# The Anthropologist as Witness:
# Humanitarianism between Ethnography and Critique

Nicolas Guilhot

**Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present**
Didier Fassin
Translated by Rachel Gomme
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. xvi + 324 pp.

**Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics**
Erica Bornstein and Peter Redfield, eds.
Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2011. xi + 320 pp.

In the concluding session of his 1976 lecture at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault introduced the notion of "biopower" to designate a new set of political technologies emerging in the eighteenth century and developing throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These technologies no longer expressed the traditional right of life and death that the sovereign exercised over his subjects, nor did they discipline discrete bodies according to the functional requirements of war, economic production, justice, or education: instead, they operated over the seamless and anonymous surface of large populations. Demographics, epidemiology, social hygiene, psychiatry, but also their institutional and political inscription into healthcare systems, insurance regimes, social medicine, or urban planning policies sought to secure conditions optimizing the life of populations in its most immediate biological manifestation. Biopower does not just preserve extant life: it actively intervenes throughout the social body to augment it and reshapes society as a secure, life-supporting environment. Foucault thus saw in biopower a new episode in the history of sovereignty, characterized by large-scale technologies of care and the dispensation of a modicum of social security, which deeply transformed the logic of government. The course was titled "Society must be defended."[1]

Twenty-five years later, a similar linkage between sovereignty and the biopolitical imperative of securing life was articulated in an influential document. Its birthplace was not the amphitheaters of the Collège de France but the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. Its purpose was not to enlighten the public of the Latin Quarter in Paris but to clarify for the international community the mecha-

nisms and circumstances under which militarized humanitarian interventions could take place. Its title was not "Society must be defended" but, close enough, "The Responsibility to Protect."[2]

In many ways, the report can be considered a landmark in the history of biopower. One of the striking things about this document is the extent to which it seems to vindicate Foucault's suggestion that biopower was replacing or redefining sovereignty. It enshrined this transformation by making sovereignty *conditional*—something unthinkable in terms of classical political theory or legal philosophy—on the effective provision of security and stated that "state authorities are responsible for the functions of protecting the safety and life of citizens and promotion of their welfare." Sovereignty no longer manifested itself exclusively by its capacity to provide security against external dangers such as foreign aggression but it included primarily protection against dangers immanent to social and political life itself (what Foucault called "endemic" dangers), namely, "threats to life, health, livelihood, personal safety and human dignity."[3]

But biopower has come a long way since 1976, and it is now acknowledged as the ordering principle of global politics. To the extent that it seeks to regulate complex life environments, biopower is not limited by the artificial partitions of political space, since a local security deficit becomes "a risk to people everywhere."[4] In order to be effective, biopower has to be global. This does not mean that it bypasses state sovereignty (the report insists that the "responsibility to protect" departs from the confrontational notion of a "right to intervene") but rather that sovereignty has to be reconstructed according to the biopolitical imperative. In the age of a globally shared responsibility to protect, sovereignty becomes the local instantiation of a security continuum that should ideally remain seamless.[5] The report thus outlines a principle of subsidiarity, as it were, a "fallback responsibility" whereby the failure of a state to provide basic security to its population opens the possibility of an external intervention meant to ensure that the global security continuum is restored. This, according to the authors of the report, "bridges the divide between intervention and sovereignty."[6]

Foucault is not the only author who seems to be vindicated by this emerging doctrine of global humanitarian government and the transformation of sovereignty on the basis of a humanitarian rationale. While it knows no geographical borders, today's biopower also ignores chronological boundaries. Military humanitarian intervention is of course a solution of last resort called for by "exceptional circumstances," with the sole purpose of restoring an effective state capacity to provide security and thus rebuilding a biopolitical sovereignty. Yet this chronological limitation quickly appears to be purely notional: the responsibility to protect entails a "responsibility to prevent" allowing for anticipatory action, as well as a "responsibility to rebuild," which includes the reconstruction of complex life-environments, from housing to sanitation, from governance capacities to productive industries, from healthcare to justice, reconciliation, and development. As a result, what was initially described as a "limited exception" has become of indefinite duration and the constitutive principle of the entire sociopolitical order. At this point, the stage is predictably set for a disquisition on Giorgio Agamben and the generalization of the state of exception.[7]

"Biopower," "state of exception," "bare life," Foucault, Agamben . . . These references now seem to provide the standard intellectual coordinates of many works dealing with humanitarianism from a perspective that is both critical and theoretical. They have provided a conceptual toolbox for making sense of humanitarian interventions and of the reinvention of politics around an all-encompassing notion of human "security." But they have rarely been tested and tried in a sustained fashion against the empirical grain of contemporary humanitarian situations. This combination of critical theory and ethnographic work is what distinguishes the two books under review here. Didier Fassin's *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* is a collection (first published in French last year) of previously published articles, each presenting an ethnographic case study, and it succeeds in its ambition to analyze each one as the different facet of an emerging "humanitarian government" that mobilizes similar moral repertoires and humanitarian technologies in the governance of rich Western nations as much as in the management of emergencies in remote war-torn or poverty-stricken countries. Incidentally, the book was initially published in the "Hautes Etudes" collection, jointly run by the publishers Gallimard and Seuil, where all of Michel Foucault's Collège de France lectures have been published. The second book, *Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics*, is a collective volume edited by Erica Bornstein and Peter Redfield, based on the proceedings of an intensive workshop held in 2008 at the School of Advanced Research on the Human Experience in Santa Fe. Like Fassin's, their book sees in the deployment of moral sentiments in domestic and international politics one of the defining features of our times. The various contributions aim at questioning contemporary humanitarianism by exploring its internal tensions and recovering its historical and comparative alternatives.

Taken together, the two volumes cover an extremely broad range of humanitarian policies. While it is not possible to present and discuss all of them within the confines of this essay, a brief sample provides an idea of the bewildering diversity of case studies: the emergence of the psychological treatment of social "suffering" and the administration of a transit center for asylum seekers in France; the state of exception following the Venezuelan urban landslide in 1999; humanitarian psychiatry and individual trauma in Palestine (Fassin); the changing meanings of neutrality for humanitarian organizations (Redfield); Islamic humanitarianism (Benthall); rehabilitation programs for heroin users in China (Hyde); the shift from development assistance to humanitarian aid in the work of CARE in Gaza in the 1950s and 1960s (Feldman). Some specific humanitarian policies are analyzed in both volumes: for instance, the medical authentication of bodily "proofs" establishing the truth of biographical narratives provided by asylum seekers in France is analyzed by both Didier Fassin and, in "From Redundancy to Recognition: Transnational Humanitarianism and the Production of Nonmoderns," Miriam Ticktin (who compares it with similar U.S. policies), while the representation of the child in humanitarian culture is the object of two penetrating chapters, one by Fassin on the iconography of the fight against AIDS in South Africa, and one by Bornstein in *Forces of Compassion* ("The Value of Orphans") on the status of orphans in Indian charity. Rather than trying to cover all of these case studies, which in the end would not do justice to any of them while pretending to treat them

all equally, I will focus on a couple of themes and problems that run through most of the contributions, and in particular on the problems raised by the critique of humanitarianism from an anthropological perspective, on witnessing and history, and on the relationship between humanitarianism and politics.

