

Backstage Labour on the Frontlines: A Feminist Analysis of Technology and the Everyday Repair Work of Humanitarian Aid in Lebanon

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Abstract

Enduring challenges of limited resourcing, pressure resulting from disasters, and competition often stifle emergency response. It is crucial to understand the labour that is dedicated to carrying out humanitarian efforts on the ground – efforts that sustain aid delivery and enable it to persist despite such challenges. Although there is a growing body of scholarship on what some scholars have referred to as “everyday humanitarianism” (e.g., Hilhorst, 2013), there are gaps in knowledge about the mundane forms of work necessary for adapting to constraints. This thesis illuminates and analyses the everyday labour required to manage breakdowns in disaster response by examining the implementation of Lebanon’s digitised cash assistance for refugees and emergency response to the Beirut Port explosion of 2020. In particular, I examine “repair work” in practice – the on-the-ground strategies required to maintain functionality in light of collapse (Jackson, 2014).

This study is informed by data collected during a three-year multi-sited ethnography, which entailed interviews, document analysis, and participant observation with humanitarian staff, residents, and policymakers. As a feminist analysis, it focuses on how the relationship between responsive strategies, power, and inequality influence crisis interventions, extending other analyses that have looked at how labour takes shape outside of traditional workspaces. By examining the technosocial constitution of repair work, this research illuminates forms of labour that not only support these systems but also transform their configurations. Despite being seemingly behind the scenes, repair work is some of the most pervasive and essential work in the humanitarian sector. A four-part analysis shows different dimensions of repair work: first, it involves contestation and under-recognised contributions, which reflects shifts in labour related to digitising humanitarian infrastructures; second, repair work that aims to include local responders in partnership structures paradoxically contributes to their invisibilisation; third, repair work that seeks to care for those suffering from the financial crisis often leads to the implementation of stop-gap responses that can prolong suffering; and fourth, repair work mitigating strains on aid delivery can become captured by dominant regulatory modes that manage humanitarian labour.

In responding to material conditions and negotiating splintered humanitarian systems, these forms of repair work reveal a tension: they often cement divisions between different humanitarian stakeholders. This labour can perpetuate fractures in working relationships, hierarchies of value related to who does what kinds of labour, cooperative dynamics between different responders, and processes aimed at providing basic assistance to vulnerable civilians.

Humanitarian repair work reflects longstanding gendered and feminist critiques of labour. Repair work in the Lebanese context is generative of uncompensated reproductive labour, care work, and emotional management labour. As such, repair work emerges in and responds to variegated formations of inequality that cross-cut concerns of precarity, disenfranchisement, and coercion experienced by groups who are supposed to benefit from humanitarianism. This thesis sheds light on both the forms and consequences of repair work, acknowledging it has received little attention in popular accounts of disaster response. Findings contribute to and complicate dominant understandings of aid reform, especially those dependent on technological innovation and systems of regulation.

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List of Abbreviations

3RP	Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
3RF	Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework
A&A	Assessment and Analysis Cell
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
BFL	Banque Libano-Française
CBA, CBR	Cash-Based Assistance, Cash-Based Response
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
E-card	Electronic Banking Card
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ESSN	Emergency Social Safety Net
EU	European Union
FAO	Foreign Aid Organisation
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
LOUISE	Lebanon One Unified Inter-Organisational System for E-cards
LRC	Lebanese Red Cross

ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ID	Identification
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA, UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PIN	Personal Identification Number
PMT	Proxy-Means Testing
POS	Point of Sales Terminal
RAIS	Refugee Assistance Information System
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
US, USA	United States of America

WASH Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Programme

WFP World Food Programme

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: 

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Chapter 1: Introduction



Figure 1.1: Area near where I volunteered to provide basic goods and services to refugees.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the fall of September 2019, I travelled from Canada to Lebanon to complete a month of preliminary fieldwork. While I waited in the dry heat for my father to pick me up from Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport, I contacted my non-government organisation (NGO) colleagues to let them know that I had safely landed and was excited to start working with them. Being raised in Canada by a family of Palestinian refugees who lived in Lebanon for almost two decades, I was eager to better understand how refugees navigate Lebanon's challenging humanitarian landscape. My hope was that completing participant observations would provide a glimpse into how digital technologies shape refugees' experience of cash-

based assistance. However, what struck me the most was the many types of work and workers who were not visible in scholarly literature and public humanitarian narratives.

I discovered a range of on-the-ground, behind-the-scenes labour by both humanitarians and non-humanitarians – workarounds that the aid sector required to adapt to dwindling infrastructures, weak governance systems, imperfect digital technologies, torn social fabric, and arduous forms of bureaucracy. I witnessed student volunteers fill the NGO's supply box with materials from their homes so that humanitarian programming could continue amidst budget cuts (see Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.2: The only box of supplies available to the NGO, which volunteers filled with goods that they purchased themselves.

Discrepancies in data systems compelled refugees to work extra shifts washing dishes for up to five hours just to have enough money to call United Nations (UN) agencies to report difficulties accessing their cash assistance. UN employees would monitor local stores on a

weekly basis to ensure that clerks did not overcharge illiterate recipients – the majority of whom are women (USAID, 2017c). These are only a few examples of the undervalued, underpublicised, and unequal labour that goes into maintaining aid delivery and repairing systems breakdown in a context that, as the World Bank (2023) says, has normalised crisis.

Lebanon currently experiences overlapping disasters that not only threaten liveability for residents in the nation but also have reverberating consequences that are felt around the world through the mobilisation of foreign funding and interventions, the spillover of insecurity into neighbouring states in the region, and global risks from cross-border conflict (Dabrowski & Domínguez-Jiménez, 2021). This has led scholars like geographer Dean Shariff Sharp (2023) to call Lebanon a context of “polycrisis.” The term refers to a multiplicity of simultaneous crises, which each have disparate but compounded effects that make their severity ever more globalised and difficult to deal with. COVID-19, climate change, rising inflation, and food shortages are happening at once. These and other omnipresent global disasters take up increasing space in the thoughts of policymakers, technology experts, and individuals. In fact, many people have framed “polycrisis” as a key challenge of the 21st century (Tooze, 2022), with anthropologists David Henig and Daniel M. Knight (2023) commenting that polycrisis has surpassed globalisation as the predominant threat to world order.

While concerns around polycrisis pervade influential spaces like the World Economic Forum (2023), scholars have argued that a preoccupation with worldwide structures and emergencies overlooks key power dynamics as they play out on the ground (e.g., Elias & Rai, 2019). Feminist studies of political economy highlight important dimensions that are not addressed by more abstract analyses of disasters that centre macro systems in ways that negate localised experiences. For example, the daily labour of maintaining, reproducing, and caring for social life has typically fallen to underprivileged groups such as women and racial minorities (Bakker, 2007). Although such backstage efforts are common and absolutely central to people’s continued survival amidst disasters, they do not feature as prominently as efforts and institutions that directly relate to the global humanitarian sector. Consider, for example, analyses of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that prioritise its global policies and promises rather than how it is navigated in community settings (e.g., Kamruzzaman, 2016): they are not attentive to the multiplicity of day-to-day practices, materialities, and hardships

that are central to the functioning of global humanitarian spheres, as well as who undertakes such work and the ways in which subalterneity becomes produced. By empirically unpacking how ordinary and routine labour is interconnected with global institutions (e.g., the UN) and structures of power (e.g., the securitisation of migrants), we can offer a more pluralistic account of crises – one that conceives of crises as unbounded systems. This thesis endeavours to offer one such account of Lebanon as a network that encompasses and shifts across multiple sites, scales, and forces of oppression and agency.

Geographer J. K. Gibson-Graham (1993) encourage feminist analysis of political economy that uncovers heterogeneous experiences rather than centring grand theorising of macro-level market dynamics, which are often linear, overdeterministic, and fail to capture what is happening on the ground. To do so necessitates considering the many other daily relations, extractive practices, and forms of labour involved in crisis response that are not defined by the traditional confines of political economy but sees them as nonetheless constitutive of one another. As feminist theorist Cynthia Enloe's (2014) contribution to feminist studies of international relations (IR) makes clear, there is a need to highlight the multiplicity of actors, sites, and knowledges at the margins of thought – especially those working backstage and in the peripheries like workers in the Global South.

Similar insights can be applied to the increasing study of technoscience in emergency response. As scholar of social media, data, and automation, Mirca Madianou (2022) suggests, technological applications in international development and humanitarianism have become future-oriented by fixating on innovation and productivism as ways to advance developing nations and respond to crises. These accounts align with humanitarian scholar, Dorothea Hilhorst's (2013, p. 1) critique of disaster studies for prioritising "official politics" over its everyday practices. By this, she means informal, common, and mundane experiences, practices, relations, settings, and decisions of people involved in crisis response. By "interpret[ing] and reshap[ing] principles and policies, the everyday is where such principles and policies come to life" (Hilhorst & Schmiemann, 2002). Although the activities and symbolism of the everyday are often blurred in practice with those of elites, global issues, and formal politics, a focus on the "everyday" is crucial to understanding how crises are experienced in society and how these dynamics shape social relations (Hilhorst, 2013). The

everyday of humanitarianism becomes the bridge between humanitarian managers and local communities, which, as urbanist and conflict scholar Silvia Danielak (2020) says, highlights how disaster politics, risks, and solutions are constructed.

Together, such accounts provide the foundation for recognising the downfalls of fixating on macro-level accounts of world systems and high-level reforms in disaster response, which largely relate to elite decision-making, politics, and are publicised in media announcements. On the contrary, there is little understanding of how crisis is managed by ordinary practices of those implementing bureaucrats' directives, operating in unremarkable settings, and sustaining the daily operation of humanitarian systems inundated with disasters. As international legal expert Hilary Charlesworth (2002, p. 391) argues, this limits knowledge "on the issues of structural justice that underpin everyday life." Heeding Charlesworth's advice, this thesis aims to bring the everyday of humanitarianism to the forefront by focusing on everyday experiences of aid delivery.

Humanitarianism in Lebanon offers a context to make sense of how feminists' advice can help us understand crisis response and its increasingly digital contours. Residents are incredibly pressed to navigate breakdowns caused by an unprecedented economic depression, government collapse, and dilapidated critical infrastructures, which all affect energy, water, food, health, and socio-economic pressures from hosting the largest number of refugees per capita in the world (UNHCR, 2021). These crises are occurring in a state that does not have the capacity to deliver social services to its residents, which has contributed to the "most diverse and active civil society in the region" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 90). Nevertheless, media attention and donor funding tend to favour foreign institutions contributing to Lebanon's aid sector like the UN, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and European Union (EU). As such, Lebanon is a country that is governed by more out-of-state interventionists than its own public administration, leading to a highly fragmented system. It has also enshrined a suite of historic power asymmetries, which have taken shape through formations of racialisation, colonialism, and Western-European interventionism (Kassem, 2020). These resulting tensions have fostered significant distrust, particularly of the nation's corrupt political elite, including public calls by some residents to put Lebanon back under French mandate (AVAAZ, 2020).

Lebanon's crises do not exist as a purely local site, as they play out in a transnational state. This poses many questions and challenges. For instance, what work is required to maintain order and functioning in a state of disrepair? What regulatory and governance strategies emerge for workers to endure, adapt, and support groups in crisis? Accordingly, this thesis foregrounds how breakdown is worked on, compensated, resourced, made visible, and contested. To understand the relationship between responsive strategies, power, and inequality, I focus on humanitarian labour – its formation, actors, tactics, and experiences. In adopting a feminist perspective, I examine Lebanon to answer the following driving research question: In light of recognised critiques of humanitarian efforts, how do actors on the ground work to ensure the viability of humanitarian interventions?

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 1.2 provides the research background, and Section 1.3 details the key contributions of this thesis. Section 1.4 provides a note on terminology. Section 1.5 provides a literature review and Section 1.6 presents an outline of the structure of this thesis.

1.2 REPAIRING HUMANITARIAN AID DELIVERY IN THE EVERYDAY

Charlesworth (2002) argues for studying the everyday of crisis by paying more attention to what is happening in the routine and daily life of disasters. This research both draws upon and extends Charlesworth's (2002) insights. Empirically studying the labour of workers, residents, and technologies, this thesis seeks to understand how they persist and sustain humanitarian activities debilitated by intersecting crises. This research unpacks the mundane yet critical work and strategies forged to overcome the forms of breakdown that disrupt aid delivery to vulnerable groups. It draws particular attention to digitisation and regulation because both have become increasingly popular in the aid sector, figure centrally in responses to breakdown, and are studied as being formative to exercises of power (Martin et al., 2023). To attend to these dynamics, I use Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholar Steven J. Jackson's (2014) concept of "repair work" – that is, the subtle and quotidian labour that goes into addressing fragility and maintaining functionality. Repair work helps make sense of interactions surrounding cascading forms of breakdown and how such breakdown is navigated in practice (Henke & Sims, 2020).

Although such work can be overlooked and even ignored, making breakdowns knowable is part of efforts to restore material, relational, and technological orders that enable humanitarianism. Focusing on this labour offers critical insight into how crises are interconnected with broader and more globalised phenomena that are not immediately perceptible, especially structures of power. Drawing upon feminist studies, regulatory governance, and critical humanitarian literatures, I highlight the relationship between social inequality, gendering, regulation, and digitised “solutions” in humanitarian work.

A large volume of humanitarian workers and institutions operate in Lebanon. To make sense of these challenges in practice, my research focuses on two cases of humanitarian aid in the country: digitised cash-based assistance for refugees (e-card system, better known as “LOUISE”) and emergency response to the Port explosion. As this thesis seeks to understand the labour that goes into adapting to and overcoming issues in aid delivery, the following supporting research questions are important to address:

- (1) How do workers engage with digital technologies and platforms in shaping their everyday experiences of crisis response?
- (2) What are the relationships between local, national, and transnational crisis workers? And, what are their implications for crisis response?
- (3) How is harm mitigated amidst institutional and infrastructural failures?
- (4) How are forms of regulation shaping workers’ experiences of crisis response labour?

I answer these questions through a multi-sited ethnography comprised of participant observations, interviews, and document analysis (see Chapter 3). This research captures the multiple sites where repair work becomes part of the emergency response to Lebanon’s growing and overlapping disasters. Using a feminist lens to understand the experiences of humanitarian work, the findings highlight the various ways in which everyday repair work takes shape in practice, paying critical attention to gendered subjectivities and hierarchical valuations of labour. They highlight interconnected configurations of power that are negotiated and subverted in the course of enabling aid delivery to persist amidst enduring forms of decay, technological enablers and impediments, and enactments of regulatory power.

1.2.1 Argument: Gendered crisis repair labour as essential, undervalued, and divisive

The labour that enables aid efforts to persevere is often studied by examining strategies like “resilience,” “preparedness,” and “recovery,” which are framed as responding to disruptions “outside the range of normal and expected disturbances” (Comfort et al., 2010, p. 9). As feminist scholarship attests, this approach often neglects the complexities of and disagreements over aid delivery in the field by ignoring the perspectives of the targets and implementers of crisis interventions (Charlesworth, 2002). Using Lebanon as a case study, my research uncovers the everyday actions undertaken by what Jackson (2014) refers to as “maintainers” and “repairers” who ensure that broken humanitarian systems continue to function amidst intersecting crises. I argue that repair work is an essential yet undervalued –and sometimes invisible – component that sustains crisis management. This thesis traces how these dimensions reflect longstanding gendered and feminist critiques of labour. In responding to material conditions and negotiating splintered humanitarian systems, this labour reveals a tension: in attempting to meet commitments to diverse groups and mandates, repair work nonetheless cements divisions between different humanitarian stakeholders. For instance, repair work can perpetuate fractures in hierarchies of value, cooperative relationships, and targeted goals and processes. This thesis exposes these configurations as well as inequities that underpin and persist through repair work, even though maintainers and repairers attempt to adapt to the best of their abilities.

