

FAILURE OF REFUGEE CAMPS: HUMANITARIAN IDEALS OR FAULTY POLICIES?

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine the reasons for the poor conditions on refugee camps. I analyze both humanitarian ideals and faulty policy implementations in an attempt explain the inadequate situation on camps. I explain humanitarianism action from a Kantian perspective and display how refugee camps are a reflection of Kantian works. I portray that the situation on refugee camps are not because of its humanitarian nature but because of fallible strategies exercised by relief workers on refugee camps. In particular, I examine how policies that are aimed towards short-term goals rather than development initiatives and programs that fail to appreciate the particular social, political and cultural environment on refugee camps result in the deteriorating situation of refugee camps. I propose that these policies need to be rectified by researching the particular dynamics of a refugee camp before applying such operations.

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Introduction

Currently, there are an estimated 14.5 million refugees in the world and over 20 million displaced persons, of whom 80 percent are women and children. More than two thirds of the refugees are found in developing countries. A refugee camp, to clarify, is a temporary camp created by governments or NGOs to receive refugees. A refugee, as defined by the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention), which entered into force in 1954, is "a person who is outside his or her homeland and is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group."¹ Refugee camps are set up in cases of when there is a mass influx of refugees at a given moment in time, the most common being a case of a civil war in the home country, or any situation which amounts to a humanitarian crisis. Throughout the 1990s, globally, there have been between 13.5 and 17.6 million refugees living outside their country of origin. Camps are expected to provide a safe haven for refugees including physical protection, as established as an international norm, and are designed to fulfill basic human needs: access to food, shelter and health care. More specifically, sleeping accommodations, hygiene facilities (e.g. toilets), medical supplies and communication equipment (e.g. radios) are often also provided. Such necessities and resources are delegated to refugees until it is safe for them to return to their home countries.²

It should be noted that although refugee camps are intended to provide temporary residence until peace is achieved in the home country, they often become more of permanent settlements rather than a short-lived residence of safe haven. Buddaburam for example, a refugee camp located

¹ Sarah Kbnyon Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries* (London: Cornwall University Press, 2005), 142.

² Ibid.

in Ghana, has been in existence for almost twenty years to date. It was opened by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1990 and is “home” to about 40,000 refugees from Liberia who fled their country during the Liberian civil wars between 1989-1996 and then again in 1999-2003 respectively.

Although refugee camps are aimed towards protecting refugees and ensuring a basic standard of living for refugees, the reality is drastically different. The general conditions on camps are extremely poor. There are deplorable living conditions, including inadequate water supplies, lack of proper health facilities and, bad sanitation and malnutrition. I will delve deeper into the problems of refugee camps later on in the paper but the question I raise here is what are the reasons for the unfortunate situation of refugee camps? There are two schools of thought on this matter: either the problem lies in the basis of refugee camps as humanitarian action or the poor conditions are due to faulty policies on refugee camps. This is the question I will explore in this paper.

The structure of my paper will be as follows: First, I will describe humanitarianism and its moral justification. Second, I will examine the problems on refugee camps, as a practical implication of humanitarianism, and determine whether such problems come from the humanitarian basis of refugee camps or whether they are because of faulty policy implementations on camps. Having established that the problems are due to flawed strategies undertaken by relief organization, I will propose some possible recommendations.

Chapter 1 – Humanitarianism and Its Moral Justification

There is extensive research on the justification and implementation of humanitarian ideals and possible reasons for the problems of such implementation. Dr. Brigitte Piquard, for example, intensely deals with the problem of implementing humanitarian action, such as providing humanitarian relief.³ The problems associated from the inability to provide enough humanitarian aid are great and include a range of issues from its inability to provide enough aid to questions concerning delegating excess aid to “undeserving” victims.⁴ There are those among international analysts who take on a humanist or Kantian perspective and believe that granting humanitarian aid is a moral responsibility. Onora O’Neill is among those who holds such a view and has researched this topic at great lengths.⁵ More specifically, O’Neill has undertaken extensive work on the responsibility and other issues surrounding food aid delegation. O’Neill holds to the fundamental nature of human rights from a Kantian perspective and actively works for the rights of others. She has expressed,

What is meant to work for human rights is to build the institutions and the requirements that create the duties that realize those rights. It can be a mockery to tell someone that they have the right to food when there is nobody who has the duty to provide them with food.⁶

Similarly, there are also those scholars, including Hugo Slim and Seyla Benhabib, who maintain that humanitarian action, especially regarding international aid towards refugees, is a practical realization of Kant’s philosophy.

³ Dr. Brigitte Piquard, “Protection Issues – The Limits of Humanitarian Responsibility,” (conference of the Digest of MSF UK Discussion Evening, March 23rd, 2006), <http://www.uk2.msf.org/UKNews/Events/DiscussionEvenings2006/digests/protectionissuedigest.doc>.

⁴ Amelia Branczik, “Humanitarian Aid and Development Assistance,” Beyond Intractability, http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/humanitarian_aid/.

⁵ Onora O’Neill, *Faces of Hunger* (London: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 1986), 4.

⁶ Edward Clay, “Food Aid and Food Security in a Globalized World,” (paper presented at the Food Aid and Security in the 21st Century meeting), http://209.85.129.104/search?q=cache:hRAygEUBxfMJ:www.odi.org.uk/speeches/horizons_nov06/30Nov/Food_aid_EJC.pdf+Onora+O%27Neill+Food+Aid&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=ca.

Conversely, there is the other school of thought that maintains that humanitarian aid should be reduced or even completely terminated and is held by a number of academics. Ben Barber, for instance, discusses the abuse of humanitarian aid and, accordingly, believes that it should be halted. In particular, he discusses how too often guerillas pretend to be refugees and siphon off aid to continue their fight.⁷ This topic has been extensively researched. Kathleen O'Toole has undergone a deep analysis taking case studies from Georgia, Afghanistan, Zaire and Cambodia, of how refugee camps instigate and prolong civil war.⁸ There are even more drastic arguments for ending aid such as those that claim victims are often "undeserving". This argument is illustrated by Nicholas Stockton when he examines what he calls the most "insidious challenge to humanitarian values".⁹ More specifically, he discusses the case of Rwanda and how it was commonplace that the 'extremist Hutu' leadership was able to sustain its political control over the refugee population by their astute manipulation of humanitarian aid.¹⁰

Having highlighted the debate on humanitarianism, I will discuss the justifications for humanitarian action, concentrating on refugee camps. More specifically, this chapter will discuss the justification for refugee camps, including both practical and moral explanations. I will be examining the issue of displaced people and Kant's humanitarian writings in order to describe humanitarianism and its practical implications. Having outlined Kant's humanitarianism and its implementation in reality, I will illustrate whether refugee camps are in fact a practical realization of Kant's philosophy. My argument will be that refugee camps, per se, are not in fact a reflection of

⁷ Ben Barber, "Feeding Refugees, or War?" *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 4 (1997), <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19970701facomment3780/ben-barber/feeding-refugees-or-war.html>.

⁸ Kathleen O'Toole, "Refugee Manipulation on Ethical Dilemma for Humanitarian Aid" *Stanford University*, Nov. 17, 1999, <http://news-service.stanford.edu/pr/99/991117manipulate.html>.

⁹ Nicholas Stockton, "In Defence of Humanitarianism," *Disasters* 22, no. 4 (1998), <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bpl/disa/1998/00000022/00000004/art00007>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Kant's works, but because of practical and political considerations, they are the most realistic practical realization of Kant's humanitarian ideals.

1.1 - Why Refugee Camps? Why Humanitarian Action at all?

The existence of refugee camps are for two reasons: to deal with displaced people and to realize humanitarian ideals. The following sections will discuss these topics.