What brings these two books together, indeed, is not the occasional overlap but a similar diagnosis of the current transformations of humanitarianism. Beyond the variety of case studies, they both delineate a consistent logic at work in the contemporary treatment of human suffering, embodied in a flexible and integrated web of global actors, agencies, and practices. The ethnographic attention to specific situations does not prevent the authors from treating each case as the local declension of a general mode of government, characterized by the mobilization of moral sentiments in the political sphere. For Fassin, there is a "general logic," a "humanitarian reason" that runs through the domestic policies addressing social suffering at home and the management of complex emergencies abroad (Fassin, 244). One of the great strengths of *Humanitarian Reason* is indeed to bring under the same lens both the social policies of rich nations and traditional humanitarian aid, and to suggest convincingly that, beyond obvious differences, similar trends can be observed as humanitarian arguments requalify social situations in ways that are congruent with a new moral economy and with the deployment of "humanitarian government": "suffering" replaces inequalities as a symptom of social disruption; social issues become matters of individual psychology; political violence is requalified as psychosomatic "trauma"; the search for justice is replaced by the principled equivalence of victims; a political understanding of social situations is displaced by an emotional response directed at depoliticized victims. A similar perspective runs through the volume by Bornstein and Redfield. The idea of a unified humanitarian government is formulated most forcefully in Mariella Pandolfi's chapter, which discerns in contemporary humanitarian interventions the emergence of a new form of power on a global scale, exercised by a "mobile . . . oligarchy" and all the more encompassing since it has collapsed into a single apparatus military, developmental, and humanitarian functions that were previously kept distinct (Bornstein and Redfield, eds., 239). But it also permeates Ilana Feldman's reflections, in "The Humanitarian Circuit: Relief Work, Development Assistance and CARE in Gaza, 1955–67," on the metamorphosis of short-term humanitarian relief into more encompassing development policies, or, in different ways, Sandra Hyde's ("Screams, Cries, and Whispers: Traveling Heroin Therapeutics and Humanitarian Aid in Post-Socialist China") and Miriam Ticktin's respective chapters analyzing how global humanitarian templates translate into specific therapeutic or medicalized techniques administering individual mobility. Fassin's contribution to the Bornstein and Redfield volume further underscores the proximity of these approaches to contemporary humanitarianism. Both books are driven by a concern with the present and start by acknowledging that, whether one locates the origins of humanitarianism in the philosophical tradition of "moral sentiments" and the Scottish Enlightenment or an older Christian tradition, there is something specifically contemporary about the humanitarianization of politics in all its dimensions. There is no Whig history here, no historical tapestry leading uninterruptedly from the civilizing eighteenth-century ideals of humanity to the "French doctors": the starting point of

both books is not a distant point in the past but a puzzlement about the present. "What is it about the present," Redfield and Bornstein ask, "that casts the care of strangers in such a leading role?" (3). Fassin's project is to make sense of the recent reconfiguration of politics as "moral sentiments made their entry into politics during the last decades" and to contribute to "a moral history of the present" (Fassin, 17). What runs through these books is a clear awareness that biopower no longer exists in the interstices of the old sovereignty—like a Red Cross stretcher-bearer running between warring armies—but has dramatically redefined the internal logic of government at home, of interventions abroad, of war, and even of sovereignty itself.

That the entanglement of humanitarianism and sovereignty is a central concern of most authors discussed here appears clearly in the critical apparatus. As one would expect, both books draw heavily on notions of "biopower," "biopolitics," "state of exception," "political theology," and cite unsparingly Foucault, Agamben, Arendt, and even, occasionally, Benjamin or Schmitt. Footnotes not only provide sources and data but also refer, as the historian Anthony Grafton suggested, "to larger theories and theoretical schools with which the authors wish or hope to be associated."[8] If this is the case, then the use of the above references is quite telling in the context of what remain essentially collections of ethnographic descriptions. There is indeed a tension between the ethnographic close-ups, the fine-grained, in-depth descriptions of humanitarian situations providing the flesh of each chapter, a general tendency to stay as close as possible to the representations and the dilemmas experienced by the actors themselves, and general concepts derived from legal or political philosophy, extraneous to the ethnographic description and associated with a critical posture. In fact, this tension is acknowledged by the authors. It is almost tangible in Fassin's work and informs his entire project, which seeks to occupy a median position between the ethnographic recovery of the internal logic of humanitarianism and the capacity to find critical leverage from outside. This balancing act leads Fassin to turn frequently to the above references, but only in order to immediately take some distance from them and qualify his own position: for instance, in his chapter on the Sangatte center in France, where hundreds of asylum seekers hoping to make it to the United Kingdom transited between 1999 and 2002 in a sort of legal vacuum established in the name of humanitarian ideals, Fassin locates his approach in relation to Agamben's thesis on the generalization of the state of exception (151–52). Yet he does so only to assert his difference as an ethnographer and a social anthropologist, more interested in the multiple nuances of his empirical material than in the validity of theoretical paradigms. The public authorities involved in the management of the Sangatte camp, Fassin shows, operated largely within the framework of the law, and the few exceptional measures (such as the deliberate intent not to inform refugees about their right to claim asylum in France) were the result of political decisions that can be analyzed using the traditional tools of the social sciences, rather than sweeping theoretical generalizations. As he writes with Mallarmean accents in his discussion of Agamben's claim about modernity as the normalization of the state of exception, "a paradigm will never abolish the real," and reality, as one might guess, is full of "complexity and ambiguity" (153).[9]

The same tension between ethnography and critique is acknowledged by Bornstein

and Redfield, who observe that, next to a traditional approach informed by the work of Mauss and analyzing the various historical and cultural instantiations of giving, a major line of research in the current anthropological literature on humanitarianism is driven by a fascination with states of exception and draws "less on the comparative study of catastrophe . . . than on the philosophical legacy of figures like Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt" or Foucault (Bornstein and Redfield, eds., 22–23). The fact that these tutelary references are given so much visibility while they are also qualified and, occasionally, criticized is all the more significant.[10]