By focusing on repairers’ and maintainers’ experiences and strategies, my findings uncover important ways that humanitarian systems are able to persist and adapt. The analysis reveals insights into the creative tactics and backstage work that goes into mending infrastructures, governance systems, and relationships as well as caring for populations and workplaces. This labour is fraught with contestations over what courses of action to take and how to effectively work around bureaucratic, digital, infrastructural, and contextual impediments. Geopolitical and overseas actors and the transnational structures they influence are major sources of such breakdown.

By emphasising how repair and its power relationships evolve in everyday practices, I situate humanitarian repair in specific spatial and temporal arrangements. In particular, I examine how the constitution of humanitarian labour is shifting in light of technological and regulatory

transformations in crisis response systems. “Constitution,” as described by anthropologist and STS scholar Annemarie Mol (2002), captures how labour does not precede technology but materialises in spatially and temporally contingent relations. In adopting a constitutive perspective to explain transformations in humanitarian labour, this thesis sheds light on the technosocial contours of humanitarian repair labour. A “technosocial” perspective, as suggested by scholars like Judy Wajcman (2015), suggests that technology is a social process, whereby technological systems and social dynamics (knowledge, belief systems, values, actions, and relations) are heterogeneously networked yet function together as a whole.

My findings uncover how repair labour in crisis response emerges from an entangled technosocial system of human and “non-human” entities. This includes the interrelationship between, for example, institutional principles, community dynamics, regulation, policy, infrastructures, digital technologies, and data practices. In taking an infrastructural approach, I do not limit this analysis to isolated events. Rather, I use repair to understand the infrastructures that are involved and how infrastructures adapt to movements of crises, including examining the actors who are making these systems function. Therefore, labour cannot be thought of as separate from a technosocially constituted system; they only occur in relation to each other.

1.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY OF HUMANITARIAN AID

The everyday work that goes into maintaining aid systems is largely absent from scholarly narratives that narrowly focus on “normative questions of whether or not humanitarianism is justified, under what conditions, and for which kinds of actions and by which actors” (Richey, 2018, p. 627). Such accounts tend to spotlight humanitarianism’s politics, public-facing actors, and productive effects in terms of “doing good,” innovating existing techniques, and reproducing macro structures of power (Duffield et al., 2001). Nonetheless, mundane acts of breakdown, repair, and maintenance have a more pervasive impact on people’s everyday existence (Russell & Vinsel, 2016). As such, repair work is arguably among the most impactful work for the humanitarian sector, which is why scholars like Andrew Russell and Lee Vinsel call for focusing on the efforts of “maintainers.” In this case, the maintainers are humanitarian workers, refugees, and Lebanese residents, all of whom occupy quotidian spaces and whose labour is relatively routine but critically shapes the formal, global aid system.

Here, I am highlighting the emergent relations and overlooked forms of labour that simultaneously support these systems but also transform their configurations. In doing so, I follow socio-legal scholar Kristin Bergtora Sandvik and colleagues' (2014, p. 222) recommendation to move past "what technology does for humanitarian action" to instead scrutinise "what technology does to humanitarian action." Repair work's ontological focus on fragility "unfold[s] otherwise inaccessible dimensions of sociotechnical assemblages," which must be studied by examining run-of-the-mill activities that keep systems working (Denis & Pontille, 2023, p. 5). Studies of improvisations and adaptations of staff in the everyday of humanitarian response are, however, limited, prompting scholars like Dorothea Hilhorst (2013), Elizabeth Holzer (2014), Lisa Ann Richey (2018), and Olof Oscarsson (2022) to call for more attention to them in humanitarian aid. Repair work is one such way of approaching on-the-ground strategies in the everyday of aid, given it foregrounds the materiality and complexity of unexceptional practices as well as the workers and users who are often delegated to rather than possess delegation power (Denis, 2020; see Chapter 2).

Repair work illuminates important dimensions of breakage, maintenance, and repair to help explain how institutions are, for example, being defunded and unendingly face implementation issues but still continue to function. That is, it accepts and accounts for the inherent incompleteness, deterioration, fractures, and failures in Lebanon's humanitarian context rather than considering them to be unusual in aid intervention. This embrace of plural instabilities instead of interrogating specific causes of isolated breakdowns consequently "helps us to expand our analysis towards why such infrastructures are fragile, and what makes infrastructure fragile" (Alda-Vidal et al., 2023, p. 2).

Feminist approaches to labour inform my attention to inequality in the representations and lived experiences of backstage humanitarian labour and its relationship to agency and knowledge. An empirically-informed feminist lens applied to repair work is important because the most publicised (repair) labour tends to be done by men and elites, whereas the hidden and undervalued work tends to be done by marginalised and lower-tier groups (e.g., Alda-Vidal et al., 2023). In fact, as Laura Houston (2017) argues, their labour must remain marginalised to maintain the façade of stable systems, tools, and relations. Furthermore, gendered divisions, characteristics, and valuations of labour aid in understanding the coercive dynamics of

humanitarian repair. For example, there are distinctions between work that become framed and valued as managerial versus for care, as well as divisions that make some forms of labour central and others seemingly peripheral. A feminist approach contributes to a more theoretically complex and robust understanding of humanitarian aid delivery, its tensions, and its governance. I am attentive to what form this work takes and how it becomes adaptive as well as its unequal power asymmetries. This focus also illuminates negotiations with state and non-state actors, which are crucial to sustaining social, economic, and political life. Such findings have implications for global humanitarian discourse and the suitability of aid's technological applications.

1.4 A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

While I recognise that defining concepts can be difficult, contentious, and laden with power dynamics, I will explain my choice to use certain terms throughout my thesis. I use “recipient” rather than “beneficiary” to refer to those who are the intended receivers of aid and social assistance. Hugo Slim (2015) describes several concerns of “beneficiary” language, such as implicit assumptions that they do not actively participate in and constitute aid as well as implicit understandings that they solely benefit rather than experience harm from welfare delivery. I mostly use the term “refugee” rather than “displaced population.” As indicated by Lebanon’s refusal to sign the Geneva Convention governing refugee status, refugees and asylum seekers residing in the country are not guaranteed migrant rights or citizen rights. Instead, they exist in a grey area of protection. It was palpable that my participants working for the Lebanese government refused to say “refugees” and instead said “displaced Syrians” and “displaced Palestinians” – as if they could reasonably return back home. I use “refugees” to push back against this disavowal and acknowledge the severity of their living situations.

There is ample literature highlighting how the “local” and “transnational” are not dichotomous (e.g., Paffenholz, 2015). While my substantive chapters, especially Chapter 5, and epistemological perspectives emphasise the blurring and co-constitution of the local and global, I try to tease them out for analytic purposes in this thesis. In particular, drawing on their distinctions helps me explain globalised actors and related structures of power. I use “locals,” “local actors,” or “local groups” to refer to civil society organisations (CSOs), religious groups, community groups, and national groups in Lebanon. By “foreign aid organisations” (FAOs), I

am referring to those that are not headquartered in Lebanon, including international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), UN agencies, the World Bank, state and private donors from outside of Lebanon, and technology sector experts outside of Lebanon. Often, they are Western European actors, but this is not always the case, as FAOs can include other groups from the Middle East.

“Digital technology” refers to electronic, internet-powered, or battery powered tools and systems that collect, store, sort, and process data to carry out a particular function or set of functions. “Digitisation” refers to the conversion of data (e.g., pictures and information) into a form that can be processed by computers. Digital technologies are often automated, although not always. The definition of artificial intelligence (AI) is more contentious, with several terms often used synonymously such as “machine learning” and “neural networks.” AI uses “algorithms” which refers to processing a set of rules or mathematical equations in order to solve a problem. I often reference algorithms as a broad term for proxy-means testing, a form of econometrics, which employs statistics to predict recipient expenditure and vulnerability levels. Where possible, I separate these concepts, but often digitisation and automation go hand in hand (e.g., biometric authentication) so I tend to describe them as digitised instead.

Lastly, well over fifty percent of Lebanon’s population live below the poverty line (UNICEF, 2021). The nation’s public welfare agency, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), works closely together with the World Bank and UN agencies like the UN’s Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and World Food Programme (WFP) to deliver various forms of social services to refugees and residents. This suggests that demarcations between humanitarian aid (i.e., in response to disaster) and social assistance or welfare (i.e., support for in-need nationals of a nation-state) are blurred. For these reasons, when referring to aid like cash, food, and shelter, I use welfare and humanitarianism interchangeably.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.5.1 Crisis, humanitarian studies, and digital humanitarianism

Much crisis rhetoric is uncritical and reflective of particular socio-cultural assumptions about risk, yet it remains a powerful tool for mobilising action and resources (Bankoff, 2001). As

anthropologist Janet Roitman (2013) contends, crisis functions as a narrative device that enables particular narratives while foreclosing other forms of knowledge. Epistemologies of disaster have long privileged Western scholars and experts and their values in crisis management (Gaillard, 2018), historically framing crisis-afflicted contexts in homogenising, essentialist, and disenfranchising ways (Jean et al., 2023). Other scholarship in disaster studies focuses on organisational responses to crises (Fowler et al., 2007), recommending courses of action like best practices, case studies, and response plans (Sapriel, 2003). In addition, the field has a tradition of classifying crises by studying their taxonomies and typologies (Gundel, 2005; Kuipers & Welsh, 2017). Collectively, these accounts tend to frame crisis and its risk mitigation measures as “governed by rational and structural features,” which can present them as more fixed than dynamic in nature (Oscarsson, 2022, p. 720). Scholars trouble the notion that disasters are stable. For instance, anthropologist and STS scholar Timothy Neale and geographer Jessica K. Weir (2015, p. 263) suggest that different types of uncertainties “are necessary variables in the production of all scientific knowledges,” and that all uncertainties require translation work between expert and public groups to make disasters legible and actionable.

The legitimacy afforded to common framings of crisis applies to an adjacent sector and body of work – humanitarian studies – which has benefitted from naturalised authority in being associated with benevolence, compassion, and caring for people in need (Fassin, 2007). “Humanitarianism” is defined in different ways, but it broadly refers to relief efforts for in-need populations harmed by crises such as natural disasters, conflicts, famine, and epidemics (Barnett, 2003). While emergency response and compassion are at humanitarianism’s core, it is well documented as influencing broader domains of local, national, and transnational governance. Humanitarianism shapes claims to citizenship (Baban et al., 2017), fortifies and polices borders (Pallister-Wilkins, 2017; Ticktin, 2016), and influences migration control (Scheel & Ratfisch, 2017). As such, humanitarian interventions have been found to be political rather than “neutral” – a founding principle of the field (Hilhorst, 2005). They carry out political decrees, global standards, policies, and agreements even though aid actors themselves sometimes remain exempt from such rules (Ticktin, 2005). Humanitarianism’s globe-spanning market employs hundreds of thousands of people around the world, and a growing number of firms are dedicated to humanitarian logistics and equipment (Carbonnier, 2015). Funding reached a record of 46.9 billion USD in 2022 (Development Initiatives, 2023).

In light of these patterns, scholars have suggested that the aid sector constitutes a core pillar of the global governance of humanity (Barnett, 2013; Reid-Henry, 2014). Nevertheless, as humanitarian studies scholar Dennis Dijkzeul and socio-legal scholar Kristin Bergtora Sandvik (2019) suggest, literature on humanitarian governance is still in its infancy. By applying insights that have received little attention in the field – namely, feminist studies of labour and repair and maintenance studies – I extend understandings of humanitarian governance by empirically analysing how it is imbricated with labour relations and digitisation. This sheds light on humanitarian governance’s techniques, interests, and consequences.

I extend insights on humanitarian governance by analysing how regulation – a subset of governance – takes form and implicates repair work. While governance is management or control that does not rely on government or sovereign power (Burris et al., 2005), regulation entails attempts to steer behaviour and “the flow of events” (Parker & Braithwaite, 2005, p. 119). Beyond biopolitics and humanitarian ethics frameworks (e.g., Duffield, 2008; Slim, 2015), humanitarian scholarship has yet to grasp the rich and varied enactments of regulation described by regulatory studies and adjacent concerns in surveillance studies. Insights from these fields are integral to investigating fairness and participation in systems as well as to capturing how the ancient drive to visibilise and categorise constitutes core organising practices with geopolitical consequences (Braithwaite et al., 2007a; Lyon, 2002). These concerns are the focus of Chapter 7, which takes a feminist approach to humanitarian regulation, which is lacking in both humanitarian and regulatory governance literatures (for an exception, see Johns & Compton, 2022). Concerns around regulation are also threaded throughout the other substantive chapters, addressing digital and non-digital social and behavioural regulation.

I situate my work as contributing to critical humanitarian studies, a subfield of humanitarian literature that is well-suited to capturing the regulatory and surveillance angles of aid. By drawing upon critical development studies and critical studies of security, this subfield disrupts notions of humanitarianism as neutral or objective by questioning the integrity of its intentions and genuine ability to help those in need (Agier, 2011; Pallister-Wilkins, 2020). I contribute to such discussions by using a novel feminist approach to labour to reveal how humanitarianism can differentially treat groups in ways that are shaped by gender and its intersections with class,

race, and nationality, as well as reflect the predominance of masculine and patriarchal enactments of power in aid (Grewal, 2017; Hyndman, 2000).

Humanitarian endeavours are frequently studied as being imbued with power – the power to occupy new lands; workers’ asymmetrical relationships of power with recipients; donors’ power to choose who receives funding and support; and, the power to decide on checks and balances (e.g., Harrell-Bond, 2002). By enacting politics and power in the name of aid, humanitarianism has not only justified imperial and civilising projects (Rabinow, 1995), but, as international affairs scholar Michael N. Barnett (2011) argues, it also arguably constitutes an empire itself. In other words, it shares deep affinities with empires by governing from a distance, intervening in the affairs of foreign populations when they are not wanted, and enacting top-down power in ways that support its own value generation. Although imperative to highlighting domination, coercion, and occupation, the aforementioned accounts can paint a deterministic and victimising picture of humanitarianism. Academics have responded by emphasising the agency, resistance, and self-determination of local subjects like refugees and people living in crisis zones (Betts & Jones, 2016; O’Byrne, 2022). I, too, take this approach in adopting repair as a lens to emphasise the agentic capacity of humanitarian workers and recipients. By focusing on humanitarian strategies and workarounds, repair inevitably highlights demonstrations of autonomy and self-determination alongside oppressive power dynamics (see Chapter 2).

The longstanding challenges of effectively, cost-efficiently, and securely delivering aid to vulnerable populations have led to transformations in humanitarian and welfare assistance over the past few decades. Many practitioners and policymakers recommend adopting smart technologies, information processing, and remote management practices to remedy deficiencies of traditional welfare tools and processes (Duffield, 2016). Digital technologies are considered valuable for their ability to automate processes, predict behaviour, track mobility and changes over time, analyse risk, and classify cases and peoples (Johns, 2023). These kinds of interventions can often reflect “techno-optimist” narratives that assume that technology will produce more beneficial outcomes and improve our world whilst being relatively uncritical of its harms (Danaher, 2022).

Such perspectives have emerged against the backdrop of a wider shift towards “digital humanitarianism” (Meier, 2015), a term that captures the assemblage “of social and institutional networks, technologies, and practices that enable large numbers of remote and on-the-ground individuals to collaborate” (Burns, 2014, p. 51). Scholars have also used adjacent terms like “tech for good” (Magalhães & Couldry, 2021) and “digital welfare state,” which refers to using technology to remedy social problems and suffering. The latter term was popularised by a past UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston (2019), who released a groundbreaking international report on digitisation’s implications for providing social protection to the poor, where he highlighted how the digitisation of social assistance has enabled infringements of human rights and Big Tech’s concerning reach of power.

