5   The Humanitarian Club
Hierarchy, Networks, and Exclusion

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Does humanitarian governance resemble a hierarchy, market, or network mode of governance? Many of the most enduring and endearing descriptions of humanitarianism map onto a network approach.[1] This is a humanitarian community whose members aspire to save as many lives as possible. Idealized network characteristics are functional for the situations they confront and their principled commitments. Networks are superior to markets and hierarchies when addressing complex, fluid problems – which give complex emergencies their very name – because they facilitate nimble, flexible collective action. Networks also aspire to principles of democracy, egalitarianism, and equality, which match humanitarian principles. Other perspectives, though, use market metaphors and mechanisms to understand humanitarian governance.[2] Importantly, these writings tend to emphasize how markets introduce perverse incentives to aid agencies and drive ineffective and dysfunctional outcomes. In this view, aid agencies are like firms that care about their bottom line, compete for scarce resources, and respond to a contracting environment that generates incentives that can shift the organization's interests from the survival of those in need to its own survival.[3] Humanitarianism is also not a market with lots of firms competing against each other, but rather an oligopoly with a few states, UN agencies, and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) at the top.[4] And as an oligopoly, it resembles a hierarchy. An additional perspective on hierarchy is provided by a critical literature that traces humanitarianism's origins and workings to colonialism and paternalism, with Western actors doing what they can and Southern NGOs and affected populations accepting what they must.[5]

   This chapter argues that contemporary humanitarian governance is best understood as a club that combines features of both networks and

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[1] Ramalingam 2014; Collinson 2016, 4; Currion 2018; UN OCHA 2012.
[2] Gottwald 2010; Bennett 2018; and Carbonnier 2015.   [3] Cooley and Ron 2002.
[4] Weiss 2013; Minear and Smilie 2004.   [5] Barnett 2011.

hierarchy. Most applications of the club concept to governance derive from a political economy perspective, and are akin to Miles Kahler's chapter on cartels (Chapter 2), highlighting the benefits to individual actors when a small group of states produce a collective good for themselves or regulate a global problem.[6] In contrast, I develop a sociological alternative. Four overlapping concepts are central to this exercise: field, elite, capital, and durable inequality. The field is a collection of actors that have a common understanding of the field's shared purpose, its rules, and basic practices. It is often created by a selective group that becomes the elite. Elites not only control the preponderance of resources but they also have the "right stuff" that qualifies them to be part of the elite and exclusive clubs. Following Bourdieu and others, this "right stuff" is capital, which has four forms: economic (money), symbolic (identity), social (trust), and cultural (knowledge). Capital in the right kinds and the right amounts provides entrée into the right clubs, and the right clubs also confers status on its members. There is stratification in the club, as there are even in those communities that aspire to egalitarian principles, but they nevertheless have the characteristics of a network. But the club distinguishes insiders from outsiders and has considerable authority to set the rules in its area of governance and consumes most of the resources, leaving outsiders often in the cold. The forms of capital and the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion help to explain the considerable durable inequality that exists within a sphere of governance. Club governance is something of a double entendre: it is "clubby" for its members but can be a force against outsiders.

I apply this argument to humanitarian governance as follows. The first section provides a brief sketch of humanitarianism prior to the 1990s, best characterized as a largely local effort with growing involvement by undertrained international actors that marched to the beat of their own drum. The second section examines the post-Cold War evolution of a club that has the characteristics of a network on the inside and hierarchy on the outside. The primary driver of the change is the rising incidence of and attention to humanitarian emergencies by Western states and the UN. A handful of Western states, UN agencies, and leading Western-based INGOs began to form an exclusive elite that helped to set the rules and build the infrastructure of the humanitarian sector. This elite formed a Humanitarian Club with network-like characteristics, and members had the right kind of capital in the right amount. Although the Club

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[6] For great power club: Carranza 2017; Larson 2018. For nuclear club: Bell 2015. For G7 and G20: Brandi 2019. For financial club: Tsingou 2015. For climate club: Nordhaus 2015; Falkner 2016. For trade club: Lamp 2016.

professed that the humanitarian sector was a community and operated on egalitarianism principles in the spirit of partnership, in practice relations between the Club and outsiders resembles a hierarchy. The much more numerous, Southern agencies became rule-takers and subcontractors, and received a pittance of the resources even though they are the first responders to emergencies and do the bulk of the work that affect their communities. Even worse, when the Western agencies come to town they often smother and displace local efforts.[7] This West casts a giant "shadow of hierarchy."

The third section explores the resilience of the Humanitarian Club and the durable inequality in the humanitarian field. For the last two decades there have been periodic field-wide efforts to change patterns of inclusion and exclusion and shift authority from the West to the South. These efforts are often prompted by claims, from both inside and outside the Club, that humanitarianism is not as effective and legitimate as it might be because of the concentration of power in the hands of a small number of Western-based actors. But they have largely come to naught. One reason for the resilience of the Club is the individual and collective self-interest of its members. Yet a closer look at capital illuminates the structural forces that work to reproduce the status quo but that cannot be traced back to the intentions of privileged actors. Interests are entangled with cultural beliefs that warn against shifting authority to the South for various reasons, including the fear that Southern actors do not have the capacity to act in the best interests of the victims. The Conclusion considers several factors that might push for greater inclusion and the possible that its appearance might mask the continued existence of hierarchy.