1.1.1 - The Issue of Displaced Peoples

One reason for refugee camps is to deal with the issue of internally displaced people and the mass influx of refugees across borders. The UNHCR is the main body that leads the refugee camp project as it falls under its mission of providing protection of refugees. Along with providing a safe haven for refugees, the UNHCR's mandate has expanded to include protecting and providing humanitarian assistance to what it defines as persons "of concern," including internally-displaced people (IDPs) who fall under the criteria of a refugee according to its legal definition.¹¹ As the UNHCR's mission is to ensure that such people fearing persecution can utilize the right to seek asylum and find safe haven, it is often the case that the UNHCR sets up refugee camps when feared persecution results in a very large arrival of refugees. As mentioned before, ideally, refugees are suppose to be provided with protection, basic necessities and the to right to exercise their basic human rights. The UNHCR, presumably, has control over refugee camps and, hence, in this respect, refugee camps are a convenient way to deal with refugees - either refugees crossing borders or IDPs - in order to ensure that rights are granted to refugees.

¹¹ UNHCR, "UNCHR Mission Statement," UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/basics/opendoc.htm?tbl=BASICS&id=3b0249c71>.

1.1.2 - Moral Justification for Refugee Camps

Aside from the practical reasons for refugee camps, as outlined above, one can take one step back and examine the underlying reason for refugee camps as such. Refugee camps, to recap, are intended to provide protection for peoples who fear persecution, most notably in the cases of civil war or genocide in their home country. The question now remains, however, is why the international community, the UNHCR and other NGOs in this case, seek to help people who have had to face extreme hardship in their home country. At the core, refugee camps are a form of humanitarian action, that is, a practical realization of an ideology whereby people perform humane treatment and provide assistance to others. Humanitarianism is based on the idea that all humans have equal value and, accordingly, they should be treated with respect and dignity. Refugee camps, in this light, are then based on the concept of humanitarianism which is, in turn, based on providing assistance to those who need it. The question now is what are the motivations or justifications for humanitarianism or humanitarian action, which will be dealt with below.

What is the impulse to do good, to remake the world into a more just and fair place and to strengthen the universal tolerance and understanding? Scholars often cite phrases like “the right to humanitarian aid” and “the international community’s obligation and responsibility to provide humanitarian relief.”¹² These statements are often taken for granted without examining the reasons behind such action. There are, in fact, countless motives as to why the international community, or one person for that matter, is responsible and obligated to provide humanitarian aid, including legal, philosophical, moral and religious perspectives. Rather than outline all the arguments from these various schools of thought, I will be concentrating on Kant’s works on humanitarianism as it is his writings that are most often referred to for the justification for providing humanitarian

¹² Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson & Francis Grunewald, eds., *Responding to Emergencies and Fostering Development* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1999), 122.

assistance, especially on refugee camps. More specifically, it is my argument that Kant's categorical imperative specifically calls on humanitarian duties which is, in turn, actually practiced by NGOs and the international community as a whole.

1.2 Kant and Humanitarianism and his Categorical Imperative

Kant's universal maxim, or categorical imperative, is central to Kant's moral philosophy and was introduced in his works, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. It is this maxim that is most often used to justify humanitarian duties. Simply put, the categorical imperative is a law to which our maxims must conform, however, these maxims must conform without hoping to fulfill any other conditions. Furthermore, a categorical imperative would signify an unconditional and absolute obligation that would expand its authority in any and all circumstances.¹³ This point is best displayed in the famous declaration by Kant, "Act only according to the maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."¹⁴

→ Universal

Hence, the categorical imperative is the single ultimate moral principle derived, is not connected to a particular situation and is universal in form. The principle asserts that one can ethically assess a situation by determining whether everyone in the world is acting on its motive. If the proposed and imagined response to the situation is coherent, the action is right; if it is not, then it is wrong. For instance, if a person commits suicide when he is fed up with living, this would be wrong because if everyone committed suicide, the society the suicide depended on would cease to exist. A similar example would be if everyone told lies, no one would be believable and so the very

¹³ Mary Gregor, ed., *Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 17.

¹⁴ Mary Gregor, ed., *Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18.

act of lying would be impossible. Hence, as lying is not universalizeable, it is wrong.¹⁵ In this respect, the action or choice needs to be consistent with humanity as a whole.

→ Right to Choose End

The formula also entails human beings as rational and requires that humans respect themselves and others as rational beings. For Kant, respecting someone as a rational being means to respect their right to make their own decisions about their life and actions.¹⁶ Moreover, not only do humans need to respect others to make their own decisions, but they also have a duty to pursue one another's ends; people should recognize the pursuit of each other's end, should definitely not hinder it and should perhaps even assist one another in attaining it.¹⁷ According to Kant, the conception of oneself as a human being able to make one's own decisions is necessary for a dignified life.¹⁸

1.3 – Kant's Practical Implications

The universal character of Kant's categorical imperative undoubtedly has an affect on moral duties outside of state borders. In one of articles, "Claiming a Humanitarian Imperative: NGOs and the Cultivation of Humanitarian Duty", Hugo Slim explicitly discusses how the humanitarian imperative, that is central to the whole idea of humanitarian action, is a practical implication of Kant's categorical imperative. The humanitarian imperative, as Slim describes it, is the Code of Conduct that NGOs dealing with humanitarian assistance abide by and states the following:

¹⁵ Mary Gregor, ed., *Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19.

¹⁶ Mary Gregor, ed., *Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22.

¹⁷ Mary Gregor, ed., *Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22.

¹⁸ Mary Gregor, ed., *Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 25.

The Humanitarian imperative comes first – the right to receive humanitarian assistance, and to offer it, is a fundamental humanitarian principle which should be enjoyed by all citizens of all countries. As members of the international community, we recognize our obligation to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed.”¹⁹

This humanitarian imperative is reflected in physical humanitarian documents including the Code of Conduct, as just mentioned, the Humanitarian Charter, and the SPHERE Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, all of which concentrate increasingly on duties.²⁰ According to Slim, the choosing of the phrase “humanitarian imperative” was obviously designed to capture Kant’s principle of humanity, and echoes the categorical imperative.²¹ That is, Kant’s philosophy calls for unconditional and universal action, along with duties that require necessary actions and assisting others in reaching their desired ends. This is reflected in humanitarian documents outlined by NGOs. For example, the Code of Conduct identifies their “obligations” and “responsibilities” in universal and absolutist terms. More particularly, certain drafts invented by NGOs relating to the standard of living include “life-sustaining” fields of water and sanitation; nutrition; food aid; shelter and site planning, and health. These standards not only provide people’s survival but also entail a dignified standard of living.²² This, in turn, takes the concept of humanitarian duty one step further by specifying the actual content of particular humanitarian duties, and exemplifies Kant’s humanitarianism. The Humanitarian Charter, for instance, is:

based on agencies’ appreciation of their own ethical obligations, and reflects the rights and duties enshrined in international law in respect of which states and other

¹⁹ Hugo Slim, “Claiming a Humanitarian Imperative: NGOs and the Cultivation of Humanitarian Duty,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 21(2002): 113.

²⁰ Hugo Slim, “Claiming a Humanitarian Imperative: NGOs and the Cultivation of Humanitarian Duty,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 21(2002): 114.

²¹ Hugo Slim, “Claiming a Humanitarian Imperative: NGOs and the Cultivation of Humanitarian Duty,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 21(2002): 116.

²² Hugo Slim, “Claiming a Humanitarian Imperative: NGOs and the Cultivation of Humanitarian Duty,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 21(2002): 116.

parties have established obligations...and reaffirms our belief in the humanitarian imperative and its primacy.²³

The Charter specifically emphasizes “a corresponding duty on others” to take steps to preserve life where it is threatened.²⁴ The goodness of the duties is not dependent on the outcomes and is governed by the categorical “must” and not a hypothetical “if”; in other words, duties are universal requirements just as Kant would have them.²⁵ This reasoning results in a situation in which humanitarian duties must exist independently of circumstances or desires of different options. Moreover, the concept of humanitarian duty is boundless just as the categorical imperative; everyone has the responsibility to undertake in the duty.

