Charity, Relief and Humanitarianism as a Means of Maintaining Social and Political Stability in the Middle East. A *Longue Durée* Analysis of Actors, Categories and Practices

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This special issue of the journal *Endowment Studies* builds on recent research that has analyzed different forms of charity, relief and humanitarian action jointly, approaching them as a means of governance and social regulation[1]. We refer to these activities as various forms of aid offered by individual or collective actors to alleviate situations of precarity. Since aid and charity could be considered as a gift, it is useful to recall that, according to Marcel Mauss, the gift is above all an exchange that links people, based on a triple obligation contracted by the donor and the recipient: to give, to receive and to return. Mauss points out that “the gift that is not returned still makes the one who has accepted it inferior, especially when it is received without a spirit of return (...) Charity is still hurtful to the one who accepts it."[2] In line with this approach, we focus on the different modes of actions and legitimation of these forms of aid, as well as on their social and political repercussions. In most cases, these activities entail relations of dependence, subordination or even control and stigma, between the donor and the receiver. It is mostly from this angle that the topic has been approached in this issue, which does not focus specifically either on aid practices motivated by solidarity or political commitment, both of which can also be drivers of these practices.

In this special issue, aid practices are examined from the point of view of a geographical field of study which lends itself particularly well to heuristic scrutiny: the Middle East.[3] There are three main reasons to consider this region as a particularly interesting observatory of aid patterns. Firstly, as the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, the region was the place where religious and charitable institutions first appeared. This explains the wealth and variety of documents and material traces available as well as the accumulation of practices, know-how and even material structures related to aid and reception. It also allows us to observe the evolution of actors, interactions and meaning of aid patterns in the *longue*

[1] Brown 2005; Cohen 2005; Naguib and Okkenhaug 2007; Brown 2012; Barnett 2013; Watenpaugh 2015; Cabouret 2020; Ruiz De Elvira and Saeidnia 2020.
[2] Mauss 1925: 145-146, authors’ translation.
[3] With this term we refer to the territories that correspond to today’s Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, the Occupied Palestinian territories, Israel and Egypt.

durée. Secondly, the demographic weight of population groups that have experienced voluntary or forced displacement is another important characteristic of the region, which explains the importance of aid and humanitarianism in social regulation. Thirdly, the central regulatory roles of families, religious communities and patron-client relationships makes it possible to observe the rooting of aid in different domains of social and political life by analysing both private and public spaces.

The geographical coverage of this research is thus clearly circumscribed, but its historical framework is, on the contrary, very broad, going from antiquity to the present day. The aim is to approach the subject with an openness conducive to understanding the evolution of the actors, modes of action and representations underlying these initiatives. This special issue is structured around three main hypotheses that tackle the role of aid patterns in maintaining social and political stability in the particular context of the Middle East.

Aid Patterns as a Guarantee of Social and Political Stability

Our multidisciplinary and diachronic analysis of forms of aid extends recent scholarship that has considered this field of action as an instrument of governance and social regulation at various scales.[4] Indeed, in the Middle East, it seems heuristically useful to consider the question of stability – social and political – as a central driver for local and international actors alike. Political regimes and their allies in the non-governmental sphere – from economic elites to religious institutions – are keen to maintain a certain level of social stability in order to ensure the regimes' stability. International institutions – consciously or not – play a role in stabilising the political status quo through humanitarian aid schemes.

Clearly, in the Middle East, the evolution of aid practices is directly linked to human mobility. The latter has taken various forms throughout history, from religious pilgrimage, to commercial exchanges and more recently of the formation of the modern nation-states as a result of the colonial partition of the former Ottoman territories that caused massive population displacements. We advance the hypothesis that these mobilities determined the need to take a census, to categorise and sometimes isolate populations in order to govern and control them. In this context, there is an important difference between aid provided to those defined as strangers or guests and that for needy members of the local community. For the first, aid entails varying degrees of exclusion or integration, while for the latter, it triggers a mechanism of loyalty and counter-gift (in the spirit of Marcel Mauss). In both cases, aid stabilises social peace without calling into question the system of inequalities and dominations.

The *longue durée* perspective allows us to show a particularity of the modern and contemporary Middle East: compared to Europe, where the industrial revolution led to the emergence of the welfare state (in various forms) as the most important provider of aid, in the Middle East, the state has until today much less prominence among the multiplicity of aid providers, such as the family, non-governmental, religious and community organisations.[5] In this context, practices of charity, relief and humanitarianism are central to understanding the logics of redistribution, domination, dependence and regulation that are embodied in these "doing-good practices".[6] On the scale of international politics, this also entails a critical appraisal of humanitarian organisations, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which stands as a witness to a process whereby a political problem is framed as a humanitarian challenge, thereby inadvertently de-politicizing the

[4] Barnett 2011; Fassin 2012; Ruiz de Elvira and Saeidnia 2020, and specifically regarding the role of hospitality in social regulation, Fauchon-Claudon and Le Guennec 2022.

[5] Destremau 2008; Longuenesse et al. 2005.

[6] De Elvira and Saeidnia 2020.

question of dispossession and forced displacement. In other words, this issue analyzes humanitarianism as a set of "discourses and practices of the government of human beings" and, more precisely, as the "politics of precarious lives", as Didier Fassin has expressed it.[7]

Vocabulary, Grammars and Contexts of Meanings

Different terms are used to designate aid to people in need proposed by various kinds of actors, with their own aims and temporalities. This diversity in the terminology is also reflected in the contributions to this special issue, and it therefore seems important to provide some context for these terms – both emic and etic – in Arabic and English.

The word charity (from the Latin *caritas*) refers to the act of voluntary giving[8] and has mainly a religious connotation. By contrast, the "emic" term in Arabic *al-ʿamal al-khayrī,* which literally means "doing good", does not have an explicitly religious meaning, but rather a moral one. The term relief is more neutral than charity and is today mainly understood as emergency relief in the context of war and natural catastrophes, whereas historically, in Europe, the word was used to describe assistance to the poor who were unable to work. In Arabic, this term corresponds to *ighātha*, which means aid and assistance to those who are in difficulty and distress. One of the most important aid providers in today's Middle East, the UNRWA, which features the term relief in its name, has evolved from an emergency relief agency into a long-term provider of all public services, from education to medical care, for Palestinian refugees in the region.[9] This shows how some terms can remain associated with institutions even when their mode of aid provision changes significantly.