Alston argues that lower-income countries are particularly “laying the foundations” for potentially dangerous expansions in digital social protection systems (Alston, 2019, p. 3). Roughly 60 per cent of the Global South’s population are in poverty, they host considerable numbers of migrants requiring large-scale infrastructures, and their infrastructures are often framed as outdated or non-existent (Arora, 2016). For these reasons, Southern regions are frequently the site for testing and building innovative welfare systems from the ground up. Consider, for example, Lebanon and Jordan’s cash assistance systems, which are characterised by the World Bank as pioneer models for other countries (Chehade et al., 2020). Despite the growing influence of less economically developed regions, Western nations dominate scholarly focus on the digital welfare state (e.g., Redden et al., 2020). As such, there is a need to expand understandings of the digital welfare state’s operation, regulatory structures, and context-specific implications throughout the Global South. While there is a growing body of work on other states, this relatively small literature tends to concentrate on a select few regions – in particular, India (e.g., Singh, 2020) and countries in Africa (e.g., Breckenridge, 2014; Donovan, 2015).

Empirical analyses of regions like the Middle East are for the most part scarce, leaving many questions unanswered about how digital welfare functions in this context. This is surprising given that Türkiye and the Islamic Republic of Iran host the largest and second largest number of refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2023), and Lebanon hosts the most refugees per capita in

the world (UNHCR Lebanon, n.d.). As argued by Rana Jawad and John Gal (2018), empirical knowledge and theoretical literature on social welfare and its policies in the Middle East has long been incredibly limited. Scholarship that does analyse Lebanese welfare largely focuses on non-state actors, privatisation, and clientelism (Baylouny, 2010; Kraft & Smith, 2019). The very few that consider Lebanon's digital aid centre the UN's use of biometrics for refugee identification (Jacobsen, 2017; Schoemaker et al., 2021), humanitarian cash provision (Bielefeld et al., 2021), and food aid technology (Talhounk et al., 2020). In response to this gap in knowledge, this thesis offers empirically and theoretically grounded insights on the experiences of differently situated actors, a range of technologies, and different locations.

Alston's (2019) report suggests that private actors, particularly Big Tech, increasingly make up most of and benefit from digital welfare's infrastructures. Many scholars take this view, describing it as part of a shift towards data being "primarily collected and processed by corporations and only secondarily accessed by governmental authorities" (Taylor & Broeders 2015, p. 229). Technical experts and public-private partnerships are conceived as invaluable to these high-tech efforts, yet scholars raise concerns about these hybrid collaborations (Sandvik et al., 2017). Risks include mass surveillance and corporate exploitation of development (Martin, 2023), the continuation of colonial legacies of value extraction (Madianou, 2019a), and the adoption of business logics like marketing and prioritising profit (Burns, 2019). Although the private sector produces salient risks and shifts governance, this focus has negated how INGOs and transnational governance institutions like the UN (whose members and donors are largely comprised of states) continue to fill gaps left by governments. This is particularly salient in the Lebanese context where the UN, World Bank, and EU shape most infrastructure projects, a pattern that emerges in many other crisis and conflict afflicted countries (e.g., Jafri, 2019). Private actor dominance thus risks being overemphasised in analyses of digital service provision, overlooking how geopolitics and transnational aid agencies are shaping innovations, labour, infrastructures, and value accumulation – core focuses throughout the substantive chapters of this thesis.

While digitised aid reveals technosocial changes, such as new configurations of regulatory governance and ethical challenges as well as roles for data, labour, corporations, and surveillance, it also represents continuities. These shifts are, therefore, not completely new in

terms of population governance and the use of surveillance (Henne, 2019). In the context of development initiatives, there is a longstanding history of data-driven tracking, verification, experimentation, and management of immigrant, criminal, and impoverished polities (Molnar, 2019). These populations have traditionally been perceived as dependent, risky, and threatening to socioeconomic order. Such assumptions are embedded in technologies themselves and justify intimate forms of technologised control and monitoring; examples include population registers and biometric fingerprinting (Breckenridge, 2005; Browne, 2015; Mitchell, 2002). In connection, academics have compellingly signalled inseparable ties between social protection technologies and deep-seated structures of transnational power, discipline, profit-generation, and control, including enduring effects of empire, imperialism, and colonialism (Jacobsen, 2015; Rabinow, 1995). For these reasons, this thesis attends to dynamics like colonialism, racialisation, and securitisation, particularly how they play out on the ground in and sometimes through repair work. In doing so, I draw connections between localised experiences of technology and labour and how they are co-shaped by macro-level structures of power.

Despite the salience of structural inequalities, as Nicole S. Goedhart and colleagues note (2019, p. 2349), “little is known about how already disadvantaged groups, in terms of gender, class or race, experience the digitalising society, and use information communication technologies (ICT) in daily life, and what they need to participate in our digital society.” Analyses of gender and digital welfare consider how women are excluded by gender-specific impediments. They include how digitised access to financial support increase women’s responsibilities (Natile, 2019; Torkelson, 2021), the “gender digital divide” in terms of disproportionate inequality borne by women related to factors like education and cultural beliefs (Al-Rababah & Abu-Shanab, 2010), and additional burdens experienced by mothers (Goerdart et al., 2019). To a far lesser extent, the preoccupation with women and girls has overlooked the unique experiences of people who are transgender and gender nonconforming (Raj & Juned, 2022) and impoverished men (Sandvik, 2018) – two social groups that are captured by this research’s intersectional lens.

Although literature on women provides incredibly important insights into how inequalities persist through the digitisation of aid, the vast majority of such analyses often frame gender in

the context of women's versus men's experiences. Few consider gendering as a social process that shapes roles, subjectivities, and materials in ways that reflect hierarchies and characteristics that are not necessarily reflective of cisgender women's identities and bodies. In connection, the treatment of gender is largely pejorative, which does not capture how feminised characteristics can be an advantage and celebrated in practice or how men can sometimes be disproportionately disadvantaged by such technologies. As discussed below and in more detail in Chapter 2, this thesis contributes to discussions on digital welfare's gendering by applying intersectional insights from gender studies and feminist scholars of labour to illuminate these nuances.

To focus on labour makes a vital contribution to debates of digital welfare's self-interested motives and exacerbation of vulnerabilities (Eubanks, 2018). Despite the gravity and pervasiveness of such harms, important questions about labour remain under-interrogated. How do workers compensate for digital welfare's fractures and failures and who is doing this labour? Who is triaging digital humanitarianism and how is triage embodied? How does reparative labour (dis)appear to others? What are the resources and relations that digital welfare labour depends on?

With the exception of scholarship on digital volunteer networks and the changing landscape of crowdsourced humanitarian data (e.g., Chernobrov, 2018), frontline workers are often peripherally represented in both digital humanitarian and welfare literatures. Accordingly, they can often emerge as merely parts of a wider system, resulting in little understanding of how humanitarian workers creatively strategise issues in the delivery of aid. Narrow understandings of workers can reinforce a unilateral view of power that does not reflect their experiences, agency, support work, and evolving conditions on the ground. Further examination is important for three reasons. First, the few analyses of digital aid labour suggest that reparative work is pervasive and central to bolstering the credibility and adaptability of crisis response (Meier, 2015). Second, scholars contend that digital aid workers are marginalised and experience conditions that exacerbate existing structural inequalities (Ong & Combinido, 2018). Third, it is well established that breakdowns, malfunctioning, and harm to recipients and workers are more frequent than exceptional; that is, digital aid delivery will always have issues to manage.

These points resonate with conceptualisations of repair work and its relationship to innovation, which I apply here.

1.5.2 Studies of labour, technology, and gender

The sociology of work helps answer the aforementioned questions about who is doing the labour, who reaps the benefits of labour, who experiences unfair treatment, and how interlocking axes of marginalisation affect work. The field offers valuable insight into how labour, workplaces, and organisations are central to the functioning of society and its social organisation (Kalleberg, 2009). Ethnographic studies have produced detailed accounts of experiences of labour and economic domination as well as strategies that workers adopt to protect their own interests while maintaining employment (Hirslund, 2021). These observations capture informal and formal labour conditions of precarious groups, experiences of gender-based structuring of work, and the production of disenfranchising work cultures (Cavendish, 1982). Intersectional power relations are thus a central focus (Thompson & Smith, 2009), framing labour and the workplace as core sites for the enactment of structural power relations like racial, gender, and class inequalities (Acker, 2006).

Technology and data are growing concerns in the study of labour. The burgeoning field of “digital labour studies,” for example, considers how the content generated by consumers as they use platforms constitutes exploited and (often) unpaid labour that disproportionately generates value in favour of tech companies (Andrejevic, 2011; Fuchs, 2014b). In a different vein, scholars have begun to investigate how digitisation is shifting work in a number of contexts, such as in automated workplaces where AI has facilitated desires for control (Kelly, 2023), in gig economy labour that does not offer protections and rights of traditional workplaces (Orr et al., 2023), and in Silicon Valley where immigrant tech workers are treated as disposable in ways that uphold historically racial hierarchies (Alfrey & Twine, 2017; Jayadev, 2001). These accounts also signal how such power is gendered, taking shape in often male-dominated, white, Global North technology firms like Meta (Noble & Roberts, 2022). Within analyses of digital labour, there is a limited focus on how disaster response workers are experiencing digitally-mediated shifts affecting their labour and capacity to respond to issues in aid programming. Humanitarian workers and aid practitioners are a prime example of this group.

Feminist sociologist Judy Wajcman (2015) offers a starting point for evaluating digital shifts in everyday life and banal settings. In examining how digitised tools quicken life and enable us to do more work, her feminist lens highlights important gendered contours of work, including the blurring of the office/work and home/personal life boundaries. Wajcman (2004) comments on how the relationship between technology and work are predicated on replicating gendered inequalities; for example, how assumptions about skilled technical work are inherently masculine and how the mechanisation of domestic tools does not reduce women's tasks but reproduces gendered divisions of labour. Her research is suggestive of how feminist studies of labour can shed light on technology's relationship to both contemporary and historical power asymmetries.

Feminist studies of labour have reconceptualised what counts as work, revealing how its ideological and historical constructions are constrained by systems of control. Gendered labour, which is often rendered as constitutive of reproductive work, is discussed as being unfairly valued in comparison to, for example, formally paid jobs taken up by men because it does not conform to heteropatriarchal structures (Daniels, 1987). Such analyses unpack how gendered labour is subject to "regimes of invisibility" (Irani, 2019, p. 4), meaning that labour roles and tasks are naturalised to the extent of being unrecognised, underpaid, and absent from knowledge (Jackson, 1999). Scholars like Silvia Federici (1974) and Kathi Weeks (2011) have been formative for applying Marxist critiques to reveal how domestic labour like women's housework participates in economic relations and capitalism, thus troubling attempts to bound domestic sites of maintenance, repair, and care to solely private, personal, and emotional spheres. Emphases on care, caring, and welfare support are inspired by the legacy of feminist scholars who conceive of care as gendered and racialised work, historically taken up by devalued racial groups (e.g., immigrant and Black servants, Tronto, 1993). Analyses of gendered labour extend beyond domestic settings (McDowell, 2002) to show how they apply to formal employment and are endemic to organisations (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). Following these insights, I examine humanitarian breakdown, repair, and maintenance labour as gendered (see Chapter 2). I apply analytic tools from feminist analyses of labour to understand the different kinds of labour, work relationships, how labour is divided, how resources for work are distributed, and labour's effects. This is integral for unpacking how repair labour is imbued with power asymmetries.

By utilising a unique combination of repair work and feminist approaches to labour to examine the everyday of crisis response and its digital contours in Lebanon, this thesis offers a feminist approach to the study of humanitarian work. This captures gender in a nuanced way, brings instrumental yet common forms of power to the surface, and generates important insight into digital welfare in sidelined regions. This offers constructive insight into globalised transformations and contributes to a growing body of ethnographies of disaster, labour, and technoscience (Neale, 2023). By attending to the interrelationship between crisis, humanitarianism, and labour, I set myself up to focus on how power operates in these issues.

1.5.3 Using feminism to investigate power in humanitarian repair work

This thesis sheds light on how power operates, its expansion and reach, and how it becomes legitimised and challenged. I am inspired by critical strands of STS, including feminist technoscience and postcolonial technoscience, shifting focus from pipelines to power. That is, I interrogate how gender and sociocultural power differentials are entangled with technology and its power relations rather than simply focusing on women in the technology sector (Subramaniam, 2009). Like media and communications scholar Mirca Madianou (2021), I shift my focus away from questions of ethics or efficacy to concerns of inequality and oppression. I am not measuring or making claims on whether interventions work or not. Rather, this research focuses on how power operates: its hierarchies, relations, and structures. I aim to uncover how power materialises and its material ramifications. In particular, I am concerned with how people are navigating humanitarian dynamics on the ground, which addresses fundamentally ethical concerns.

Feminist geographer Jennifer Hyndman and feminist anthropologist Malathi de Alwis (2003, p. 215) persuasively argue that “every humanitarian project, in its design, method, evaluation, and impact, is gendered.” Feminist insights help me understand gender as a configuration of power that fundamentally constitutes humanitarian breakdown and its repair work. It aids in describing social worlds by illuminating how gender and inequalities take shape. I uncover related power dynamics by picking up on themes that exhibit gendered narratives, roles, norms, and authority. My application of gendering is distinctly feminist, and I acknowledge it as

overtly political. I take a normative stance that challenges structures of domination, which hopes to inspire change and reform (Cipolla, 2019; Hyndman, 2000).

I draw on intersectional analyses in STS by emphasising not only gender's inextricable connections with technology, but also its intersections with interlocking formations of difference and oppression that are constituted by "sociotechnical networks and practices of a globalized world" (Åsberg & Lykke, 2010, p. 299). Adopting an intersectional approach, I unpack how categories of marginalisation that manifest along lines of age, class, ethnicity, gender, race, disability, and nationality interrelate and combine to exacerbate individuals' unique experiences of inequity, dependency, and exploitation. It also aids in illuminating certain spaces of privilege and protection (Carbado, 2013). Given that intersectional inequities can be addressed, amplified, and side-stepped by responses to breakdown, I highlight how cross-cutting axes of oppression impact forms of failure as well as repair work. By making sense of historical and cultural particularities, I aim to uncover financial, bodily, emotional, security, and social experiences that are integral to how we understand repair and maintenance – its repercussions, constraints, and legitimating practices.

This lens aligns well with traditions of transnational feminism, which build upon earlier global feminist work that draws parallels between differently situated subjects (Mendoza, 2002). One of its primary emphases involves paying specific attention to globalised structures of power, including capitalism and colonialism, to understand their influence on the production of both new and old power asymmetries across distinct but connected spatio-temporal contexts (Grewal & Kaplan, 2006). Feminist transnational studies thereby allows me to interrogate hegemonic power and narratives of the Global North as they relate to and manifest in repair. Diverse groups, including those who have occupied the margins of liberal feminist thought, including "Third World" groups and refugees, are at the heart of my conceptualisation of power and subjectivity but in ways that recognise their agency, resistance, and capacity to mobilise (Mohanty, 2013). To capture this, I focus on the entanglements of micropolitics and macropolitics in Lebanese crisis response (Gupta, 2006). In doing so, I attempt to avoid privileging the application of Western, Eurocentric, white, and liberal explanations of power, inequality, gender, and racism (Alexander & Mohanty, 1996).

1.6 THESIS OUTLINE

The first section of this thesis (Chapters 1-3) outlines my epistemological approach to data analysis and collection to set the stage for how I study responses to breakdown in humanitarianism. In the second section (Chapters 4-7), I apply my empirical findings across interrelated areas of humanitarian engagement – technology, localisation, financial crisis, and regulation – to reveal how overlooked forms of repair work labour materialise, travel, and shift the governance of crisis. The four substantive chapters each show distinct dimensions of repair work using a feminist lens in order to examine diverse yet entangled lived experiences, strategies, contestations, and structures of oppression. The conclusion (Chapter 8) reflects on how the relational divisions sustained in repair work have broader implications for regulation and reform of the sector.