With regard to the practical implications of Kant’s views of human dignity, two points need to be mentioned. Firstly, Kant states that people should not treat humanity, either within themselves or to anyone else, as a means to an end but rather always an end within itself. This has a key practical implication in human rights because one can infer from this statement that each person has an intrinsic value that entitles them to be protected by rights.²⁶ An article by Stephen On clearly displays this point when he states:

[t]o treat a human being merely as a means is to deny that anything at all is due to [her or] him, which is to deny that [s/]he has any rights. If [s/]he is to be treated not merely as a means but as a person having intrinsic value for [her- or] himself, [s/]he must have rights... there have to be rights that every human being has, if a life worth living and worthy of the status "human" is to be considered (possible)... To live a life without human rights is to live a life unworthy of a human being. It is to be condemned to a life (sentence) deprived of moral value and human dignity.²⁷

²³ Hugo Slim, “Claiming a Humanitarian Imperative: NGOs and the Cultivation of Humanitarian Duty,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 21(2002): 117.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Hugo Slim, “Claiming a Humanitarian Imperative: NGOs and the Cultivation of Humanitarian Duty,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 21(2002): 118.

²⁶ Stephen On, “Kant and Nietzsche on Human Rights: A Theoretical Approach” (paper presented at the International Studies Association, Los Angeles, California, March 14-18, 2002), <http://www.ciaonet.org/isa/ons01/>.

²⁷ Ibid.

The right to humanitarian aid implies the right of victims of armed conflicts and other disasters to receive assistance and protection as a way to satisfy their basic needs. More specifically, humanitarian aid includes the means of survival (clothing, medicine and, among others, moral support) and providing victims with a safe haven and basic rights.²⁸ The second or positive side of Kant's categorical imperative declares that if people are to be treated as ends and not means to an end, then there are particular ways in which they must be treated and certain ways in which they must not be. This should apply in all circumstances and necessarily implies an application of human rights.²⁹

In sum, Kant's categorical imperative calls on humanitarian action, based on universal human rights, obligations and human dignity, which are reflected and practically realized through the work of NGOs. More specifically, refugee camps are a practical realization of Kant's categorical imperative and, moreover, is a humanitarian campaign that Kant actually discusses.

1.3.1 – Kant's Discussion on the Right to Asylum

In his essay entitled, "Perpetual Peace", Kant explicitly defines how asylum seekers are to be dealt with. Kant's purpose of this essay is to display certain conditions of how to run the world and articulate certain principles in order to maintain perpetual peace. In his third article of the essay, Kant notes that "The Law of World Citizenship Shall Be Limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality".³⁰ More specifically, hospitality implies that a stranger has a right not be treated as an enemy when he arrives in a territory that is not his own. These people that arrive have the right to association, as all other humans have and, moreover, they have it by virtue of their common

²⁸ Humanitarian Studies Unit, ed., *Reflections on Humanitarian Action* (England: Pluto Press, 1988), 7.

²⁹ Stephen On, "Kant and Nietzsche on Human Rights: A Theoretical Approach" (paper presented at the International Studies Association, Los Angeles, California, March 14-18, 2002), <http://www.ciaonet.org/isa/ons01/>.

³⁰ Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 105.

possession of the earth, as originally no person has more of right to a particular part of the earth than the other.³¹

Kant further discusses the inhospitality in the past of the inhabitants of the earth, the Bedouin Arabs for instance, and explains how such inhospitality is opposed to natural law. It is only by treating foreign arrivals with welcome and privilege can the “world come into peaceful relations with each other...”³² Hence, it is through these mechanisms that humanity as such can become one step closer to a constitution of establishing a world citizenship, a citizenship that is needed in order to maintain public human rights and a state of perpetual peace.³³

1.4 Are Refugee Camps a Practical Realization of Kant’s Humanitarianism?

So far we have witnessed that Kant’s categorical imperative calls on universal morals and obligations and, more specifically, we have analyzed that Kant’s illustrations in *Perpetual Peace* call upon hospitable welcoming and protection of foreigners. The necessary practical implications of these points that Kant makes can be seen in a number of humanitarian projects. The question now remains if whether refugee camps are a practical realization of Kant’s philosophical writings. At first glance it would seem like such a case. That is, it appears as though refugee camps are a form of humanitarianism that Kant was calling on. Refugee camps, as previously illustrated, are intended to protect and provide the basic necessities for those people who fear persecution from their home country. They are essentially about living up to our moral obligations as human beings to help others in times of distress and in order for them to fulfill a dignified life. More so, it would

³¹ Ibid.

³² Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 106.

³³ Ibid.

seem that Kant's discussion in *Perpetual Peace* specifically calls upon governments to welcome foreigners onto their land. Accordingly, the argument can be made that refugee camps do just that.

However, the opposite argument can be made, with credibility in fact, that refugee camps are not actually a practical realization of Kant's philosophy. Kant appeals to governments to take in aliens, and although he does not require the government to grant them citizenship rights, he does not call for them to be confined within a certain territory. According to Kant, a stranger may claim a right of resort because all humans are entitled to be part of another's community as the earth is communally owned; one must necessarily tolerate another's company.³⁴ Further, Kant examines that, "...no-one originally has any greater right than anyone else to occupy any particular portion of the earth."³⁵ The human race shares the right to the earth's surface in common. Nevertheless, there are limits to the relations that the foreigners can develop with the locals:

But this natural right of hospitality, i.e. the right of strangers, does not extend beyond those conditions which make it possible for them to attempt to enter into relations with the native inhabitants.³⁶

Despite this limitation, Kant's attitude towards strangers allows foreigner, refugees included, to be free and have the right to associate with members of the "native" population. It is in this respect that refugee camps, the mere fact that they are camps, perhaps steer away from Kant's vision of how a state should deal with foreigners. Refugee camps, in their very nature, are sites with fixed boundaries that are, in effect, limited to a certain segment of the area on the land. Although refugees are not necessarily confined to the parameters of the refugee camp, although sometimes they are, the mere fact that they are actively segregated from the local population denies them their right of association. While, in theory, on refugee camps in which the population is allowed to leave the premises, it may be *possible* for

³⁴ Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 106.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

refugees to associate with the native community, this possibility is extremely minimal, if at all. The right to association is totally denied in cases where refugees are unable to leave the boundaries of the camp. It is in this light refugee camp, in their mere existence, do not (necessarily) reflect Kant's philosophy.

1.4.1 - Political and Practical Reasons

There are, of course, practical and political reasons as to why refugee camps are created. Most refugee camps are located in developing countries. These countries are struggling, and often failing, to meet the need of their own population, and so are often hesitant and unwilling to welcome strangers onto their land and provide for them. Confronted with weak economies, inadequate infrastructures, environmental degradation and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, many of these countries cannot deal with "excess" population. Consequently, it would seem that these governments would have little if any incentive to allow a mass migration of foreigners on to their soil. Nevertheless, states often let aliens, especially those who have had to face extreme hardship and traumatic events, into their countries because of international pressures and perhaps a sense of responsibility. However, still, these heads of states are unwilling to provide such peoples with the same "benefits" they provide for their local population and, hence, set up confined territories for the mass influx of refugees to reside in. In designing such a site, the countries are able to provide a minimal amount of safety for the refugees while not having to undertake a significant burden by allowing them to merge with the local population and providing them with citizenship.

1.4.2 - Refugee Camps Reflection of Kant's Humanitarian

Nevertheless, despite the fact that refugee camps fail to adequately reflect Kant's philosophy on how to treat aliens, and even though they are motivated by political and practical considerations, the basis of refugee camps is undoubtedly Kantian in the respect that it is based on humanitarian action at its core.

More specifically, Kant's categorical imperative, with its universal and obligatory nature, and even his arguments about how one should treat foreigners has most often been used by governments and international organizations as a basis of how one should treat and deal with asylum seekers. Benhabib, for instance, describes Kant's great impact on refugee status. She reiterates Kant's notion that one cannot deny universal hospitality and that this right, that is, the right of humans to seek contact with one another, to seek access to each other's land, and to seek access to resources is a fundamental human right.³⁷ Benhabib uses Kant's discussion of the right of the stranger as a starting point for her vision of how to deal with refugee and migration problems. She goes even further than Kant and says that the human right of hospitality should not apply to a single visit, but in some cases to long-term stays. For example a country shouldn't send a refugee back when it is not sure whether he or she is safe in the country of origin. Nations should have obligations to exiles and refugees, these obligations are different from the obligations to immigrants.

