THEME SECTION

Affective regimes of care beyond humanitarian crisis
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Rethinking affects of care through power
An introduction

Heike Drotbohm and Hansjörg Dilger

Abstract: This introduction outlines the contemporary emergence of new forms of informal crisis-related care, which both complement and contradict classical forms of humanitarian assistance. The introduction traces the spread, blurring, and differentiation of novel forms of non-state assistance and support against the backdrop of increasingly widespread criticism of large-scale international aid. Tackling regimes of care beyond the exceptionality of a crisis notion, the introduction then summarizes how the three contributions and the commentary to this theme section employ the lens of affect for exploring how these highly intersubjective forms of encounter are experienced, performed, and reflected on.

Keywords: affects, aid, care, emotions, solidarity, vernacular humanitarianism

The provision of humanitarian care, even under emergency conditions, is not confined to the clearly demarcated, politically legitimated, and administratively controlled interventions of large-scale humanitarian organizations. While representations of, and engagements with, suffering, the formalized organization of assistance, and the political regime of aid have coalesced into an institutionally distinct field of humanitarian logic and practice (Fassin 2012; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Feldman and Ticktin 2010; Ticktin 2006), there have always been complementary—informal or spontaneously established—modes of humanitarian engagement, such as soup kitchens, charity, philanthropy, neighborly aid, or solidarity initiatives (Drotbohm 2021, 2022b; Ferguson 2015; Jeffries 2014; Muehlebach 2012; Sezgin and Dijkzeul 2016). Like institutionalized and often highly bureaucratized forms of humanitarianism with a clear political mandate, these more informal[1] initiatives are promoted by both secular and faith-oriented actors and may connect recipients and givers of care in hierarchical and ambivalent ways (for informal faith-oriented aid, see Abubakar 2020; Cook 2008; Dilger 2014; Mittermaier 2019).

In recent years, a growing spread and differentiation of such forms of informal crisis-related care[2] has been observed in all parts of

the world. In kindergartens, schools, community centers, churches, mosques, gyms, squats, or under bridges, nonprofessional helpers—students, volunteers, activists—collect donations, distribute food and clothing, offer language training, provide legal and bureaucratic counseling, or share their leisure time with "those in need" (Ataç et al. 2016; Fleischmann 2020; F. Murphy 2019; Prince and Brown 2016; Sezgin and Dijkzeul 2016). The fact that humanitarian support is offered by highly diverse types of individuals and organizations with diverging degrees of formalization and political capital is certainly not new (Barnett 2011; Caldwell 2004; Paulmann 2016; Scott-Smith 2020). However, in this theme section we argue that the social, political, and affective type of relationship that has been established between these different forms and scales of aid—as well as among all involved actors in informal settings of humanitarian care—is a distinguishing feature of the contemporary world.

When informal and unbureaucratic initiatives of support are intended to supplement, complement, or support institutionalized forms of aid, or, as we are seeing more and more frequently, distance themselves from them critically, these different modes of humanitarian care do not exist separately from but refer to and depend on each other. Notions such as "vernacular humanitarianism" (Brković 2016, 2017), "new humanitarianism" (Sezgin and Dijkzeul 2016), or "solidarian humanitarianism" (Rozakou 2017) have aimed to capture how the lines between formal and informal forms of aid, which assumedly belong to different organizational and professional fields, are blurred. As this theme section will show, this expansion and differentiation of the field of humanitarian assistance has become deeply embedded in, and is thus co-constitutive of, the contemporary political and social order in which "spontaneous" or "informal" ways of humanitarian aid coexist firmly along with formalized types of humanitarian intervention *beyond* acute states of crisis (Drotbohm 2021). Furthermore, we argue that the processual nature of all these dynamics can

be understood best through a focus on affect that helps uncover the often-ambivalent engagements of, and encounters between, all involved actors in these highly politicized settings.

