of the two, and humanitarian reason pays more attention to biological life than biographical life. Biological and biographical lives take on two very different notions of futures. Fassin bases his distinction between biological and biographical life on Hanna Arendt's (1958, 97) *The Human Condition*: "Limited by a beginning and an end, that is, by the two supreme events of appearance and disappearance within the world, life follows a strictly linear movement whose very motion nevertheless is driven by the motor of biological life which man shares with other living things. The chief characteristic of this specifically human life, whose appearance and disappearance constitute worldly events, is that it is itself always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story, establish a biography (…)."

There is a striking similarity in Arendt's work on biological life (labour) and biographical life (work) and Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of "immanence" and "transcendence" (Veltman 2010; Brun 2015; Brun and Fabos 2015) and I aim to understand the implications of a predominance of biological life in humanitarianism by the help of Arendt and de Beauvoir and feminist readings of their work (Young 2005; Veltman 2010).

Biological life is the movement of the living organism, including the human body: "Life is a process that permeates its being and makes it alive. (…) Life is a process that everywhere uses up durability, wears it down, makes it disappear, until eventually dead matter, the result of small, single cyclical, life processes, returns into the overall gigantic circle of nature herself, where no beginning and no end exist and where all natural things swing in changeless, deathless repetition" (Arendt 1958, 96). Biological life is repetitive, and it consists of activities which arise out of necessity. This understanding of

biological life is very similar to Simone de Beauvoir's (1952/1988) writings six years earlier on the different notions of time and social status in *The Second Sex*. Although some of her reflections may be read as outdated, and particularly the dismissal of reproductive work, the understandings are constructive to bring into the discussion of temporalities of humanitarianism. Where Arendt uses "labour" to understand reproductive work and biological life that produces nothing that endures, de Beauvoir's immanence expresses the movement of life rather than history. It is "a time with no future and no goals" (Young 2005, 138). De Beauvoir famously used the example of housework to explain that women were trapped in this activity of a never-ending and cyclical practice which does not feel as if lives move into a future, but is just sustaining other people needs or biologies.

Work, or biographical life, on the other hand, produces, according to Arendt durable artifacts and shapes a world-structure. This is what de Beauvoir terms "transcendence" which refers to a mode of temporality in that the living subject is future-oriented; "the future is open with possibility" (Young 2005, 137). Biographical life is understood in relation to the ability to act within or upon the forces that shape and restrict our possibilities to reach a desired future. There is much more of an opening for understanding lives in a particular context – as situated lives – in notions of biographical lives. Hence, engaging with biographical lives and future-oriented subjects enables an understanding of hope as a relational phenomenon in historical time and a potential for change (Jansen, this issue).

Those who labour exclusively at the maintenance of life are just there to provide productivity for others. Saving strangers in the meaning of saving biological lives, may in a sense be interpreted as the labour of the victims – as biological life –to sustain and develop the humanitarian imagery of emergencies as I return to below. Labours of immanence only serve to sustain life, but does not achieve anything beyond continuation of life, they cannot themselves serve as the justifying ground for living. "Life," de Beauvoir writes, "does not carry within itself its reason for being" (Beauvoir 1952/1988, 69). Life is not self-justifying, one needs a reason to labour and to maintain life in the first place. Justification for maintaining life can only be achieved in the transcendence (Veltman 2010).

If we take the distinction between biological and biographical life with us into humanitarianism, saving biological life does not entail a future. People feel stuck when biographical life, transcendence and consequently the future are not available: they feel trapped in a never-ending presence (Jeffrey 2008). Some would say its extremely naïve

and dangerous to mix the two notions of biological and biographical life, because if humanitarianism start to engage with biographical life it will challenge the principles of neutrality and impartiality in the humanitarian imperative. The question then becomes, what kind of lives should humanitarianism save?

In the midst of conflict, it may be straightforward to make a very good argument for saving lives and preventing people from dying. However, my argument is that when a humanitarian crisis becomes protracted, there is a need to start thinking beyond biology. The next question thus becomes, what kind of futures – what concepts and understandings of future – are available in humanitarianism? To start that discussion, I turn to the Vulnerability Assessment Framework formulated for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