Similarly, Zygmunt Bauman discusses the value of Kant's writings. He illustrates how Kant predicted and warned that there would be no empty space unpopulated left in which people could inhibit. Hence, it would be vital to view hospitality as the supreme principle that humanity would

³⁷ Seyla Benhabib, "Right to Rights" (interviewed by Harry Kreisler at Philosophic Iterations, Cosmopolitanism talk, University of California, 2004), <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people4/Benhabib/benhabib-con5.html>.

have to embrace. He states, “Indeed, if ethics, as Kant wished, is a work of reason, then hospitality is - must be or sooner or later become, the ethically-guided mankind's first rule of conduct.”³⁸

Finally, O'Neill is strongly influenced by Kantian principles and this point is often displayed in her work. For instance, O'Neill has undertaken extensive work on the responsibility and other issues surrounding food aid delegation. O'Neill holds to the fundamental nature of human rights from a Kantian perspective and actively works for the rights of others. More explicitly, she has expressed:

What is meant to work for human rights is to build the institutions and the requirements that create the duties that realize those rights. It can be a mockery to tell someone that they have the right to food when there is nobody who has the duty to provide them with food.³⁹

Accordingly, although Kant's discussion may not specifically call upon refugee camps, and may in fact steer away from what Kant envisioned on how to deal with refugee, they are undoubtedly a reflection of his humanitarian ideals.

³⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, “Living Together in a Full World,” UNHCR, http://www.unhcr.pl/english/newsletter/19/zyjac_razem_w_przepelnionym_swiecie.php.

³⁹ Edward Clay, “Food Aid and Food Security in a Globalized World,” (paper presented at the Food Aid and Security in the 21st Century meeting), http://209.85.129.104/search?q=cache:hRAygEUBxfMJ:www.odi.org.uk/speeches/horizons_nov06/30Nov/Food_aid_EJC.pdf+Onora+O%27Neill+Food+Aid&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=ca.

Chapter 2 – Problems on Refugee Camps: Humanitarian or Bad Policies?

This section will analyze the problems on refugee camps and determine whether the problems associated with aid delegation on refugee camps are an outcome of the core basis of providing relief – humanitarian action, or if the difficulties in providing aid are because of certain policies by relief workers in providing aid. I take the latter reason to be the cause for the challenges on refugee camps.

2.1 – Refugee Camps and Their Problems: My Experience at Buduburam

There is countless literature of the terrible conditions of refugee camps, but for limited length of the essay, along with my personal experiences, I will be concentrating on Buduburam, a Liberian refugee camp in Ghana. Buduburam was established by the UNHCR in 1990 and is home to about 40 000 Liberian refugees, with more than 25 000 children. My time on camp was not very long, about three months, however I think I spent enough time there to notice the poor and sometimes dangerous conditions of camp. The extremely poor sanitation system and lack of healthcare, food and protection was astounding. The actual definition of a refugee is one who flees their home country for refuge and protection and, as mentioned before, is a(n) (indirect) practical implication of Kant's philosophical writings. Life on camp, I would argue failed to provide adequate refuge and protection. My discussion of life on Budaburam will consist of my recollection along with a fellow volunteer's, Matthew Phelps', journal entries that he was kind enough to let me use for the purposes of this paper.

→ Sanitation System

The sanitation system, of lack thereof, was either provided by the UNHCR or the local NGO camp, “Children Better Way”, and consisted of a drainage system of open sewers. The “wealthier” refugees on camp were able to afford “toilets” which in actuality meant an out-house toilet consisting of a 10-foot deep hole into the ground. Unfortunately, these toilets were seldom found as most people could not afford them and, hence, most of the refugees would simply relieve themselves right over the drain or any other place on camp they felt was suitable. The problem with relieving oneself right over the drains was that there were large amounts of garbage and other sediments that would block the flow of water. This would, in turn, result in a number of diseases. For example, the stagnant water flow would make malaria more prominent on camp because the malaria carrying mosquitoes had a place to lay their eggs (as they require still water). The raw sewage, the mixture of human feces with rotting garbage and perhaps a few small dead animals sitting in the intense humidity, would be a safe haven for a number of diseases including hepatitis A, hepatitis C and cholera, not to mention an unpleasant odor.

→ Healthcare

The lack of adequate healthcare was also quite astounding. The UNHCR did have a clinic on camp but they were extremely under resourced and staffed to deal with the amount of healthcare needed on camp. There would be at least fifty to seventy people in a cue for one doctor. Moreover, the clinic was geared towards providing immediate medical aid rather than educating or dealing with potential illnesses in the future. For instance, if a patient was fortunate enough to see the doctor they often times could not afford the medication needed (the malaria pills were the most often case) and were provided with only aspirin as a remedy.

→ Food

Food aid was not provided on camp. The UNCHR had initially provided some food when the camp had first been created but had halted the program a number of years later when they believed that the refugees could either: be repatriated back into Liberia or had developed a minimal type of economy on camp that would allow them to purchase food themselves. However, more often than not, this was not the case and, consequently, refugees had to attain food by stealing, picking it off the floor or asking volunteers on camp for money to buy food. This fact undoubtedly caused tension to increase as neighbours would often steal from neighbours and the situation caused much frustration among the refugees. This suspicion and frustration leads me to my final point about life on Buduburam, that being the lack of protection.

→ Protection

There was minimal if any protection on camp. With regard to the lack of food on camp, sometimes there would be instances in which volunteers would give out their leftover food. For instance, two weeks into our program, and perhaps still incredibly naïve, my fellow volunteers and I decided that we would attempt to rotate our leftover food to the families in our “zone”. For example, the first night family A would get the leftover food, followed by family B the next night, followed by family C the next night and so on. My fellow volunteers and I were quite excited in coming up with this plan. It was a win – win situation: we would be able to provide every family in our zone with food once a week while not wasting our leftovers. The plan was a disaster to say the least. The very first night one of the children from family B, Prince, came to collect the leftovers. Less than fifteen minutes after he left we heard a lot of commotion outside our house and came to find that five other kids in our zone had ambushed Prince for the food, broke half of his ribs and almost successfully managed to kill him had we not been able to get him to the hospital in time. The volunteers and myself were at least partly responsible for what happened to Prince. It was our

foolishness in attempting to give out food in a rather blind manner without considering possible repercussions. Had we fully appreciated the situation beforehand, I highly doubt we would take the same measures.

Buduburam is just one example of the poor conditions on refugee camps and it is by no means one of the worst. In order to further depict the deprived standard of living on refugee camps, and not to delve into the numerous amount of literature that speaks of it, I will just highlight the incident in 1973 in which Palestinian refugees in the Bourj al Shemali camp went on strike against the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA).⁴⁰ The refugees argued that the aid provided was not at all sufficient. The average budget of the UNRWA towards the Palestinian project was \$34 million per year but divided per person, it only came out to \$2.50 per month, an amount that was expected to cover food, shelter, education, health, water supply and sanitation for 1.5 million people.⁴¹ The refugees residing at this camp, along with those in surrounding camps, decided to block donations by the UNRWA and deny UNRWA employees access to the camp until some basic demands for improved conditions were met. Their demands included a regular water supply, a doctor to be present during weekdays, a garbage collection, fair distribution of aid and drainage should be provided for the sewage in camp.⁴²

2.2 - Problem in Humanitarian Ideals or Fallible Policies?

Refugee camps do entail a number of problems. It has been noted by an analyst that, “they (refugee camps) should be introduced only when there is no other viable option available.”⁴³

⁴⁰ “A Strike Against UNRWA,” *MERIP Reports* 21 (1973), <http://www.jstor.org/view/00477265/di011377/01p0090d/0>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Andrew S. Natsios, *US Foreign Policy and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Conneticut: The Center with Strategic and International Studies, 1997), 151.