The Rise of the Humanitarian Club

Contemporary humanitarian governance arose from three relatively independent historical origins: abolitionism, missionary activity, and colonialism (saving lives and societies); nineteenth-century European wars and the First and Second World Wars (saving soldiers and civilians); and decolonization and the rise of development (moving from relief to reconstruction and welfare).[8] After the Second World War they began to integrate into a humanitarianism that had four defining elements. Humanitarianism was generically defined as providing relief to distant strangers, but relief provision came from the West and went to

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[7] Christian Aid, Save the Children, and Humanitarian Accountability Partnership 2013.
[8] For a review of the history of humanitarianism see Barnett 2011.

the South. This growing activity sometimes supplemented local practices of relief, but often they ran roughshod over them, much to their detriment and to that of the local moral economy.[9] Whereas once humanitarianism was largely dominated by private, voluntary organizations, after the Second World War it became supplanted by the United Nations, Western donors, and Western-funded INGOs. Lastly, aid agencies went from one emergency to another, reinventing the wheel as they did. There were no standard operating procedures, codes of conduct, or formal or informal rules that created a template for action. Many volunteers were trained in emergency medicine and public health, but many others had little or no experience, jumping into the fray believing that all they needed was a can-do attitude and good intentions. INGOs rarely coordinated their activities with each other or with local and national institutions.[10]

The end of the Cold War can be read as either the transformation or the beginning of humanitarian sector: this was the moment when the rather unorganized and motley set of aid agencies began to develop some coherence, coordination, and sets of rules to improve their effectiveness. Various factors produced more demand for and supply of humanitarian governance. The hope was that the end of the Cold War would produce a kinder, gentler world order. For some it did. For others, though, it unleashed once relatively contained and submerged conflicts, producing "new" wars that were creating mass refugee flights, killing, and suffering. With more emergencies than ever before there was a greater demand for emergency relief, leading to more kinds of interventions by more kinds of actors. An increasingly active UN Security Council, working with an expanded notion of international peace and security, began authorizing others to intervene and doing so itself on an unprecedented scale. In response to many actions without structures, in December 1991 the UN passed UNGA/RES/46/182, which put into place many of the crossbeams for the humanitarian sector. States began to pour more money into humanitarian operations, which were funneled through increasingly well-funded international organizations (IOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Sometimes states provided more than money, as they used their militaries to move mountains of aid and protect aid workers on the ground. Many existing NGOs got bigger, and a growing number of emergencies and an expanding level of resources grew the population of aid agencies. This rapid and impressive growth, though, meant that there were more actors descending on an emergency than

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[9] Boateng 2018.   [10] Boateng 2018; Juma and Suhrke 2002.

ever before, creating more confusion than effective action on the ground. More was not better. In response, a handful of the leading states, UN agencies, and NGOs began to try and develop coordination mechanisms, common rules, standards, codes of conduct, and other regulatory guidelines.[11]

Humanitarianism began to develop the qualities of a field: "a collection of actors that interact with one another on the basis of shared (which is not to say consensual) understanding about the boundaries and purpose of the field, relationships to others in the field, and the rules governing legitimate action."[12] Before discussing the elements, it bears emphasizing that the boundaries and rules of the field are openly and continuously contested, fueled by principled differences and self-interest, for the winning side can gain resources and status.[13] Nevertheless, fields have several defining qualities.

First, members of the field have a shared understanding of its purpose and what is at stake.[14] For those in the humanitarian field it is a humanitarian imperative – action should be taken to prevent or alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster or conflict, and nothing should override this principle.[15] In other words, at stake are lives and humanity itself. The humanitarian imperative is intertwined with principles that shape how humanitarianism is supposed to be done. Four principles have become central.[16] Humanity, which commands attention to all people. Impartiality, which requires that assistance be based on need and not discriminate on the basis of nationality, race, religion, gender, or political opinion. Neutrality, which demands that humanitarian organizations refrain from taking part in hostilities or from any action that either benefits or disadvantages the parties to the conflict. And independence, which means that financial and other forms of assistance should not be connected to any of the parties directly involved in armed conflicts or who have a vested interest in the outcome. These principles are both constitutive and regulative. They help to define what humanitarian *is*. They also helped aid agencies get access to victims. If combatants and others with authority and arms perceive aid agencies as helping victims alone, then they are more likely to get access. The moment they are perceived as having ulterior motives they risk losing their humanitarian space and become suspects and targets.

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[11] Barnett 2005; Kennedy 2019; Krause 2013; Roth 2016.
[12] Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 9.
[13] Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 10, 15; Emirbayer and Johnston 2008, 6; Kauppi and Madsen 2014.
[14] Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Jenkins 1992, 84.   [15] Sphere Project 2018, 28.
[16] Sphere Project 2018, 6; Pictet 1979; Weiss 1999.