Chapter 2 centres on my conceptual framework. I start by outlining Lebanon's overlapping economic, political, social, and aid crises, which indicate how this site is saturated in formations of disrepair and fragmentation. I then explain repair work and how it adds coherence to the issues that humanitarians are facing in Lebanon, as well as describing how scholars have studied repair work in different contexts. I proceed by detailing how I approach the study of repair in this thesis, which suggests that my site requires attention to the globe-spanning spatialities of repair and attention to the Global South – both of which challenge current understandings that are often bound to particular territories and do not capture unique dynamics of breakdown in crisis zones. Next, I explain why repair work is an ideal lens to analyse social inequality and labour, which I approach using a feminist lens. By highlighting the limitations of ongoing literature that applies feminist-inspired ideas on care and gender to repair work, I suggest how I contribute to this body of literature in ways that unpack underexamined contours of oppression, social division, and harm.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of my research design, methodology, and methods. I situate my research as taking place during the global COVID-19 pandemic, which required methodological adaptation and the use of remote methods to support my initial ethnographic fieldwork. Concentrating on transnational and decentralised relationships and their interconnections leads to my multi-sited and contextualised approaches to ethnography, the goal of which is to capture globalised circulations of repair work throughout local and global

spaces, groups, and scales. I then explicate how I practically applied ontological approaches inspired by STS and feminist technoscience such as preserving messiness, attention to multiplicity, situated knowledge, and non-human actorship. As part of these approaches to understanding how my data explains the world, I situate my own positionality as an insider-outsider Canadian-Lebanese-Palestinian woman and reflect on how this impacted my research. I then explain data collection methods, including sampling and recruitment, reflexivity strategies, and informed consent. In the data analysis section, I outline procedures for familiarising myself with the data, generating themes, and abductively analysing information. The chapter concludes with methodological challenges and ethical concerns.

Chapter 4 examines gendered forms of repair work that sustain the delivery of aid via digitised humanitarian systems: the digitisation and automation of identity registration, cash assistance, and vulnerability targeting. This repair work is feminised in being comparably peripheral, behind the scenes, and generative of forms of labour that are not publicly valued or compensated as humanitarian work but are nonetheless reproductive. Gendered repair of digital infrastructures directly responds to, and is entrenched in, wider technosocial aid formations, which has enabled the UN to consolidate its influence over the structures and conditions of humanitarian labour. The UN's move towards monopolising these dynamics through infrastructural power symbolically asserts masculine power because it enshrines unilateral control, bestows ownership, and maintains the authority to distribute crisis response labour despite posing burdens on the ground. Digital infrastructural power that expresses monopolisation is found to not only reinforce social inequality. By compensating for and distancing from oppressive (digital) structures, it also generates improvisatory and subversion practices that are central to maintaining the ability of aid programmes to support populations in crisis. This reflects how digitisation contributes to shifts in humanitarian labour.

Chapter 5 examines the invisibilisation of aid labour by local and national Lebanese groups. Localisation – shifting ownership and leadership of crisis response to local actors – sustains the daily delivery of aid, making it more reflective of community needs as well as isolating the global humanitarian system from critique by addressing concerns of colonisation and Western-European dominance in the Global South. In light of decolonisation debates, this chapter offers a feminist critique of localisation. I analyse how local labour is included in transnational

projects and funding, how they are compared against one another in partnerships, and how capacity building efforts are framed and technologised. Compared to INGOs and UN agencies, I find that localisation in the name of repairing aid's power asymmetries invisibilises by marginalising, devaluing, and degrading locals' contributions. These gendered and racialised hierarchical configurations suggest that although foreign-led localisation is supposed to support decolonisation, it actually disavows local labour that enables humanitarian aid to endure on the ground. As such, localisation with good intentions in the name of repair work legitimates FAO dominance over funding privileges, public narratives, and social stature.

Chapter 6 focuses on Lebanon's financial crisis, which shifts the demands of humanitarian labour by compelling adaptations to rapidly dwindling circumstances, reducing resources, and impacting humanitarians' wellbeing. This chapter argues that humanitarians' repair of issues posed by the financial crisis were restricted to a form of "palliative governance" – a term coined by sociologist Anthony DiMario (2022). A palliative approach to humanitarian repair and maintenance entails limiting the risk of dying among refugees and poor Lebanese residents – that is, easing, though not relieving, symptoms of suffering. It aids in keeping humanitarian institutions from going under, and, ensuring humanitarian labour is viable, though not efficacious. Here, I apply a critical feminist lens to illuminate the mundane care practices that constitute palliative governance in this context. Although well intended, palliative governance strategies exposed residents and aid recipients to community violence, further poverty, and risks of injury – albeit by making selective choices about who is protected and who is allowed to suffer more. At the same time, humanitarian employees were compelled to work in untenable conditions. Palliation illuminates humanitarian repair work that sustains varying degrees of precarity, explicitly divides subjects, and enables workers to suffer.

Chapter 7 examines regulatory ritualism – that is, insincere yet routine forms of regulation (Braithwaite, 2008) – and how it becomes a form of domination. Transnational crisis response entails managing substantial publicity, funding, and competing needs, which creates a space that is supportive of habitual checks and balances on humanitarian labour. This research argues that the embrace of regulatory practices, tools, and logics often fills a ritualistic and performative role that is more about ticking boxes rather than meaningful rule setting that facilitates effective and accountable humanitarian activity. Digital platforms and surveillance

technologies contribute to the enforcement of regulatory ritualism in the humanitarian workplace via self-discipline and the illusion of control. Although ritualism is not always recognised as a form of domination, this chapter reveals how regulatory ritualism reinforces and creates forms of domination. Specifically, self-evident, naturalised, externally imposed power that demands complicity. Workers negotiate and contest regulatory ritualism, which amounts to repair work that keeps aid delivery going in practice. Ultimately, however, regulatory ritualism produces significant gendered burdens from the perspective of participants, including the need for dedicated emotional labour and management of interpersonal divisions between their colleagues, donors, and recipients.

The conclusion (Chapter 8) starts off by summarising my argument and findings. Reflecting on how this thesis has complicated popular understandings of digital humanitarianism, I suggest how findings shed light on broader (re)configurations in aid. As part of these transformations, I recap that repair work's interrelationship with digitisation and how it is situated within technosocial systems. Following, this section highlights the salience of regulatory governance within gendered repair work and in studies of humanitarianism more broadly, which I use to argue for more feminist studies of regulatory governance. In highlighting broader tensions in humanitarian governance, I reflect on how repair work interfaces with and sustains divisions in the humanitarian sector. Then, I discuss my contributions to wider studies of social inequality, including my attention to diverse kinds of labourers and labour spaces as well as worker agency. I end with reflections for future research, including my desire to re-centre the Middle East as a space on the periphery.

Chapter 2: Background and Theory: Lebanon's Humanitarian Repair Work

2.1 BACKGROUND: BREAKDOWN IN LEBANON

Lebanon, a small Middle Eastern country bordering Syria and Israel, has a population of roughly 5.5 million people (World Bank, 2022). Some imagine Lebanon as a “failed state,” while others suggest it is “weak,” “absent,” and “rapidly failing” (e.g., Betz, 2021; UN Human Rights, 2021). Such conceptualisations highlight the nation’s enduring conditions of internal turmoil, foreign dependence, and dwindling political legitimacy. As scholars like Robert I. Rotberg (2003) have underscored, the Lebanese state arguably collapsed several decades ago, suffering from extreme human and economic ramifications from over a decade of conflict in Syria, the nation’s civil war from 1975-1990, and years of dysfunctional governments (Samad & Moschin, 2016). In fact, Lebanon has long been recognised by the World Bank (2021a, p. xi) “as a Fragility, Conflict & Violence (FCV) State.”

More recently, the nation’s social, economic, and political situation has worsened due to overlapping and grave emergencies. Many humanitarian actors have described the contemporary breakdown in Lebanon as “unprecedented” (Cordaid, 2021), and the World Bank (2021b, n. p.) has framed the situation as one of the “most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century.” Although Lebanon’s populace is accustomed to disasters, the scale and severity of the current humanitarian situation have led many residents to report having limited capacity for managing more trauma (El Hajj, 2023). Nevertheless, they expect that insecurity will not alleviate any time soon, especially given cross-border fire with Israel throughout October 2023 which has already displaced 19,000 people living along the nation’s southern border (Ghossn, 2023). In addition, roughly one-quarter of Syria’s population has relocated to Lebanon. Now one in six people residing within its borders is a refugee – the largest number of refugees per capita in the world (Government of the United Kingdom, 2023).

Although many politicians blame refugees for the nation’s economic turmoil, the Lebanese economy was fragile well before this population influx. Lebanon has one of the highest levels

of debt compared to its gross domestic product (GDP) in the world following decades of overspending, poor economic management, unsustainable levels of government debt, and budget deficits since the 1990s (Dakhlallah, 2020; Neaime, 2015; Saad, 2011). Systemic political corruption and government and banking sector under-regulation have sustained a severe financial and economic crisis since October 2019 (Aabouzeid, 2021; Safieddine, 2019). This has forced banks to close and limit withdrawals of cash from people's own bank accounts. Violence at banking sites has consequently ensued, including banks being set on fire (ABC News, 2023) and a wave of bank heists with hostages taken in attempts to access their own money that is stuck in banks (Safi, 2022).

The economic crisis has contributed to a parallel “fuel crisis”, with people lining up for hours to fuel their cars – that is, if they can afford the extremely high petrol prices (Dakhlallah, 2020, n. p.). As recounted by my participants, this made it harder for humanitarians to do their work, including transporting goods, meeting with recipients, and travelling to work. Given that the state electricity company (Electricité du Liban) has long been unreliable, which has forced most residents to rely on private generators powered by fuel, the fuel shortages have led to what some experts describe as the “almost total collapse of the electricity system” (Ahmad et al., 2022, p. 1). Rolling blackouts have been a long-standing issue throughout the country, but now, prolonged blackouts have left entire communities without electricity for days (Nucho, 2022). Facing little regulation, politicians and lawmakers can benefit from not fixing issues with energy infrastructure (Hatoum, 2020). Elites have connections to private generator operators and “profit from the failures of the national grid” (Whewell, 2019, n. p.), resulting in a small oligopoly of neighbourhood electricity providers referred to as the “generator mafia” (McDowall, 2019). However, since 2019, even private electricity providers have struggled due to the crash of the national currency. These factors have led to Internet and phone service blackouts (Lewis, 2021; Tampa Bay Times, 2022). Humanitarians have thus struggled to implement digital aid solutions that use electricity, like ATMs and biometric identity registration.

Shortages also apply to water and food insecurity, especially as grain reserves are depleted due to the war in Ukraine (Chehayeb, 2022). In 2022, inflation reached over 200% for the third year in a row (Ramadan, 2022). This hyperinflation has made essential items, such as flour and

bread, unaffordable for many residents (Save the Children, 2021). This has contributed to violence, including shootings and stabbings, at food distribution sites as food insecurity and poverty rates are high¹ (Azar, 2021). While Lebanon's crises pose challenges for all residents in the country, these issues bear disproportionate consequences for the nation's refugee population. A recent assessment of Syrian refugees' vulnerability found that "almost 90 per cent were in extreme poverty and needed assistance to survive" (UNHCR 2023, n. p.). These conditions have blurred the demarcations between humanitarian aid and social assistance – the former referring to immediate response to disaster with the aim of alleviating suffering, while the latter caters to a broader group of recipients who require support for ongoing issues.

Many of the aforementioned issues are the result of the Lebanese government's inaction on meaningful "legal and political reforms" (Cortés & Kairouz, 2023, p. 10). The political elite has long suffered from chronic divisiveness, resignation, stalemate, and corruption. This is fuelled by the ethnic and religious division of its government, which political scientist Tamirace Fakhoury critiques for "reproduce[ing] itself through interest-based and clientelist coalition building at the expense of institutionalised structures" (Fakhoury, 2017, p. 682). Indeed, the government has been a major source of controversy and harm within and outside the nation. One of its major political parties, Hezbollah, is classified by some countries as a terrorist group, which has led to incredibly strict controls on who receives aid and how much money is funnelled into the country (Todman & Harper, 2021). More recently, international donors and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have demanded that the nation's government and central bank commit to an extensive list of reforms in order to incentivise structural reforms (BBC, 2020; Heller & Zoughaib, 2023). Commentators have called for changes to these support strategies because the Lebanese polity bears the brunt of conditionality restrictions. Conditions on funding mean that urgently needed aid is withheld, which contributes to the worsening of vulnerabilities and suffering (Diwan & Sayed, 2023).

Within the country, large-scale and sometimes violent protests against the government have taken place, most notably as part of the October 2019 protests in response to the government levying unreasonable taxes for WhatsApp (BBC, 2019). Mass protests and concerns related to

¹ Roughly 80% of Lebanese residents live below the poverty line, with roughly 36% in extreme poverty (EU DG NEAR, 2023).

the government ignited in response to the 4 August 2020 explosion of ammonium nitrate at the Beirut Port (often referred to as the “Beirut Blast”). The event was described as “‘historically’ powerful” in being one of the “biggest non-nuclear explosions in history” (Amos & Rincon, 2020, n. p.). It caused widespread homelessness, urban destruction, damage of already poor infrastructures, physical injury, and a total of 218 deaths (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The blast further ruined confidence in and the legitimacy of the government, which led to government resignation (Chulov, 2020). Within several years after the blast, unemployment had increased 35% and “hospitals, schools, and other facilities” are still rebuilding and struggling to keep the lights on (Kahil, 2023).

As noted by several participants, Lebanon is one of the only countries in the world where the government does not provide basic minimum services for its citizens. National and foreign aid actors such as international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs), transnational governance organisations (United Nations and the World Bank), and community and religious groups are tasked with filling the gaps in public social welfare provision (Finckenstein, 2021). Monthly cash assistance has been provided to a small number of Lebanese nationals by the World Bank for roughly 10 years under the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP) (Kelley, 2017). However, since NPTP took a while to set up and needs drastically skyrocketed from the Port explosion, foreign actors like the World Bank, European Union (EU), and UN established the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN). The pervasiveness of interventions by out-of-state actors – especially those from North America and Europe – suggests that emergency response in Lebanon emerges at the nexus of broader power asymmetries, such as foreign dependency, diminished state sovereignty, and French colonisation (Kassem, 2020).

One cannot discuss humanitarian disasters in Lebanon without considering how they map onto broader geopolitics and structures of governance linked to the country’s distinct history, which is tied to French colonisation and still influential. For example, in the aftermath of the ammonium nitrate blast in Beirut, over 60,000 Lebanese residents signed an online petition to place the nation back under French mandate for ten years (Djeham, 2020). Although the government is to blame for many of the state’s ruptures and its decay, scholars suggest that many of these issues are rooted in colonialism. As Rana Jawad (2009, p. 238, 242) argues, the crisis in Lebanon is “not merely an issue of underdevelopment”; it is formatively shaped by

historical and cultural forces that include “inheritance[s] from colonial rulers.” The French model of welfare imposed upon Lebanon during their period of colonial rule entailed minimal state intervention and prioritised religious organisations and foreign support. This thwarted the possibility of state-led welfare and weakened the state’s capacity to deliver welfare on its own without foreign interference (Cammett, 2011, 2014). Similarly, a paternalistic view of development became ingrained in welfare provision, as “French officials held the view that the colonies could not develop themselves but rather needed the initiative of the French Administrative Authority” (Schmitt, 2015, p. 334). Settler colonialism is therefore central to the nation’s welfare initiatives, including how welfare is organised and its present-day issues that merit transnational support and technological “solutions.”

Professor of communication studies, Aimee Carrillo Rowe, and scholar of critical race and Indigenous studies, Eve Tuck, define “settler colonialism” as an enduring set of structural relations predicated on pursuing land, in which settlers travel to a place populated by Indigenous peoples and claim that land as settler-owned property (Rowe & Tuck, 2017). Settler colonialism by Israeli occupation has impelled Palestinian refugees to flee to Lebanon since 1948 (Randa, 2013). At the time, it was not foreseeable that the Palestinian presence in Lebanon would be long-term; however, many have remained and are unlikely to leave in the foreseeable future. As senior United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) official and scholar of refugee protection Ninette Kelley (2017, p. 84) observes, “[s]imilar reasons were given [later on] for the refusals to enable legal recognition of temporary residence and to facilitate registration of Syrian refugees.” Lebanese officials have prevented the establishment of Palestinian and Syrian refugee camps as a means of dissuading their stay in Lebanon, including suspending their identity registration in 2015 (Janmyr & Mourad, 2018). Settler colonialism is consequently a foundational influence on the Lebanese state’s hesitancy towards allowing the UN to register the legal identities of Palestinian and Syrian refugees as well as the normalisation of human rights infringements like blocking refugees’ access to essential services, preventing property ownership, and restricting the jobs they are legally permitted to do. Such infringements have been legitimised as the country refuses to be a signatory to the Geneva Convention, repeatedly asserting that it is “not a country of asylum” (Janmyr, 2017, p. 440).