The Vulnerability Assessment Framework for Syrian Refugees in Jordan

In Jordan, humanitarian reason is institutionalised in many ways. A most prominent example of this separation of biological and biographical life can be found in the dissemination and application of the Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF). The framework is developed by the UNHCR in collaboration with a number of other humanitarian organisations to map registered refugees' vulnerabilities. Vulnerability is generally understood as the degree of exposure to risk (hazards or shocks) and uncertainty, and the capacity of households or individuals to prevent, mitigate or cope with risk (DFID 1999). Vulnerability is considered to be multidimensional (it varies across physical space and among and within social groups), scale dependent (with regard to time, space, and units of analysis) and dynamic (the characteristics and driving forces of vulnerability over time) (Verme et al. 2016). The Steering Committee of the Vulnerability Assessment Framework (UNHCR 2015, 65) in Jordan defines vulnerability in a more simplistic manner as "the risk of exposure of Syrian refugee households to harm, primarily in relation to protection threats, the inability to meet basic needs, limited access to basic services, and food insecurity, and the inability of the population to cope with the consequences of this harm."

The current VAF is a major initiative to produce knowledge about the protection needs of Syrian refugees in Jordan. It is based on Syrian refugee-households that register with the UNHCR and then interviewed by the help of a questionnaire. From the questionnaire, profiles of vulnerabilities are made. It is a household survey with some information on the household and some information about the interviewee, normally the head of the

household. The questionnaire covers aspects that will provide an overview of current needs: dependency ratio; registration/documents in Jordan; school attendance; shelter conditions; food consumption; household food security coping strategies; debt and access to health services.

All this knowledge and information is helpful in understanding vulnerabilities among Syrian refugees in urban areas, and it is used in multiple ways to argue for the current needs of Syrian refugees in Jordan. It has helped to show that many Syrian refugees adopt what may be termed "negative coping strategies" including reduction in food consumption, withdrawing children from school and taking on informal, exploitative and dangerous informal work (UNHCR 2015). The framework and the data it produces, has become one of the main knowledge sources on Syrian refugees in the country. However, the tool does not cover a number of protection-related risks comprehensively such as gender relations within a household. Of equal importance, is that the VAF does not in its dissemination produce any biographical data, beyond the educational level of the head of household and schooling of the children in the household. There is no information about history, place of origin in Syria, social capital and relationships to relatives and networks in Syria, Jordan and further afield. Similarly, there are no narratives of the experiences of war, people's movements after displacement and after entering Jordan. Consequently, to assist based on the published and accessible data of the VAF, provides a generalised picture that only depicts the now. It is currently only helpful to assist individuals and households based on need in one particular moment and without understanding spatial or temporal contexts. Through this exercise, refugees are denied a biography and, as I will now argue, hope for the future.

Humanitarianism, the emergency imagery and empty/abstract futures

*Besides, aid workers and armed forces have what might be called a similar temporality, that of **emergency**: they enter and leave the country at the same time and pace. They both deploy their personnel in sites strictly isolated from local populations, officially for safety reasons. They share certain objectives, such as taking care of the wounded and participating in aspects of the reconstruction* (Fassin 2013, 101, my emphasis).

Let's think of the future as a phenomenological existential position (Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Adam and Groves 2011) where the future may be represented as the temporal dimension of experience through which meaning is projected and woven with

the past and present and may thus take on a greater weight (Adam and Groves 2011). These are futures that fall within the horizon of an individual life-time and that affect the rights of living individuals. People experiencing conflict, displacement and disasters actively produce meaning, they actively extend themselves into the future through imagination and through action: futures are made and taken. Engaging with such futures, "the act of futurizing" (Luhmann 1976) is about re-establishing the link between action, knowledge and ethics (Adam and Groves 2011).

This notion of future must be understood in relation to the emergency imagery which is an important component of humanitarian reason (Pandolfi 2003; Calhoun 2004, 2010). This imagery designate the present condition as a state of exception (Agamben 2005) but also an anticipation of an emergency to come – an emergency that may struck the economy, the climate and environment and societies as a whole (Adey et al. 2015). Authors writing about the emergency imagery base much of their thinking on humanitarianism and it may be possible to say that the emergency imagery has helped to make humanitarianism come into a central position in global governance (Calhoun 2010). The humanitarian emergency-imagery depicts the future in a particular format: as a disruptive, potentially catastrophic event (Opitz and Tellmann 2015, 107). This notion of "emergency" then tends to "defuturize" – or empty – the future because it presents us with a heightened sense of discontinuity, rendering the future more contingent. It is a way of detaching observations about the future from past experiences: "if the catastrophe befalls us, it is from a future without chronological continuity with the past" (Opitz and Tellmann 2015, 112). The understanding of future invoked in the emergency imagery does not stretch out before us like an open field, but it comes at us. "It is a future not to be lived but to be survived" (Elmer and Opel 2006 in Opitz and Tellmann 2015, 112).