Toward a post-humanitarian perspective

With our argument, we build—and expand—on two strands of literature that have explored these developments empirically over the last couple of years. First, informal initiatives and networks of humanitarian assistance have responded to acute types of needs that were not met adequately—or at all—by more formal forms of emergency support, be they provided by governments, municipalities, or long-established humanitarian organizations. Especially in times of heightened crisis, as, for instance, during the "long summer of migration" in Europe in 2015 (Bock and Macdonald 2019; Hess et al. 2017), there was almost a "mushrooming" of informal aid initiatives when an exceptionally high number of refugees, from Syria and other countries, crossed European borders, and locally available facilities, reception centers, and counseling facilities reached their limits (Ataç et al. 2016; Braun 2017; Della Porta and Steinhilper 2020; Dilger and Dohrn 2016; Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017; Karakayali 2017; F. Murphy 2019; Rozakou 2012, 2016; Schwiertz and Schwenken 2020).

A declared goal of these often newly emerging, highly informal modes of care provision was not only the practical delivery of aid—and a compensation of state or other large-scale organizations' absences and shortcomings in this regard—but also the creation of a less formalized, less bureaucratic, less political, and eventually, as Astrid Bochow (2015) made clear in the context of the city of Göttingen's improvised help initiatives for asylum seekers in 2015, more "humane" form of hospitality. According to Serhat Karakayali, these dramatic events turned an already existing but fragmented spectrum of volunteer initiatives into a kind of "welcome movement" (2017: 7) that involved highly di-

verse groups and individuals of German society. In her work on "contested solidarity," Larissa Fleischmann (2020) shows that those supporting migrants under these conditions considered themselves often "apolitical"—though they *simultaneously* aimed to support and complement local political actors. Thus, while these types of informal support were alternately understood as expression of individual solidarity, political activism, or civil society engagement, these differing and sometimes competing interpretations are closely intertwined with questions of power asymmetries and the political ambiguities of aid in contexts of crisis as a whole.

Second, similar challenges and phenomena can be observed *beyond* migration and refugee assistance and beyond states of *acute* crisis. For instance, as a result of the global financial crisis and the austerity policies that followed particularly in Southern Europe from 2008 onward, numerous state-run aid programs were cut back and new forms of precarity emerged, which also required immediate, unbureaucratic, and flexible forms of support especially for unhoused, ill, or elderly people (Cabot 2016; Kehr 2020; de Lima and Oliveira 2015; Rakopoulos 2016). In her important book on the landscape of neoliberal welfare in Italy, Andrea Muehlebach (2012: 11) has shown that the mass mobilization of "selfless" moral citizens has become an indispensable tool of neoliberal capitalism. As the Italian welfare state has been increasingly dismantled, care work is now performed by those who have "the heart" for it—often those at the margins of society like underemployed youths, Catholic volunteers, or the elderly themselves. In line with these thoughts, we argue that the expansion and differentiation of "help" and "support" represent not only individual citizens' or whole groups' desire to contribute to but also an effort to critique and eventually transcend the shortcomings of institutionalized, or "disappearing," modes of care provision.