Attempts to cut costs, enhance accountability, and streamline the provision of resources to the vast refugee population have accelerated humanitarianism's use of data-informed decision-making and digital technologies. In October 2016, the Lebanon One Unified Inter-Organisational System for E-cards (LOUISE) was launched as the primary mode through which cash-based assistance was delivered to impoverished Syrian refugees in the nation. LOUISE delivers monthly cash-based assistance using a digitised e-card akin to a debit card (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2019), enabling aid to shift away from food vouchers, cheques, and in-kind food assistance. As of 2013, cash-based aid has been prioritised or “targeted” specifically to the most in-need or most vulnerable (El-Huni, 2015). If deemed eligible, recipients receive banking cards that are automatically uploaded with \$27USD per person every month. The cards can be used like debit cards at automated teller machines (ATMs), which aim to help recipients purchase essential goods and services from over 500 WFP-contracted shops throughout the country (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2019). LOUISE represents one of the biggest, “and likely most digital,” cash transfer programs in the world and in history (Chehade et al., 2020, p. 2).

These social benefits are delivered through a single, centralised, and digitised system. An array of disparate yet interconnected technologies support LOUISE's operation, including the biometric identification and verification of beneficiary identity, mobile phone applications that compare prices of goods at different shops (Dalili), automated eligibility assessment, and numerous transnational inter-agency databases like the Refugee Assistance Information System (e.g., CAMEALEON, 2022; WFP, 2019b). Spearheaded by the World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Lebanon Cash Consortium (LCC), LOUISE has been characterised as an exemplary collaborative humanitarian network (Berthaut et al., 2018; Groupe URD & ALNAP, 2018). All contributing actors are, in a way, only semi-autonomous. These actors include banking institutions, NGOs and INGOs, state governments, civil society organisations (CSOs), faith-based organisations, activists, academic institutions, and private sector contributors like technology companies and local retailers (Chehade et al., 2020). LOUISE therefore constitutes a transnational, multi-sectoral, and multi-level assemblage of actors participating in social assistance governance, collaboratively directing how issues are defined, dealt with, and marketed. Lebanon's cash

program is one of the largest in the world (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, 2017), with 204,045 cards issued through LOUISE as of November 2018 (LOUISE, n. d.).²

Overall, Lebanon as a research site reveals chronic and interconnected disrepair, fragmentation, and decay, which participants reaffirmed in interviews and during fieldwork. For example, Jaad and Nada, both Lebanese nationals and residents, said that they have experienced more days of disaster than stability. Of course, chronic breakdown is not specific to Lebanon. Other states face similar issues, and the global humanitarian sector often struggles with persistent failure given, as economist Giles Carbonnier (2015, p. 4) states, “humanitarianism is in crisis. Renewed criticism from within and outside the sector hint at the failings of the humanitarian system. Acute needs for assistance and protection simply remain unaddressed.” Despite pervasive breakdown, aid persists due to dedicated work on the ground. How, then, do humanitarians deliver critical assistance in light of these barriers? This chapter addresses how a focus on repair work aids in understanding humanitarian labour amidst perpetual breakdown generally (Section 2.2), and the issues facing Lebanon specifically (Section 2.3). Section 2.4 concludes the chapter.

2.2 REPAIR WORK

Scholars from different disciplines have laid the foundations for studying how systems are perpetually broken down, maintained, and modified as well as for bringing what is unintelligible into sight (Akrich, 1992; de Laet & Mol, 2000; Latour, 2005). While many of them have made critical contributions to what is now framed as “maintenance and repair studies,” sociologists Christopher R. Henke (1999) as well as Stephen Graham and Nigel Thrift (2000) are particularly formative to the field. Henke (1999, p. 56) draws on and expands ethnomethodology’s focus on repair and conversation analysis to examine how social order is negotiated and reorganised by interactions between repair workers. He puts forward a “sociology of repair” which illuminates the relationship between repairing social and material systems; that is, in the repair of physical equipment and buildings, repair workers concomitantly (though often invisibly) modify and maintain people’s knowledge, assumptions, and relationships. Graham and Thrift (2007) extend Henke’s (1999) work in their examination

² Updated numbers are not readily available on how many e-cards have been issued through LOUISE.

of contemporary cities, making the argument that scholars need to further develop ways to study the imperceptible labour and materials required to keep systems functioning. Since these accounts, scholarly attention to breakdown, maintenance, and repair has gained traction, particularly among scholars of science and technology studies (STS) (e.g., Callén & Criado, 2015), geographers (DeSilvey, 2006), anthropologists (Anand, 2020), and sociologists (Burrell, 2012).

STS scholars, in particular, have embraced this lens. It is well-suited to STS analyses that are known for scrutinising taken-for-granted ideas around technoscientific innovation and for highlighting the agency and vulnerability of non-human actors and materials (Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Suchmann & Bishop, 1999). Infrastructures comprise a major focus in the field, which are conceived as relational systems embedded in existing social arrangements that offer unseen support and classification of tasks, people, and objects (Star & Bowker, 1999). A foundational insight emerges from Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder's (1996) work, which contends that infrastructures only become perceptible when they are broken, overridden, and questioned. Breakdown and responding with repair are integral for seeing and understanding how infrastructures work, as they involve multiple humans, technologies, users, objects, and spaces that are hidden from view.

Many scholarly accounts of infrastructure consider breakdown to be disruptions to systems, a break from the status quo and what is expected. In his now influential essay, Steven J. Jackson (2014) centres breakdown, putting forward “broken world thinking” and “repair work” to contest the idea of breakdown as being an anomaly. Broken world thinking, the ontological stance that informs repair work, accepts that nothing is perfect or fully fixed. Jackson (2014) contends that “breakage” is an omnipresent problem and theme because everything has cracks, eventually breaks, and is endlessly changing; think of, for example, roads and political systems. By conceiving of breakdown as an inevitable and never-ending process, one that perpetually iterates between repair and breakdown, Jackson's (2014) framework is helpful for overcoming binaries like operative versus inoperative that fail to capture the omnipresence of change and incompleteness in everyday life (Schwennessen, 2019). It also counteracts emphasis on advancement, evolution, and modernisation that are prioritised in understanding “the nature,

use, and effects of information technology and new media” (e.g., AI innovation and disruptive technology) (Jackson, 2014, p. 221).

What Jackson (2014) refers to as “broken world thinking” or “repair-centered ethics” has two primary assumptions. First, this lens values the incompleteness, instability, and fragility of our social worlds. Most structures, relationships, and materials are constantly in the process of malfunctioning, falling apart, decaying, and being replaced. These are not moments of exception, and should not be unappreciated, hidden, and considered only a stepping stone or blockade. Instead, breakdown is a catalyst for important change and a valuable entry point for analysing technology’s nature, consequences, and application. Breakdown is not simply mechanical, isolated, and located in a single issue; rather, it is interconnected with other social, political, and economic systems and its effects reverberate widely.

Second, there is a need to bring to light the activities, processes, and labour that maintain functionality, (re)produce stability, repair issues, and fill gaps in techno-social arrangements and infrastructures (Jackson, 2014). What Jackson (2014) calls “repair work” consists of the routine, incremental, and mundane acts of repair, maintenance, and restoration. This intervention aims to “keep things working,” patch over holes, and hold landscapes and relationships together (Domínguez Rubio, 2016, p. 76). Repair work involves creativity, reconfiguring, strategising, resilience, innovative tactics, and labour. In the process, repair work preserves order, prolongs human and material value, attempts to meet working standards, and moulds to the “circumstances of organisations, systems, and lives” (Jackson, 2014, p. 222).

Taken together, broken world thinking emphasises two contrasting yet complementary axes: perpetual breakdown and constant processes of fixing, giving rise to new combinations. Repair is the hinge that holds these two assumptions together. In the context of Lebanon, repair work is central within existing systems that operate amidst overlapping crises. Because needs are so acute and breakage is so omnipresent that it has constrained most resources and stifled what were once considered to be robust development strategies, responses in the nation often cannot overhaul systems or enact structural reform. Instead, responses to breakdown are often more modest by focusing on restoring functionality and mending relationships.

Focusing on repair work enables asking important questions. Who is restoring systems that are taken for granted as working? How is order broken and maintained? How are capabilities extended and limited in instances of decay? This framework is also valuable for contesting linear and deterministic notions of repair. Repair does not always lead to reparative outcomes and it is not always effective. Instances of repair can break things, or they can maintain breakage and foster inequality (addressed below). Repair does not have less value than innovation; in fact, sometimes the most valuable interventions are subtle and ordinary. Repair does not only happen after innovation or at the end of the product's design process once it has been shared with the world because repair and invention are continuous and never-ending. Finally, repair reveals the endurance of old things, including materials, processes, and logics, and that innovation is not isolated to those that are new. In the context of humanitarianism, repair work troubles the tendency of humanitarian and disaster studies literatures to frame crises as the opposite of moments of stability or as disruptive of the natural order of things.

Repair work resonated strongly with my interview findings. Across my participants, what stuck out the most was how different stakeholders (practitioners, donors, and CSOs, among others) regularly focused on repairing the breakage of old and new devices and programmes as well as negotiating contestations over repair and the challenges it created. The different forms of breakdown can be described in the following ways: “eroded,” meaning they have slowly deteriorated and lost efficacy over time; “broken,” meaning they quite literally do not work as intended or needed; “fractured,” meaning its relations and components have rifts and are separating; and “rotting,” meaning they are infected and decaying due to malicious or contaminated dynamics or actors (e.g., corruption). This dissertation focuses on the forms of repair work in which humanitarians engage in response to variegated forms and systems of breakdown.

It is important to note what repair work is *not*. Repair work is not focused on the notion of actually fixing individual things. Instead, repair work is a set of practices that enable things to function because they are always in disrepair. This means that repair does not focus on enacting structural reform or expansive change, although this quality has been contested; for example, see Sims and Henke's (2012) discussion of “transformative repair.” Repair work also does not necessarily improve systems or levels of performance. Think of repair as bandages that prevent

infection, fuse pieces together, and stop bleeding so that bodies can remain healthy but not live forever. In another way, maintenance is like the work of mechanics who conduct tune-ups, test systems, and replace eroded hardware in the hopes of prolonging functionality and mitigating damage. Furthermore, repair is not a final strategy or solution; it is an ongoing, never-ending process that adapts and responds to gaps and fissures when they arise. It is an active way to respond to decay and failure. Repair work exists in moments and logics that recognise breakage as inevitable, yet are not satisfied with leaving sociotechnical phenomena in their current state. Importantly, as Jérôme Denis and David Pontille (2023) contend, repair has ethical and political stakes that extend further than the site of technosocial breakage.

Repair work and broken world thinking have been studied in various ways. Researchers have used ethnographic (e.g., Strebel et al., 2018) and autoethnographic (e.g., Graziano & Trogal, 2017) methods to capture the negotiation of repair and breakdown in action and how it is experienced in specific contexts. Shedding light on different types of repair and maintenance strategies, the concept has been extended to explain the assemblage of environments, materials, and human and non-human actors involved. For example, “wrangling, re-representation, and optimisation” (Tanweer et al., 2016), “patchwork” (De Coss-Corzo, 2021), and “retrofitting” (Howe et al., 2016) reveal the multiplicity of aims, contexts, relations, and ramifications in attempts to make things workable. Within the repertoire of strategies concerned with breakdown, scholars often, and intentionally, separate repair from maintenance: the latter occurs before failure and is a more preventative, voluntary, and ongoing process with a future-oriented focus (Carr, 2017).

Infrastructures constitute major sites of maintenance and repair, including those that are both formal and informal (Baptista, 2019). Investigations of infrastructure often adopt sociotechnical approaches to power that emphasise who and what are taken for granted and how they are imbricated in keeping infrastructures in operation (Henke & Sims, 2020). As part of this theme, scholars often address the repair of material objects and data to emphasise the inherent fragility and constant labour of preserving our material worlds (e.g., Denis & Pontille, 2015; Pink et al., 2018). While temporal dimensions of repair have received considerable attention, emphasising breakdown’s fluidity, contingency, and multiple timelines (Jackson, 2017; Ramakrishnan et al., 2021), analyses of its spatiality are in shorter supply. This

discrepancy can be explained by Valeria Graziano and Kim Trogal's (2023, p. 70) observation that "labour and space are often analysed separately." As a collection, the literature on breakdown, repair, and maintenance suggest that the field is diverse, interdisciplinary, and can be adapted to the study of perpetually broken humanitarian systems.

2.3 STUDYING REPAIR WORK IN LEBANON'S HUMANITARIAN LABOUR

I apply repair work as an analytic focus that captures the existence of perpetual fragility and breakdown in states, communities, and aid systems, which have long required ongoing labour dedicated to preservation and mending. I use ethnography to concentrate on how actors respond to and experience breakdown in humanitarianism. In doing so, I respond to the call by Philippe Sormani, Alain Bovet, and Ignaz Strebel (2019) to examine how repair work materialises *in situ*. In Lebanon's humanitarian context, this means that the substantive chapters (Chapters 4-7) examine how strategies, logics, and tools of repair work operate on the ground. This is made possible by describing, for example, the actors and spaces involved in repair and how breakdown transpires and evolves. They aim to trace the forms breakdown and repair take and how they are uniquely experienced by those in the field, including in conflicting ways. Thus, I avoid abstract understandings of repair work.

Researching repair as it "take[s] shape in and across particular situations" (Sormani et al., 2019, p. 4) fits well with a study of repair as it emerges in a highly globalised system. In order to understand humanitarian action in what some have characterised as a collapsed or failed state such as Lebanon (e.g., UN Human Rights, 2021), I had to get a spatial grounding. This means I contemplated how repair in crisis contexts is shaped by a wide range of regions and groups, how space is wielded as a repair strategy and technology of power, and how areas are constantly reconfigured in the name of restoring nations experiencing disaster. In contrast, there is a tendency to take a state-centric approach to understanding national failures in the Global South (e.g., Vindegg, 2022). Repair work's effects, infrastructures, and responses are often framed as being bound within a region or population (e.g., Baptista, 2019). As such, the possibilities for repair and breakdown are heavily tied to territory, referring to states as if they are defined, naturalised, and bounded spaces where social, economic, political, and cultural relations and activities take shape. This approach does not resonate in the Lebanese context where there are high rates of foreign interventionism, substantially large migrant and diaspora communities,

continuous circulation of humanitarian actors and resources in and out of the country, and state borders are breached with exchanges of fire and artillery.

Lebanon is an increasingly transnational space. A multiplicity of out-of-country state and non-state actors have significant power and sway compared to many Lebanese actors, including the Lebanese government. The UN, World Bank, IMF, and EU, in particular, influence much of the nation's political, social, and economic activities. Through development initiatives like the Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) (World Bank, 2020b), they are cooperating to (re)build the state's eroded critical infrastructure, urban settings, and welfare service delivery, as well as impel political and economic reforms. Repair work in Lebanon thus goes well beyond government-centric notions of the state – and in many ways, it deliberately circumvents the state and its actors – in order to engage UN systems, INGOs, and private sector influence. The 'state' that is Lebanon is fluid and globalised. The nation's transnational actors and relations diverge from studies on repair work that are territorially bound. This thesis takes seriously the challenge of engaging the spatiality of states, recognising that repair work within and across them is not taking place within static and self-enclosed territorial borders. In my approach to repair work, I thus draw upon and expand existing literature on “the complex global and local flows that sustain repair work” (Houston & Jackson, 2016, p. 8). I do this by utilising insights regarding the interconnections of global and local spaces (see Chapter 3) as well as heeding calls from critical urban theorist Neil Brenner (1999, p. 40), who advocates for re-prioritising “sub and supra-national forms of territorial organisation” such as communities, workplaces, and institutional headquarters.