While it may bear witness to their current vogue in some quarters of academe, it also suggests that one of the stakes of the new anthropological literature on humanitarianism is to remain committed to an ethnographic approach while striving to find a *critical* vantage point, uncontaminated by the actors' representations and allowing for a degree of distantiation from the humanitarian project. This attempt at articulating a reconstruction of the humanitarian worldview from within, as it were, and a critique from without, leads Fassin to describe his project, here in the *Forces of Compassion* chapter "*Noli Me Tangere*: The Moral Untouchability of Humanitarianism," as a quest for "distanced interiority," to the extent that the critical perspective remains subordinated and indeed internal to the reconstruction of the principles of justice driving humanitarianism (Bornstein and Redfield, eds., 39). Within the broader field of disciplinary forces, it essentially consists in finding a middle ground between an advocacy-driven, "critical" anthropology and a "culturalist" anthropology that only translates symbolic systems (Fassin, 245). It is hard not to hear echoes of recent French sociological debates and in particular of attempts at reconciling a "critical sociology" inspired by Pierre Bourdieu with the program of a "pragmatic sociology of critique" formulated by Luc Boltanski or Bruno Latour.[11] By constantly steering a middle course between critical theories of biopower and the ethnographic immersion in the moral economy of humanitarianism, Fassin seeks to combine the respective benefits of these approaches and apprehend humanitarianism both as an ideology concealing specific relationships of domination and as an ethos that is constitutive of our way of experiencing the world today and, more generally, of our moral sense, despite its shortcomings. Nonetheless, his project is ultimately presented as a "critique of humanitarian reason."

So is the case with the Bornstein and Redfield volume, which is "informed by a critique of the larger humanitarian project" (Bornstein and Redfield, eds., 25). In "Humanitarianism and Its Discontents," Pandolfi, for instance, advocates a "'critical' turn in anthropological work," while others, such as Bornstein and Jonathan Benthall (who respectively write on the protection of orphans in India and Islamic charities), find a position of critical externality in other humanitarian traditions (243). Alternatively, the study of humanitarian technologies, such as the rehab programs analyzed by Sandra Hyde, can be connected with a more general critique of neoliberalism that focuses on the role of such techniques of self-discipline and self-regulation in the production of neoliberal subjects. The articulation of ethnography and critique is certainly one of the issues that both books seek to address.

Traditionally, ethnography and critique went hand in hand: for an anthropologist, following his or her subject often meant becoming involved in some form of advocacy

against global forces disrupting traditional ways of life. However, the encounter between anthropology and humanitarianism has reshuffled the cards. This encounter took place on the basis of deep-seated affinities between anthropology and humanitarianism. It is not just that, like humanitarians, anthropologists go on field missions in faraway places and develop a professional and sometimes personal interest in the lives of the people they interact with (the line is indeed subtle between the ''do no harm'' enjoinment of the American Anthropological Association's code of ethics, and the desire to ''do good'' that characterizes humanitarianism). But more generally, the contexts in which they work have often been reshaped by humanitarian interventions, democracy-promotion programs, human rights campaigns, or various developmental projects, as a result of which anthropologists have started to turn their ethnographic gaze toward humanitarian work itself and its inscription in specific cultural contexts.

More importantly, the interest of anthropologists in humanitarianism was, at least in part, the *result* of their increased proximity to aid workers. In ''*Noli Me Tangere*,'' Fassin provides some very interesting clues in this respect when he reflects on his own involvement in the operations and the governance of Médecins sans Frontières:

> When the organization would ask me to intervene ''as an anthropologist'' to help them understand what had caused the difficulties it encountered during a particular mission, expecting me to give them ''cultural keys'' for interpreting ''resistance from the population,'' I would explain that, as I saw it, the analysis should encompass the entire intervention scene—that is, not just aid receivers but the association and its members. (40)

While the case of Fassin may be unusual, given the extent of his responsibilities within the structure of MSF, it certainly applies to more common patterns of fellow-traveling or socialization in the field between anthropologists and aid workers and is indicative of the deep-seated connivance linking the anthropological critique of humanitarianism to the humanitarian project itself.

Yet as the aid system was moving into anthropology's field of vision, it was simultaneously fueling the development of new forms of biopolitical control on a global scale. Occupying a position close to that of the humanitarian operator, the anthropologist was now finding herself potentially included in a new apparatus of global crisis management—a development perfectly illustrated by Pandolfi's perceptive analysis of her own disorientation as she navigates the sociological ''melting-pot'' of the humanitarian apparatus. In some extreme cases, this functional integration of anthropology within the humanitarian-military nexus has been explicitly articulated and encouraged, as in the controversial Human Terrain System program of the Department of Defense, which embeds anthropologists into combat units in Afghanistan and Iraq, or in their recruitment by the African Command's Social Science Research Center.[12] But even setting aside these particular programs, it is clear that there is no longer an immediate linkage between ethnography and critique, and that the practice of anthropology has become potentially ambiguous or even functional to interventionist projects. It is in this context that the need to look at things from outside started to be felt across the discipline.

The tensions and compromises associated with the proximity of anthropology to

humanitarianism come to the fore in both volumes, and they are very much at the center of Fassin's reflections, but they appear nowhere as strongly as in Harri Englund's chapter, "The Anthropologist and His Poor." The point of departure is provided by a tragic anecdote that took place while Englund was attending a community-empowerment workshop in Malawi. The sudden illness and death of a workshop participant unraveled the rhetoric of communality and equality on which the initiative was based: rather than receiving treatment onsite, the victim was sent back to his remote village by bus, lest his relatives accuse the workshop conveners of witchcraft. He died shortly after reaching his destination. While Englund's initial impulse was to seek immediate medical assistance—assuming that common attendance to an "empowerment" workshop forged bonds of solicitude among participants—the organizers chose instead to reinscribe the victim's life within a different set of social relationships that "carried the responsibility for attending to it" (91). At one level, the episode reveals the impasse in which a certain form of community-oriented perspective may end up, as it leaves unchallenged and even reproduces the very sociocultural structures the workshop was supposed to transform through individual empowerment. "For all its promotion of critical awareness and egalitarianism," Englund writes, the workshop "was instrumental in reproducing a structure of relationships that posed little challenge to Malawi's entrenched inequalities" (87). But the principles of critical awareness and egalitarianism animating the workshop—not to mention the co-production of knowledge by the professionals of aid and their beneficiaries—are also those of collaborative ethnography, and they reveal some "unsettling similarities" between anthropology and humanitarianism: "The participatory rhetoric of 'community-based' and 'grass-roots' interventions poses a dilemma to the anthropologist, whose engagement with the poor takes place within the context of a myriad of projects to improve their lot, some of which bear uncanny resemblance to the egalitarian sensibilities of anthropology itself" (76).