Accordingly, one can make the argument that humanitarian action should be terminated because of the poor and sometimes dangerous conditions of refugee camps. This argument assumes, however, that it is the humanitarian ideal that is the reason for the unfortunate conditions on refugee camps. I do not take this to be the case. Rather, the bases of the problem, I argue lies in specific policy approaches carried out by the international community towards providing aid on refugee camps.

2.2.1 – Do Not Blame Humanitarianism

Humanitarianism cannot be responsible for the problems associated with refugee camps. Humanitarianism, in all the actions that it entails, is justified by the conception of human rights, as displayed in my discussion of Kant. Human rights are those rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled and, accordingly, should never be deprived of. There are established human right instruments, refugee law, for example, that enable people to ensure that their human rights are not violated. These traditions, I think, need to be accepted at this point. Examining the problems associated with such humanitarian implementations, such as those displayed on refugee camps, runs the risk of de-legitimizing humanitarianism at its core and, in turn, question humanitarian implementations across the globe including, humanitarian law, for example, and the credible work of humanitarian organizations. I think at this point, the international community needs to take for granted such humanitarian ideals; questioning the humanitarian ideals because its implementations would be extremely problematic. Further, no realization of a humanitarian ideal will be perfect. Many, if not all, humanitarian implementation are flawed and have problems but to discredit them would be ineffective because one would be left with no other viable option.

Hence, rather than humanitarian ideals which are the cause of the problems associated with refugee camps, I would argue specific policies on camps need to be rectified in order to deal with the challenges.

2.3 Problem With Refugee Policies

The problem with refugee camps is that the assistance that is provided on refugee camps often undergoes a short-term relief with disregard for the particular sociological and cultural context livelihood of the refugees which, in turn, can have dangerous consequences. This point, I think can be used to explain the challenges that the refugees on Buduburam had to encounter. That is, the problems associated with the (lack of) sanitation, healthcare, food and protection system, were a result of the short-term relief oriented aid, with little regard for the particular dynamics of the situation. The next section will attempt to describe just this.

2.3.1 – Short-Term Solutions vs. Long-Term

Because NGOs are often incapable of appreciating the socio-political history, immediate and temporary aid is often the answer. This, in effect, can cause long-term dependence and weaken the capacity of the local population to create a sustainable, secure and self-reliant life in their new environments.⁴⁴ Contrary to popular belief, refugee camps need not necessarily be short term and can, as displayed in the past, become more of permanent settlements than momentary areas of livelihood. It is for this reason that humanitarian relief should be directed towards humanitarian development.

⁴⁴ Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks & Joke Schrijvers, eds., *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 190.

There are two radical positions that have been outlined regarding the issue of humanitarian aid: either that humanitarian aid should be strictly separate from humanitarian development or that humanitarian aid is not enough and that humanitarian agencies should concentrate on development along with relief.⁴⁵ According to the first view, which favours relief over development, humanitarian aid should be provided as only emergency relief from a neutral stand, whereas development should be undertaken by those who are responsible for such projects, including development oriented agencies. The second view, especially in light of the fact that refugees sometimes reside on refugee camps for decades, adheres to the belief that there needs to be ‘a more human response to refugee needs.’⁴⁶ The view that refugees, since they cannot and sometimes never return home, should be seen as part of the host country and not as separate aliens was put forward more than twenty years ago. It was then in the 1990s that it was even seen as ‘dehumanizing’ not to take advantage of the development potential that refugees could contribute to their host state.⁴⁷

One of the core problems with humanitarian action in general is that, all too often, it is undertaken with the absence of a serious-long-term policy with respect to the target population and, hence, fails to assist the refugees in finding durable solutions.⁴⁸ There are problems of refugees residing in camps with a passive, bored, despaired and dependent nature.⁴⁹ These problems can be resolved by undertaking in a more developmental approach rather than a pure relief effort that is often exercised by humanitarian workers in refugee camps.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks & Joke Schrijvers, eds., *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 191.

⁴⁸ Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian Action in War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 26.

⁴⁹ Andrew S. Natsios, *US Foreign Policy and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Conneticut: The Center with Strategic and International Studies, 1997), 151.

There are a number of reasons why humanitarian relief is favoured by some more than humanitarian development including both conceptual and political motives.

It may be beneficial here, before I begin my discussion on the reasons why humanitarian relief is favoured over humanitarian development, to briefly outline the difference between immediate relief and sustainable development.

Table 1: Ideal-typical comparison between relief and sustainable development⁵⁰

Factor	Relief	Sustainable Development
Objectives	Alleviation of immediate, basic needs of aid recipients	Improvement of standard of living
Nature of needs	Physical, psychological	Economic, social, political
Type of Intervention	Delivery of material provisions and initial reconstruction	Quantitative and qualitative changes in ongoing socio-economic processes
Aid characteristics	Short-term, temporary (external))	Long-term (embedded)
Management characteristic	Donor-driven	Recipient-focused
Main foci	Top-down, <i>dirigiste</i> Delivery, speed, logistics and output	Bottom-up, participatory Underlying processes, long-

⁵⁰ Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks & Joke Schrijvers, eds., *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 171.

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Firstly, with regard to conceptual reasons, there is the belief that ‘gradual process is the normal pattern of development’.⁵¹ Accordingly, aid should be directed at providing minimal humanitarian relief to provide the basic necessities while development should be allowed to run its ‘natural course’. For instance, in the Netherlands, during the late 1990s, there were harsh criticisms of the UN negotiations about development aid of the then Minister of Development Cooperation with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Netherlands was more comfortable with providing immediate relief and was rather sceptical about implementing developmental programs. Consequently, the Netherlands’ Advisory Council for International Affairs (1998) advised that humanitarian aid adhere to its original mandate, the original mandate being the ‘emergency package’.⁵² More specifically, the emergency package they proposed was to be directed towards people in crisis situations only and distinguished clear-cut stages of emergency aid from separate forms of strategies for reconstruction. This type of thinking is undoubtedly often applied to refugee camps. There is a strong held belief that refugee camps are of a temporary nature and, accordingly, there is often the view that relief only should be provided. This, however, becomes problematic when, as mentioned previously, “temporary” refugee camps become more of settlements. Refugees, in these circumstances have a twofold disadvantage: firstly they are deemed as no longer a crisis situation

⁵¹ Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks & Joke Schrijvers, eds., *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 169.

⁵² Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks & Joke Schrijvers, eds., *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 193.

and, hence, unable to attain aid and, secondly, they are oftentimes unable to provide for themselves because of the lack of development initiative taken on refugee camps.

The problem with the belief that development is a “natural process” is, however, that there is not much empirical or analytical validity and should be replaced by one which takes into account the diversity of humanitarian relief situations and acknowledge that development programs, along with immediate relief, is necessarily in providing humanitarian aid.⁵³

The second set of motives behind providing humanitarian relief deals with that of a political nature. At the end of those providing humanitarian assistance, usually NGOs, relief is provided without many, if any, conditions attached.⁵⁴ More particularly, relief aid is most often supplied on the basis of humanitarian criteria without any political conditions on the receiving countries, or communities in the case of refugee camps. Humanitarian relief, in this light, is a kind of blind and immediate assisting technique directed towards providing aid without any externalities or other factors to be taken into consideration. Thus, an extreme position could hold that delivering unrestricted humanitarian relief is as ‘simple as you can get’. Implementing development programs, on the other hand, requires much more time, effort and resources. For instance, as displayed in the table above, development operations, in comparison to providing immediate humanitarian aid, requires NGOs, or humanitarian agencies, to engage with the particular economic, social and political atmosphere of the environment they are operating in. Moreover, it is long-term commitment that is directed towards bottom-up initiatives with participation on part of the recipients. These are just a few examples that display how development requires a more committed

⁵³ Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks & Joke Schrijvers, eds., *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 170.

⁵⁴ Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks & Joke Schrijvers, eds., *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 171.

and complex approach, and hence is the more favourable approach is undertaking in humanitarian action, in comparison to the immediate remedies of providing humanitarian relief.