Existing literature on repair in the Global South (e.g., Houston, 2017) draws attention to how collaboration and adaptation are engaged on the ground as a means of preserving and strengthening existing infrastructures. As Cecilia Alda-Vidal and colleagues (2023) argue, repair work particularly resonates in these contexts where there is variable infrastructure, broken state systems, and political and infrastructural disruptions. As Christina Schwenkel (2015) points out in her analysis of poor urban neighbourhoods in Vietnam, these Southern sites offer a great deal to the study of repair and maintenance, as they disrupt dominant assumptions in the literature about the (in)visibility of infrastructure when it breaks down. In Lebanon, infrastructural leaks, breakdown in politics, and sub-par humanitarian systems are

more prevalent than streamlined flows and productive capacity. In addition, both the Lebanese government and humanitarians often try to hide this failure, breakage, and rust given risks to their reputation and legitimacy, sometimes displacing the locus of breakdown on others, such as refugees (Baylouny, 2020).

2.3.1 Repair work and inequality

Addressing inequality is important in a context where a large proportion of historically marginalised groups like migrants, the poor, and labourers grapple with the effects of overlapping crises and hierarchies of authority. Jackson (2014, p. 226, 233) writes, “[b]reakdown, maintenance, and repair” have always been a part of histories of “exploration, empire, and globalisation” and have the potential to uphold “resistance to antidemocratic and antihumanist projects.” Despite this statement, Jackson (2014) largely frames repair work using an optimistic lens. He imagines how repair enacts “care” – continuous acts of maintaining living beings, systems, and technologies needed to sustain our worlds – and discusses how repair has the potential to build “solidarity” between people and objects (Jackson, 2014, p. 233). While repair highlights interdependence and ethical responsibility to look after others (Jackson, 2014), a number of scholars like Alejandro De Coss-Corzo (2021) challenge current studies of repair that endorse such practices as upholding infrastructures and relational bonds.

A growing body of scholarship highlights how repair and maintenance reinforce inequalities. For example, in Jessica Barnes’ (2017, p. 147) analysis of Egypt’s irrigation infrastructure, she challenges the typically “celebratory tone” of maintenance and repair that meaningfully attempts to highlight overlooked labour but also sidesteps how uneven power dynamics are upheld. She finds that maintenance practices fix issues within Egypt’s irrigation infrastructure as much as they sustain state authority that disenfranchises its farmers. In this thesis, I similarly consider how repair and maintenance that is fixated on responding to physical and tangible breakages, like fixing homes and bodies, simultaneously responds to intangible fractures related to acts of violence, dispossession, and disempowerment. I contribute to existing literature on repair by applying an intersectional lens and taking the stance that repair and maintenance can enact violence just as much as they are essential to maintaining survival.

What responsibilities, burdens, or privileges come with repair work? How are the benefits and consequences of breakage and repair distributed? What knowledge and expertise are required in moments of breakdown and consequent repair? Who decides what is maintained? What/whose interests are baked into repair work? How does (in)visibility factor in repair work, and who has the (in)ability to manage visibility of their lives/work over others? Whose capabilities are extended and whose are left behind amidst decay? Who is accountable for leaks? As these questions about power reveal, there is a “social and moral ethics of maintenance and repair” (Schwenkel, 2015, p. 520). And, power is not unidirectional – repair can both expose and reinforce dominating power as well as combat inequality and restore order.

2.3.2 Repair work labour and its relationship to feminism

Repair work is inevitably about labour. The fact that Jackson (2014) says repair comes out in practices rather than representation or identity invites a focus on the labour of repair. Alda-Vidal et al. (2023, n. p.) suggest that to view fragility as an innate characteristic pervading infrastructures, objects, and relationships enables “us to see the labour that makes infrastructure functional.” Similarly, Graham and Thrift (2007, p. 4) suggest that moments of repair “illustrate the importance of human labour and ingenuity” because, for example, sources of breakdown may not be clear, resources required to restore order are not always available, and acute issues require acting fast and creatively. All of these conundrums demand improvisatory labour to adequately respond to breakdown.

Given repair accommodates mundane matters, inequality, and labour, it is particularly attuned to highlighting the repair labour of non-elite groups – those who do not hold the majority of power, influence, status, and capital. In my case, this particularly refers to the targets of aid intervention (e.g., the poor) and aid workers implementing interventions (such as country directors, protection coordinators, volunteers, and technical specialists). The latter group of workers can be understood as what other scholars describe as “intermediaries” (Chaudhuri, 2019) and “street level bureaucrats” who manage daily service delivery by mediating between bureaucrats and users (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977).

While much repair literature examines the work of non-elite workers (e.g., building mechanics; Henke, 1999), I extend the focus on non-elite work, scrutinising *who* engages in repair labour and what consequences it has for a broader conceptualisation of “workers” and “work.” Here, workers are not just those who are traditionally considered to be skilled, experts, or formally employed by institutions (e.g., country directors, protection coordinators, and technical specialists). Repair “workers” also include those who are not necessarily responsible for contributing to aid and do not have official job titles but nonetheless labour to keep fractured humanitarian systems afloat and maintain its imperfect technologies and interventions. In my research context, this references refugees, shop owners, taxi drivers, family members, and many others. They are not compensated for their support work, nor are they publicly recognised as, and appreciated for, managing humanitarian breakage. In addition, these non-elite workers are typically considered to only engage in repair labour in private settings rather than those that are public and tied to the formal market. Rather than repairing aid as a requirement of formal employment, their labour is compelled by the need to access aid, desires to uphold social justice, or social contracts in communities. This repair work is not necessarily voluntary, as the stakes may be high; in some cases, repair and maintenance may be quintessential to ensuring the survival of oneself or others, or to mitigating a welfare institution’s illegitimacy. As such, it reveals unique conditions, logics, and constructions of failure and repair.

In taking this approach, I shift away from the focus of literature that tends to examine “clearly identifiable jobs associated with infrastructure’s construction, maintenance and repair” (Alda-Vidal et al., 2023, n. p.). Having qualities that are distinct from repair work by, for example, hobbyists (Rosner, 2013) and engineers (Velkova, 2023), my attention to non-elite groups expands understandings of repair work. This approach to repair labour enables considering how breakage and repair labour are invisibilised, discounted, and gendered (discussed in the subsections below). Further, to understand refugees and community members as *engaging* in repair and maintenance labour subverts unilateral ideas that refugees and community members are only *helped* by repair work, which does not capture labour on the ground. Instead, I show how humanitarian issues are not predetermined as they come to be understood differently by different groups of people.

By foregrounding work and workers that are behind the scenes, taken for granted, and deliberately or indeliberately out of view, this research responds to feminist calls for extending the meaning of labour and what counts as work (Stokes & Lawhorn, 2022). It also enables capturing feminist calls to analyse labour that takes place beyond the paid workplace (“life’s work”; Mitchell et al., 2004). In the context of humanitarian workers, this focus also means considering the places that workers inhabit that are outside the office such as banking sites and their homes (Mackenzie & Rose, 1983). In reflecting on feminist analyses of the material basis of labour, I focus on invisible labour dynamics and actors demanded by analyses of repair as well as understanding how governance operates in humanitarian contexts.

In sum, I draw on the small but growing number of analyses of breakdown, repair, and maintenance that adopt feminist (Cozza et al., 2020) and gendered (de Wilde, 2021) perspectives – the former with an explicitly normative political stance, while the latter focuses on examining how gender is a social construct that pervades our worlds. The following subsections describe the notion of care and gendering in more detail.

2.3.2.1 Care

Within existing literature on repair work and feminism, maintenance and repair are studied as care, which constitutes a crucial form of gendered labour (e.g., de la Bellacasa, 2017; Silvis, 2023; Young & Rosner, 2019). As Daniela K. Rosner (2013, p. 66) notes in the context of repair clinics, the boundaries between care labour and repair work are often muddled in practice, which “complicate gendered practices.” Care offers important insights into feminist studies of repair and maintenance, demonstrating the necessity yet devaluation of supportive labour (Corwin & Gidwani, 2021), the vulnerability of objects, materials, and matter (Callén & Criado, 2015), how infrastructures subject to rust, decay, and erosion are preserved (Cohn, 2016), and the skills that are needed to meet the pressing demands of climate change (Carr, 2023). It reveals how gendered care labour that is characteristic of private spaces (e.g., homes) and family responsibilities (e.g., cooking and tending to sick family members) becomes constituted in an array of public and private settings (e.g., DeVault, 1991). In humanitarian spaces and relationships, repair-as-care labour is central to humanitarian work. Humanitarian labour, and the sector more broadly, has been conceptualised as being fundamentally premised on care given its publicised benevolence and core focus on compassion, protection, supporting

welfare, and helping people (Ticktin, 2011). As shown throughout the substantive chapters, especially Chapter 6, care defines the logic behind designing aid for migrants and how humanitarians adapt to pressures posed by resource constraints.

While care offers an imperative lens to understand how traditionally feminised labour is integral to sustaining our social worlds, there is an over-emphasis on care as a feminist approach to maintenance and repair. This limits our understanding of labour and governance, as there are many other ways that a feminist lens can help us capture the power relationships and gendered dynamics that are integral to responding to breakdown. Furthermore, valourising care does not consider how care is “romanticised,” as Shannon Mattern (2018) contends. Mattern (2018, n. p.) highlights work by historian Michelle Murphy (2015, p. 5), who pinpoints that the “politics of care by 1970s feminists was simultaneously conditioned by white privilege, capitalism, and postcolonial humanitarianism.” Fantasies of humanitarian repair risk perpetuating Mattern (2018) and Murphy’s (2015) concerns about idealising care, including being blind to how the responsibility for caring and the type of work entailed in care reproduces historical and contemporary racialised, classed, and gendered power asymmetries. For example, care work is known as historically exploitative and being disproportionately carried out by enslaved populations, indentured labourers, servants, and people of colour – particularly Black and immigrant women (e.g., Brody, 2016; Glenn, 2010; Romero & Pérez, 2016).

The oppressive, gendered, colonial, and racialised histories of care work are particularly applicable to the humanitarian sector. Humanitarian intervention has a legacy of being carried out by Western countries in the name of caring for what they frame as deficient and dependent “Native” Others residing in underdeveloped and developing nations of the Global South. This poses complex and power-laden gender identities, as humanitarians are both hyper-masculinised protectors and feminised philanthropists and peacekeepers, which feminises Indigenous populations by imposing them with inferior status and frequent objectification (Angathangelou et al., 2003). Although contemporary analyses do not frame humanitarian care as repair (e.g., Reid-Henry, 2014; Sahraoui, 2020), the affinities are clear between the desire to save lives in disasters and ongoing acts of adapting to breakdown.

I contribute to existing literature on care and repair by suggesting its vital support of humanitarian mandates and its downfalls for marginalised groups and workers. I do this by applying a form of care labour that has not yet been considered in repair literature, such as the application of “palliative care” in Chapter 6, namely the care for others that merely aims to maintain survival and postpone death in light of limited resources and failing policies (DiMario, 2022). Palliative care does not try to avoid breakdown because it is conceived as inevitable. Instead, it mimics aspects of Marisa Leavitt Cohn’s (2016, p. 1514) conception of “convivial decay” by strategising how to make breakdowns as elegant as possible, “work[ing] actively with decline rather than against it.” In another way, I consider how care is enabled by more than humans, as it is imagined to be secured by money, technologies, and institutions. This is an essential insight given that STS has long established that human carers, and humans in general, live interdependently with non-human actants.

There is an unceasing need to conduct care, repair, and maintenance work because there are multiple forms of breakdown and breakdowns continuously transform (Denis & Pontille, 2015). That is, repair is not a sustainable solution because everything eventually degenerates, things are in varying states of decay, and levels of fragility are constantly fluctuating with each interaction and changes in the context. I highlight this multiplicity of fragility by examining the heterogenous experiences of non-elites’ labour. This reveals contradictory accounts of humanitarianism, showing conflicting perspectives and accounts that do not easily align with public imaginaries and literature about innovation, technology, and aid reform. It can also reveal threats posed not just by foreign actors but also by those on the ground (and thus contradicts prevailing notions of care/harm). Doing so empirically de-naturalises humanitarianism’s virtue, assumptions, and fixed and linear character, which contributes to existing research that destabilises humanitarianism as straightforward and self-evident (e.g., Verdirame & Harrell-Bond, 2005).

2.3.2.2 Gendering

While the everyday labour of women in repair work has been widely examined (e.g., Tacchetti et al., 2022), Christina Schwenkel (2015) argues that comparatively, the gendered dimensions of maintenance and repair have been sparsely considered. Alda-Vidal and her colleagues (2023, n.p.) confirm that this gap in knowledge has not been remedied, stating that “the gendered

dimensions of infrastructure fragility and of the labours of maintenance have been little interrogated.” The dearth of gendered and feminist approaches thus leaves an important gap in our understanding of repair work.

Noticeably, these authors, including many others who analyse the gendering of repair (e.g., O’zmin, 2017), largely focus on women and men as sites of knowledge. With few exceptions (e.g., Vindegg, 2022), gendered accounts of repair are gleaned through women’s versus men’s roles and identities, sometimes reifying binaries without interrogating other dimensions of power. While there is a robust literature on gender and labour, the attention to gender in repair work analyses is very targeted compared to how gender and labour are discussed more broadly. Many gendered analyses of repair work tend to reflect gender as defining skills and competencies in repair work (Young & Rosner, 2019), as revealing repair work that is invisibilised labour (Cozza et al., 2020), and gender-specific consequences of breakdown (Rosner & Ames, 2014). As such, they tend not to reflect how feminist scholars have challenged and expanded our understanding of gender – understanding gender to include a broader group of objects, practices, environments, and interlocking power relations (e.g., Puar, 2020). To treat gender as a structure of power and hierarchy thus captures its complex histories and the multilayered contours of gender and how it produces subjectivities.

Feminist approaches to labour focus on and uncover what is rendered invisible – and in fact, are actively *invisibilised* through gendered social conditions (e.g., Adams, 2022). “Invisibilisation” refers to accidental or explicit attempts to make phenomena perceptible or imperceptible and how perceptibility is connected to broader socio-political power structures. Invisible labour constitutes work that is undervalued, underappreciated, and peripheral, which has typically fallen to women and people of colour in their roles that are considered to be unskilled such as mothering and service work (Clement, 1993). To invisibilise is to withhold comprehension of various knowledges, experiences, and people involved in work, which makes it more difficult to challenge its oppression (Suchman, 1995).

As scholars like Wajcman (2004, p. 45) have shown, to visibilise labour that is invisible is particularly important in studies of technology because the “hidden” and “cheap” labour of women has long enabled the tech sector to accumulate profit and sell domestic technologies.

Ruth Schwartz Cowan (1985) finds that domestic technologies like washing machines have the effect of reifying gendered stereotypes and tasks as well as creating new gendered responsibilities and unachievable standards, while Arlie Hochschild (1989) finds that technologies reinforce patriarchal social order. Taken together, these observations suggest that it is crucial to uncover how repair and maintenance labour are often “hidden, gendered and class-orientated work essential to keeping things going” (Udall, 2019, p. 276).