There is no place for biographical life in the emergency imagery of the future, because it is a future that radically breaks with the past. This emptying of the future – or rendering of an abstract future – shows that the emergency imagery decontextualizes and "de-situates" the lives of people experiencing a crisis. In the emergency imagery, emergencies arise as exceptions to what is understood as otherwise normal social conditions of stability which helps to justify the humanitarian reason. From the beginning of most humanitarian operations, there is no future, so future cannot begin (Lumann 1976). Only if the humanitarian system defines a future beyond the exceptional condition of the emergency, can it be relevant to engage with the communities in which agencies work. Thus, humanitarian reason largely stays the same as long as humanitarian work is defined as such: short-term relief work aiming to save

strangers' lives. The reasoning has unintended consequences when crisis become the normal, protracted and when there is no return to a stability that may never have been.

"Creating our own framework" – the case of shelter projects in Jordan

Humanitarian organisations may stay in the same area for 10, 20 or more years. During this time they may engage in development activities, but their mandate mostly not covering so-called "development" activities. Rather, the time-perspective of the assistance tends to be short term. In a series of interviews, we did for a project on knowledge gaps in the humanitarian sector (Brun and Attanapola 2015), we found that similar to many of the forced migrants in protracted displacement, humanitarian workers also in some ways feel stuck and want to know more about how to transfer activities from relief to development. They feel they lack concepts of change that may enable a more active engagement with the future in the context in which they work. The humanitarian workers expressed the need for a mandate that opens up for long-term engagement and physical presence in conflict, post-conflict and disaster settings. At the moment, however, such notions of future are not part of their vocabulary. Thus Vigh's (2008) proposal to understand crisis as context rather than the exceptional condition, becomes a productive starting point for an alternative ethics and humanitarian reason.

The emergency imagery denies refugees the ability to make sense of their lives during crises as well as their opportunities for a future. Humanitarian workers are uncomfortable with the universalist humanitarian system's aim of saving strangers (Feldman 2007, Malkki 2015). At the same time, humanitarian workers are professionals that represent their organisations and participate in inter-agency committee meetings where there is a general understanding of what is needed and what is possible within the given policy framework. These are the official meetings, where the universalist language of humanitarian agencies are conformed to within an ethics that maintains the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. However, even in the more narrowly defined Western humanitarian system to which I have limited the discussion here, a number of nuances in the experiences and practices may be identified. A helpful starting point for enabling alternative practices is Feldman's (2007) identification of the "Quaker way" where she discusses the frustration the workers involved in the Quaker American Friends Service Committee relief project in Gaza from 1948 to 1950. Here, the humanitarian workers of the organisation, negotiated the narrow ethical register of humanitarianism by emphasising their own humanitarian

position that placed more importance on interpersonal relations, acknowledging both the refugee and the humanitarian worker in that relationship. What do humanitarian actors do when they must act within a very general system and when they have to work within the humanitarian reason, but see that there are other needs that concern a more relational understanding of humanitarianism? "We develop our own framework" was a common response by the humanitarian workers in Jordan.

These more specific organisational frameworks are dependent upon the individual experiences and skills among staff in the organisations, the relationship among staff in the organisation, between staff and local authorities and between staff and the refugees they are there to assist. Additionally, the knowledge developed for understanding needs in the refugee population is based on the organisation's own research and capacity to do such research. Even for the larger and more established humanitarian organisations, it is the individual experiences and insights of staff that are used to make decisions on what to do, and what is possible to do in this particular context. I mentioned above that many humanitarian workers do not come with work experience in urban contexts, but they still use their experiences as best as they can based on past experiences and their readings of the situation. It becomes important to learn more about how the humanitarian system operates based on how the individual humanitarian workers in country offices and field offices around the world take the general guidelines and formulate their own way of doing humanitarian work in the context of long term presence. It is thus crucial, I would argue, that the biographies of the humanitarian workers also become more prominent in the way humanitarian assistance is formulated and implemented.

The negotiation of shelter practices in Jordan provides some insights into the realities in which humanitarian workers struggle to assist people in protracted situations of displacement. There is a housing shortage in Jordan, which started before the arrival of Syrian refugees in March 2011 (Kelberer 2015). Humanitarian organisations decided to assist hosts to finalise unfinished houses in the process of being built for future generations so that the housing units could be used for Syrian refugees to rent and to ease housing needs at the national level. However, the Jordanian government would not approve the building of permanent structures associated with the refugees as it would indicate and acknowledge long-term – even indefinite – presence. Project plans were kept on hold, but the shelter teams were there, funding was available and humanitarian workers were just waiting, ready to start acting. In this situation, "we just had to do something" as one representative of a humanitarian organisation said. This "something" was to help refugees with small improvements in their rented spaces, in agreement with

their landlords. As part of the agreement, the refugees would be able to stay in the accommodation for a lower rent for between one and two years.