There is a special emphasis on short term belief because of its ability to immediately display successfulness. That is, successes in delivering clean water and lowering short starvation rates by providing food can be translated into immediate good feelings for the distant constituencies the international refugee relief regime serves. This immediate required perceived successfulness is necessary for the donors. Donors require predictability and hope to see their funds and resources being beneficial. This is where the importance of press comes into play. The more prestigious and high-profile positions in agencies, such as the UNHCR, MSF and Oxfam are not doctors, nurses or engineers, but are those who are responsible for handling the press. How well the medical or engineering staff actually performs is irrelevant unless it can be presented in way as to be appreciated by the donors.⁵⁵

Crisis by its definition is unpredictable. It is for reasons that NGOs in refugee camps seek to routinize planning, be it for the standardization of water supply systems, food pipelines, or medical protocols. In effect, they seek to routinize crisis management. Planning, in this way, is undertaken to eliminate the unpredictability in operations. The irony is though, planning requires creating predictability out of something that is unpredictable. One can display the problem by examining Oxfam in Ngara. In the water sector, the Oxfam emergency program was used to good effect. However, the problem was that the initial creation of it established bureaucratic assumptions that the available procedures could not deal with. This was not the issue of the technology per se, but the assumption that the initial influx would end. This assumption was embedded in water-systems engineering, whose principles were based on fixed populations and were inappropriate for

⁵⁵ Tony Waters, *Bureaucratizing the Good Samaritan* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 43.

unpredictable refugee populations.⁵⁶ Oxfam, in this face, failed to thoroughly realize the (possible) change in population. It is a fact that refugee populations increase, decrease and alter rapidly. The lack of knowledge or the lack of contraceptives often causes the birth rate to significantly increase, while, in contrast, the size of the population can drastically decrease during the repatriation processes. Accordingly, providing water resources can be incredibly complex if one does not take into account the change in dynamics of the refugee population. Moreover, learning from the Oxfam example, along with taking into account the possible changes in population, international agencies should also be cautious and be prepared to provide resources for years, rather than months.⁵⁷

The importance of long-term geared education is often underestimated but remains a key element for development.⁵⁸ The problem with the current education systems in refugee camps, if they do in fact exist, is that they are short-term projects. Education that is aimed at long-term directives can be incredibly beneficial. Such education can act either as a mobilizing instrument for peace and reconciliation or as a central activity for the purpose of reconstructing the human resources for the country.⁵⁹ There have been approaches by the international community to further the education on refugee camps, namely the studies and programs undertaken by the International Extension College (IEC). More specifically, the IEC documents contain a detailed analysis for NGOs on how to provide a new education program that will foster development in each community of refugees, according to the specifications determined by the refugees themselves and by the agencies working with them.⁶⁰ Education is just one example of how developmental programs on

⁵⁶ Tony Waters, *Bureaucratizing the Good Samaritan* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 239.

⁵⁷ Tony Waters, *Bureaucratizing the Good Samaritan* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 239.

⁵⁸ Gonzalo Retamal & Ruth Aedo-Richmond, eds., *Education as a Humanitarian Response* (London: Cassell, 1998), 3.

⁵⁹ Gonzalo Retamal & Ruth Aedo-Richmond, eds., *Education as a Humanitarian Response* (London: Cassell, 1998), 5.

⁶⁰ Gonzalo Retamal & Ruth Aedo-Richmond, eds., *Education as a Humanitarian Response* (London: Cassell, 1998), 6.

refugee camps can be extremely advantageous for the situation on refugee camps and for an improved situation once/if repatriated.

→ Criticisms of Development

Despite the advantages of developmental programs as opposed to humanitarian relief, critics are not shy from pointing out the negative aspects of humanitarian development. Specifically, with regard to refugee camps, operating a development program is far from an easy task to undertake. As mentioned before, development requires institutional reform which is often a difficult mission and requires long-term commitment. The fact is that practices and customs within refugee communities, or any community for that matter, are deeply embedded and altering them requires endurance, not to mention political will which is also rare.⁶¹ Even in cases in which positive developmental directives are taken, success of the projects remains questionable. For instance, it is often the case, with reference to refugee camps, that structures and activities are designed in certain ways that may contribute to the development of the camp. This seems to be quite a positive provision for refugees and their development capacity. The problem is however, this development provided on refugee camps does little, if anything, for the future development of the refugees once they get repatriated. It is difficult, according to some critics, “to imagine what type of useful development initiatives can be designed related to their future environment, still far way in time and place.”⁶² However, to reiterate, refugee camps are not necessarily temporary places of residence and become more of a permanent settlement. Buduburam is an example of this case. In many of my conversations, especially with children who had been born and raised on camp, they believed that Buduburam was more than there temporary place of residence. Many of them feared

⁶¹ Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks & Joke Schrijvers, eds., *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 176.

⁶² Ibid.

going back to Liberia for many reasons and hoped to stay on camp indefinitely. When Ghana played in the World Cup, for example, many refugees were extremely patriotic towards Ghana whom, for many of, had become home.

Even if this is not the case, that is, even if a refugee camp is in fact a temporary settlement in which the refugees get repatriated, development initiatives are still useful and beneficial. One of the problems with providing humanitarian relief, without any development initiatives is that it can hamper future development in the refugees' home country. Aid can often have unintended negative side effects what weaken local coping mechanisms and capacities. For instance, humanitarian relief can provide disincentives to restart local economic activity after a civil war, genocide, or any other type of emergency. These disincentive sentiments can get transferred to the home country and can result in a situation in which the abuse and diversion of humanitarian aid can actually prolong or sustain emergency/tension situations. For instance, aid can be manipulated to serve the interests of the parties in conflict including warlords and profiteers.⁶³ This point will be more thoroughly examined later on in the essay.

Developmental programs, on the other hand, assist the refugees on being self-reliant both on camp and back in their home country. The survival strategies of the local population, be it on a refugee camp or elsewhere, are most often overlooked, but they are invaluable advantages which ought to be sustained.⁶⁴ Presumably, developmental programs on refugee camps would involve significant participation by the refugee population themselves. Accordingly, the refugees in these cases would not simply be provided with short-term humanitarian relief but would be taught certain

⁶³ Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks & Joke Schrijvers, eds., *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 176.

⁶⁴ Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson & Francis Grunewald, eds., *Responding to Emergencies and Fostering Development* (London: St Martin's Press, 1999), 31.

traits and skills that would assist them in building up their own institutions and infrastructures that they see fit. These skills and traits would especially be useful if/when they returned home as such abilities would be needed in war-torn countries.

The previous section has analyzed how international agencies aim at humanitarian relief as opposed to humanitarian development on refugee camps which, in turn, has negative effects on the refugees both on camp and when they return home. Next, I will examine how relief organizations also ignore the particular political-socio and cultural context of the refugee camp which, too, has dangerous consequences.

2.3.2 - Ignoring the Particular Dynamics on Refugee Camps

Emergency aid always had a social context.⁶⁵ According to Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson and Francois Grunewald the risk factor in providing humanitarian aid lies somewhere in between “Manichean empathy and sanitary colonialism”. What the authors mean by this statement is that humanitarian workers oftentimes believe that they can have control over the ‘good’ or the ‘bad’ and that support for a supposed just cause supersedes the respect to remain within the parameters of the mission.

One of the principle problems with providing aid, in general and especially on refugee camps, is that one often limits the aid to the distribution of survival good and services with little or no regard for the particular political-social dynamics on the ground.⁶⁶ Neither International organizations nor humanitarian aid workers, in the like, have been able or willing of appreciated the

⁶⁵ Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson & Francis Grunewald, eds., *Responding to Emergencies and Fostering Development* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1999), 26.