Partially, the emergence of these diverse, and often complementary, forms of informal humanitarian care can be understood against the backdrop of a criticism of large-scale international nongovernmental organizations such as Oxfam, Save the Children, or Médecins sans Frontières. In the past, there were allegations of alliances of several agencies with political or military forces and reports of dubious financial practices (Barnett and Weiss 2011; Paulmann 2016; Raventós and Wark 2018; Weizman 2011); more recently, cases of sexual exploitation have discredited the work of humanitarian organizations (Javed et al. 2021; Westendorf 2020). Furthermore, the narrative of "crisis," probably *the* key element of humanitarian intervention, is subject to this critique. Different from ordinary, long-term politics, humanitarianism tends to focus on the eventfulness of "crisis" and therewith reinforces the political status of securitarian actors, as for instance in the field of border control, which helps mobilize political actors who hide interventionist acts behind the veil of "emergency" (Brun 2016; Calhoun 2004; Fassin 2007; Holmes and Castañeda 2016; De Lauri 2018; Ticktin 2011). "Suffocated by the imperatives of crisis, emergency, and declared neutrality, the very idea of political change is anesthetized in favor of humanitarian goals," writes Antonio De Lauri (2019: 150). Thus, in the same way as the "crises" and ruptures of individual and collective lives have become the norm—and no longer the exception—of the contemporary global order, large-scale humanitarian interventions are today part and parcel of long-term governance and political dependencies (Redfield 2005). At times, the aid sector is even accused of lacking sincerity, when the encounters between professional aid workers and recipients are seen as based on the management and control of distant, neutral, and impartial (i.e., de-emotionalized) care provision (Barnett and Weiss 2011; Fassin 2010; Redfield and Bornstein 2010; Ticktin 2014).

The critique of humanitarianism tends to overlook the fact that alternative forms of aid—be it the informal provision of medical care, in social movements or other solidarity initiatives, or other spontaneous support in times of acute need—often adopt central parameters that are actually legitimized in and through long-

established humanitarian practice. This can happen, for instance, when volunteers or political activists employ the notion of "vulnerability" or "worthiness" in their attempt to decide over matters of material distribution in contexts of scarcity, as shown in Muehlebach's (2012) work on Italy, in Susann Huschke's (2014) on Germany, and in Moisés Kopper and Matthew Richmond's (2021) on Brazil. As *the* moral regime of the twentieth century (Fassin 2012: 8), humanitarian logics continue to shape ideas and ideologies on the appropriateness of aid and its legitimacy (Fassin 2007; Paulmann 2016: 287). Therefore, even in more informal forms of humanitarian encounters, the allocation of scarce resources is frequently based on the prioritization of certain dimensions of suffering, operating with gender- or age-specific, highly ethnicized images of innocence and deservingness (Dahl 2014; Ratzmann and Sahraoui 2021; Vrabiescu and Kalir 2017). To capture how these informal(ized) initiatives negotiate different and sometimes overlapping categories and hierarchies of need, which can at times be filled with nationalist, racialized, and gendered stereotypes and distinguish the "deserving" recipient of aid from "others" who are classified as potentially uncomfortable or even dangerous, Heike Drotbohm (2018) referred to the notion of "post-humanitarianism." This, she argues:

> captures not only the a posteriori of a given "emergency" in spatial or institutional settings that follow a given crisis situation. Rather, multiple individuals, initiatives and even organizations intend to move beyond or out of the "aid box," while they simultaneously orient their actions towards a moral grammar that has previously been produced in humanitarian settings.

In many contexts, unforeseen dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, as well as actors' ambivalent feelings about their informal positioning between various agencies of communal welfare and state politics, challenge these emerging forms of post-humanitarian volunteering and informal aid (Bhimji 2020; Bochow 2015; Mittermaier 2019; Theodossopoulos 2016). It was probably anthropologist Liisa Malkki (2015) in her book *The Need to Help* who worked out most clearly how much different types and dimensions of aid—the one provided by institutionalized international or local missions and the "art" of knitting "aid bunnies" or organizing awareness-raising campaigns in highly informal settings—are intertwined. Hence, these apparently "new" forms of humanitarian interventions are not necessarily less challenging than "classical" humanitarian practices: they imply their own complications regarding the way that care and aid provision leads to the emergence and reification of dependencies and inequalities in the context of local and transnational power relations.

Thus, like more formal forms of humanitarian assistance, these evolving formations are composed of mundane routines and interactions that unite a large range of different actors in their efforts to provide or receive help. Affected or targeted persons encounter experts from multiple professional fields, as well as volunteers, religious actors, political activists, or members of the wider civil society who, eventually, may turn into humanitarian care providers in moments or contexts considered "exceptional" or "extraordinary." In their daily contact, they interpret and adapt, but also question and challenge diverse understandings of need and suffering, as well as the legitimacy of political norms and routines, which are co-shaped by international and local hierarchies, institutional rivalries, bureaucratic systems of accountability, and commercial aims.