The word humanitarianism enters the vocabulary in Europe from the nineteenth century onwards.[10] In Arabic the term is designed by *al-ʿamal al-insānī.* According to Bruno Cabanes (2014), the end of the First World War marked the beginning of a new era in which humanitarianism was a central means of international governance. It refers to a set of interventions aimed at protecting the most vulnerable populations and is based on human rights and the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.[11] It is further distinguished by addressing both emergency situations and the deeper causes of misery and, unlike charity, which is more locally based, humanitarianism is international in scope and has a universal ambition.[12] In the aftermath of the First World War, what Keith Watenpaugh calls "modern humanitarianism" emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean.[13] The author draws the distinction with "early humanitarianism" – including charity and philanthropy – in terms of motivation and context: early humanitarianism was closely linked to religious motivations (charity being a religious imperative) and, in the context of colonialism, it was often taken to be part of the so-called "white man's burden" and the "civilizing mission" of the colonizers. While modern humanitarianism still contained some elements of nationalist and colonialist ideology, unlike its early form, it was envisioned as a "transnational, institutional, neutral and secular regime for understanding and addressing the root causes

[7] Fassin 2012: 4.
[8] Drotbohm 2020.
[9] Al Husseini 2000.
[10] Barnett and Stein 2012: 12.
[11] Barnett 2016: 243.
[12] Barnett and Stein 2012: 13.
[13] Watenpaugh 2015: 2.

of human suffering."[14] He sees the Armenian Genocide (1915) as a defining moment of this emerging modern humanitarianism in the Middle East, and we hold that the Palestinian Nakba (1948) is another crucial turning point in this development. Both cataclysmic events contributed to significant changes in the modes of action of humanitarian organizations. In the case of the Armenians, humanitarian intervention was informed by an "international consciousness that what had happened to the Armenians had been the "Murder of a Nation', [and] a 'crime against humanity,'"[15] showing the growing importance of international humanitarian law. In the case of the Palestinians, the sudden emergence of a large refugee population led to the creation of an ad hoc humanitarian organization in charge exclusively of Palestinian refugees in the region, the UNRWA, and specific legislation regulating the degree of integration and exclusion in each host country.

There are also other relevant terms in the field of assistance to the needy that are not used in this issue, like philanthropy,[16] welfare and social protection, because while they appear in the terminology used by some international actors, like the Catholic Near East Welfare Association studied by M. Levant, they do not seem conceptually relevant for the field as a whole. They are in fact strongly linked to the emergence of the welfare state, which did not develop in the Middle East in any way comparable to contemporary Europe.

In this introduction, we use the term "aid" extensively since it is not linked to a particular religious or cultural context. The other terms presented in this issue do not necessarily follow one another chronologically but coexist until the present day: the analysis of their contemporary articulation, as well as the choices that are made in highlighting one rather than another, shed light on the actors and their motives. As argued by Michael Barnett and Janice Gross Stein,[17] over the course of the nineteenth century, many religious organizations began to downplay their religious identity and their interest in conversion in favor of improving the lives of local people. The adoption of a secular framework represents a strategy and "a key foundation to position the language, goals and process of humanitarianism outside and above the fray of conflicting beliefs and ideologies."[18] A similar process is noticeable during the early nineteenth century, when Protestant missionary organizations, which played a particularly important role in poor relief in the Near East,[19] gradually moved from a missionary outlook to what Watenpaugh calls a "semisecularized" ambition to contribute to what they saw as "modernity".[20]

If the study of different terminologies used to designate aid patterns is central to understanding the drivers, aims and meanings of the activities, it's also essential to identifying the diversity of beneficiaries and actors.

Beneficiaries and Actors

Judaism first created a real link between caring for the poor and the practice of piety, offering the oldest manifestations of charity towards the poor in the Middle East.[21] The Torah refers to charity by the word

[14] Watenpaugh 2015: 5.
[15] Watenpaugh 2015: 61.
[16] See the special issue in this journal on *Foundations and the Power of Giving* (Chitwood and Möller 2020).
[17] Barnett and Stein 2012.
[18] Ager and Ager 2015: ix.
[19] i.e. Okkenhaug and Sanchez-Summerer 2020; Heather Sharkey 2015.
[20] Watenpaugh 2015: 18.
[21] van der Horst 2016 and 2019.

tzedaka, which means "justice". Justice for the poor, who are the "protected of God", is obligatory[22] and anonymity in the charitable act is recommended, as Maimonides / Ibn Maimûn reminds the faithful again in the twelfth century. Organized and institutionalized forms of charity appeared among the Jews from the first century CE. Synagogues began to practice *quppah*, the distribution of money to poor fellow citizens, and *tamhuy*, a soup kitchen, was offered daily to anyone in need, regardless of religion. The extent to which this institutionalization of charity took place is still debated.[23]

In classical antiquity and in the Roman Middle East, political and civic status took precedence over all other forms of identification. Before being rich or poor, one was either a citizen or a foreigner. Evergetism, which is according to Paul Veyne[24] the gifts of an individual to the community, the patronage towards the city, helped to govern and regulate social, economic and political relations. The evergete, expecting civic and political recognition in return, distributed food and erected great public monuments for all his fellow citizens, among them the poorest.[25] According to P. Brown, "Ancient Greeks and Romans were not thereby hardhearted or ungenerous. They were aware of the misery that surrounded them and often prepared to spend large sums on their fellows. But the beneficiaries of their acts of kindness were never defined as 'the poor', largely because the city stood at the center of the social imagination. The misery that touched them most acutely was the potential misery of the city."[26] From the 3rd century CE onwards, several upheavals took place within Roman society, thereby contributing to the emergence of new values. One of them became predominant with the advent of Christianity: the "love of the poor", in the words of the father of the Church, Gregory of Nazianzus. Christians were encouraged to follow the charitable precepts of Jesus and redeem their faults by caring for the poor, and giving became associated with a redemptive value. In the fourth century CE, Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman empire, which then spread Christian ideas, values and practices all around the Mediterranean basin.