Second, and related, fields have rules to define what counts as legitimate and effective action. These rules can evolve without a guiding hand, but often leading actors gather in formal settings to debate, define, and revise what counts as competent and legitimate action. In response to their own desire to improve their effectiveness and pressure from donors, INGOs played a leading role in establishing the rules governing relief, including voluntary minimum standards of care and accountability to affected populations. Their debates and decisions fed into sector-wide discussions, often occurring at the UN, between states, UN agencies, and a handful of INGOs, resulting in the adoption and revision of new rules and reform initiatives such as the Humanitarian Response Review in 1995 and the "transformational agenda" in 2005.[17] The process of creating rules for legitimate action led to a growing rationalization of the field, which has several dimensions. It includes developing methodologies for calculating results, abstract rules to guide standardized responses, and procedures to improve efficiency in identifying the best means to achieve specified ends. It includes bureaucratization, with growing specialization, spheres of competence, and standardization to drive means–ends calculations. And it includes professionalization, with a growing demand for expertise both in individual fields of intervention such as sanitation and in humanitarianism more generally.[18] The concerted effort to rationalize the field began in the mid-1990s, and because of two major factors. Aid workers began to confront soul-shaking failures in places like Rwanda, leading them to question their professionalism and knowledge. From then on aid agencies began to chant the mantra "do no harm" and acknowledge that emergency relief was no place for amateurs. Donors also began to insist on specialized knowledge and to know that their money was being well spent with evidence to prove it – or risk their funding.

Third, a field can, and usually does, consist of actors of different kinds – firms, states, NGOs, and so on. States, IOs, and INGOs have dominated the humanitarian field. Over the last fifteen years other kinds of actors have become more involved, including corporations, philanthropies and foundations, faith-based organizations, local NGOs, and diaspora networks. But states and their IOs, and INGOs, continue to dominate the field. Not all actors, moreover, necessarily play the same role; that is, there can be differentiation. For instance, states and their militaries have their role, such as funding, delivery, and protection; IOs have their role, such as legitimation and coordination; and NGOs have

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[17] Walker and Maxwell 2008; Maxwell and Gelsdorf 2019.
[18] Barnett 2005; Kennedy 2019; Krause 2013.

their role, such as the delivery of assistance. These actors do not always agree on the limits of their role and the boundaries between them. Such friction has been most manifest in the relationship between aid agencies and military forces. Militaries sometimes take it upon themselves to provide aid for various reasons – because they can, because there is a need, and because they want to win hearts and minds. Aid agencies, though, worry that such relief and development activities will complicate their ability to deliver relief, because they will be perceived as sharing the military's concern with winning wars.

The relatively exclusive group of states, IOs, and INGOs that were creating a field also were becoming an elite. Fields almost always have elites, whose signature characteristic is the "vastly disproportionate control over or access to a resource … that advantage them."[19] Because of their advantages and privileges, elites often become a ruling or dominant class with a common outlook and interest in preserving the status quo. Moreover, these elites often interact, network, and circulate in overlapping and interlocking institutions that reflect and reinforce their exclusive standing and serve their common interests.[20]

The humanitarian elite includes three kinds of actors: states, UN agencies, and INGOs. A few donors provide the bulk of the official assistance. The top three – the U.S., the European Community, and the United Kingdom – provide almost 50 percent of all aid, and the inclusion of other Western donors brings the total to 87 percent. The remaining 13 percent is divided between Turkey (the second largest donor and largely because of the Syrian crisis), the Gulf states, China, Brazil, and a few other countries; these are often referred to as "new" or "nontraditional" donors. At least for the moment the Gulf countries and China have not participated in these sector-wide associations. Money does not just buy membership – it also buys influence. Many of the rules of the humanitarian sector, especially those dealing with funding and financial accountability, are dictated by states. A handful of UN agencies are part of all discussions pertaining to humanitarian action, and they are members of the highly influential Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC): it is chaired by the head of the Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and includes the World Food Program, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and five other specialized UN agencies. Standing invitees include the World Bank, International Committee of the Red Cross, the International

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[19] Khan 2012, 362. Also see Mills 2000; Therborn 2008; Domhoff 1994; Mosca 1939; Bell 1958; Pakulski 2012; Farazmand 1999.
[20] Collinson 2016, 1.

Federation of the Red Cross, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, and the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. There are thousands of INGOs, but the major INGOs can be counted on two hands. Five – Doctors without Borders, World Vision International, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam, and Save the Children – collect about one-third of the available aid. The top-ten agencies, including Mercy Corps, Christian Aid, Action in Aid, Norwegian Refugee Council, and International Rescue Committee, bring the total to over 70 percent. Other Western-based agencies scoop up nearly all the rest. Local NGOs receive below 2 percent of all direct aid (and less than 1 percent according to some sources). Or, according to another figure, of the $20 billion available in 2016, local organizations received a minuscule $129 million.[21]

Elites are distinguished by their preponderant control over resources, which can be understood as capital. It takes capital to become a member of an exclusive club. Bourdieu and others have proposed four forms of capital.[22] Economic capital includes wealth, income, and property. For aid agencies this is primarily about funding. Symbolic capital concerns being held in esteem and conferred honor. In the aid world, organizations and individuals often achieve such recognition for claiming fealty to the fundamental principles of humanitarianism and serving nobly in the field, and especially in the major, landmark emergencies (even in operations that are subsequently labeled a "failure"). Social capital derives from relations of acquaintance and familiarity. Friendships and "bands of brothers" are formed between aid workers in emergencies, which can be strengthened in their ongoing sector-wide meetings and debates about humanitarian governance. Western aid workers often have comparable experiences and reference points, speak English and the jargon, and generally have a comfort level with each other that is not easily achieved between Western and Southern aid workers.

Cultural capital refers to educational achievement and credentials.[23] A rationalized world produces specialized knowledge and the category of the "expert," an actor who is perceived to possess specialized skill and knowledge about an area of life. Although expertise can be achieved through experience and practice, in modern society the emphasis is on formal education, training, and credentials.[24] Specialized knowledge is

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[21] These numbers are drawn from various sources, including Humanitarian Outcomes; Development Initiatives; the Global Public Policy Institute; OCHA; Els and Carstensen 2015; Mowjee et al. 2017.