To select people for assistance, the information from VAF was not used. People were generally chosen based on who got in touch with the organisation to receive assistance. The organisations would then make their own vulnerability assessment of the household that they were about to assist. The vulnerability assessment would vary from organisation to organisation, based on what they deemed most important for their work. The organisation worked closely with the family to make the improvements, which would mainly consist of decorating, plumbing, improving wiring, windows or sometimes, when the conditions were extremely bad, build or finish an outer wall to protect the family against the elements. People who got in touch with the organisations and became "beneficiaries" would frequently become attached to that organisation in other ways, and be involved in other activities that the organisation was involved in. Sometimes, this activity would be legal assistance, sometimes it was more related to community- and participatory work. Cooking classes and other social activities were important and popular activities that helped to create an environment and a feeling of community. Assistance which generally started with the household getting in touch with the organisation, often created a more long-term relationship between the refugee and that organisation.

We can take several lessons from this. The constraints that humanitarian workers experience add to our understandings of the humanitarian system. There is a tension in what the humanitarian organisations and workers wanted to do – and what they could do. They wanted to build permanent structures, to make durable changes that would benefit both the host-community and refugees by increasing the housing stock in the country. However, they ended up with a small renovation project that helped the refugees short-term, perhaps for a year. Despite the uncertain consequences of their intervention, they had to do something. Risks associated with the project is that when the contract with the refugee for reduced rent expired, would the landlord increase the rent beyond the payment capacity of the refugee; would the refugees be asked to leave, to what extent would the improvement of those housing units increase rents and improve the refugees' life in the shorter term, but make them more vulnerable to eviction in the longer term? Despite the uncertain consequences of their intervention, "they had to do something".

Shifting spatio-temporal scales: towards an ethics of care for the future in humanitarianism

… how can we live up to the demands of ethics and responsibility in a world held together by an array of impersonal organizations, institutions, and forms of discursive power? (Popke 2006, 505)

Hugo Slim and Miriam Bradley (2013) suggest in a literature review that ethical demands thicken and increase the better you know people, the more you do with them and the longer you are with them. Hence, in their understanding, the sheer length of time humanitarians are present in a particular context, closes the moral gap between relief and development in many humanitarian crises. The durable presence of humanitarian actors in a conflict or disaster does, according to Slim and Bradley, necessarily challenge the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality. Place and a "politics of propinquity" matters for the humanitarians on the ground who develop a face to face relationship to the people they are there to assist. This reality requires a change in the relationship between humanitarian action and ethics. An instrumental ethics of neutrality necessarily moves – on the ground – into an ethics of care were a form of responsibility develops in which tending to relationships between people becomes the core. I propose that an ethics of care potentially enables an inclusion of local contexts, biography and consequently the future in humanitarian action. It is this spatio-temporal shift – or scale change – that must be borne out more explicitly in how humanitarians operate on the ground because the ambition of saving strangers' lives turn into an ambition of saving people we feel related to. Dobson (2006) suggests that cosmopolitanism needs to bring distant strangers near to us in a way that references to common humanity appear not to do. He suggests a "thick cosmopolitanism" that identifies relationships of causal responsibility which may trigger a sense of obligation towards the other. A feminist ethics of care may thus be a helpful development of current humanitarian principles in order to engage more explicitly with the future in humanitarianism.

A feminist ethics of care was first introduced by Carol Gilligan in 1982, but has later been adopted by a number of scholars (for a useful overview, see Raghuram 2009). Care ethics are concerned with caring *about* rather than caring *for* (Raghuram 2009, 29): it deals with questions of why care and how to care about relationships in order to move towards a more just world. Care ethics begins with a social ontology of connection (Lawson 2009), where social relationships of mutuality and trust rather than dependence are foregrounded. Rather than being a universal principle, it emphasizes

contextualisation, and is a mode of relational thinking – like an intersubjectivity of caring (Lawson 2009; Raghuram 2009) where the biography of those who assist and those who are assisted matters. Consequently, people who are to be assisted in a crisis are not strangers, they are part of the wider relationships in which we involve because we are being part of the world (Massey 2004; Young 2006; Brun 2009).