Reading Englund, one clearly sees why anthropology's salvation will not come from the sprinkling of critical theory over its ethnographic material but from questioning the critical stance that has brought anthropologists to speak "in the external register of humanitarian outrage" in the first place. This unquestioned moral empathy, which has percolated all the way into the egalitarian methodological principles characteristic of what Englund calls "anthropological populism," is what prevents anthropologists from articulating their own difference toward their interlocutors and from opening to the possibility of an argument developed on the basis of diverging interests. And yet, Englund suggests, it is precisely the possibility of such an argument that makes a radical equality meaningful and concrete. In the absence of a break with anthropological populism, the assertion of equality in knowledge-production and the calls for grassroots approaches and collaboration will continue to dissimulate the same kind of power asymmetries that characterize the relationship of the aid worker to the aid recipient. These asymmetries are indeed one of the problematic features of the humanitarian relation identified by most of the authors discussed here and a favorite target of their critical acumen: a critique of compassion is necessary, Fassin writes in *Humanitarian Reason*, because "compassion [is] a moral relationship with no possible reciprocity" but one that also has an objective, sociological existence, notwithstanding

whether or not it is subjectively experienced by the parties involved (Fassin, 3). And the inequalities at work within the humanitarian relation are indeed the subject of most contributions, from the differential relation to biology in Ticktin's study of asylum seekers to the violence involved in the therapeutic situation analyzed by Hyde, or the different values assigned to the life of humanitarian workers and their beneficiaries in the chapter that Fassin dedicates to the fiasco of the medical team that Médecins sans Frontières left stationed in Iraq during the 2003 invasion, which could not attend to the victims and eventually left. But Englund leaves the reader with the lingering suspicion that the denunciation of these inequalities and of the humanitarian failure to live up to its self-professed principles of justice will remain ineffective or, worse, will only detract from anthropology's own involvement in similar patterns as long as it does not lead to a transformation of anthropology itself. Fassin comes close to a similar conclusion: "I have not situated myself above actors" (246). Such self-implicating critique, he writes in "*Noli Me Tangere*," disturbs "both the person who produces it and the person who receives it" (Bornstein and Redfield, eds., 43). Englund, by contrast, definitely moves beyond programmatic calls and outlines the methodological and political implications of an anthropology that begs to differ not only from the humanitarian perspective but from its own premises.

If anthropologists succeed in breaking with anthropological populism and with a form of advocacy that obscures their own difference, what is the specific position, the exact distance that should be kept in the ethnographic relationship? Englund suggests that, within the "postpopulist" paradigm he is advocating, this position is not one of identification or alignment with the poor or the victim that would erase the distance but one of mere *witnessing* (89). Yet rather than undoing the problematic entanglement between anthropology and humanitarianism, his solution seems to bring us even closer to the very core of contemporary humanitarianism. Starting in the 1970s, what Fassin calls the "second age of humanitarianism" has indeed been characterized by "the emergence of the witness" (Fassin, 206). Witnessing, more generally, has become a powerful cultural narrative in our societies and a major channel of what Albert Hirschman once called "voice." It has also become an important subject of debate among historians, in particular about the exact status of the testimony as a source—a debate that, as we will see, has since penetrated the anthropology of humanitarianism.

What makes the humanitarian testimony specific is that it is premised on several principles that make it possible in the first place but may also contradict it, *in primis* the principles of neutrality and impartiality, widely regarded as essential pillars of humanitarianism. As Peter Redfield observes in his chapter on the history and the practice of neutrality, the exact relationship between the "practice of speaking out" and the conception of a humanitarian space as a neutral space, excluded from the surrounding conflict, has always been highly unstable and remains so today (Bornstein and Redfield, eds., 63). The history of an organization such as MSF, he argues, is essentially the story of how this tension has been constantly negotiated, as it reflected the political and logistical constraints specific to each humanitarian context as well as the political line set by the organization itself. This means that "neutrality" is a strategic notion that is never fully realized but creates a space for the pursuit of different,

potentially diverging interests. By the same token, this also suggests that "witnessing" is never a moral absolute either, a direct window on the ultimate meaning or the root causes of disasters and wars, but a practice contingent on the conditions in which it is deployed.

Humanitarian witnessing is complicated by a second element: it stems from a care for suffering bodies and is often developed within a medicalized relationship. How does a concern with biological life give rise to a meaningful testimony, one that transcends the boundaries of the organic and transforms bodily states into the meaningful traces of a political history? Even the medical certificates that are supposed to validate the biographical narratives of individuals claiming asylum on the basis of illnesses that could not be cured in their home country reduce such narratives to their biological and apolitical dimension, as Ticktin shows. The question of the testimony is also at the center of a key chapter of Fassin's book, which revolves around the role of psychiatry and psychology in bridging these two dimensions of contemporary humanitarianism, based on a case study of humanitarian psychiatry in the Palestinian territories. But it is not too far-fetched to venture that the problem of witnessing is the central issue addressed in *Humanitarian Reason*. As remote situations that are apparently very different from each other are increasingly subjected to the same humanitarian technologies, Fassin suggests that most of these technologies generate testimonies, whether this is their primary purpose or a side-effect of their implementation. This is true, for instance, of the "lieux d'écoute" that French authorities started opening in the mid-1990s to deal with the psychological suffering of a marginalized urban youth feeling alienated from society at large and failing to identify with socially rewarding roles. It is also the case with the distribution to needy households of subsidies coming from a "Social Emergency Fund" established by the French government during winter 1998, which ends up rewarding very specific rhetorics of self-presentation: means of mere survival are thus exchanged for written "fragments of life," as Fassin writes in *Humanitarian Reason* (Fassin, 214). And this is obviously true of the authentication by medical personnel of the biographical narratives of people petitioning for asylum on the basis of major health conditions. But the same thing can be said of the intervention of humanitarian psychologists and mental health specialists in the Palestinian territories, as they register the traumas experienced by those who have been exposed to war or to the violent destruction of their life environment. In all these cases, complex social processes are translated into the clinical language of individual suffering. The humanitarian government, according to Fassin, is first and foremost a machine that elicits and administers testimonies.

Yet these testimonies, co-produced by the humanitarian operator and the victim, often obscure as much as they reveal. As the distress related to pauperization or marginalization is put into words, individual psychology gradually becomes a new language for visualizing the social, displacing other ways of articulating it—in particular the language of social inequalities and class. Structural economic transformations gradually drop out of sight as subjective psychological states become the prism through which they are reflected. Society becomes essentially a mentalscape. These displacements obviously affect the way in which these issues are addressed by the authorities and the nature of the policy responses: social or economic policies aiming