[22] Bourdieu 2011; Jenkins 1992; Pouliot 2016; Swartz 2012.   [23] Brint 1996.

[24] Brint 1996; Collins and Evans 2007; Boswell 2009, 23–24.

not esoteric or ideographic. Instead it is generalizable knowledge – it can travel from one case to another because of the systematic consideration and structured comparison across different contexts. Such knowledge has the added advantage of being more objective and less prone to subjective judgments, mistaken analogies, or personal experience. Although humanitarianism has stressed the importance of volunteerism, which sometimes translates into amateurism, humanitarianism has always benefited from expertise in the fields of medicine, public health, and the health sciences. Over the last two decades the field has become more specialized with a greater demand for expertise in a range of domains, including logistics, human resources, information technology, engineering, policy analysis, grant writing, evaluation, and security.[25] As Sending perceptively observes, "humanitarian relief is already made up of a range of specialized professional actors … What unites these different specialties is the distinct attributes of a humanitarian situation in which these different professionals work, in particular the stress on working in difficult, often extreme, situations to save lives."[26] In addition, humanitarianism has become a profession unto itself, defined by the kinds of demands imposed by the specifics of a humanitarian setting.[27] There are now stand-alone master's programs, web-based certificates, and other outlets for specialized and credentialed training in humanitarian action.

The concept of capital introduces four additional claims that are relevant for understanding relations within the group and with outsiders. Capital is not a thing but rather is a social relation and thus helps generate hierarchy, patterns of inclusion and exclusion, and positions of superiority and inferiority. Second, the value of capital can change depending on the underlying field and social structure. In other words, the field assigns value to the capital. For instance, modern society is a "credentialed" society, in which knowledge and expertise has become more highly valued relative to two centuries ago.[28] Symbolic capital, to the extent that it is constituted by honor and esteem, might be less valuable today than a century ago. In an article written four decades ago on the concept of honor, the eminent sociologist Peter Berger opened by comparing it to chastity in terms of its "unambiguously outdated status."[29] Third, because a changing field can produce changing values of capital, the exchange rate between forms of capital can shift. Honor might be less valuable than specialized knowledge in the modern economy. Fourth, capital is central to the struggle for

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[25] Krause 2013.   [26] Sending 2017, 67.   [27] Walker and Russ 2009.
[28] Collins 1979.   [29] Berger 1970, 339.

dominance, status, and authority. And, in fact, what forms of capital are most valuable will itself be a site of struggle.[30]

Elites and those with capital and status often form clubs. Clubs, generically speaking, are an association of actors with shared interests. There are rugby clubs, garden clubs, literary clubs, knitting clubs, service clubs, swimming clubs, country clubs, officers' clubs, metropolitan clubs, and on and on. But, as this list suggests, not all clubs are the same, differing in purpose, relationship to outsiders, barriers to entry, and other assorted matters. The sorts of clubs that most interest students of global governance are those that govern not just themselves but also others, limit membership to those with the right stuff, and enjoy private benefits, even for clubs whose purpose is to serve others.

A political economy approach dominates the literature on global governance. Economists define a club as "a voluntary group deriving mutual benefits from sharing one or more of the following: production costs, the members' characteristics, or a good characterized by excludible benefits."[31] In this perspective, clubs are formed by actors to generate "club" benefits – that is, benefits that could not be generated individually. These benefits can be individual welfare, satisfaction, well-being, or wealth. The political economy perspective also emphasizes how membership is usually limited to ensure club benefits. Said otherwise, clubs provide benefits that cannot be achieved individually, but there comes a point of saturation, diminishing returns, and increasing costs. Swim clubs have this characteristic, which is why they cap how many families can belong and why families often pay high fees to join rather than go to much less expensive public pools. But other sorts of clubs generate private and quasi-public goods. These are the sorts of clubs that most concern students of global governance because they act like a quasi-governor.[32] Members of international trade and financial clubs, for instance, will establish rules to regulate non-members to create collective goods that typically generate benefits that favor them.[33] Some of the proposed climate clubs represent a form of minilateralism as a select group of states to establish rules that are intended to regulate a quasi-public good.

Whereas the political economy approach starts and ends with *homo economicus*, the sociological approach weaves a normative dimension into group life.[34] Before identifying the differences, I want to stress three shared claims: actors are often motivated to form and join clubs for

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[30] Emirbayer and Johnston 2008, 6.
[31] Sandler 2013, 267; Buchanan 1965. Also see Prakash and Gugerty 2010.
[32] Keohane and Nye 2002.   [33] Tsingou 2015.
[34] Tsingou 2015, 225–256; Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008, 6.

self-interested reasons and to achieve benefits and produce collective
outcomes that they could not achieve on their own; clubs create mech-
anisms of exclusion, and often do so to protect their stream of benefits;
and clubs establish rules that regulate not just the actions of their
members but also the wider community.