The diversity of beneficiaries is particularly well attested in the literary sources of the end of antiquity (4th-6th century CE), mostly in Greek, and also in Latin and Syriac. During this period, the term *ptochos* for instance seems to include both the absolute indigent, unable to work because of disabilities and who depend on begging, as well as the laboring pauper who has some resources but not enough to survive unaided. Among them there are the elderly, children, widows, disabled and also prisoners.[27] The word *xenos* designated the "foreigner", which could refer to displaced people as well as to travellers, most often, belonging to the Empire, but foreign to the local population[28] and pilgrims, sometimes in search of healing through contact with holy places and relics, particularly, in the eastern dioceses of the Roman Empire from the fourth century onwards.[29] Another category of recipients was the sick, lepers counted among them. In late antiquity, charity or relief offered to all these recipients was polymorphous, consisting sometimes of the distribution of food and clothing, sometimes of hospitality and lodging, access to baths and health care.[30] The institutionalization of charity at the end of Antiquity became clearly visible in the landscape of the Middle East through the construction of numerous charitable

[22] Girardin 2021.
[23] Mauss 1925: 67; Seccombe 1978; van der Horst 2019; Girardin 2021.
[24] Veyne 1976.
[25] Patlagean 1977; Brown 2012; Saliou 2020; Cabouret 2020.
[26] Brown 2002: 517.
[27] Patlagean 1977; Horden 2012; Cabouret 2020: 133-136 and 155-170.
[28] Malamut 2016: 243.
[29] Maraval 1985; Ritter 2019.
[30] See, for instance, Fauchon 2013; Gatier 2009; Horden 2012.

establishments.[31] The words used to designate these establishments showed that they were intended for distinct categories of beneficiaries: the *ptocheion*, “asylum for the poor”, the *gerokomeion*, “hospice for the elderly”, the *nosokomeion*, “hospice for the sick”, the *xenodocheion*, “hospice for strangers”, etc. The ancient texts also make it possible to identify several categories of providers: the emperor, the Church, the believers who acted individually, as well as lay associations, in the case of deaconries, for example.

Similarly, from the earliest times in Islam, believers, whatever their condition, were invited to practice charity. The obligatory annual alms (*zakāt*) were to benefit the poor, slaves, debtors, Sufi clerics and travellers.[32] Voluntary donations (*ṣadaqa*) were very common and motivated as much by the quest for paradise as by the donor’s desire to show prestige and power. As Amy Singer points out[33], pious foundations (*waqf*, pl. *awqāf*)[34] were the most visible form of *sadaqa* and the one that left the most lasting trace in the form of mosques, schools, kitchens/soup kitchens (*ʿimāret*), public fountains, etc. There is a high concentration of such infrastructures along the pilgrimage routes to Jerusalem and Mecca (*darb al-hajj*), for example. Other reception and care structures for Christian pilgrims from the West were built at the time of the Crusades between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries by the hospital and military orders along the roads leading to Jerusalem.

The Ottomans considered the whole region of *Bilād al-Shām* as *Shām Sharīf*, i.e. sacred, and this is part of the explanation for the continued increase of Muslim, Christian and Jewish pious foundations set up to serve the poor in the region during that period. “The endowments are simultaneously a societal and a personal statement, reflecting characteristics of both, permeating the public and private spheres in cities in the Islamic world since the earliest centuries of Islam. (...) *waqf* endowments concurrently affected the daily lives of both ordinary and extraordinary persons living and working in cities.”[35] Şerife Eroğlu Memiş shows in her study of the Hebron soup kitchen in Palestine that meals were served to pilgrims, foreigners and locals alike, regardless of their social status, although the poor were given priority. The practice described for the eighteenth century by S. Eroğlu Memiş at Hebron still exists in the old city today, through the *Takiyya* of Abraham.[36] In all of the Middle East, there are similar structures that provide various forms of aid to the poor on a regular basis.

But aid practices can also be a field of competition, especially in a region as influenced by religious considerations as the Middle East. The numerous hospitals built by different military orders and communities in the Holy Land during the Crusades period (eleventh-twelfth centuries) are likely to be a manifestation of this.[37] At the end of the First World War, thwarting the important Protestant presence in the region was one of the motivations of the work of Catholic organizations such as the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), as Marie Levant shows in her contribution. In this respect, the

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[31] Leclerq 1925; Voltaggio 2011; Whiting 2016; Di Segni 2020; Piraud-Fournet 2022.

[32] For an analysis of certain contemporary dimensions of *zakāt* in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, see Schaeublin 2014.

[33] Singer 2015: 947.

[34] According to Randi Deguilhem, “the waqf provides an infrastructural framework recognised by the religious and political powers from the earliest centuries of Islam, for an individual, woman or man, to pay year after year, in the name of the founder, the income of a specified amount (in cash) or in agricultural products to the recipient of his choice.” (Deguilhem 2016: 1556, authors’ translation).

[35] Deguilhem 2008: 926.

[36] Bert Geith and Abu Eisheh 2017.

[37] Touati 2007: 189-191.

author points out that "as a missionary territory, the Middle East is a place of both confessional rivalries and intra-Christian rapprochement, especially in the field of beneficence and humanitarian work."

In another contribution, Jean Allegrini discusses the essential place that religious actors occupy in the contemporary humanitarian world, by studying aid patterns at the level of a church, a parish and a neighborhood in a small Lebanese town bordering Syria (Zahle). In the case of emergencies, local religious communities are often the first to provide assistance as well as opportunities for social recomposition and resilience through rituals.[38] Religiously-inspired humanitarian actors have furthermore seen a significant rise in their activities regionally since the Syrian refugee crisis, with large investments from Gulf countries.[39] The latter, in addition to seizing humanitarian aid as a tool for regional influence, rely on actors they consider to be closer to the population, and in this way aim to challenge a certain form of Western supremacy in the humanitarian sphere.