at dealing with root causes and structural imbalances are gradually replaced by humanitarian-inflected policies dealing with individual suffering.[13] A creeping process of medicalization and psychologization sets in, and the "humanitarian government" extends its reach further. Changes in the mode of production, in workplace relationships, and in general social interactions are reformulated as problems of individual adjustment and call for specific interventions that mobilize new forms of medical expertise. This shift in our representation of the social world is concisely captured by a labor sociologist quoted by Fassin: "Before, colleagues used to pass on union cards; now they exchange antidepressants" (25). Psychology, in that sense, is not just an instrument of diagnosis that identifies medically certified pathologies. It becomes constitutive of the social bond, a general language for articulating the experience of social violence and making "sense" of it—although this "sense" is obviously very different from the meaning that a sociological or historical analysis would produce: while the latter is driven by an ambition to objectivize the social world, the former dissolves it in a continuous process of subjective experiences. The same logic is at work in the policies of "social emergency" deployed by Western governments at home and in the humanitarian interventions abroad. In his study of the work of humanitarian psychiatrists in the Palestinian territories, Fassin suggests that this language has become nothing short of a "new vocabulary of war," as humanitarian psychiatrists "tell of violence in the language of subjectivity" (202). In these testimonies, the Israel-Palestine conflict is apprehended through a generic notion of "trauma" that conflates under a same category different causes—exposure to extreme violence and private life issues, combat experience and professional delusions, political deaths and biographical idiosyncrasies. As a result, the "trauma" becomes a fungible notion, easily transposable across radically different contexts: it is the condition of the Palestinian fighter, of course, but also of the Israeli living in fear of homemade rockets or suicide bombing, and even of the humanitarian worker herself, constantly exposed to their suffering. In the end, reprocessed through the notion of trauma, the condition of "victim" loses any discriminatory and explanatory power it may have once possessed: manufactured by humanitarian witnesses, victimhood becomes a universal condition that can be claimed by actors inhabiting incommensurable situations (or granted to them in the name of impartiality), and these situations lose their historical intelligibility. This form of testimony based on the psychological assistance to victims, Fassin writes, "reduces violence to the trauma, and the subject to victim. What is not said about the historical situations in which deaths and sufferings are set when the focus is placed entirely on the simple fact of dying or suffering? And how much of the intelligibility of the conflict is obscured at the moment when one speaks of the trauma and the victim? . . . what is lost in this translation . . . is, precisely, history" (220).

Fassin is not the only one denouncing the problematic nature of the humanitarian narratives of witnessing, and the twin themes of "depoliticization" and "de-historicization" run deep in both volumes. They are very much in the background of Peter Redfield's subtle analysis of the shifting contours of "neutrality"; the orphans awaiting adoption in the UNICEF brochures are "without history," according to Erica Bornstein (Bornstein and Redfield, eds., 124); Miriam Ticktin shows that in the process of granting asylum for health reasons, "political history is rendered irrelevant"

and asylum is conditional on becoming an "apolitical" body (184); Ilana Feldman describes CARE's relief and development projects in Gaza as the contrary of a "political solution" (223); Mariella Pandolfi mentions the "desubjectification" generated by the aid apparatus and denounces the humanitarian space as one of "depoliticized exception" (235, 245). She suggests that the notion of "emergency" is a way of imagining events that emphasizes their "unpredictability" and, one gathers, of detaching them from historical processes. This critique is not new. It is the same as the critique of humanitarian images offered by Susan Sontag, for instance. And James Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine*, published in 1994, was already building on a well-established tradition of critiques of technocracy to analyze development bureaucracies, thus sealing the alliance of Foucauldian approaches with the denunciation of the depoliticizing tendencies at work in humanitarianism. Harri Englund thus seems right to suggest that the theme of depoliticization is, by now, "well-worn" (90).

But Fassin's chapter on humanitarian witnesses in Palestine stands out as an attempt at reexamining this theme by questioning the relationship between witnessing and history. Borrowing on the work of the historian François Hartog on the different figures of the witness in Greek and Roman history (*testis*, *superstes*, *martus*, *histôr*), Fassin deploys this typology in order to analyze the logic of humanitarian witnessing as it can be observed from the work of psychiatrists sent to Palestine. Traditionally, the witness is the survivor, the *superstes*, who tells the world about what he has seen and experienced. But humanitarianism has established a new figure of the witness, who is not the survivor but the person who has tended to him and who is presented material or narrative evidence—a neutral witness, as it were, who is only presented with the facts and is referred to as the *testis* in the historical and legal tradition Fassin mobilizes. This witness has not experienced the events that he reports. Instead, he speaks out for the survivor. But there is a paradox specific to humanitarianism: this witness occupies the structural position of the *testis*, and yet his testimony is not the neutral, matter-of-fact reporting of the legal witness. It deploys the emotional rhetoric of the *superstes*; it does not establish facts but conveys emotions and feelings. It makes the suffering visible and tangible. What really matters in the humanitarian testimony, then, "is not that the event took place, but that it was felt" (Fassin, 208). The truth that is at stake here is not factual but experiential: its entire purpose is to invite compassion. By the same token, this form of testimony has a strong rhetorical component: its entire purpose, as Fassin points out, is to "move people" with a poignant story, not to recover the truth of a complex historical situation (212). What seems to worry Fassin is that the humanitarian witness is not so much interested in ascertaining facts, in the critical analysis of his sources, or in documenting events, but in generating emotional responses: attention to facts disappears behind their emotional traces. The emergence of humanitarian psychiatry and the associated forms of witnessing have thus signaled "the end of history" (215).

Fassin himself acknowledges that the job of humanitarian organizations is obviously not to arbitrate about the past but to intervene in the present. Aid workers, after all, are not historians. Why is history so important, then? And why is the critique of dehistoricization so central to the critique of humanitarianism? Fassin provides some clues in his description of a different approach to witnessing. Citing a joint report by

Médecins du Monde and the International Federation of Human Rights documenting violations of human rights and humanitarian law in Palestine, he suggests that it aimed "to attest to the factual truth" rather than stirring up compassion; "eyewitnesses were called, written documents were produced, material evidence such as bullets and X-rays was sought" (217). It is no coincidence that this description oscillates between the repertoire of the trial and that of antiquarian history: the notion of "proof" has long been bridging the domains of history and jurisdiction, allowing for the circulation of numerous metaphors between them. Fassin associates positive meanings with witnessing protocols that seem to follow the patterns of the historical method, and in the first place a notion of justice: a testimony that does not erase history, he suggests, construes its subjects as right-bearers. The emotional testimony, instead, generates "subjectivities without subjects," pure victims whose history is diluted beyond recognition within a general notion of "trauma" or suffering. Factual witnessing—but "testifying" would be a more accurate wording here—is associated with a claim for justice. History is a tribunal. And although Fassin never says so, everything suggests that in this tribunal, the new figure of the witness inaugurated by psychiatric aid is a mere sophist, more interested in performing oratory feats inspiring pity than in establishing what "really" happened, the *ipsum verum factum*.

Although this position is never clearly spelled out, the critique of dehistoricization seems to be tethered to an ideal of justice based on enforceable individual human rights and requiring the production of evidence in a legal sense. But is humanitarianism really to blame for the failure of this ideal to be fulfilled? Didn't human rights reinvent themselves as a vehicle for a global reform program, more than as a system of enforceable entitlements? If humanitarianism can be described as a force of depoliticization, one might also consider that its development in the past four decades was directly related to the crisis of human rights as an instrument of enforceable justice.[14] It is also tempting to question the charge of dehistoricization that is made. What does it tell us about the vision of history that is mobilized in the critique of humanitarianism? For it is indeed history that offers a normative vantage point from which the critique of the humanitarian depoliticization proceeds. If history offers such critical leverage, it is because humanitarian organizations, in order to bear witness, must relate to historical reality, however indirectly. But because they are not visual witnesses and must deal with secondhand sources (they must report what they have heard, not what they have seen), they face challenges that "are not so far removed from those encountered by historians," Fassin says (215). The humanitarian witness, it seems, can thus be held up to the standards established by historical research.