Moving the affects of care beyond crisis

The articles in this theme section of *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* reflect on the encounters between the providers and the recipients of care that occur outside, or at the fringes, of established large-scale human-

itarian interventions and diverge from these agencies' often self-assured attitude, which is usually based on the politicized paradigm of "crisis." The authors tackle a variety of imaginations, practices, relationships, and material configurations that allow for the creation and transformation of an emergent sociality in which alternative categories of mutuality, personhood, well-being, and affective coexistence coalesce into distinct types of humanitarian states and interactions. They also show that all these processes cannot be understood independently from the dynamics of politics and power in an interconnected world, which have created the demand for informal and formal humanitarian interventions in the first place and are simultaneously criticized or challenged—and often reified—through the same acts of care provision *in* and *beyond* times of crisis.

The title of this theme section, "Affective regimes of care beyond humanitarian crisis," refers to the *relational* component of these settings, when a large range of different actors expose and move beyond established routines of aid, co-shape their own social and material environments in new ways, and are simultaneously affected by, and potentially subvert, politically cultivated humanitarian ideals that were often formulated in the "Global North" and in transnational settings. As a group, the articles in this theme section focus especially on these *intersubjective* dimensions of a turning point that is sensed, felt, and interpreted in different local and national contexts in highly situated ways. In this regard, this theme section connects the literature on "humanitarian assemblages" (Robins 2009: 637) and "vernacular humanitarianism" (Brković 2017) to explorations of "ordinary affects" that shape humanitarian actors' capacities to affect and be affected in their everyday lives (Stewart 2007). As Deborah Gould stated so well in her work on AIDS activism in the United States, affects, feelings, and emotions are fundamental to political life, as they "make up 'the political'" (2009: 3) and help us understand the impact of ideologies, which she sees as a key factor in social reproduction and social change

(27). It is therefore through the lens of affect—and its analytical cognates, emotion, and sentiment[3]—that we understand how experiences, practices, and relationships of humanitarian care provision are made and remade on a day-to-day basis, by both the providers and the recipients of care. "Affect" in such constellations is never only a matter of individual (mental and/or bodily) states, but always part and parcel of a particular "discursive-material" and sociopolitical formation that unfolds in open-ended—and nevertheless, patterned—ways (Slaby et al. 2019: 5). The "affective arrangements" (ibid.) that come into being under these conditions are spaces of potentiality in which imaginations and practices of "living otherwise" (Povinelli 2011: 128) are experienced, performed, and reflected on. The important role of affect for understanding these various dynamics of informal humanitarian care provision are well demonstrated in the contributions of the theme section.

In her article "Along the twilights of care: Continuities of technomoral politics in São Paulo's pro-migrant activism," Heike Drotbohm concentrates on those dimensions of care that fall *between* the competences of overlapping civil society organizations and activist networks. By tracing the moral, organizational, and technical continuities between humanitarianism and pro-migrant activism, she highlights the affective consequences of these overlaps for social relations that emerge in this interstitial sphere. Regarding the intersubjective dimensions of these arrangements, she shows that not only community-strengthening feelings such as indignation, joy, and hope emerge between Haitian newcomers to the city and Brazilian activists, but also shame, embarrassment, and guilt are part of encounters between these actors who calibrate different, and at times opposing, needs, normative expectations, and moral claims.