In contemporary times, aid provided in emergency situations caused by violent conflicts that have shaken the region also produced various categories of beneficiaries and marked the advent of international actors in this field. The prolongation or even the perpetuity of some of these conflicts raises the question of tensions and social fractures that impact access to aid and the categorization of beneficiaries between refugees and host populations who are also often in need of aid.[40] It also brings to the fore the issue of the integration of humanitarian aid into development programs for host countries. In Jordan, the emergency humanitarian aid that was organized following the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2011 has been combined, since 2015, with a resilience program that includes the poorest Jordanians as beneficiaries of aid, aiming to improve infrastructure and local economies.[41] These developments also mark the emergence in the humanitarian vocabulary of a category of beneficiaries that are the so-called "vulnerable" populations, be they refugees or citizens. This polymorphous term which refers to situations of poverty, precariousness, dependency and fragility conceals the idea of exposure to risks which, for some people (particularly women, children and the elderly), would imply a major deterioration in their quality of life.[42] In the context of population displacements, humanitarianism can also produce explicitly exclusionary categories such as the "non-Syrian refugees", term used by the UNHCR in reference to Sub-Saharan African and Yemenite asylum seekers that do not have access to the same humanitarian aid as other refugees[43].

The variety of beneficiaries and providers of aid at different times implies a method of analysis that brings together a wide variety of disciplines and approaches.

A Dialogue between Various Disciplines and Sources

The challenge taken up in this volume is to bring together contributions from specialists representing different disciplines and periods, whose work is based on a variety of sources and methods of analysis. These scholars base their work on interviews, observations and reports (J. Allegrini), minutes of the Ottoman municipal council (F. Naïli) or waqf account books (S. Eroğlu Memiş) but also on Vatican

[38] Ager 2014: 17.
[39] Ababsa and Muhsen 2014.
[40] Carpi 2020.
[41] Al Husseini and Napolitano 2019.
[42] Adjamagbo et al. 2020.
[43] Al-Majali forthcoming.

and Church archives (M. Levant) and on the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Egyptian Red Crescent society and the Egyptian and British national archives (El Neklawy & Möller). Last but not least, these sources also include ancient testimonies and chronicles, lapidary inscriptions and architectural remains (P. Piraud-Fournet).

This approach is the result of a symposium organized by the French Institute for the Near East (Ifpo), an institute that brings together researchers from the humanities and social sciences, including geography, political science, archaeology, history, sociology, anthropology, etc. A first experience related to issues of reception and assistance, conducted between 2012 and 2018 in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, is representative of this approach. It mobilized methods used by geographers, anthropologists and political scientists (interviews) and architects-archaeologists (architectural surveys, material culture and urban observation) to collect as much data as possible in the field in order to document the formation of the camp and its progressive urbanization; it describes the uses, practices and daily life of its occupants, beneficiaries, supervisory bodies and aid providers.[44]

More generally, the three guest editors of this *Endowment Studies* issue witnessed the omnipresence of humanitarianism and its social issues in their research fields in the Middle East, whether in public debates or on-site in daily practices. Observing the development of Syrian refugee camps and the organization of humanitarian aid and forms of solidarity since 2012, the archaeologist examines the materiality of charitable structures that recall those abundantly evoked by texts from late antiquity in the ancient provinces of Syria, Arabia and Palestine; she seeks to identify their remains in the present practices. The modern historian is interested in the links between aid, urban governance practices and the question of citizenship since the late Ottoman period. The sociologist analyzes the way in which aid and cross-border solidarity, prior to the Syrian conflict, which began in 2011, structure the lives of Syrian refugees in the Middle East.[45]

In this context, this special issue analyzes the different forms of this fundamental social phenomenon at different times. The disparity in the treatment of periods and themes makes this work a collection of case studies and does not aim to provide more than a rough sketch to facilitate future research. The variety of subjects, methods and periods covered shows, in any case, that the combined analysis of the most varied sources is the most likely to give us access to the reality of the phenomenon which is at the heart of our research. The information provided by textual sources or interviews alone may be too incomplete and imprecise, just as the study of the materiality of assistance alone may be biased and difficult to interpret. Bringing together such distant disciplinary and methodological approaches is an epistemological challenge, but it allows us to analyze the aid practices over time and to trace their genealogy and interactions with other forms of social intervention linked to private or state initiatives.

The hypotheses raised and the contributions in this issue are structured around three cross-cutting themes that address the question of the relationship between the providers of aid and power (I), the regulation of human mobility (II) and the production of space resulting from these activities (III).

I. The Power of Giving: Analyzing Private and Public Initiatives as a Continuum

[44] Doraï and Piraud-Fournet 2018.
[45] Napolitano forthcoming.

In the Arab world, aid practices are "often understood through the prism of religion and associated with both private and public actors."[46] Indeed, the *waqf khayrī* is a good example of an institution dedicated to the public good (hospital, fountain, soup kitchen, etc.) that emanates from an individual and therefore a private pious gesture. This allows us to question the dichotomy between private and public spheres in the field of aid. Indeed, private and public forms of social intervention must be considered jointly and in continuity, whether in the Arab world or elsewhere. Blandine Destremeau has emphasized that the social and political effects of charitable practices are the result of the historical construction of a division of tasks between the public administration of social policies and private initiatives with their respective economies, which are sometimes complementary.[47] This division of labor often serves a common objective, that of controlling the most marginalized part of society and maintaining a level of social peace that stabilizes the governance system. In this sense, there is a strong connection between aid and power, as different contributions to this volume show (F. Naïli, J. Allegrini, E. Möller and S. El Neklawy).

Infrastructures of power and, in later periods, the state, enhanced their control through aid practices. In the Ottoman Empire, imperial patronage for charitable institutions was driven by "piety or the creation and reinforcement of networks of clients or taxable citizens necessary for rule."[48] Indeed, institutions such as soup kitchens maintained a certain level of social peace and created links between different social groups, while reinforcing the image of the imperial benefactor, as Şerife Eroğlu Memiş shows in her analysis of the "Table of Abraham" in Hebron, Palestine. But this "circle of care"[49] included some and excluded others, as other contributions show. In late Ottoman Jerusalem, for instance, the rural poor continued to be excluded after the municipal responsibility for the social welfare of the urban poor had been asserted in a new legal framework governing municipalities, as analyzed in Falestin Naïli's contribution.