Yet by rejecting the poignant experience-based testimony as a rhetorical construct that erases history, Fassin is implicitly enforcing a particular version of what constitutes history. He seems indeed to entertain the idea that there is a "fact in itself," an "objective truth of the events" that can be established through the rational critique of the sources (208). There is, at times, a smattering of positivism in this critique. And there is nothing wrong with that: the idea of a "reality" accessible through critical inquiry, indeed, should not be relinquished in favor of a perspectivist view where all testimonies are considered equal or, worse, in favor of despicable forms of historical

revisionism. But access to this reality is problematic and never direct, and the specifics of its recovery are still very much an object of historiographical debate.

A difficulty thus arises when one attempts to declare that some testimonies are located beyond the pale of history because they bear an elusive relationship to external facts and end up documenting mainly themselves. According to Fassin, the new humanitarian testimony is indeed one "that substitutes its own truth for the truth of those in whose name it is deployed" and "indicates more about the moral sentiment of the witness than about the experience of the victim" (204, 222). This may well be the case. But the fact that a testimony may not be a reliable source of what really happened and may reveal more about the witness is not sufficient to expel it from the realm of history. It is precisely such ambiguous cases that the historian Carlo Ginzburg has addressed in a cogent essay on testimonies provided by a single witness.[15] How should we treat the testimonies provided by a unique survivor when they cannot be cross-referenced by other witnesses or external documentation? Such testimonies are the only source about a given event, but they are also the only "fact" we can establish with certainty. They may tell us something about the events they purport to describe, but they may also document nothing else than the conventional genres and the rhetorical *topoi* that have cultural currency at a given time and impose themselves on individual narratives. In fact, this applies very much to the prefabricated rhetoric of victimhood and trauma manufactured by humanitarian psychologists and which Palestinians can inhabit, so to speak: they document a mode of subjectivation more than they shed light on a political situation. While the very particular testimonies generated by single witnesses call into question the distinction between positivism and relativism, this ontological indeterminacy, Ginzburg suggests, is constitutive of the historical material in general. He illustrates this point further in one of his essays dealing with his own work on witchcraft, which can help us think about the humanitarian testimonies so carefully studied by Fassin. Ginzburg analyzes the status of inquisitorial trial proceedings as sources for the history of witchcraft: here too a testimony is produced within an asymmetric power relationship in which the inquisitor is trying to elicit the "proofs" that fit the ecclesiastical representation of heresy. The truth of the victim is thus replaced by the highly codified exchanges of the inquisitorial interrogation. And yet these are sometimes the only sources through which historians have access to the cultural universe of witchcraft—but it would not cross their minds to dismiss them under the pretext that they cancel the history of their subjects or that they tell us more about the inquisition than about the cultural universe of witchcraft.[16] More generally, any kind of historical inquiry deals with sources that can be understood as testimonies and that first have to be *produced* within a specific social relationship. Even the most exclusively *material* inquiry involves an "inquisitor" of sorts who makes *things* speak out and yield their secrets—such as walls, ruins, or bullets in forensic architecture, for instance. And notwithstanding their focus on material evidence, these testimonies too are often challenged under the pretext that they reflect the biases of the inquisitor rather than the "facts," as Eyal Weizman has recently shown.[17] The problems of humanitarian testimonies, in the end, may well be the generic problems of historical interpretation. Even in their solipsistic self-referentiality and their uncertain relationship to facts, such testimonies outline a

different path toward the recovery of the past and cannot be taken as announcing the "end of history."

On closer scrutiny, therefore, denouncing humanitarian witnessing as an instance of dehistoricization may not be sufficient. It is not just that the work of the historian and that of the humanitarian witness are two different things—as Fassin clearly acknowledges, of course, and as Susan Sontag suggested when she wrote that photographs bearing witness to the pain of others are not "supposed to repair our ignorance about the history and causes of the suffering it picks out and frames" but simply require our attention and invite us "to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by established powers."[18] More to the point, the theme of humanitarian dehistoricization may distract us from seeing that what is really at stake in the contemporary figures of humanitarian witnessing is also the transformation of our historical condition and of our experience of it, rather than the end of history. Once we acknowledge that the murmur of humanitarian voices is not a Fukuyamesque choir but a different formatting of our historical experience, the question is no longer "How does humanitarianism dehistoricize its subjects?" but rather "What kind of history is associated with the exercise of biopower?" What does a biopolitical history look like, provided there can be such a thing? What kind of history is being written by humanitarian witnesses? And, more importantly, are other forms of history possible? The recurring accusation that the testimonies of victims produced by the humanitarian apparatus deprive their subjects of their "biographical life" and reduce them to their "biological life" may be beside the point (254). Of course, as Pandolfi shows, the administrative apparatus of humanitarian aid transforms "fragments of humanity" into "numbers and needs in emergency situations" (Bornstein and Redfield, eds., 235). But this critique cannot miss its target because it is moot: to the extent that it applies to faceless populations, as Foucault reminds us, biopower ignores the individual almost by definition. In a biopolitical narrative, the individual can only be featured as an *exemplar* of humanity, a specimen that stands for a much wider context, the localized embodiment of a life that flows through wider socio-biological environments. In this regime of subjectivation, there are no such things as individual histories. For the same reason, the search for individual justice is replaced by a clinical etiology that does not distinguish between political and private causes, as Fassin rightly points out. The individual of the humanitarian testimony fulfills synecdochic or metaphoric functions. But in this rhetorical setup, meant to stir up the compassion of the public, the humanitarian witness may in fact reactivate a different, older historical tradition—one that sees the work of the historian essentially as a work of rhetoric and persuasion. Historians point out that the modern idea of "evidence" is derived, through the Latin *evidentia*, from the Greek *enargeia*: the illocutionary force that makes its subject so vivid that it is as if the audience could see it.[19] The gripping humanitarian testimony that speaks directly to our capacity for compassion is, in fact, one of the oldest forms of historical narration. It certainly does not conform to the modern canon of positive science, nor does it fit any positivist conception of source criticism, but it is no less historical for that matter. This history summons inspiring examples the audience can relate to or empathize with; it requires from its addressees

an emotional and moral participation; and, in that sense, it seeks to strengthen a sense of community: this is indeed moral history in its purest form.