The sociological approach, though, adds several features that are quite
familiar to anyone who has ever tried to gain admission or belonged to an
exclusive club. Whereas the political economy approach limits motives to
material interests, the sociological approach includes nonpecuniary,
charitable, and philanthropic reasons for joining. Many service clubs
have this attribute, as do many international groupings and associations
that are designed to help others, including the Humanitarian Club. Of
course, self-interest is present in everything actors do, and this includes
the desire to join even the most altruistic clubs whose explicit goal is to
serve others. Whereas the political economy approach emphasizes that
being admitted to the club is based primarily on the ability to contribute
to the collective good, a sociological approach allows for other criteria.
New members must have the "right stuff." Sometimes it is money, but it
can also include the right breeding and background, culture, gender,
racial, religion, or educational credentials.[35] In other words, it includes
all four forms of capital.[36] Whereas the political economy approach tends
to presume group solidarity is maintained by selective incentives, the
sociological approach recognizes how a club contains social relations that
produce a club identity and mutual belonging that can become the ties
that bind.[37] These integrative processes are particularly evident in social-
izing mechanisms that are responsible for assimilating new members,
producing a common culture, and creating a high degree of trust.[38]
They often are "Good Old Boy Networks" in the truest sense of the
phrase.[39] This common culture produces common outlooks and even
"inside" humor; see, for instance, the website "Stuff Expat Aid Workers
Like."[40] Moreover, this common culture can produce a shared outlook
and policy cohesion, which is particularly evident when the club is
confronted by ambiguities and uncertainties; it will often react to events
that distinguish it from non-members.[41] Lastly, members of the club are
more likely to be open to persuasion from other members than they are
from non-members.[42] Clubs, like all groups, will have internal

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[35] Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 88; Tsingou 2015, 261; Kendall 2008.
[36] Kendall 2008, 51–54.   [37] Kendall 2008, 29.
[38] Bond 2012, 615; Harrington and Fine 2000; Kendall 2008, 3.   [39] Kendall 2008, 8.
[40] https://stuffexpataidworkerslike.com/.   [41] Swartz 2012, 100.
[42] Domhoff 1994, 18.

disagreements and pecking orders, but these occur in the context of a sense of distinction between the members of the club and outsiders.[43]

The sociological approach to boundaries emphasizes their material and symbolic character, and how, in turn, they create distinctions and differences. While distinctions need not translate into feelings of superiority, they often do, especially for those clubs formed by elites. Clubs in colonial societies are a vivid example of such dynamics.[44] Leonard Wolff observed that they were "the centre and symbol of British imperialism … with its cult of exclusiveness, superiority, and isolation."[45] Club members might deny their elitism, but outsiders certainly feel it, which is one reason why they want to be admitted. As C. Wright Mills astutely observed: "To the outsider the club to which the upper class man or woman belongs is a badge of certification of his status; to the insider the club proves a more intimate or clan-like set of exclusive groupings which places and characterizes the man."[46]

Humanitarian governance has the characteristics of a club, but there is no literal Humanitarian Club. Like many exclusive clubs, the Humanitarian Club is not brick-and-mortar but rather wall-less, often having formal and informal bodies with rotating locations or interacting through variable arrangements and gatherings. Much like other clubs in global governance there is no authorized list. Instead there are the "usual suspects" that play a dominant role in the humanitarian sector and are active participants across the various standard-setting, coordinating, and rule-making bodies. Some are limited to states, such as the Development Assistance Committee and UN meetings, and others, such as the IASC, include the International Committee of the Red Cross and several INGO bodies. There is a slew of INGO-led and dominated associations, including: SPHERE, ALNAP, and the Humanitarian Accountability Project. There are umbrella organizations for NGOs, such as Interaction in the United States and the International Committee of Voluntary Agencies in Geneva.

In addition to playing a dominant role in humanitarian governance institutions, the Club also directs action on the ground and at field level. In the major crisis countries of Somalia, Sudan, and Democratic Republic of Congo, the Club members controlled 85 percent of the UN's pooled funds.[47] The Club tends to relegate non-members such as local NGOs to the role of subcontractors and implementing

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[43] Pouliot 2016.   [44] Kendall 2008, 29.
[45] Sinha 2001, 490; Cohen 2009; Batzell 1998.   [46] Mills 2000, 61.
[47] CAFOD 2013, 40.

partners.[48] As bemoaned by former USAID administrator, Andrew Natsios, the major aid agencies have translated partnerships into subcontracts and delivery.[49] In 2005, in the hope of improving efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability, the UN created "clusters," which divided humanitarian action into different categories, such as sanitation, reconstruction, livelihoods, and education. Different organizations were deputized as having lead responsibilities – and they all came from the UN and leading Western aid agencies. The Southern agencies continue to be marginalized. English is often the lingua franca in the field and at these meetings another barrier to local community participation.[50] An extraordinary moment occurred at a cluster meeting during the Philippine typhoon response in 2018 – the cluster meeting was held in the local language, which one UNHCR official said was the first to her knowledge.

The Resilience of the Humanitarian Club

Humanitarian governance has become increasingly institutionalized, the Humanitarian Club has maintained its centrality, and patterns of inclusion and exclusion have continued. These patterns resemble what Charles Tilly called durable inequality: "those that last from one social interaction to the next, with special attention to those that persist over whole careers, lifetimes, and organizational histories."[51] These durable inequalities can become established for various reasons, including perceptions of competence, and then maintained through processes of social closure.[52] Although these inequalities and closures can be attributed to strategic and instrumental action, this is not the case for all of them; there are "diverse practices … which are practically organized toward this end, without in any way being explicitly conceived and posed in reference to it."[53] Forms of capital reproduce because of structural and agentic dynamics that cannot be reduced to interests.