As Randi Deguilhem points out again in the conclusion to this volume, aid is not only a matter of altruism, it actually empowers charity givers and it is also an important source of prestige and political power. In the fourth century, Christians were encouraged to practise direct charitable giving – to give alms from hand to hand – as well as indirect giving, justified by the fear of misuse of the gift or unequal distribution, which led them to entrust their wealth to the Church. Charity henceforth benefited from an institutional organization aimed at ensuring the subsistence of the poorest in numerous charitable facilities, as mentioned above, managed by associated monasteries. Such an inflow of wealth also allowed the Church to ensure the maintenance of the clergy and bishops, allowing them thereby to build up their political power[50] to such an extent that, in the sixth century CE, they became a new civic authority. The assistance to the poor, organized by the bishops, the "watchers of the masses" according to Ambrose, was such a factor of social stability that the emperor supported their activity and the institutionalization of the phenomenon.

In the same spirit, during the twelfth century, at the beginning of the Ayyubid era in Damascus, the waqfs founded by the new rulers were used to create or reinforce the influence of Sunni Islam against the influence of their predecessors, the Shiite Fatimids. The foundation of religious and educational institutions in particular also involved the creation of salaried positions (imam, etc.), helping to build new support networks for the Ayyubids.[51] Şerife Eroğlu Memiş similarly underlines the economic

[46] Ruiz de Elvira and Saeidnia 2020: 21.
[47] Destremau 2008; Catusse and Perrier 2018.
[48] Watenpaugh 2015: 9.
[49] Watenpaugh 2015: 13.
[50] Brown 1992; Brown 2012; Sotinel 2006.
[51] Deguilhem 2008.

dimension of waqf institutions during the eighteenth century, when they had significant purchasing power and also allowed the state to pursue several policies simultaneously, including "the investment in and maintenance of infrastructure, creating employment, combating poverty and subsidizing state finance."

This type of aid practices gradually changed in the context of the reforms (*Tanzîmât*) of the second half of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, the definition of Ottoman citizenship included a definition of the rights of the citizen vis-à-vis the state and the different levels of public administration, and this was also discernible at the municipal level. While the urban poor had once been the collective responsibility of their neighborhood of origin, they became the responsibility of the state, which was now in charge of their care (F. Naïli). As Critchlow and Parker have pointed out in their history of private charity and public welfare in European and North American contexts: "Since the poor constituted the socio-economic margins of a society, decisions about who merits what type of assistance bring the boundaries of a community into clear focus."[52]

Later, in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the humanitarian field also became a means to support national projects in the context of colonial domination. Shaimaa E. El-Neklawy and Esther Möller argue in their study of the Egyptian Red Crescent, that humanitarian action allowed nationalist elites to access new economic and political opportunities. They show how humanitarianism inherited from an ancient tradition of endowment and was also a means to affirm their own vision of social and medical reforms in the context of Egyptian nation-building. The field was invested by governments, both colonial and national, but also by members of the socio-economic elites, in particular women, who used charitable discourses and practices to strengthen their own positions in the political, social and cultural spheres.

With the emergence of modern states, the question of the right to "social protection" became a constitutive element of the social pact on which states are based. At the regional level, Blandine Destremeau notes that to counterbalance the restrictions on political freedom, several countries, such as Syria, advocated a rhetoric of solidarity, defining the improvement of social welfare as its principal mission.[53] However, from the 1980s onwards, in a context of economic crisis, privatization of services and a simultaneous increase in poverty, there was a "great return to assistance and charity" which were invested by a multiplicity of private or state actors in search of legitimacy and "moral benefits".[54] Assistance thus becomes the framework for the development of clientelistic relationships at the expense of legally-based social assistance.

Similar dynamics could be observed in contemporary Lebanon where, faced with the Syrian refugee crisis, the state withdrew from humanitarian intervention, creating a vacuum that favored the care of refugees by local and communitarian actors, as studied by Jean Allegrini in this issue. The Christian Bishoprics in Zahle decide freely how to distribute available aid, and their priorities vary according to the place they project for themselves and their beneficiaries within the framework of the Lebanese state. The priorities of the Maronite Church, for example, are linked to its ambition to be the only "national church" of Lebanon, thereby also showing the porosity between religious and political reasoning.

Aid practices can thus create categories and attribute a particular place to beneficiaries, a dynamic which is especially pronounced in the framework of human mobility and migration.

[52] Critchlow and Parker 1998: 3.
[53] Destremeau 2018: 205.
[54] Longuenesse et al. 2005.

II. Assistance and Regulation of Mobility

Since antiquity, various institutional and normative devices have been implemented to regulate mobility in the Middle East. They aim to manage the social challenges and economic, political, religious or environmental repercussions brought on by the various kinds of mobility.[55] This supervision takes place through the construction of a "population knowledge apparatus", which takes different forms.[56] The division of the space to be administered is one of these tools which makes it possible to strengthen controls on mobile people. Hospitality may have been another when, for example, urban authorities require hoteliers to declare the people they are accommodating.[57] As merchants, soldiers, messengers and emissaries who had their own structures of hospitality, travellers such as pilgrims, refugees or exiles[58] benefited from lodging, food, care and the distribution of goods. For instance, during the first quarter of the seventh century, when the Persian invasion devastated the ancient provinces of Syria, Arabia and Palestine, the patriarch of Alexandria, John the Almsgiver, sponsored facilities to accommodate the numerous displaced people fleeing from these provinces. He organized food distribution and built hospices to shelter and care for them, including, for instance, seven maternity hospitals.[59] In addition to being structures of care, such facilities were likely to have been places where the movement of these people could be monitored.[60]

The will to supervise the movement of persons also manifested itself under the Ottoman government with the adoption of the Refugee Code (sometimes also referred to as an Immigration Law) in 1857 and the establishment of a Commission for the Central Administration of Immigration in 1860. According to this code, people with little capital were to receive state land with exemptions from taxes and from conscription obligations for a certain number of years, depending on where they settled. The commission was charged with the coordination of relief aid to refugees entering the Empire, mainly as a result of the Ottoman-Russian wars, which included Tartars and Circassians.[61] This reception policy implemented by the Ottomans was not only humanitarian in nature but also served to settle sedentary populations basing their livelihoods on agriculture (such as the Circassians) in parts of the Empire which had largely escaped the control of the Ottoman State in terms of security and tax collection. This policy thereby helped to counterbalance the power of non-sedentary populations such as the Bedouin in Jordan, for example.