In both volumes, the critique of humanitarianism as a form of depoliticization also appears in connection with the reduction of social and political life to "bare life" and is never very remote from a discussion of the concept of sovereignty and, by way of consequence, from an engagement with Agamben, Schmitt, and "political theology" more broadly. Political theology features most prominently in the chapter of *Humanitarian Reason* that Fassin dedicates to the management of the emergency that followed the 1999 *Tragedia* in Venezuela, based on a prior work he co-authored with Paula Vasquez.[20] Following torrential rains in Caracas and a neighboring region, massive landslides destroyed entire neighborhoods and created a national emergency. On December 17, the parliament declared a state of emergency throughout the country and gave full executive powers to the recently elected and charismatic president, Hugo Chavez. This situation—a humanitarian disaster technically and legally framed as a state of emergency—is presented as an interesting case study allowing for the empirical testing of current claims about the generalization of the state of exception. Denouncing the current infatuation with the idea of a routinization of the exception, Fassin suggests that, rather than taking the "state of exception" as an absolute, we should look at it as a nuanced and modulated condition that often departs from its classical analysis by Schmitt. Rather than a global suspension of the law, it was, in the Venezuelan case, a partial one. And more importantly, Fassin locates the dynamics of the state of exception not so much in the sovereign decision on the imminent danger as in the social demand for it and the moral sympathy expressed by large segments of the population for the victims (hence the title of the chapter: "Desire for Exception"): "The exception perhaps emerges less in the decree that instituted it than in the sentiment that justified it" (Fassin, 198). This sentiment finds its roots in the fact that the exception is not only a political-legal situation but a social one: the humanitarian disaster, by affecting indiscriminately the rich and the poor and by triggering a national response that momentarily unites the nation in a common effort, seems to suspend ordinary social hierarchies and class distinctions; it abolishes "ethnic and racial, economic and political boundaries" (199). Differences between who is sovereign and who is not tend indeed to disappear, making the decision a shared one. Despite obvious differences in the way the well-off and the rest of the population were assisted and in the level of insecurity they faced in the aftermath of the landslides, the humanitarian principle according to which all lives are equal seemed to prevail over the injustice of social inequality. A powerful religious rhetoric suffused the governmental discourse and depicted the disaster as a moment of redemption and rebirth for the nation (Chavez suggested that the victims of the *Tragedia* be called the *dignificados* rather than the *damnificados*). If the *Tragedia* is an instance of political theology, for Fassin, it is because it erases the social, economic, and political determinations in favor of a higher unity of the nation, in a religious mystique that connects the exception with the redeeming value of suffering. "The constitution of life as sacred and the valorization of suffering thus make contemporary humanitarian government a form of political theology" (251).

As usual with Fassin, the ethnographic analysis is rich and subtle. Yet one cannot

help wondering whether the critique of the "exception thesis" is effective and whether the reference to political theology is really illuminating. First, because the peculiarities and the limited nature of the Venezuelan exception cannot be taken to call into question the validity of Schmitt's thesis, as Fassin suggests (they don't). But the discussion of political theology is confusing mostly because, in seeking to give an empirical, sociological content to political theology, Fassin inadvertently refashions the concept into what it is not. For once political theology is assimilated with the mobilization of a religious repertoire in politics, it becomes conflated with political religion—which in fact is its exact opposite. Political theology, at least in its Schmittian definition, does not refer to a retheologization of the state: Schmitt sees the modern European state as a territorial order that has emerged as a force of neutralization of religious conflicts. While this territorial order has inherited its *formal* characteristics from the moral order of the Church, it is distinct from it and detached from its moral *substance*—and should remain so. Political religions, on the other hand, emerge when the state becomes so secularized that it endows its own actions with absolute moral value and conflates its interests with those of mankind. In fact, it is Schmitt, the political theologian, who inveighs against political religions. The result is that Fassin's critique of what he calls "political theology" sounds awfully similar to Schmitt's critique of political religions, and in particular to his critique of humanitarianism. The illusory nature of humanitarianism as an ideology that seems to suspend social inequalities and to abolish political divisions while it implies an asymmetric relationship finds its seminal model in Schmitt's attack on humanity as a depoliticizing concept that conceals "the possibility of the deepest inequality" and is therefore a "cheat."[21] Of course, Fassin is not content with a purely critical position, and he also acknowledges the positive performative effects of compassion as it occasionally transcends social divisions and is constitutive of our moral sense. But if humanitarianism is not just a cheat, then what is it? Fassin does not take the road that consists in denouncing humanitarianism as a political project that does not say its name. He takes seriously its contribution to the emergence of a new moral sense, which precludes such a reductionist interpretation. Rather, he sees in humanitarianism a religious resurgence, a postsecular phenomenon that thrives on the unraveling of the state. Ultimately, he privileges an essentially Christian interpretation of humanitarianism. Associated with suffering as redemption, with a language of salvation, with notions of absolute good and evil, with the assertion of the sacred character of life, and with an idea of universal equality, humanitarianism is inscribed within a specifically Christian history. "Historically, but also genealogically, humanitarian reason . . . is embedded in a Western sociodicy . . . The ethos from which it proceeds has its source in the Christian world" (248). According to Fassin, the fascination with suffering that characterizes the current culture and its particular manifestation in the politics of compassion can be traced to Christianity and, even more specifically, to the Passion of Christ. Modernity has only extended to compassion the redeeming value originally associated with suffering.

In part because of its self-proclaimed objective of steering a middle course between external critique and internal ethnographic understanding, *Humanitarian Reason* is not a book that delivers grand theses. Yet if there is one such thesis, it is that humani-

tarianism is what is left of religiosity in a secular age. Following the analysis of political theology offered by Claude Lefort, Fassin ultimately locates humanitarianism in the grand narrative of secularization, as a religious resurgence informed by Christianity that comes to surface when the structures of the modern, secular nation-state fail to alleviate the tragic condition of modernity (251–52).

Erica Bornstein and Peter Redfield, on the other hand, follow a radically different approach when they denounce "attempts to monopolize the charitable sector within a historically Western frame" (Bornstein and Redfield, eds., 96). Two chapters in their volume—Jonathan Benthall's study of Islamic charities and Bornstein's piece on orphans in India—deal with different religious and cultural traditions of humanitarianism and offer a counterpoint to Fassin's focus on Christianity. Benthall's, in particular, is a useful reminder that Christianity has not been the sole source of humanitarian feeling, but also that it was not the only source of universalism either: driven just as much as Christianity by a missionary and expansionist outlook, Islam is capable of generating similar claims to humanitarian universalism. Even in its most radicalized forms, it claims to embody a "humanitarian" cause and is not dissimilar from Western forms of global politics. The positive value associated with sacrifice is not specific to the Christian worldview either, and it finds equivalents within Islam, including and maybe particularly in the most radical forms of Islamic militancy.[22] Conversely, it is highly debatable that the affirmation of life as the supreme good is a Christian legacy, as Fassin seems to suggest (after all, a substantial part of Christian theology locates true life in the *civitas dei* and dismisses mundane existence as deprived of value per se). Nor is secularization a path opened exclusively to Christian ideological formations: the Islamic *zakat*, as Benthall shows in "Islamic Humanitarianism in Adversarial Context," is also capable of developing its own secularized forms, which facilitate the cooperation between Muslim and Christian humanitarian organizations at the international level (119). More importantly, the suspicion surrounding Islamic charities in the wake of 9/11 and the blacklisting to which some of them have been subjected suggest that politics has not completely abandoned the field of humanitarianism.