Care ethics have been criticised for being too oriented towards face-to-face relations and propinquity. In addition, I would be careful in moving too far into notions of mutuality and personal/private relationships in humanitarianism as this is an unrealistic aim. Lately, however, scholars have suggested adopting the principles of ethics of care for relationships across distances (Lawson 2009). Dobson's (2006) thick cosmopolitanism may be relevant if we understand how our lives are radically entwined with those of distant others. It is the ways in which we can care from a distance or when we are close, by moving away from a notion of the stranger towards embodied subjects with both biology and biography, to use the vocabulary I developed earlier. Care ethics may help to recognise the inheritances of the past, and its role in shaping the present and the future, "as well as to recover 'pasts' that have escaped history but may provide a route into crafting future selves" (Raghuram 2009, 29, citing Chakrabarty 2000).

The point is that when we care about an "Other", we acknowledge their future, their welfare, and their ethical significance are bound up with our own future (Adam and Groves 2011). Within an ethics of care, care is always future directed and in the first instance, always attached to specific individuals. It is thereby specifically directed towards their biographies and their futures and is tied to futures which are embedded in distinct contexts of concern. From discussions of ethics of care, it is possible to understand care as more than simply a social relation with moral and ethical dimensions, it can also entail an alternative politics (Popke 2006), it becomes related to everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world and make it liveable (Tronto 1993).

Conclusions for an expanded ethical register in humanitarian work

There is a moment of possibility in this crisis. In November 2015 many of the humanitarian agencies present in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt published a joint report titled "Right to a Future" (Joint agency Briefing Paper 2015). It is a promising perspective. I communicated with some of the humanitarian workers in

Jordan in November 2015 who had helped to formulate the report and the title reflects some of the challenges I have discussed here and that humanitarian workers in this region experience. The paper helps to understand the experience of being stuck that humanitarian workers express when assisting in a protracted crisis. From the summary of the report their frustrations and insights become clear:

The scale and duration of the crisis mean that emergency humanitarian responses, while as necessary as ever, are no longer enough. Humanitarian aid must now be complemented by more sustainable approaches to help refugees and host communities cope in the medium and longer terms. Over the past year, the governments of Syria's neighbours, in cooperation with international aid agencies and donors, have increasingly recognized this reality. Together, they have developed a socalled "resilience agenda" to help refugee-hosting countries deal with the huge weight associated with supporting refugees from Syria.

But for the refugees themselves, increased vulnerability, not resilience, is the norm. More and more refugees are being pushed to make desperate choices. Children are forced to leave school and work illegally, girls are forced into marriage before their time, and many have little option but to risk their lives on dangerous boat journeys in the hope of reaching Europe, or even to return to Syria.

Humanitarian reason incorporates a particular politics of time that help to empty the future for those who are incorporated into the system. Consequently, and as I have shown in this paper, the current emphasis on universalism, biology, urgency and emergency in humanitarianism decontextualizes lives and futures. What is important in this context is that this is exactly what humanitarian practitioners struggle with in their everyday practices. There is a need to thicken responsibility and obligation in order to create a future for humanitarianism beyond biopolitics. The article has argued for the engagement with a feminist ethics of care that may place more importance on interpersonal relations, acknowledging both the refugee and the humanitarian worker in that relationship (Feldman 2007). Humanitarian actors represent the humanitarian system, whether they like it or not and whether they identify with it or not, and they must find a way to begin the future. Currently, humanitarian ethics and practices seem to advocate an understanding of what counts as responsible action in a way that privileges the interests of the present and, thus, puts at risk the interests of future generations (Adam and Groves 2011).

My proposition would be that by documenting and analysing more thoroughly how humanitarian workers experience their work and constraints and possibilities in protracted humanitarian crises, we may be able to understand better the ethics humanitarian workers perform and the possibilities of a wider ethical register in humanitarianism. Interviews, conversations and documents such as the Joint Agency Briefing Paper (2015) on Right to a Future show that humanitarian workers in protracted crises would like to practice an ethics which is closer to an ethics of care. An ethics that emphasises interpersonal relations and, in all its nuances, may help to open up for the possibility of integrating biology and biography on the ground. Such integration opens up for making the future relevant through hope as a temporal sense of potential. With such an expansion of the ethical register in humanitarianism, notions of justice for thinking beings rather than embodied ones (Dobson 2006) that more closely addresses both refugees and humanitarian workers' feeling of being stuck in this protracted crisis may be enabled.

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