The beginning of the twentieth century was marked by the intensification of a process called "the unmixing of peoples" – an expression attributed to Lord Curzon[62] – linked to the rise of nationalism and European colonization, among other things. The application of the nation-state model to the provinces of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War (including the former Arab provinces

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[55] Moatti 2004; Moatti et al. 2009; Kerneis 2018; Fauchon-Claudon and Le Guennec 2022.

[56] Milliot 2007: 29.

[57] Moatti and Kaiser 2007: 10.

[58] About people exiled or persecuted in Late Antiquity, see, for instance, Fauchon 2013; Malamut 2016; Theodoropoulos 2020.

[59] *Leontios of Neapolis* VI, 10, 350, and 262, 324-325, 449.

[60] Unless, like the churches with which they were associated, we can propose that the hospices constituted, at least in some cases, places of inviolable asylum where individuals exiled or persecuted for religious and political reasons knew they could take refuge. A law of the *Theodosian Code* indeed extended ecclesiastical asylum to buildings associated with the church, "houses, gardens, courtyards, baths and porticoes", see *CTh* IX, 45, 4, 216-223. About church asylum in Late Antiquity, see Di Segni and Feissel 2020. Even if, as for P.-L. Gatier 2009, such a group would more specifically designate the episcopal group, it could be interesting to consider the possibility that the mentioned "houses" could have been charitable hospices.

[61] Chatty 2010: 97-99.

[62] Chatty 2011: 42.

placed under mandate) was thus accompanied by demographic engineering and population exchanges. In this respect, the massacres committed against the Armenians of Eastern Anatolia at the end of the nineteenth century, culminating in the genocide of 1915, and the massive displacement of Circassians and Chechens during the Russo-Ottoman wars between 1774 and 1878, prefigured the logic of population exchange and the creation of nation-states along ethnic-religious lines that were later at work during the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. The societies of the region have been durably marked by this logic and their consequences. The late Ottoman Empire was thus an area of significant migration and dispossession, such as was the case of Kurds. The Ottoman state apparatus acted to welcome certain populations such as the Circassians and Chechens displaced during the Russo-Ottoman wars, while at the same time provoking the displacement of other populations, such as the Armenians and Assyrians.

The exodus of nearly a million refugees from historic Palestine to neighboring countries (mainly, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Iraq) following the formation of the state of Israel in 1948[63] constituted a moment of major political and social rupture for the whole region. Various forms of reception and assistance were organized within the host societies: Palestinians were welcomed within families, in schools and mosques. The International Red Cross provided emergency aid and the institutional response was coordinated in each host country around an institution responsible for the census of Palestinians and the attribution of a legal status in accordance with national interests.[64]

Parallel to the Palestinian Nakba in the Middle East, Europe experienced the displacement of millions of refugees caused by the Second World War. These movements led to the organization of a collective response with the creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The establishment of an international refugee protection regime stipulated by the 1951 Geneva Convention is a central moment in the creation of "humanitarian governance" of refugees.[65]
By creating the legal status of refugee and asylum seeker, the UNHCR produces new categories of people that states can administer and govern. It is thus during the twentieth century, called the "century of refugees" by Liisa Malkki, that humanitarianism indeed becomes a "key figure in global politics".[66]

In the contemporary Middle East, just as in Europe during the two World Wars, the management of massive population displacements has determined the emergence of what Michael Barnett describes as an "international humanitarian order"[67], i.e. a set of norms that makes it possible to define the status of refugees in order to protect them and also to govern them. If forced population displacement is at the heart of contemporary reconfigurations of humanitarian aid and charitable actions at the regional level, this is also linked to the generally non-inclusive nature (from a legal point of view) of reception policies in countries that are not signatories to the 1951 Geneva Convention[68] and where the majority of refugees[69] do not have access to the citizenship of the host countries. On the contrary, their presence is thought of in a paternalistic register of hospitality towards "Arab brothers".[70]

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[63] Pappe 2007.
[64] Al Husseini and Bocco 2010.
[65] Barnett 2016: 243.
[66] Malkki 2015: 1.
[67] Barnett 2016: 241, 246.
[68] Doraï 2014.
[69] In this respect, the case of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan is an exception as this country, unlike the other host countries, is the only one to have granted them Jordanian nationality.
[70] El Abed 2014.

Moreover, the perpetuation of the Palestinian refugee issue in the Middle East and, with it, the long-term insertion of humanitarian assistance as an instrument of governance, has been accompanied by new waves of migration, mainly that of Iraqis since 1990 and Syrians since 2011 and, to a lesser extent, those of Yemeni, Sudanese and Somali refugees. Today the Middle East hosts nearly 12 million refugees[71] and 8 million internally displaced persons,[72] being one of the regions of the world with the largest number of forced migrants. In this context, older aid networks have been reactivated and new humanitarian practices have been tried. Jean Allegrini shows how in Zahle, the arrival of Syrians is perceived as a danger to social stability. While humanitarian assistance is largely provided by confessional actors, the churches adopt a differentiated treatment of refugees. Some take the decision to include them among their beneficiaries, while others only work for the benefit of the Lebanese population. Depending on their resources or their political agendas, each of these churches either favors the settlement of Syrians or encourages their departure to third countries.

The arrival of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries has also led to the deployment of a range of new digital technologies to facilitate the registration and distribution of aid. In the case of the Zaatari camp in northern Jordan, the distribution of aid to refugees is carried out through an iris scan, a practice that is particularly coercive and disrespectful of refugees' rights.[73] We are also witnessing the growing involvement and professionalization of members of the communities receiving aid under the status of "volunteers", which allows them to access sources of subsistence and to act as intermediaries with their communities without interfering with worker rights.[74]

While these phenomena reflect trends that run more widely through the humanitarian world, we note the emergence of examples that are specific to this region where several waves of migration overlap. For instance, since 2011, Syrians have been settling in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. In these camps, a "refugee-refugee humanitarianism" has been organized, to use the terms of Elena Fiddian-Qasmyie,[75] with the collection of basic necessities, reception in homes, and the sharing of useful information to register and access aid. Similar dynamics can be seen in Jordan, where Syrian migrants who arrived before 2011 for family, economic or political reasons play a central role in hosting recent refugees fleeing war.[76] These local responses are, however, not without tensions in a context where old and new arrivals share a situation of extreme precariousness. Syrians are, for example, blamed by Palestinians refugees for occupying all the attention and aid of humanitarian actors,[77] thereby demonstrating the active role of refugees as beneficiaries as well as providers of aid and social protection.[78]

The assistance offered to people on the move today as well as in the past has left material traces, be it the huge refugee camps established over the past seventy years in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon or the buildings erected all over the Middle East in ancient, medieval and modern times, along the communication routes, in the heart of cities or on their outskirts.