Obviously, a discussion of the religious underpinnings of contemporary humanitarianism would require a much more sustained analysis and would exceed the competence of this reviewer. But the case of Islamic humanitarianism calls into question a number of assumptions about the mooring of humanitarianism in a Christian tradition and suggests the existence of alternative ways to construe a sense of global belonging. It is also a powerful reminder that political theology is not the only lens through which the question of the religious legacies at work in humanitarianism can be analyzed. In fact, the sociology of religions and the comparative study of different traditions of charity and aid may be more effective ways to move beyond the framework of political theology, which, more often than not, encloses the discussion of humanitarianism in a very specific setting where its critique is tied to an implicit, and sometimes unconscious, attachment to a notion of politics that humanitarianism may well have made obsolete—which does not mean, however, that it announces the end of politics.

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Both Fassin's book and Bornstein's and Redfield's volume make important contributions to our understanding of contemporary humanitarianism. The main one, certainly, is to buttress empirically the claim that humanitarianism has become a unified logic of government deployed across the most disparate contexts, whether these contexts are the management of poverty in France, the rehabilitation of heroin addicts in China, the fight against AIDS in South Africa, or the provision of medical assistance in Baghdad or Gaza. Taken together, the various case studies collected in these books extend and provide a powerful ethnographic illustration of Foucault's intuition that biopower has opened a new chapter in the history of the technologies of government and is reshaping the old structures of political sovereignty. But they also illustrate the difficulties of finding an appropriate critical position from which the shortcomings and contradictions but also the risks of humanitarianism can be brought to light. Critique requires a break with the ethnographic approach and an external point of view; or it can remain internal and denounce what appear as contradictions according to the very terms of the normative system it describes. Certainly, the core values of humanitarianism make it difficult to develop a purely external critique, as a result of which commentators privilege critical strategies that point at the failures of humanitarianism to live up to its own ideals of equality and impartiality. Referring to the myth of the cave in Plato, Fassin characterizes his own approach as one that refuses to take position inside or outside the reality he describes, and he remains ''on the threshold'' of the cave (Fassin, 245). If it is doubtful that such a position is tenable, not least because a threshold is not a place where one stands but an imaginary limit one crosses; it captures the dilemmas facing the anthropologist engaged in a critical account of humanitarianism. And indeed, Fassin alternates between an internal critique, sympathetic to the humanitarian project, and an external one, mostly informed by the charge of depoliticization. The contributors to the Bornstein-Redfield volume, who obviously cannot be expected to develop the same degree of consistency as a single author, also navigate on both sides of this imaginary threshold and seek to combine the recognition of ''the messy mass of lived experience'' and the moral forces at work with a capacity to formulate a general critique of humanitarianism understood as a power relationship (Bornstein and Redfield, eds., 252). This quest for the right critical distance is also a work of anthropology on itself, an attempt to deal with its uncomfortable proximity to humanitarianism by working out the differences between its own form of witnessing and the testimonies generated from within the humanitarian relationship. As she emerges from *Humanitarian Reason* and *Forces of Compassion*, the anthropologist seeks to be a witness who refuses the suspension of historical time involved in the idea of ''emergency'' and who reinscribes humanitarianism within a history that remains political. Yet once it is clear that humanitarianism's bid to transcend politics has failed and generated a humanitarian government whose instruments contribute to reproducing deep inequalities, the question is to decide whether the politics of humanity can be analyzed as the continuation of politics through other means, or whether the temptation to accuse humanitarianism of, alternatively, imperialism or depoliticization simply means that we have not yet developed the proper conceptual tools for analyzing politics once it is translated into biopower.

1. Michel Foucault, *"Il faut défendre la société": Cours au Collège de France (1975–1976)* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil 1997), 213–35. The first notion that appears in the text is that of "biopolitics," which Foucault then uses interchangeably with "biopower." They will take on different connotations in subsequent use.

2. International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: IDRC, 2001).

3. Ibid., 13, 15.

4. Ibid., 5.

5. For how national and international biosecurity can overlap but also represent conflicting projects, see Andrew Lakoff, "Two Regimes of Global Health," *Humanity* 1, no. 1 (2010): 59–79.

6. International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *Responsibility to Protect*, 5, 17.

7. Ibid., 31, 33.

8. Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1999), 13.

9. Similar instances of critical distance toward critical references can be found in other chapters of Fassin's book. In his analysis of the psychiatric construction of "trauma" in Gaza, he introduces Foucault's concept of "subjectivation" only in order to rearticulate it in a way that is more congruent with the idea of a social construction of subjective roles (296 n. 8). In the analysis of the natural disaster of the Venezuelan *Tragedia* of 1999, the reference to "political theology" introduces Schmitt but also empties the concept of its substance and reduces it to the explicit mobilization of Christian themes in the political management of the emergency (251).

10. Setting aside self-citations, Foucault is the most quoted author in *Humanitarian Reason*, closely followed by Agamben and Arendt. Although there is no index allowing for such calculations in *Forces of Compassion*, a cursory glance at the bibliography suggests a similar pattern.

11. This synthesis was first proposed by Boltanski himself in his recent reengagement with a critical perspective. See Luc Boltanski, *De la critique: Précis de sociologie de l'émancipation* (Paris: Gallimard 2009).

12. On HTS, see Robert J. González, *American Counterinsurgency: Human Science and the Human Terrain* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm 2009).

13. The same can be said of the language of human rights, which has taken the structural place previously occupied by other emancipatory projects of internationalism. See Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2010).

14. Ibid.

15. Carlo Ginzburg, "Unus testis: Lo sterminio degli ebrei e il principio di realtà," in *Il filo e le tracce: Vero falso finto* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2006), 205–24.

16. Carlo Ginzburg, "L'inquisitore come antropologo," in ibid., 270–80.

17. Eyal Weizman, "Forensic Architecture: Only the Criminal Can Solve the Crime," *Radical Philosophy* 164, no. 9 (2010): 9–24.

18. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 117.

19. The notion of evidence as *enargeia* is analyzed by Hartog. See François Hartog, *Evidence de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), in particular chap. 1.

20. Didier Fassin and Paula Vasquez, "Humanitarian Exception as the Rule: The Political Theology of the 1999 Tragedia in Venezuela," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 3 (2005): 389–405.

21. Carl Schmitt, "The Legal World Revolution," *Telos* 72 (Summer 1987): 88; Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 54.

22. See in particular Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press 2008), and the review by Julian Bourg, "On Terrorism as Human Sacrifice," *Humanity* 1, no. 1 (2010): 137–54.