The Humanitarian Club plays a central role in producing and reproducing the durable inequalities in the humanitarian sector. And these inequalities have led to two major critiques of humanitarian governance and the demand for widening patterns of inclusion. The first is the lack of effectiveness. There were many explanations for its shortcomings, but a growing theme was that it was due to its overly centralized and top-down

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[48] Humanitarian Exchange Network 2011; Gingrich and Cohen 2015, 30–31.
[49] Natsios 2010.   [50] Knox and Campbell 2015; Humphries 2013.   [51] Tilly 1997, 6.
[52] Weber 1968, 1, 43–46, 341–338; Parkin 1979; Murphy 1988; Naylor 2019; Keene 2012.
[53] Wacquant 1993, 31; quote is from Bourdieu.

governance structure that marginalized local actors – the very ones who are the first responders, do the bulk of the work, can more easily mobilize local resources, and have the necessary local knowledge. The other is a lack of legitimacy because of the Humanitarian Club's arbitrary power, failure to incorporate those affected by its actions, and absence of accountability.[54] It is a "pathology," observed a veteran observer, because the "people most affected by the crisis have the least involvement in the international relief system."[55]

The obvious remedy to these maladies was to increase the authority and voice of local actors, and the periodic reform efforts almost always included a push to increase participation, partnership, accountability, and other adjustments that would limit the arbitrary power of the Club and alter patterns of exclusion and inclusion. "Localization" is the most recent and substantial effort to reform the system and shift power and authority from the "international" to the "local." Inaugurated at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, localization has attracted sector-side support, including from the Humanitarian Club, but all this lip service and activity has had little tangible effect. The humanitarian sector with the Club at the center is nothing if not durable.[56]

What accounts for the durable inequality and the resilience of humanitarian governance's hierarchy? The simplest answer is self-interest – those with power rarely want to yield it.[57] Western aid agencies might advocate reform, but when faced with the choice of maintaining or yielding power they behave just like all organizations. As explained by one critic of the sector, the elite is unable to put "egos and logos aside."[58] A Self-interest certainly plays a part, but not all practices can be traced back to self-interest. Interests are entangled with judgments about whether Southern actors can act in ways that are in the best interests of victims and saving lives at risk. In short, if Western actors have their reservations about inclusion, it is partly due to the often unstated belief that they are better than local actors at saving lives. In other words, inclusivity will translate into lives lost.

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[54] Humanitarian Leadership Academy and British Red Cross 2015; Zyck with Krebs 2015; Gingrich and Cohen 2015; Humanitarian Policy Group 2016b.

[55] Bennett 2018, 12.

[56] Barnett and Walker 2015; Hough 2018; Gingrich and Cohen 2015; Bennett and Foley 2016; Humanitarian Policy Group 2016a, 2016b; Aly 2016; Steets et al. 2016; Barbalet and Wake 2020; Humanitarian Aid International 2017; Patel 2021.

[57] Barbalet 2018, 10; CAFOD 2013; Bennett and Foley 2016; Collinson 2016; Featherstone 2017.

[58] Parker 2017, 2; Singh 2016.

Economic Capital

If Southern NGOs have one chief complaint it is that they are excluded from humanitarian financing. Those outside the Humanitarian Club get a pittance of the available funds. Because they exist subcontract-to-subcontract, if at all, this means that they are unable to retain quality staff or develop the capacity and infrastructure they need to be an attractive recipient to potential donors. Why are they reduced to this threadbare existence? One answer is that those who receive the bulk of the funds will view any decrease as a threat. Simply put, they view humanitarian financing in zero-sum terms: an increase in funding for local actors means a decrease for international agencies.[59] This has been the case when there is more money flowing into the sector, and it is particularly pronounced when it is constant or declines.

Major donors and INGOs explain and justify this inequality in various ways, but all reinforce the message that it would be unwise to increase funding to local aid agencies.[60] Western donors have developed a fair degree of trust and comfort with the major INGOs, which has reinforced the belief that Western organizations are more effective, efficient, and accountable. Moreover, major donors have imposed heavy reporting demands on recipients, expecting them to provide detailed records of their spending to ensure upward accountability and transparency. And Western donors have much less confidence in Southern agencies, worried that their contributions will be mismanaged, be poorly spent and on the wrong things, be pocketed by corrupt local actors, and lead to rampant fraud. Additionally there is the post-9/11 fear that Southern NGOs might be fronts for terrorist or radical organizations; such fears are amplified by the fact that most aid flows to Muslim-majority countries and many local agencies have a Muslim identity. These reporting requirements create a heavy administrative and bureaucratic burden that even the largest NGOs have difficulty meeting.[61] Southern agencies have requested financial support from Western donors to build the necessary administrative capacity, but for various reasons donors are reluctant to do so.[62]

Many INGOs offer a public-spirited reason for their own lack of enthusiasm. Humanitarian emergences are exactly that – emergencies. They require urgent action. It is well known what victims need medicine, shelter, food, clean water, sanitation, and other life-saving assistance.

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[59] Redvers 2017; Pantuliano 2016, 4.   [60] Poole 2013.
[61] Humanitarian Policy Group 2016b, 60. Redvers 2015.
[62] Troicare 2017; CAFOD 2013.