Invisible labour has become a focus in contemporary analyses of repair work and its reproduction of historical inequalities. For example, Nikhil Anand (2020, p. 53) analyses the repair work of labourers like plumbers to reveal how “invisibilities of infrastructure are themselves contingent on the invisibilisation and subjugation of maintenance workers, who are placed beyond sight to regularly and constantly work to make water flow again.” In Chapter 5, I contribute to existing literature on the (in)visibilisation of labour by showing how locals’ humanitarian repair work is hidden from view by foreign aid actors who attempt to make it look like they are flattening power dynamics. Rather than meaningfully localising aid, they perpetuate the devaluation and subservience of local aid workers. Chapter 4 also visibilises the behind-the-scenes labour required to make up for issues from monopolised digital aid, revealing how this labour is not recognised as traditional work involved in digitising humanitarian interventions. This invisibilisation and labour mimics how women’s labour was historically not considered to be work, but rather, it was considered to be irrelevant, unskilled, and reproductive.

As part of the making of undervalued labour, I draw on feminist work on divisions of labour. For instance, feminists have studied divisions of tasks and labour as reflecting typical male and female roles. Men are expected to primarily contribute to household income by holding formal jobs, while women have been relegated to informal domestic and reproductive labour of caring, cooking, cleaning, and laundry (Breen & Cooke, 2005; Frederici, 1974) and to spend their funds on household expenditures (Bikketi et al., 2016). Feminist scholarship has also revealed how work that is symbolic of managerial, expert, and skilled work with the ability to direct others has long relied on subservient work like that of secretaries, cleaners, and workers (Leidner, 1993; Wichroski, 1994).

While this is only a small window into the robust literature on feminist approaches to divisions of labour, these labour divisions reflect gendered, racialised, and classed inequalities, such as “women and men of colour” conducting the vast majority of janitorial jobs whereas white men hold the vast majority of management positions (Tronto, 1993, p. 113). These divisions of work and ownership reflect legacies of colonialism, slavery, and legalised racism (Phan, 2019) because the lesser valued jobs coerce workers “to please and to serve,” which enables workers in higher valued jobs to rehearse masculine qualities of dictating, leading, protecting, and aggression (Crain et al., 2016, p. 201). These jobs rely on and exploit the vulnerabilities of disenfranchised groups who may be punished or incur risks to their livelihood if they do not take up such jobs or push back against being eroticised or subjugated, such as the work of sex workers (Blanchette et al., 2021) and immigrant sharecroppers (Sanchez, 2015). This is not to say that such workers have no agency, as individuals’ and unions’ resistance to labour divisions and mistreatment is well-documented (e.g., Crain, 1991). Rather, such divisions of labour enshrine the hierarchies of past and ongoing labour contexts in which immigrants, poor people, people of colour, women, trans peoples, and people with disabilities are relegated to jobs with higher risks, servility, and dehumanisation, as well as poorer remuneration, praise, and reputation (e.g., Sanders et al., 2022; Woollacott, 2015).

Considering how labour is emblematic of these entanglements advances feminist approaches to repair by going beyond a narrow focus on gender to consider its intersections with structural axes of oppression and social justice. Following other feminist work on repair’s division of labour (e.g., Rosner, 2013), I examine humanitarian repair work to reveal the relations created by the aforementioned legacies of divisions of labour. I consider repair work as a way to perform and reinscribe masculine and feminine gender qualities, which are central to shaping the constraints and logics behind repair. For instance, do-it-yourself home repairs are a way to intentionally frame home improvements as domestic masculine labour (Gelber, 1997). I do not just focus on power between humanitarian designers and recipients because power is also enacted between humanitarian workers, some of whom are foreign and some are both foreign and national (e.g., INGO personnel who are Lebanese and work only in Lebanon by representing the agency’s national branch). This means I examine both vertical and lateral forms of power and how these relations shift given the emergent nature of humanitarian aid breakage (Seim, 2020). Divisions are unpacked by considering labour that is both paid and unpaid (Carr, 2017): Chapter 4 explores the unpaid labour of shop owners and refugees, which

is required to work around the malfunctioning of digital ID and digital cash assistance. Chapter 5 captures how locals' humanitarian labour is invisibilised in being under-compensated, designated as having lower status, and receiving lower prestige. This reveals how humanitarian organisations (Acker, 1990) and humanitarian partnerships are structured by gendered hierarchies.

Henke (1999), citing Robin Leidner's (1993) work, recognised that elite (masculine) work like medical doctors is understood to involve emotional burdens given their importance, difficulty, and education certifications as compared to low standing service work like (feminine) restaurant servers which are understood to have no emotional labour at all. Inspired by existing feminist work on women's immaterial labour (Fortunati, 2011; Jarrett, 2014), I reveal various forms of immaterial repair labour conducted by non-elite workers in Lebanon. In particular, in Chapter 7, I highlight the lived "emotional labour" (Hochschild, 1993) of implementing repair work, which only a few analyses of repair have empirically highlighted (e.g., Crooks, 2019; Schwenkel, 2015). This includes the management of emotion, affect, and feelings generated by breakdown and the need to commit to repair. Emotional labour is specifically expressed in relationships as hermeneutic labour, which Ellie Anderson (2023) defines as communicating your feelings, deciphering others', and working to resolve interpersonal issues. As strategies aiming to manage and maintain relationships, this type of work has typically fallen to women and is considered to be women's work. Embodied emotion and relational management of repair are important contributions to repair and maintenance studies. By revealing underappreciated ways in which repair labour can be burdensome and exploited, my unpacking of immaterial labour helps answer questions about hidden forms of repair labour, inequalities of repair that are difficult to see and often fall to marginalised groups (Crain et al., 2016), and what propels repair beyond immediately apparent breakdown.

Moments of breakage and repair make workers' needs and neglect starkly apparent. In Lebanon, humanitarians are working in rapidly worsening job conditions with high stress, unpredictability, and mounting pressure from internal and external stakeholders. This includes limited funding, fuel shortages that make it harder to get to work and travel around the country to deliver assistance and work with other humanitarians, and limited diesel to power electricity generators in their offices. When the blast happened, it destroyed many humanitarians' office

buildings, and the number of people in need of emergency assistance skyrocketed drastically overnight. Humanitarians had to deliver aid under dwindling conditions while grappling with a disaster that killed or maimed people they knew, damaged their homes and communities, and, according to many participants, shattered the little hope they had left in conditions improving. Then COVID-19 hit, which enabled security officials to impose restrictions on residents' mobility, and set specific curfews and restrictions for refugees. Humanitarians advocated against these arbitrary rules, but they, too, had their work restricted. Humanitarian groups were forced to submit detailed requests to security officials in order to receive special approval to move around the country to deliver aid, all the while managing social distancing and other rules set by the government (e.g., Rima). Some even switched to remote operations and/or delayed their work, especially for "non-lifesaving services", including remote monitoring and delaying identity verification and their in-person household visits to assess living circumstances (e.g., Zaina). Working with donors also became more challenging because there was a huge turnover in the donor community, and they could not benefit from face-to-face interactions that generated stronger rapport (e.g., Nisreen).

Given how breakdown impacts aid workers tasked with repair and maintenance, I focus on the experiences of frontline workers and the work they conduct in order to sustain themselves, their organisations, and their recipient populations. As part of this, I pay attention to the treatment of workers and the conditions shaping their repair work. Focusing on humanitarian repair work labour allows me to give attention to inequalities that workers face and their affective consequences. This is particularly important because scholars have highlighted how aid workers face "structural inequalities" and "organisational hierarchies" (Yehia, 2023, p. 1), as well as high rates of fatigue, "distress, depression, anxiety, and burnout" (Lopez Cardozo, 2012, p. 1). I attend to the emotional labour and affective consequences of repair work throughout the substantive chapters, especially in Chapter 7 when discussing how regulatory burdens strain workers, their relationships, and ability to mend fragile aid systems.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Lebanon's humanitarian context, features intersecting crises, is characterised by social, political, and economic breakdown and decay. This thesis draws upon Jackson's (2014) concepts of repair work and broken world thinking to help explain the labour that responds to

and compensates for fragility in the nation's aid delivery. Repair work lends well to the study of both inequalities and labour given its emphasis on the inevitability of and adapting to violence and harm. I extend this by uncovering how repair work operates amidst taken for granted infrastructures of the Global South and how the burdens of repair are disproportionately distributed. As a core feature of my focus on inequality, I draw on insights from feminist studies of labour. This includes its analyses of care and gendering to understand repair work's relationship to power. I extend these understandings of gendered repair work by focusing on interlocking relations of power and uncovering underexamined dimensions of work such as emotional labour. The next chapter reviews how I empirically uncover these insights by outlining my research design, methodological approach, methods, and data analysis process.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Using Lebanon as an in-depth case study, I studied how workers and systems behind aid delivery have adapted and transformed, including the experiences of residents, practitioners, and policymakers. Using qualitative methods, I documented how participants perceive shifts towards the use of data, digital technologies, and regulation, which shed light on technosocial and transnational networks. To investigate these foci, I cultivated a detailed understanding of local, national, and transnational contexts and formative influences, described how humanitarianism in Lebanon is designed and operates, identified actors and mapped networks of relations, and unearthed social inequity repercussions along the way.

My project faced disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic and has thus shifted. I had initially hoped to conduct research on the ground in Lebanon with in-person participant observations and interviews with refugees. Employing a multi-sited ethnography – in which the researcher investigates localised conditions and relationships across different sites to understand how they are interconnected and globally circulate (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2014) – I adapted my project to instead focus on the dispersed systems and workers behind digitised welfare delivery.

This study is a contextualised ethnography that empirically explores the labour that people conduct in their everyday lives in response to breakdown. It examines the practices of aid and how they are influenced by larger, more global systems (Henne, 2017). This approach enabled a deep understanding of developments in the field (Marcus, 1995). The “field” is not a space, as media anthropologist Jordan Kraemer (2021) argues, but rather a relational practice to my participants and social sites. As such, I refer to the “field” as both those that are in-person and remote.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 3.2 details the site selection and research design, and Section 3.3 presents the research methods used in this thesis. Section 3.4 describes the data

analysis procedure, followed by a discussion of methodological challenges and ethical concerns in Section 3.4. Finally, Section 3.5 concludes with a chapter summary.

3.2 SITE SELECTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The answers to my research questions as they apply to Lebanon – especially attention to backstage labour that sustains humanitarian aid delivery – are under-studied in both academic literature and practitioner and private sector reports. For these reasons, rather than make definitive claims and test causal inferences, my research was exploratory. Ethnography lends well to this, as it is largely exploratory in nature and enables immense detail and depth required for an introductory understanding (Reeves et al., 2013). Practically this meant I began with preliminary questions that were open to change as social phenomena unfolded. Thick description provided the necessary detail and richness to support an iterative approach to revisiting and revising the questions (Miles et al., 2014).

In keeping with ethnographic traditions that seek a deep understanding of the research context, I focused my investigation on practices of humanitarian governance in Lebanon. My collective case study, the approach used here, examined two humanitarian responses that are co-located in this research site. Lebanon, as a nationally bounded site, offers insights that can be applied globally and to several domains of practice like policy, welfare practitioners, technology experts, and diverse academic fields. Unlike most countries situated in the Global North, the nation persistently experiences interconnected crises (see Chapter 2). This made it ideal to answer my research focus, which aimed to unpack the labour that goes into adapting to and overcoming issues in aid delivery. As such, Lebanon's humanitarian systems were rich in data and research participants. It was thus possible to investigate how global welfare institutions (e.g., UNHCR, WFP, and Oxfam), as well as less influential and more local ones (e.g., ABAAD and Al Majmoua), collectively contribute to digitised aid governance. For these reasons, I could capture how repair work takes shape through interactions between a wide range of actors.

3.2.1 LOUISE and the Beirut Port explosion as sites for studying digital humanitarianism

States often do not have one digitised welfare initiative, but rather, several that are typically overlapping and interdependent (e.g., Nair, 2021). Lebanon is no different, especially since the

country has long delivered many welfare initiatives simultaneously through a plurality of groups – well before the mass flow of Syrian refugees erupted. I, therefore, chose two cases of digitised service provision and crisis response: digitised cash assistance (e-card) and crisis response to the Beirut Port explosion. Going beyond one case or welfare programme ensured that I captured a more comprehensive picture, accounting for the multiple and diverse ways in which digital humanitarianism manifests.

The two cases were purposely selected due to their divergences and affinities in labour such as their mandates, resources, and coordination structures. In one way, they are dissimilar in that one's labour is dedicated to cash-based intervention to refugees whereas the other's labour is dedicated to emergency response that includes cash handouts as well as other modalities of aid to a wider array of the nation's residents.³ In another way, they share important characteristics. Both are incredibly transnational in their workers and partnerships, yet they are nationally bound at the same time and draw upon local actors' support. In addition, both involve remnants of welfare, humanitarianism, and their blurring – though LOUISE is more welfare-related (i.e., longer-term approach to welfare provision) and the Beirut Port explosion response is more humanitarian (i.e., specifically in response to the devastation caused by the 4 August incident).

3.2.2 Methodology: A feminist multi-sited and contextualised ethnography

I brought together insights from feminist technoscience, anthropology, and sociology in my approach to contextualised ethnography. Anthropology and many traditions of feminist STS pay attention to everyday practices as opposed to the exceptional, as they often focus on immersion in daily lives and practices over a prolonged period of time (Jacobsen, 2015). My focus on everyday practices revealed the routine work of practitioners and responses to daily needs that shape how digitised humanitarianism plays out, how it is interpreted, and how its power relations manifest. Inspired by feminist scholar Laura Foster, combining feminist sociolegal studies' methodological attention to technicalities and feminist technoscience's emphasis on materialities, I sought to illuminate how shifts and transformations in digitised responses in crises are “historical and sociocultural process” rather than objective and value-neutral (Foster, 2016, p. 139). Given that these approaches share an appreciation for the

³ The intended recipients of aid depend on the agency. Some provided aid to all who reside in Lebanon whereas other agencies are targeted to specific groups (impoverished Lebanese, refugees, women and children, etc.).

situated, networked, and heterogenous nature of technosocial phenomena, it was fitting that I adopted multi-sited ethnography to study repair work's relations.

This study of globalised sociotechnical phenomena merited nuanced and in-depth understandings of globalised change and how globalised objects take shape. As anthropologist George E. Marcus (1995) argues, ontologically and epistemologically it is not prudent to separate the local from the global. Local phenomena are infused by global influences and global phenomena are enacted within local spaces (Merry, 2015). The interdisciplinary tradition of multi-sited ethnography directly responds to these multi-scalar, globalised interconnections. Using field-intensive methods, it empirically maps and make sense of how a multiplicity of actors, institutions, regulations, and policies influence sociotechnical regimes. Multi-sited ethnography thereby provided the analytic tools to answer my research questions, which are attuned to multiple actors, partnerships, and transformations. Attending to this multiplicity “add[s] capabilities for generalisation and contextualisation beyond single sites” (Eisenhart, 2017, p. 144).

By tracing circulations (of logics, objects, regulations, etc.) multi-sited ethnography enabled me to attend “to multiple sites of observation and participation” as a means of capturing local, global, structural, and systemic factors (Marcus, 1995, p. 95). This approach was not only helpful for attending to many sites of labour without having to spend extended time in Lebanon; it also opens analysis up to a broad spectrum of sometimes seemingly unrelated activity (e.g., UN decision-making and commerce at local shops). This research design thus enables attention to how technosocial labour relations are defined and mutate through interconnected, decentralised, rhizomatic networks (Henne, 2020). Given that my selected cases are embedded in and shape world systems, they cannot be studied using more static methods that overlook the interlinkages of actors, institutions, and milieus.

Lebanon's digital humanitarian interventions signal this local-global interconnection and networking. On the one hand, international actors (e.g., UN, INGOs, World Bank, EU, and out-of-state donors) primarily direct funding, design, management, coordination, and distribution in ways that can hollow out local and national groups' involvement. On the other hand, these interventions cannot be distinguished from, and are reflective of, the present-day

socio-political context in the nation. In order to be effective and in line with calls to de-colonise aid (Peace Direct, 2021), they are also reliant upon heavy involvement of local and national NGOs and community groups (e.g., Caritas, Al Majmoua, and ABAAD). The concept of digitised welfare itself is arguably global in origin – largely a European construct with colonial roots (Mann & Daly, 2019) – yet it has been circulated, appropriated, and redefined to adapt to conditions specific to local settings. At the same time, Lebanon’s digital cash programming and data-driven aid response to the Beirut Port explosion are interventions that concurrently traverse local and global sites, as they are pioneer models for crisis response in other regions (Chehade et al., 2020).