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[71] Nearly 5.7 million Syrian refugees according to UNHCR; nearly 1 million Iraqi, Yemenis, Sudanese and Somalis, nearly 5 million Palestinian refugees registered by the UNRWA in 2021.
[72] Mainly Syrian internally displaced persons.
[73] Macias 2019.
[74] Driff 2018 and Al-Majali forthcoming.
[75] Fiddian-Qasmyie 2016.
[76] Napolitano forthcoming.
[77] Abou Zaki 2015.
[78] Pincock et al. 2020.

III. Forging Spaces. Borders, Centers and Margins

Aid activities have marked the territorial organization of the Middle East, contributing to the emergence and development of neighborhoods and even cities. Their material traces inform us about the nature of these activities which may have served to mark borders or to display centers of power. With the institutionalization of care for the needy in the christianized Roman Empire, we find an important architectural and urban manifestation of this phenomenon. The end of antiquity saw the construction of numerous establishments designed to provide a framework for assistance to welcome, house, feed and care for the most vulnerable. The exploration of ancient texts and collections of epigraphic evidence has already allowed researchers to identify more than two hundred establishments of this type in the Middle East, built between the fourth and seventh centuries. Furthermore, archaeological discoveries have identified the remains of numerous hospices or hostels in the region. These structures were often built near the routes leading to sanctuaries, both large and small, such as those in and around Jerusalem.[79] Their construction may be linked to the pilgrimage to Jerusalem but also to Saint Symeon the Stylite in the region of Antioch as well as to healing sites such as Abu Mina to the east of Alexandria. The identification of their remains could then help to identify the location of the ancient routes. Among these pilgrims, many were sick and lepers; these structures could therefore have been real hospitals and infirmaries.[80] However, these establishments were not only intended for pilgrims. Several of them are mentioned in village inscriptions in southern Syria, as shown by Pauline Piraud-Fournet in her contribution in which she also mentions monuments of this nature, for example, the *ptocheion*, “hospice for the poor” in Bostra, built in the sixth century at the request of Emperor Justinian or the *diakonia* in the city center of Gerasa where an association of laymen distributed food to the needy in the courtyard of a church.

The idea that *xenodocheia*, “hospices for strangers” and for the sick, were built along the boundaries between dioceses has been put forward by historians and archaeologists working on the subject in ancient Gaul (France): they could thus have served to regulate mobility at the border of the dioceses; they could also, by their number or their ostentatious position, have personified a competition or a rivalry concerning the field of assistance between ancient bishoprics. These interpretative hypotheses must still be explored for the Middle East. The position of these buildings, in the heart of towns, around villages or in isolated areas could thus be understood within the context of diverse economic, practical or social reasons.[81] In any case, it illustrates the place that societies intended to give to foreigners, the sick, refugees and the marginalized. The observation of contemporary phenomena is also likely to help comprehend the practices of antiquity. Today, refugee camps are built along the borders that separate Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan from Syria, as Kamel Doraï reminds us in the conclusion; this observation supports, for example, the hypothesis of identifying the limits of the ancient cities, territories or bishoprics, on the ground near any concentrations of philanthropic establishments.

Christian philanthropic establishments, the traces of which are still to be found in the sources and on the ground for the period between the seventh and ninth centuries, were reactivated and renewed

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[79] Voltaggio 2011.

[80] *Anonymous of Placentia*; Maraval 1985; Hirschfeld 1997; Horden 2012; Renberg 2017.

[81] F.-O. Touati 1996 shows, for example, in his study of the 395 leprosaria of the eleventh-thirteenth centuries recorded in a region of France, that they were built on the outskirts not because of a rejection of lepers but for practical and economic reasons (available space, fields to cultivate, easy access). He also encourages us not to trust appearances: these leprosaria were vast and numerous, yet, they were a late response to a past event and only received a very limited number of patients.

between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries under the impetus of the Crusades and the associated military and religious orders. At least fifty philanthropic establishments were erected along the pilgrimage routes by these different orders.[82] The multiplication of establishments along these roads as well as of hospitals in the cities (Jerusalem and Acre, in particular) responded to a need to feed, protect and care for people but they perhaps also participated, by their number and distribution, in marking the territorial hold of each of these orders.

The Islamic period saw the development of a major institution, still very active today, the *waqf*. This institution, developed by Muslims, Christians and Jews, is also materialized by charitable establishments that mark the sacred territory and the roads that cross it. Thus, the Old City of Jerusalem has a large number of *waqf* structures dating from the Umayyad, Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman periods. They are particularly concentrated around the Noble Sanctuary (Haram al-Sharif), notably in the Maghrebi quarter, destroyed by Israel in 1967.[83] The city also has a significant number of *waqf* properties belonging to the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian patriarchates.[84] Similarly, the *imaret* in Hebron is a witness to the long tradition of *waqf* structures, as Şerife Eroğlu Memiş underlines in her contribution: the first account of this soup kitchen dates from a Persian traveller's account of the eleventh century, also showing the importance of mobility in the larger region.