And the very reason why international actors must provide such services is because of an absence of local capacity.[63] But if Western agencies shift scarce funds into the hands of local NGOs during an emergency, it will cost lives.[64] As put by someone from a large INGO, "To do capacity building, INGOs have to tolerate failure."[65]

Yet even if Southern agencies received a bigger slice of the funding pie it would not necessarily increase their autonomy or influence. Western donors have tightened control over recipient agencies over the last two decades, allowing for less discretion and demanding more oversight, monitoring, and reporting documents. In fact, more money has resulted in diminished autonomy for Western agencies.[66] Relatedly, it has produced upward rather than downward accountability – that is, accountability to the donors at the expense of the recipients. And they focus on what donors want, which includes financial accountability.[67] The reasonable inference is that if Western donors increased funding to Southern NGOs, donors would still demand control and responsiveness to their interests. In short, direct funding might "transform local NGOs into auxiliaries of the North."[68] As summarized by the Indian-based Humanitarian Aid International: despite all these initiatives to localize aid, "there is a fear that existing power structures and complex dynamics within the humanitarian fraternity may not help in realizing the vision of empowering local organizations through higher resource allocation."[69]

Symbolic Capital

Another source of resistance to widening inclusion is the fear that local actors will not or cannot honor the core principles of humanitarianism, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.[70] As Paul Currion observes regarding the difference between "genuine" humanitarian actors and others such as the private sector that also provide assistance: it is not the kinds of work they do but rather the principles they use.[71] It must be noted, though, that Western actors are not paragons of principles. Humanitarian actors rely on large donors, who have a large say over

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[63] Wall and Hedlund 2016, 18–20.   [64] Obrecht et al. 2015, 16–17.
[65] Quoted from Gingrich and Cohen 2015, 32.
[66] Barnett 2005; Humanitarian Accountability Partnership 2013, 31; Turk and Eyster 2010, 168.
[67] Humanitarian Accountability Partnership 2013, 19, 61; Deloffre 2016.
[68] Dubois, 2016, 4. Also see Banks et al. 2014.   [69] Singh 2016.
[70] Schenkenberg 2016, 12, 14–17.   [71] Currion 2018, 2.

where and what kind of aid is delivered; in this respect they often are heavily instrumentalized.[72] Moreover, aid agencies must consistently adapt these principles to circumstances on the ground. Improvisation is the name of the game.[73] In that respect these principles are aspirational. But the central concern is not whether local actors fall short of complying with these principles in practice, but whether they even see them as integral to the humanitarian identity.

Club members raise several concerns regarding the ability and willingness of local actors to follow these fundamental principles. Local agencies might not interpret the principles as Western agencies do or even find value in them.[74] Because of pressures and interests, local and national actors might "twist or manipulate the localization agenda to their advantage."[75] Other local actors might even "redefine 'humanitarianism' to their liking in a particular crisis situation."[76] They are more likely to have a stake in the outcome. Because local actors are local they are much more likely to depart from needs-based principles and help those with whom they have cultural proximity. And even if they wanted to help those on the "other side," it might be harder for them to do so because of pressures from friends, families, and local combatants to demonstrate loyalty to one's own. And these pressures can be violent; local aid workers have had their families threatened if they refuse to demonstrate favoritism.

From the perspective of the Humanitarian Club, the inability or unwillingness of local agencies to embrace these principles might hollow out the meaning and practice of humanitarianism – and increase risks to Western actors. Western aid agencies believe that these humanitarian principles help to establish a space that both protects aid workers from attack and provides access to vulnerable populations. If these principles disappear, or the commitment by aid agencies to them is questioned by local authorities and combatants, then all aid agencies will become targets and aiding victims will become hazardous to their health. In this regard, the fear that local actors will not pledge allegiance to humanitarian principles provides Western actors with lots of reasons to keep their distance.[77]

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[72] Donini 2012.   [73] Humanitarian Policy Group 2016a, chapter 3.
[74] Schenkenberg 2016, 12, 14; Troicare 2017; Stoddard 2004; Wall and Hedlund 2016.
[75] Schenkenberg 2016, 24.
[76] Campbell and Hoffman 2015, 194; cited from Boateng 2018, 63. Also see European Parliament 2015; Humanitarian Policy Group 2016a, 53; Troicare 2017.
[77] Barbalet 2018, 23.

Social Capital

The heart of social capital is the intense and continuous interaction between individuals that leads to the formation of solidarity, emotional bonds, and trust. Members of the Club enjoy social capital for two major reasons. One is that they have had shared experiences forged in the heat of emergencies. There are several waves of aid workers that have immediate identification with each other because they worked in the same emergency; Cambodia, Sudan, Darfur, Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda have all provided common experiences and weak ties between aid workers. Another source of social capital are the many associations, meetings, and gatherings that are intended to help forge and distribute rules of humanitarianism. Although these are no longer monopolized by Westerners, my interviews with various participants from the Global South suggest a feeling that they are not trusted in the same way that Westerners are and are often there because of tokenism.

Trust is at the heart of social capital, and the insinuation of the previous paragraph is that, *ceteris paribus*, the distinctions between Western and Southern aid agencies and workers would erode with more opportunities for interaction. But is there something else that hinders interactions or dulls the trust that might otherwise emerge between those from the West with the same history? One possibility is race. In my interviews with staff from Southern agencies, race was a frequent topic of conversation for explaining the unwillingness of Western agencies to relinquish power to Southern agencies.[78] According to Adia Benton, African expatriates working in other parts of Africa are frequently positioned on a "lower rung of the humanitarian professional hierarchy."[79] African aid workers were assumed to be less competent, and even when they demonstrated they had the skills white aid workers would still question their competency.[80] African aid workers constantly felt as if they were having to prove themselves and were never quite treated as an equal member. The Black Lives Matter protests have produced considerable introspection in many Western aid agencies, with many organizations looking around the room and discovering few people of color in leadership positions and wondering why.