⁶⁶ Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson & Francis Grunewald, eds., *Responding to Emergencies and Fostering Development* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1999), 20.

unique situation they are dealing with.⁶⁷ According to Philippe Biberson, a foreign correspondent and the President for Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), the ideology that motivates actors in aid programs can be described as, “the need to provide a solution here and now to safeguard the vital needs of individuals without necessarily considering what happened in the past and what will happen afterwards”.⁶⁸ For instance, frequently aid providers feel the need to display grand “compassionate” gestures by delegating a large lump sum of aid at one time. “The simple fact of acting implies that ‘doing something is good in itself’.” This “good act” can, in turn, run of risk of concealing suffering and misery behind a discreet “veil of charity.”⁶⁹ That is, there is the argument that humanitarian aid projects are carried out by western countries provide aid in order to allow them to get away with doing the bare minimum and not resolving the underlying problems. There are those scholars who point out that in the western world, the rise of exclusion and individualism provides the base for humanitarian programs that reduce the meaning of humanitarianism to first aid assistance and glorify aid operations as incredibly significant.⁷⁰ By undertaking in such “humanitarian” acts, and presenting such actions to be extremely beneficial for those in need of aid, those who provide relief are able to keep their distance for tackling certain essential challenges. These challenges are those that result in the need for humanitarian relief in the first place.

Some aid workers have fallen into this trap but past events have displayed that simplistic short-cuts can cause more harm than good.⁷¹ Previous examples, Oxfam in Ngara and the (attempted) food rotation in Buduburam, have adequately displayed this point. The fact remains, however, that aid, no matter what forms it comes in or where it is delegated, cannot escape a

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson & Francis Grunewald, eds., *Responding to Emergencies and Fostering Development* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1999), 26.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson & Francis Grunewald, eds., *Responding to Emergencies and Fostering Development* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1999), 30.

particular (sociological or cultural) context. The aid delegation project, undertaken by NGOs and the like, has gone off course and its impact has been hindered mainly because of the misunderstandings on the part of agencies, donors and public authorities, along with the media and public opinion, to a lesser extent.⁷²

Pirotte et al. describe the risks that humanitarian aid confronts. More specifically, they describe the risk of aggravating the social dialogue. That is, aid operations predict the needs of those receiving aid, however, in trying to alleviate their immediate need for necessities, aid operators often fail to adequately preserve the fabric of local structures.⁷³ For example, to provide another example from my time at Buduburam, there was the issue of the children doing chores for the elders. The children on camp, most of them, would do many chores and run a number of errands for elders, often without question, including the international volunteers. There was an instance, one month into our stay there, in which one of my fellow volunteer, Martha, decided that she would offer money if one of our neighbours, a child, would pick up some supplies she needed from the other side of camp. It was the case that this child, Joshua, was in desperate need of money as his mother needed malaria medication and, as volunteers are not able to “hand out money”, the volunteer figured that it would be suitable to provide Joshua with monetary compensation for his services. However, we realized a problem when Joshua’s mother approached Martha and started to yell at her for paying Joshua for doing an errand. It is custom and the norm for children to perform chores for elders without receiving anything, at least material, in return. Although Martha did not realize it at the time, she had disrupted an aspect of their tradition. This is just one example how

⁷² Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson & Francis Grunewald, eds., *Responding to Emergencies and Fostering Development* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1999), 26.

⁷³ Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson & Francis Grunewald, eds., *Responding to Emergencies and Fostering Development* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1999), 26.

providing aid without paying particular attention to the socio-cultural context can tamper with the present culture.

2.4 - Dangerous Consequences

International agencies providing humanitarian aid on refugee camps with minimal regard for the actual situation of the dynamics of the camp run the risk of empowering guerilla groups. In refugee camps throughout the developed world, guerilla movements receive protection, sustenance and a dependent population from which to gain legitimacy and garner more manpower. For instance, refugee camps in Pakistan harboured mujahidin fighting the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul; the humanitarian aid on refugee camps in Honduras assisted the Contras in their war against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua; and the financial aid to the Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand helped to support the Khmer Rouge.⁷⁴

Aid resources can create a situation of intensified conflict. As aid resources are seen as a form of economic and political power, guerilla groups or people engaged in conflict will seek to control them.⁷⁵ It has been displayed that aid's economic and political resources influence conflict in a number of ways, all of which are relevant to the delegation of aid on refugee camps. Firstly, aid resources are often stolen by warriors and used to support armies and buy weapons.⁷⁶ Armies steal food, blankets, vehicles, and communications systems either to directly support them or to be sold in order to purchase needed supplies.⁷⁷ Another way in which aid can fuel conflict is through its distribution. That is, when aid is directed towards certain groups, with other sections of the

⁷⁴ William Maley, Charles Sampford & Ramesh Thakur, eds., *From Civil Strife to Civil Society* (New York: United Nations University Press, 2003), 284.

⁷⁵ Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1999), 38.

⁷⁶ Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian Action in War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 33.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

population getting the short end of the aid stick, competition between the people is fueled.⁷⁸ Because of their limited resources, aid groups set priorities and determine where the need is most needed and design aid programs accordingly. However, in doing this, they can reinforce subgroup identities and draw attention to (forgotten) intergroup differences or clashes.⁷⁹ This point, also, was illustrated at Buduburam. Volunteers, along with a few NGOs, would donate supplies to camp, such as toiletries, clothes, stationary and so forth. Because of the limited supplies the aid was often delegated to those that were deemed “most worthy”. Oftentimes these would be those people who was diagnosed with HIV and ostracized from the rest of the community or those families that were especially struggling because of an unexpected death or sickness in their family. These were the type of people/families that would get the supplies. The problem was however that there would be instances in which the supplies ended up with families that were part of the same Liberian tribe. This turned out to be quite a serious problem because, even though the civil war had technically ended more than a decade ago, tensions would reemerge and people would realign themselves with those from their own groups. The situation even resulted in a death during our time on camp. Hence, aid distribution on refugee camps, with little regard for the particular environment, can increase inter-group tensions and have dangerous consequences.

Finally, there are also substitution effects on aid. That is, in some cases humanitarian aid can completely fulfill the needs of civilians including food, shelter, safety, and health services that significant local resources are hence free to pursue their warring mission.⁸⁰ When international organizations provide all the resources necessary for the community to survive, leaders of the group, in turn, surrender their responsibility. In the case of warlords, they are more inclined to

⁷⁸ Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1999), 46.

⁷⁹ Liesbet Heyse, *Choosing the Lesser Evil* (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006), 11.

⁸⁰ Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1999), 46.

redefine their responsibility only in terms of military power. Even if initially the warlords were committed to peace, the aid provided allows these leaders to concentrate only on military ends.

Chapter 3 – Recommendations

Having previously outlined the fallible policies in providing aid and their dangerous consequences, in this section I propose some recommendations in an attempt to rectify the challenges posed on refugee camps.

3.1 – *Doing Your Homework*

As noted above, because of the particular political-socio context, aid must be delivered with careful consideration.⁸¹ Even though humanitarian aid is well intentioned, it is sometimes betrayed by its implementation. Putting more emphasis on the means than ends of the project can result in an unpleasant situation for the refugees to say the least. Once again, one needs to analyze the particularities of the situation in order to avoid the many challenges that are associated with humanitarian relief.⁸²

As the situation on the ground is constantly changing, humanitarian workers need to repeatedly re-evaluate and challenge the validity and quality of the action, in order to adequately decide how to and if to carry out their operation(s).⁸³ Humanitarian agencies need to be aware of the constant changing environment around them. The ICRC, for instance, acknowledges the importance of regular analysis trends in conflict zones in which it operates. Such operations require detail examinations of the situation on a case by case basis. For example, the ICRC undertakes in early analysis of social and political trends in an attempt to predict potential humanitarian needs

⁸¹ Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson & Francis Grunewald, eds., *Responding to Emergencies and Fostering Development* (London: St Martin's Press, 1999), 27.

⁸² Amelia Branczik, "Humanitarian Aid and Development Assistance," *Beyond Intractability*, http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/humanitarian_aid/.

⁸³ Claire Pirotte, Bernard Husson & Francis Grunewald, eds., *Responding to Emergencies and Fostering Development* (London: St Martin's Press, 1999), 32

that may arise in a case of internal conflict or armed violence.⁸⁴ Thus, the ICRC's deep analysis of certain political and social dynamics enables them to deter problems when implementing their programs.