The geographical space of the contemporary Middle East has been partly shaped by infrastructures linked to religious and commercial mobility (pilgrimages, *darb al-hajj*, railways, caravanserais) and those linked to forced displacement of populations in cities and in camps which still contribute to shape it. Thus, the Zaatari refugee camp, set up a few dozen kilometers from the Syrian border in Jordan in 2012,[85] was built around military hospitals established on the outskirts of the village of Zaatari.[86] Hundreds of refugees were treated there every night; large sheds on the outskirts of the camp held the food that was distributed to families, who were installed in tents inside the camp. At the end of 2013, the hospitals were dismantled and replaced by housing units, composed of sheet metal and shacks, as well as schools and shops. The observation of the evolution of these constructions in the camp illustrates a duality: while the Jordanian authorities forbid the use of solid construction materials (concrete blocks, bricks, stones) in order to prevent the permanent settlement of refugees on their territory, the ingenuity displayed in these constructions and in the organization of the neighborhoods shows the importance for the refugees of shaping their living environment in a sustainable manner.[87] The fact remains that the construction of free hospitals near what was previously a hamlet surrounded by desert steppe, intended to receive and treat wounded Syrians fleeing the combat zones of southern Syria with their families, has enabled the Jordanian government to direct a large number of refugees to this site and to organize humanitarian aid there, along with the UNHCR. The refugee camps are, in fact, the UNHCR's preferred aid mechanism. In addition to facilitating the identification of aid beneficiaries and their visibility vis-à-vis donors, they make it possible to keep refugees away from host populations and to avoid their competition on the labor market.[88]

[82] Touati 2007.
[83] See Sroor 2010 and Lemire 2022.
[84] Tamari 2018.
[85] Dalal 2022 and Dalal and Fraikin forthcoming.
[86] Darras 2014; Doraï and Piraud-Fournet forthcoming.
[87] Doraï and Piraud-Fournet forthcoming.
[88] Turner 2015.

For Barbara Harrell-Bond, these camps are also spaces of rights denial and a symbol of an aid system based on charity rather than human rights, a situation which creates dependency and subordination.[89] Furthermore, the observation of the urban organization of the camps tells us about the will of humanitarian actors to systematize and regulate the access of refugees to services and aid (schools, hospitals, NGOs, etc.) and, at the same time, to exercise control over their daily practices. The lack of coffeehouses and public meeting places in Zaatari camp, for example, is linked to the authorities' desire to avoid gatherings by the refugees. Changes within the camps are regularly monitored to avoid gatherings that would escape police control. Similarly, the Syrian camp of Azraq, in northern Jordan, was designed as several villages, each with the necessary services, separated from each other by several kilometers to prevent over-grouping of people and to facilitate their control. The camp management is placed away from the villages, making it difficult for the refugees to access it and stage protests there.[90]

Thus, the analysis of aid practices over a very long period of time and through various disciplines represents a real epistemological challenge but which is particularly relevant to understanding these practices. Indeed, in the Middle East, whether the benefit of these actions is reserved for citizens – regardless of their material situation – as in Greco-Roman society – or specifically for the destitute – as supported by Judaism, Christianity and Islam – or for foreigners (pilgrims, travellers, displaced persons, etc.), they contribute to maintaining social and political stability. The definition of the deserving beneficiary is, however, a crucial issue, as it shows the limits of fraternity, solidarity or citizenship in different historical contexts.

The analysis of the identification of categories of beneficiaries and the impact of this categorization on society would take on a further dimension if linked to gender issues. Shaimaa El-Neklawy and Esther Möller show the central role women of different social classes played in funding the Egyptian Red Crescent as a means to affirm themselves in the public sphere. Except for this contribution, the gender dimension could not be addressed in this volume. This dimension would make it possible to show, for example, how considering women to be more vulnerable than men sidelines the latter, who are sometimes just as threatened as women, particularly in the case of the Syrian conflict for deserters from the army.[91] It would also allow a clearer analysis of the representations and moral injunctions that aid often carries and the way in which charitable practices, as related to a person's body, contribute to the governance of individuals.[92] In a recent collective work, historians have highlighted the gendered dimension of humanitarian work, focusing particularly on its beginnings when it was considered to be more of a female domain. They point out that women working in religious organizations played a key role in the transition from missionary to humanitarian service and in the development of social welfare.[93] For even earlier periods, late Antiquity, in particular, textual sources present some women as key players in the organization of charitable activities.[94]

The interdisciplinary approach used in the present issue, including archaeology, brings to light a wide variety of different types of aid from ancient structures scattered over the territory, in and around cities, to modern ones that develop from temporary to permanent, eventually becoming part of their wider environment. This is the case of refugee camps in the contemporary era which have gone from being

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[89] Harrell-Bond 2002: 53.
[90] Dalal et al. 2018.
[91] Turner 2020.
[92] Shanneik 2021.
[93] Möller et al. 2020: 7.
[94] Klein 2022.

"non-places" to becoming "cities".[95] Another interesting observation is the permeability between religious and secular worlds, a phenomenon which includes contemporary times, and which, in this region – the cradle of the three monotheistic religions – is undoubtedly even more pronounced than elsewhere. This runs counter to the idea of a gradual secularization of the welfare sphere and shows instead the persistent role of religious actors and the importance of the community dimension they can provide.

This issue is also based on a collective approach to aid practices, both in terms of the actors which provide aid (state bodies, churches, religious foundations, international organizations, associations, NGOs, etc.) and the repercussions of these actions on society. An analysis of the trajectories of individuals involved in this work, already documented for contemporary periods and regions,[96] would have given us more information on their sociological profiles as well as on their motivations and, in particular, on the role of emotions and moral feelings associated with them.[97] In the words of Didier Fassin, "humanitarian government has a salutary power for us because by saving lives, it saves something of our idea of ourselves, and because by relieving suffering, it also relieves the burden of this unequal world order."[98] Moreover, this issue does not dwell on the generous and fraternal character of assistance but focuses rather on its social repercussions, analyzing it above all as an important instrument of power, working sometimes towards integration and, at other times, towards exclusion of a part of the population. By using a discourse focused on moral sentiments and using the terms of "suffering to speak of inequality, when we invoke trauma rather than recognising violence, when we give residence rights to foreigners with health problems but restrict the conditions for political asylum, more generally when we mobilize compassion rather than justice",[99] humanitarianism as much as charity dodges the question of the root causes of injustice and inequality.

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[95] Agier 2008.
[96] Dauvin and Siméant-Germanos 2002; Fourn 2018.
[97] Fassin 2002; Malkki 2015; Benthall 2017; Ruiz 2021.
[98] Fassin 2002: 252.
[99] Fassin 2022: 8.

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