Cultural Capital

Humanitarianism used to be staffed predominantly by volunteers. Indeed, volunteerism is a principle of humanitarianism. For decades a

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[78] Barnett 2020.   [79] Benton 2016, 268.   [80] Benton 2016, 270.

good heart could seem to matter more than experience or competence. As discussed in the first section, beginning in the late 1990s the humanitarian field became increasingly bureaucratized, rationalized, and professionalized, increasing the salience of credentials and specialized knowledge. Lived and local experience still counted, but increasingly ranked below credentials and objective, specialized knowledge that could be generalized across cases. As one staff member of a Southern agency observed, Western agencies rhetorically recognized the importance of local knowledge but international "expert" knowledge remained privileged.[81]

A perceived advantage of credentialed and expert knowledge is that it is available to all. In other words, it is egalitarian and democratic. This is more accurate in theory than in practice. Most of the knowledge-producing and training institutions are in the West, which are more accessible to those in the West than those from the Global South. Not only are the major centers for specialization located there, but Western-based humanitarian agencies and institutions are the critical producers of knowledge. When Southern agencies and actors participate in the process of knowledge production it is almost always as a subcontractor, translator, or informant.[82] The world of knowledge production has the same hierarchical patterns as everything else in humanitarian governance.

Durable inequality is produced and reproduced by economic, social, symbolic, and cultural capital. These patterns that maintain inequality are arguably to the advantage of Western actors, but it is difficult to reduce these patterns to self-interest. Partly this is because capital cannot be reduced to economic logics, and partly this is because these patterns are often defended or justified not on the grounds of self-interest but rather in the interests of others. Any substantial reform that shifted authority and resources from the West to the South would certainly cost Western aid agencies dearly, but, respond many in the Club, would it save more lives? And even if Western aid agencies were willing to take the risk, Western donors are not prepared to gamble with house money.

Conclusion

I have painted a picture of humanitarian governance that is a highly durable club – in which the members of the Club have a network-like

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[81] Urvashi 2016, 8. Also see Redvers 2015; Schenkenberg 2016, 21.
[82] Domhoff 1994, 18.

association and the Club members enjoy considerable authority over non-members. The critiques leveled at the Club, including its lack of legitimacy and effectiveness, continue, and the proposed solutions remain the same – more inclusion. As I have suggested, those in the Club do not duck the criticism and are broadly sympathetic that a humanitarianism that lived its principles would be more inclusive than it currently is.

In 2020 two dramatic events have raised the question of effectiveness and legitimacy with greater urgency. The first is Black Lives Matter. Many of the largest aid agencies either came out of colonialism or stepped into the shoes of the departing colonialists. Humanitarianism has largely been about white people doing things for non-white people. Many from the Global South attribute the unwillingness of Western aid agencies to relinquish power as a product of racism, though masked through the language of competence and capacity building. The Black Lives Matter movement has not only provided a jolt to these feelings, it has also caused most of the largest aid agencies to question whether and how race works in and through their agency. Will this moment of introspection lead to tangible change and greater inclusion, or will it become the most recent challenge to the Club's attempt to maintain its legitimacy?

The second event is Covid-19. The humanitarian sector is no better positioned to respond to the considerable suffering caused by the virus than are much better resourced states. And just like Moon describes in Chapter 8, so too is humanitarian governance attempting to fix a tattered architecture on the fly. An additional challenge is that Western workers are having difficulty getting access to those in need because they are concerned about their own risk of infection and worried about spreading the infection to others. Such developments have left many Western aid agencies with little choice but to shift authority and power to local actors. This development builds on previous pressures to remove western staff from the field because of security concerns. Because of security considerations and attacks on aid workers, many INGOs have shifted greater responsibility to local actors as they retreat behind barricades and to distant capitals.

But does this foreshadow a change in the mode of governance? Will there be more inclusion and less hierarchy? Will the shadow retreat? Possibly, but there are three reasons to suggest that the Club will adapt. The first is that any substantial change will require a dramatic shift in the financing of humanitarian action, and there is no indication that the donors are prepared to do anything radical. Nor is there any evidence that the "nontraditional" donors are prepared to provide an alternative

pool of resources without conditions. Second, those instances in which the Club has admitted new members might give the appearance of growing diversity without the substance. New members are expected to exhibit decorum and accept the rules of the Club. It can have all the characteristics of tokenism, especially since being admitted to the Club does not mean that their voices are truly welcome. Moreover, while such selective inclusion provides opportunities for upward mobility and greater inclusion and diversity, it might also help to preserve the Club's power because it potentially works against forms of solidarity and protest among Southern agencies and networks.[83] Third, and related, the literature on multistakeholderism suggests that there might be more actors around the table, but the critical decisions are made by the same elite before they enter the room.[84] For these and other reasons, the Club is well set up to continue to operate in the shadows.

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[83] Naylor 2019, 4–5.   [84] Wade 2011; Wade 2013; Saffer et al. 2018.

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