In her article "Affective relatedness, temporalities, and the politics of care in a medical South-South partnership: The Cuban mission in Brazil," Maria Lidola concentrates on a key protagonist of humanitarian aid—Cuban health professionals working under the Cuban-Brazilian treaty

"More Doctors for Brazil." In her exploration of the intimate encounters between Cuban physicians and Brazilian patients in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, Lidola highlights the temporalizing practices that not only comprised but also transcended the chronicity of crisis that was so prevalent in the Brazilian health care system at that time. Lidola pays attention to how the imaginaries that shaped these international treaties played into the dynamics of interpersonal encounters. Although the Brazilian public health care suffered from a constant scarcity of resources and professionals, Cuban doctors were confronted with a long-lasting postcolonial imaginary about the appropriateness of aid as being "white." By means of particularly time-intensive caregiving and an affectionate provision of medical counseling, Cuban medical staff countered this resentment and emphasized the "help" they provided, which moved these encounters beyond the technical aspect of medical work.

These two case studies illuminate how actors negotiate different patterns and preexisting normative ideas about social relations emerging both in humanitarian and solidarian spaces across different local and national contexts. Tackling these normativities from another perspective, Čarna Brković elaborates on "Disappointment and awkwardness as ugly feelings: Humanitarian affect in a 'Global East,'" looking at humanitarian initiatives that generated rather unexpected and partly averse reactions in Montenegro. She suggests that to understand the emergence of these feelings deemed "ugly," it is crucial to consider the region's geopolitical position, which does not belong clearly to either the Global North or the Global South. Studying the disappointment and awkwardness generated by two transnational humanitarian projects, Brković shows that many Montenegrins feel excluded from opportunities to provide aid, as these are subject to a conventional North-South logic. Understanding "ugly" feelings as a sense of suspended agency, she argues that the "Global East" sits oddly alongside humanitarian traditions grounded in colonial history and structured by postcolonial inequalities between the Global North and the Global South.

Through these case studies, we address the—often highly ambivalent—relationships and mutual references between formal and informal forms of humanitarian aid by adopting a close focus on the encounters and interactions between *all* involved actors, materialities, discourses, et cetera in specific historical and political settings. Miriam Ticktin's article "Care as political revolution?" finally ties the central theses of the theme section together. First, she critically reflects the long-established separation between the providers and the recipients of help, which was never resolved even in the long criticism of humanitarian practice but is questioned through the ethnographic examples provided in this theme section. Ticktin illuminates the different political traditions that play into the respective national-specific constellations of care and illuminates how volunteers, political activists, doctors, and "solidarians" strive for a "different" type of care—one that not only compensates for the most pressing emergency but aims at a real change in the relationships involved. Despite all these attempts, Ticktin notes, one central form of asymmetry persists and has not (yet) been overcome: that of race. She ends her article with an excursus into the movement for Black lives and its abolitionist politics of care. Using this example, she shows how the separation between subject and object of care can be transcended, how the temporality of care can be extended beyond moments of crisis, and how joy, a central emotion otherwise little named in this theme section, can be reinforced by the global movement of anti-Black racism.

Care provision beyond North-South settings and "the West"

Another common feature of these four contributions is that they move beyond a North-South dichotomy that is usually an integral part of humanitarian practices. Again: South-South cooperations are by no means new; rather, they

need to be understood as historically aligned with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Patricia Daley concentrate on socialist and regionalist initiatives such as pan-Africanism and pan-Arabism for showing how the critical notion of "the South" actually came into being (2019: 3). As Turunen (2020: 200) states, South-South forms of humanitarianism often rely on a different—and differentiating—developmental narrative, when the mutually beneficial peer relations are underlined, and terms such as "donor" or "recipients" are rejected (see also Thelen and Read 2007).

In contrast to the numerous research that concentrated on macro perspectives for illuminating the emancipatory character of South-South cooperation (as, for instance, Gray (2011) on Russia, Santos and Cerqueria (2015) on Brazil, or Zhao (2014) on China), anthropological research puts the focus on the challenges and ambivalences that arise in the everyday implementation of these assumptions, or expectations, of equality and laterality (Caldwell 2004; Niu 2016). This is where the contributions to this theme section come in. Above all, Brković's article sheds light on the tension that emerges when local actors position themselves in contrast to the (post)colonial and neoliberal economies of aid. She illustrates not only the emergence of a new regionalism, the "Global East," but also the cultural and ideological misfit between the impulses of care provision that are contained, for example, in fundraising campaigns that require certain technological or political preconditions. As she shows, individual agency can even be suppressed when actors cannot find space to position themselves accordingly.