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible to undertake in constant re-evaluation of the environment if the humanitarian project needs to answer to a single donor, political party, or the like. Without financial independence, periodic evaluations are often biased, as their overarching goal is to carryout the mandate given by their superior. Independence, then, is key.⁸⁵

Another issue that is connected with the issue of the changing circumstances on the ground is that of staff turnover in humanitarian projects. There is quite a high aid worker turnover in NGOs and this can be problematic as new employees may not always have an all-encompassing view of the political-socio nature on the ground and its dynamic structures.⁸⁶ Again, with regard to the ICRC, this particular organization seems to be more effective in its missions require because of their careful recruiting and training tactics. The actual relief workers are vital in humanitarian programs and certain things needs to be taken into account in determining a particular staff for a certain job. For instance, in many instances it may be beneficial to employ the same aid workers from the beginning to end of a project so that those that implement the operations would, presumably, have the best knowledge of past and complex structures of the particular society. Hence, staff hiring and training is also important in determining the success in undertaking humanitarian action.

⁸⁴ Liesbeth Lijnzaad, Johanna van Sambeek & Bahia Tahzib-Lie, *Making the Voice of Humanity Heard* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004), 6.

⁸⁵ Kathleen O'Toole, "Refugee Manipulation on Ethical Dilemma for Humanitarian Aid" *Stanford University*, Nov. 17, 1999, <http://news-service.stanford.edu/pr/99/991117manipulate.html>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

3.2 – The Problem of “Too Much Homework”

Presumably, having undertaken in an extensive examination of the particular sociological and cultural context on the ground or, done the “homework”, so to speak, would result in a situation in which past and present clashes or tensions between different groups in the community would be acknowledged. This, in turn, runs into the problem of making moral judgments between people and sectors of the population. Blindly delegating with minimal knowledge, or regard for that matter, of the previous conflicts between groups is one thing while “knowing” the history of a conflict and providing aid is quite another. People, are often inclined to label others as victims and oppressors, with some more worthy than others. This already is the situation in many relief programs, especially on refugee camps. Refugee aid implies the presence of war and, hence, inevitably requires evaluating enemies and making moral judgments.⁸⁷ This is only escalated by undertaking in a detailed contextualization of the situations.

This problem, I think, can be solved by adhering to a neutrality principle. That is, one needs to keep in mind, that one goes into refugee camps, or any other areas of need, in hopes to help assist and not to undertake in value judgments. Ideally, and perhaps unrealistically, aid should be equally distributed towards those in need. However, it is more often the case that there are some in worse conditions than others and, consequently, certain people require more relief and attention than others. Nevertheless, providing “more” aid to those “more” in need should not be affected by one’s individual attitude toward that person, because of past events or the like. However, at the same time, one should be aware that there exist different groups within the population and be sensitive to the particular dynamics so as to avoid certain conflicts. For example, in a situation in which the population is fragmented on a tribal basis, it would be beneficial, although obviously not

⁸⁷ Tony Waters, *Bureaucratizing the Good Samaritan* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 49.

always possible, to avoid providing more aid to one tribe than the other. Hence, research of the situation is important to avoid potential tension but, at the same time, too much analysis of the history should not enable relief workers to make moral judgments.

Further, there is also the problem, in thoroughly researching the dynamics of the situation, of becoming perhaps “too culturally sensitive” and potentially undermining the humanitarian goal. For instance, there is the risk of accepting, after having “understood” the social dynamics, violence against women. This, I think, is a reoccurring problem and was all too evident on the refugee camp. The following excerpt is taken from Matthew’s journal entry:

I awoke this morning to the sound of a young girl screaming bloody murder. I peaked out through the bars and mosquito net in my window and saw a half naked young girl getting a beating with a stick by her father. Our water guy (the person who gets the water from out well for our bucket showers), who was between our neighbours I thought I was looking at him, cheerfully waved and greeted me good morning, completely oblivious to the action going on behind him. Later, as when I left to go to work, I noticed that she was tied up in front of their house.⁸⁸

These were just one of the many instances of women abuse that occurred on camp and, presumably, one of the least severe as the most dangerous situations most often did not happen around where the international volunteers resided (so as a way not to deter future volunteers). In a number of my conversations, too many for my comfort in fact, about why the UNHCR or World Vision, or any other international organization on camp did not attempt to halt domestic abuse. Some claimed that they were not aware of such violence while others, a representative from World Vision, stated that it was not in their “mandate to deal with such issues” or, even more disturbing, that “violence against women is the norm amongst Liberians” said Erin, the person in charge of the international volunteers. The problem sometimes arises when a person gets too involved with the particular situation on the ground and losses site of the overall goal. Erin, for example, had lived on camp for more than a year and had, presumably, learned much about Liberian customs and “norms”. The

⁸⁸ Matthew Phelps Journal Entry, June, 2006.

problem was, however, when such knowledge interfered with or prevented Erin, or any other humanitarian worker or agency from fully realizing their humanitarian obligations towards refugees. It is all too easy to get caught into the particular politics and cultural traits of the community and hence, periodic mental or physical distance from the situation is sometimes required.

Working on refugee camps and being a humanitarian relief worker is a difficult task and sometimes its simpler to make excuses for failing to act by stating that the unjust situation, such as domestic violence, is simply part of the culture and that doing something to stop the problem would be overstepping the boundaries. It is sometimes the case that humanitarian relief workers become completely involved in the situation and lose site of what they are working towards. For instance, having to deal with such dilemmas can make people ask themselves questions like, “What is the purpose of my role in humanitarian aid?” or, “What am I doing here?”⁸⁹ The following is a journal entry from a humanitarian relief worker:

How can you work with people who have gone through such horrific experiences? It is not easy. It means becoming completely involved. In the first year, nearly everybody on the team suffered nightmares. This was basically the case after Tuesday, the day we received people. Hardly anyone on the team could get up on Wednesday morning.⁹⁰

Becoming completely involved, however, runs the risk of undermining the humanitarian goal. Although violating cultural parameters can in fact occur, this cannot be the case in issues of blatant unjust violence; domestic abuse is unjust and should not be sanctioned by international agencies on refugee camps. However, one can argue that had these people not been in a refugee camp, exposed to international relief organizations, domestic abuse, or supposed cultural practices

⁸⁹ Carlos Martin Beristain, *Humanitarian Aid Work: A Critical Approach* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 97.

⁹⁰ Carlos Martin Beristain, *Humanitarian Aid Work: A Critical Approach* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 101.

would occur. But the fact remains that in this instant, in the case of refugee camps, the international community has the ability and hence an obligation to prevent such wrongdoings from happening. To reiterate, a refugee camp is intended to provide refuge and protection but such protection can only occur when international agencies on camps live up to their responsibilities of ensuring safety.

Conclusion

Refugee camps are created to serve two purposes: to set up an establishment of displaced peoples and, more importantly in my opinion, to realize humanitarianism, the type of humanitarianism that is discussed in Kantian works. Although refugee camps do not completely reflect Kant's philosophy, as they steer away from ensuring all the rights that strangers have on foreign soil, they provide, taking into account both political and practical considerations, the best possible option. Although refugee camps are intended to provide a safety and protection for people who have had to flee their countries because of injustices in their home country, this safety and protection is, however, seldom satisfactory. There are a number of problems with refugee camps. People do not receive adequate food, healthcare, protection and proper sanitation facilities. There are those who argue the problems related to refugee camps, or any other humanitarian implementation, are related humanitarian ideals and there are those who argue that difficulties on refugee camps are because of specific policy implementations undertaken by international agencies on camps. I have displayed that the latter is the reason. Program strategies on refugee camps, unfortunately, are often geared towards short terms solutions, with little focus on development, and fail to appreciate the particular social and cultural dynamics of the environments. This, in turn, has dangerous consequences, including increasing tension and violence on camp. This problem can be resolved by exercising more long-term strategies and researching the unique dynamics of the refugee camps. This, too, can entail problems but can be rectified by undertaking in a fine balancing act: being culturally sensitive enough so as to not disrupt the cultural and social dynamics and being distant enough from the dynamics of the refugee camp so as to not lose sight of the goal: realizing humanitarianism.

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