The situation is different in Drotbohm's article, which deals with the direct encounters between Brazilian activists and migrants coming from the Global South. These asymmetric encounters can be understood as resulting from historically sedimented understandings of gendered, classed, and racialized differences. Against this background, Drotbohm argues that the negotiation of positions and (self-)ascrip-

tions of capacity, ability, and generosity sometimes refer to the superiority performances of the "West" without intending to adapt or copy it. Indeed, as Ticktin states in her article, humanitarians involved in any type of setting, consciously or not, often respond to earlier forms of colonial asymmetries and hence tend to reproduce the racialized global color line. The constellations between Black Cuban physicians and their Brazilian colleagues, as well as their patients, as illuminated in Lidola's contribution to this theme section, offer complementary insights into divergent temporalities in South-South medical partnerships. Cubans interpreted the disrespect and the professional discrimination regarding their medical competence as an improper negation of Cuba's national achievements in public health and medical training. When treating patients in Rio's favelas, Cuban physicians treated their patients in particularly time-intensive ways and hence expressed not only mutual recognition but also a political horizon of care provision beyond the immediacy of crisis.

Thinking humanitarian care through affect and power

Finally, in view of the parallelism and mutual penetration of care configurations—in which more informal or spontaneous forms of aid tend to distance themselves from "conventional" humanitarian interventions and at the same time are not free from their all-encompassing moral and political order—we propose to take a closer look at the inherent power dynamics of these entanglements. Again, the focus on affect can help us understand the *intersubjective dimensions* of power relations in these settings. As cultural studies and social science scholars have argued extensively, affects always unfold—and shape people's cultural registers of feeling—under specific historical circumstances and are thus inherently political phenomena (Ahmed 2014; Slaby and Röttger-Rössler 2018; Thrift 2004). As Deborah Thomas shows so clearly in

her ethnography on *Political Life in the Wake of the Plantation*, the political subject is not only constituted through nationalism or state-driven processes of subjectification, but also through the cultivation of affects that are part of particular (and continuing) historical times (2019: 5). According to her, the relationships that emerge in these constellations in the wake of violence, exploitation, and mistrust are complicated by the fact that power is personalized, which is associated with the charisma and protective patronage of particular leaders (10).

In our theme section on informal settings of humanitarian care, the political force of—individually felt and collectively imagined—affects, and their painful effects for social relationships developing therein, becomes visible in all four contributions, as they are central for bringing the involved actors together in solidarity and action (see Gould 2009). However, as Ticktin remarks in her article based on the examples from the Black Lives Matter movement, the close focus on *diverse* and *alternative* types of affects in these arrangements also makes clear that the resulting configurations "allow us to imagine political forms that are not limited by sympathy and compassion"— those kinds of affect that have become dominant in the "liberal tradition" of humanitarianism in all parts of the world (cf. Gomez et al. 2020).

The open-ended exploration of affects in this theme section reveals, for instance, the "ugly feelings" that Montenegrins harbor toward those types of aid intervention that are inaccessible for them (Brković) and that "challenge the dominance of liberal sentiments like sympathy, compassion, and pity" (Ticktin). Similarly, the protagonists of Drotbohm's study in Brazil draw on sentiments of solidarity in their pro-migrant activism in order to subvert more conventional and bureaucratized forms of aid. At the same time, however, the case also demonstrates the potential for ambiguity, embarrassment, and conflict, which is contained in these "alternative" and allegedly more "egalitarian" visions of humanitarian care. Lidola's insights into the emerging sociality between Cuban doctors and

their Brazilian patients highlight a relational and much more egalitarian dimension of care that contradicts the Brazilian standards of clinical routines and thus allow for a sensitive dimension of intersubjectivity. Hence, she sees the affective expectations emerging in these encounters also as an implicit critique of the colonial legacies of the Brazilian care regime.

Doing research in these ethically sensitive contexts inevitably raises questions about how researchers themselves are able to "fit in" within such politicized settings. Thus, while care relations in humanitarian settings can be shaped by intimacy, solidarity, and affective proximity, they may also be characterized by feelings of anxiety, helplessness, affective alienation, and mistrust. Against this background, taking their own body and senses seriously as methodological instruments (cf. Pink 2009; Stodulka et al. 2018) helps researchers study care arrangements with a focus on affect when affectivity is often difficult to articulate, and silence is as much a part of people's interactions as verbal expression is (see Mattes et al. 2019).

Conclusion

Taken together, the contributions to this theme section make clear that providing humanitarian care in informal settings is an often highly affective and emotional affair that is configured not only by asymmetric power relations between the providers and recipients of aid but also by the shared value of human life in politicized settings that connects those who give and those who provide care in often diverging cycles of social obligation and contested reciprocity (Minn 2007). Furthermore, in the same way affect is always a dynamic relation that unfolds between specific actors and their socio-material and political environments (Slaby and Röttger-Rössler 2018: 3), the emerging encounters can be understood best through the emplacement of these affective relations in particular situations and localities in which constellations of care "are established, dissolved, and remade" (Dilger

et al. 2020: 15) over time. This understanding of "Affective regimes of care beyond humanitarian crisis" provides a language for moving beyond discursive perceptions of "crisis" in the field of humanitarian aid and digs deeper into the micro-phenomena of daily affects, emotions, and sentiments that constitute the embodied formations of local and translocal humanitarian engagement. At the same time, the articles of this theme section connect their explorations of the micro-politics of care to the global and transnational power relations that have also shaped the field of large-scale humanitarianism and are challenged—but partly also reified—through the increasingly diverse forms of humanitarian care in the early twenty-first century.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. We use the categories "formal" and "informal" in a mostly heuristic way to emphasize the emergence of informal groups, networks, and organizations, which distance themselves and critique the strongly institutionalized and highly bureaucratic field of humanitarian care organizations (Barnett and Weiss 2011; Hyndman 2000; Redfield 2005; Weizman 2011). This critical attitude can even be characteristic for some types of formalized care organizations, for instance, those working in South-South settings and with a strongly decolonial impetus.

2. The practice of care is a mundane and ubiquitous act. As an analytical notion, it allows researching a large range of relations, activities, attitudes, and values (Drotbohm 2022a; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Ticktin 2014, 2019). While a large number of scholarly works, especially in the social sciences, have explored the asymmetric power dynamics inherent in care giving (Drotbohm and Alber 2015; Kofman 2012; Kowalski 2011; Mol 2008; M. Murphy 2015;

Nguyen et al. 2017; Sevenhuijsen 1989; Thelen 2015; Thelen and Read 2007; Tronto 2013), this theme section refers to a strand of literature that employs the notion of care for critically examining how humanitarianism relies on imagined relations of care, while reconfiguring social relations under conditions of need and dependency (Feldman and Ticktin 2010; Huschke 2014; Ticktin 2011; Turner 2019; Williams 2015).

3. It is important to emphasize that the conceptual triad of affect, emotion, and sentiment (Bens and Zenker 2019; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Massumi 2002; Slaby et al. 2019) is not used by our contributors in the *same* overarching analytical logic. Rather, affective states—as well as emotions and sentiments—mold humanitarian assemblages of care in highly situated ways, and our contributors draw on specific definitions of these concepts in order not to lose sight of ethnographic particularities or "the conceptual subtleties that their exploration requires" (Dilger et al. 2020: 4).

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