Lebanese social assistance systems are thus localised in provision yet crucially exist within and are shaped by national, transnational, and global circulations, frameworks, and systems of meaning, discourses, ideas, and bodies. Far exceeding its national boundaries, these globalised dimensions and tensions shape behaviours, lived experiences, and the extent of national governance (Merry, 2015). By crossing national borders, Lebanese social assistance systems do not simply exist in both local and global levels as if they were distinct spaces, but also “move back and forth between them” (Merry, 2015, n. p.).

For these reasons, I employed a contextualised ethnography to make sense of how adaptations and transformations occur by capturing multi-scalar influences. My approach diverged from traditional ethnographies committed to detailed investigations of meaning-making fixed in singular, micro, and local social systems (Fetterman, 2010) that nevertheless aim for contextualisation (Eisenhart, 2017). Contextualised ethnography enabled me to study how knowledge, agendas, problems, institutional frameworks, and forms of expertise involved in humanitarian repair work travel. In particular, Kim Fortun’s (2009) methods informed my study in a few key ways: tracing disasters across different spaces and groups that yield influence and mutate the characterisation of disaster; how these dispersed spaces and groups shape what disasters become; and how disasters are embedded within political, economic, and social world systems. Looking at the aftermath of the Union Carbide chemical plant incident in Bhopal, India in 1984, Fortun (2009) conducted in-depth qualitative inquiry on how advocacy took shape.

Just as Fortun (2009) documented and analysed the disaster as going well beyond India, framing the disaster itself as a contemporary manifestation of processes that began much earlier, I studied digitised humanitarianism as exceeding singular notions of space and time. That is, spatially, sites are interdependent and undyingly fluid rather than delineated by fixed boundaries and borders. And, temporally, the historic is entangled with the present and future, disasters are not fixed in time but have continuous effects, and time is nonlinear and difficult to categorise as simply past, present, or future. I took an expansive view that situates these micro, sociotechnical systems within their multiple, mobile, and global contributing factors, tracing the interrelationships and movements between actors, institutions, policies, and events that are local, national, *and* supranational. In the process I analysed how they get translated – and redefined as global – and what happened when those translations circulated and shifted. Such an outlook was critical because, as discussed, the constituent parts of repair work in Lebanon’s digitised aid systems are not static, nor are they bound to separate groups or sites; they are highly mobile and transnational. I therefore incorporated elements of multi-sited and contextual ethnography to trace connections, processes, and relations of repair work (Henne, 2017; Marcus, 1995). This is important for capturing how ideas, things, and labour move between varying scales, jurisdictions, and spaces – a necessary outlook for digitised humanitarianism as a globalised, emerging phenomena.

As I was unable to travel to Lebanon during the pandemic, digital ethnography became particularly useful for answering my first research question on the experiences and influences of data and digital technologies upon technosocial welfare systems, and more broadly, how they change the ways “we live, work, and play” (Hjorth et al., 2017, p. 1). It offers several strategies to apply ethnographic approaches to research to digital culture. For instance, by observing digital ethnography’s call to interrogate expressly digital artifacts, as well as non-digital domains (e.g., relationships, where the technology was designed, and social environment),⁴ guidance from digital ethnographical approaches enables me to capture how digital technologies are interrelated to and become part of technical, social, material, and affective worlds (Pink et al., 2016). Digital ethnography also helped me generate embedded descriptions of how digital innovation figures in the context of the welfare state by

⁴ Digital ethnography advocates for an emphasis upon ‘non-digital-centricness’ in studies of digital technologies and communities (Pink et al. 2016, p. 25).

“immers[ing] myself in the online [and offline] spaces where humanitarian data and innovation are debated and reported” (Madianou, 2019a, p. 7).

3.2.3 Preserving the messiness using insights from STS and feminist technoscience

STS have long argued that understanding phenomena through clear, linear descriptions does not accurately capture their complexity, lack of or partial organisation, and disorder (Law, 2004; Law & Mol, 2001). This research captured the disorderliness, irregularity, and diverse lived realities of labour dedicated to Lebanon’s digital humanitarianism. Preserving the “messiness,” as sociologist and STS scholar John Law (2004) states, enabled making normative claims, while challenging the idea of a single ordered world via neat narratives. In practice I worked towards capturing the messiness of technoscientific phenomena by uncovering inconsistencies, vagueness, unpredictability, disagreements, tensions, and entanglements in repair work. As Law (2004, p. 18-19) argues, ethnography is particularly conducive to a messy epistemological approach: “ethnography lets us see the relative messiness of practice. It looks behind the official accounts of method (which are often clean and reassuring) to try to understand the often ragged ways in which knowledge is produced in research.” Uplifting complexities and divergence provides a more nuanced understanding of contestations and resistance (Chapter 4), asymmetrical relations in the name of equality (Chapter 5), paradoxical outcomes of care (Chapter 6), and diverse strategies to counter control (Chapter 7) – all of which shape humanitarian repair work.

Messiness was also sought by attending to the multiplicity of discourses, experiences, and knowledges, which allowed uncovering the relations between different practices, objects, and realities. Annemarie Mol (2002, p. 6) offers epistemological critiques similar to Law’s (2004) claims, stating that “[e]pistemological normativity is prescriptive: it tells how to know properly.” In response, Mol’s (2002) book attends to the enactment of objects in practice, revealing that bodies, medicine, and diseases do not have a single reality. They are multiple, changing, and ever-shifting according to the different practices and spaces that interact with them as they are active in practice. Like Mol (2002, p. viii), I paid attention to ontological politics: “a politics that has to do with the way in which problems are framed, bodies are shaped, and lives are pushed and pulled into one shape or another.” My research, therefore, focused on how understandings and practices of crisis response are vague, in conflict, in

tension, and do not prescribe a uniform view of how crisis response should be. Practically, this required continuous engagement with and reassessment of my data in order to avoid fixed and final valuations (Krane, 2016). Embracing the “discomfort” in my data can, as Diana Masny claims, “lead to greater creativity, new questions, and innovative and novel interpretations” (Masny as cited in Krane, 2016).

By welcoming the inherent incompleteness of my data and avoiding clean and precise explanations of crisis response, I heed advice regarding situated knowledges and feminist objectivity as initially explained by Donna Haraway (1988). I avoid grand theorising and reductionist accounts of technosocial phenomena “from nowhere” (Haraway, 1988, p. 589) by accepting that all understandings of the world are embodied and situationally contingent. I recognise that the knowledge I studied and documented is partial, contingent, and bound by time and space but is nonetheless accurate and robust. This includes recognising the effects of power relations related to my own positionality as a researcher, my participation in the research setting, and my interactions with participants, and that my data is filtered by my own interpretations.

I considered non-human and irrational actors as agents, looking at how technologies themselves are actors with authority – an observation yet to be fully recognised in sociological research on social actors and subjectivity (de Laet & Mol, 2000; Law & Mol, 2001). Such an ethnographic sensibility was critical given that welfare technologies and policy-making are not passive, exogenous, and merely implemented due to welfare needs, nor are they causal: they are actively involved in the constitution of social values, knowledge, relations, language, governable subjects, and politics, and are also *constituted by* these same factors. For these reasons, they are incapable of being separated, otherwise referred to as the co-constitutive effects of technology (Faraj & Pachidi, 2021). Inspired by de Laet and Mol (2000), I examined how these actors and interconnected systems can simultaneously be distinct as well as fluid. That is, they do not have static identities and are not confined to well-bound borders, so they maintain their agency (de Laet & Mol, 2000). I conceived of human/non-human actors not as passively surrounded by their context, but rather, in each of its diverse enactments they “[contain] a variant of its environment” (de Laet & Mol, 2000, p. 252).

In line with feminist traditions, especially those in critical STS work, I understood my research decisions, data analysis, and interactions with my participants to be fundamentally shaped by my positionality. I am a cis Canadian-Arab woman whose parents were both born in Lebanon, with my father being Lebanese and my mother being born there as a Palestinian refugee. I thus maintained both insider and outsider status at different stages of the project and concomitant power dynamics. Nevertheless, as critical race and feminist scholars have posited, this blurred positionality can be, and was, conducive to conducting feminist research attentive to inequities, resistance, and domination (Harding, 1993). Patricia Hill Collins (1991), for example, suggests that being the “outsider within” enables “heightened sensitivity to anomalies, distortions and invisibilities” given that I could relate to participants’ interconnected axes of marginalisation whilst I was socialised, albeit as an outsider, to their communities in the field (Collins, 1991, as cited in Acker, 2000, p. 5).

During my research, my Lebanese positionality was important to not just my Lebanese participants but to the non-Lebanese interviewees. Access to Lebanese fieldwork sites and participants was at least somewhat facilitated by my personal background as a (partial) insider. Almost all my participants assumed or explicitly articulated that I must be Lebanese due to my appearance and because my last name belongs to a well-known tribe and village (Borj El Brajneeh), both of which many of my participants signalled. A few participants told me that they were happy another Lebanese person was researching this topic, and one participant said they would not have responded to my recruitment email if I was not Lebanese. Presenting as an insider – alongside my deep understanding of the Lebanese context and culture – very clearly enhanced my participants’ willingness to speak to me, the ease of rapport and trust, and their openness to discuss (sometimes emotional) issues impacting Lebanese peoples. My Arab background also ensured that I did not stick out as much while conducting research.

Of course, insider status also presented challenges. As Romain Malejacq and Dipali Mukhopadhyay (2016, p. 1013) signal, “power asymmetries can be particularly pronounced in research with elites, especially those with outsized access to coercion and capital.” These elite power asymmetries were blunt, complex, and at times contradictory. Often it was clear that I was perceived as less intelligent and less respectable because I am a woman conducting research in the Middle East. Nevertheless, I was spoken to as an elite, as if I shared the same

anti-Palestinian, anti-Syrian, classist, and patriotic values as the Lebanese elite. In volunteering with Syrian refugees, my Lebanese background very clearly proved to be worrisome, as many announced their distrust of Lebanese citizens. When I told them that I am the daughter of a Palestinian refugee family, that made me more relatable and thus facilitated their receptivity to speaking to me. Nevertheless, culturally and linguistically I am Canadian, which complicated participants' relationships to me and my research topic. I was perceived as being both personally affected *and* unaffected by Lebanon's crises. Finally, as a PhD candidate at a research-intensive Australian university, I benefitted from its recognised legitimacy and expertise, which was particularly salient to and acknowledged by practitioners, academics, and policymakers I engaged. Overall, this insider-outsider positionality shifted with each encounter, which required deep reflection and careful response (see reflective journaling below).

3.3 RESEARCH METHODS

Being elite actors, representatives of international governance institutions, technology experts, and government are oftentimes guarded and can be secretive (Monahan & Fisher, 2015; Neal & McLaughlin, 2009). Referred to as the "hidden or dirty data problem," data on elite actors are often deliberately withheld from the public and researchers due to their potentially contentious nature (Hameed & Monaghan, 2013, p. 144). This research was approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol 2020/496).

Given the plurality of actors involved in my case studies and the rapidly evolving context of digitised welfare, information was inconsistent and incomplete – not a symptom of "wrong" answers, but rather an indication of the complexity, diversity, and fluidity of my research sites. Methodological pluralism was thus fruitful to overcome the limitations of research on social problems requiring hidden or dirty data, as well as to compensate for the weaknesses of each data collection method using the strengths of others (Denzin, 1970). My layered, mosaic strategy amassed information from differently situated subjects and sources. When put together this enabled a multidimensional picture that fostered robust, nuanced descriptions of the ways in which Lebanon's social assistance has transformed while capturing its multiplicity from different angles (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Hameed & Monaghan, 2012). It also facilitated

“deeper theoretical questions” and stimulated intellectual and theoretical innovation (Lamont & Swidler, 2012, p. 162).

This research applied digital methods, which were necessary for “flexibility, adaptation, and responsiveness of research methods to the research context” – in this case, an unprecedented global pandemic (Rahman et al., 2021, p. 2). As an ad hoc response to research constraints during the pandemic, digitising qualitative methods was justified by a growing body of literature that points to their immense benefits. They “increase the inclusivity of knowledge exchange, reduce time and costs of organising academic interactions, and enable more diverse workspaces with geographical and temporal flexibility” (Schwarz et al., 2020, p. 68). There are, of course, new challenges and ethical risks with digital methods, such as data security concerns and ensuring that participants are divulging their responses in private spaces they have control over (Marhefka et al., 2020). I thus took all possible steps to mitigate risks associated with digital methods.

Leaving a ‘trail’ of research decisions and contexts, both personal and spatial, supported data analysis, as it enabled tracking why decisions were made, why data was interpreted in particular ways, and what unobservable factors impacted my research. Reliable data analysis and my application of feminist objectivity required such a record because, as Luigina Mortari (2015, p. 2) argues, “[m]ost of cognitive life happens without us being aware of it” and “the mental experience of the researcher conditions the research.” Sustained and introspective reflection was thus crucial; however, it is not our natural or spontaneous tendency to be reflective so I had to take conscious steps to do this work (Mortari, 2015). Reflective journaling at the end of the day during fieldwork and after remote interviews therefore provided several benefits (Ortlipp, 2008). I was able to add further detail and notes on what stuck out while it was fresh in my mind. Journaling practical aspects of research revealed areas of saturation and what areas I still needed to uncover. I documented my physical, emotional, and mental states at the time, which helped me track how my personal experiences impacted data collection and analysis. This was particularly important given that many of my interviews were late at night, so I was often fatigued (i.e., 10pm-1am).

I aimed to be as reflexive as possible, continuously self-reflecting on and questioning my positionality and relationships with my participants, how they shifted within each interaction and between interactions, and how that impacted data collection and its interpretation. This enabled me to make connections between what my data says and the context within which I conducted research. In terms of analysis, writing as a form of practice facilitated analytic thought. Journaling revealed how my own learning and understanding of events progressed and changed throughout the research process – an important analytic insight. Overall, journaling enhanced trustworthiness in my data by making my research process as transparent as possible (Watt, 2007).

3.3.1 Sampling strategies, recruitment, and access

This study collected data from a diverse array of participants, as well as in-person and online sites and sources. Participants were directly involved in designing, delivering, researching, regulating, and/or reporting on LOUISE and/or humanitarian response to the Beirut Port explosion (see participant observation and remote interviewing for more detailed explanation of the sample for each method). This includes those who worked on selective aspects of these cases such as proxy-means testing, biometric identification, and aerial drone use. I interviewed a total of 41 participants.

In conventional social scientific terms, I used three sampling strategies: maximum variation sampling, targeted-purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. Maximum variation sampling was a means of attaining the perspectives and voices of differently situated people involved in the creation, management, and operation of Lebanon's digitised social assistance (Creswell & Poth, 2017). As such, I spoke to locals and non-locals, those who delivered on-the-ground and remote responses, and those involved directly in aid provision/delivery and those involved in 'behind the scenes' work like coordination, management, and design. Participants were located all around the world, including the Middle East, Europe, Australia, and North America. Though not representative, as a collection their occupations comprised most of the key groups involved in the design and implementation of my two case studies. Speaking to a more heterogeneous population was of immense value to avoiding a simplistic understanding because I attended to diverse experiences and processes, as well as perceptions from those in different positions,

locations, and angles. Targeted, purposive sampling, on the other hand, ensured depth via specific selection of cases that were missing or fundamental to either case (Patton, 2015).

Lastly, snowball sampling, particularly favoured in research on the Middle East (see Clark, 2006), identified potential interviewees and organisations through their personal networks (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). When in the field, I asked personal and volunteering contacts to introduce me to relevant people in their social or professional circles. Typically, they would e-introduce us via WhatsApp. At the end of each remote interview, I snowball sampled by asking participants whether they were willing to recommend someone for an interview. I sent an introduction message to the participant which they could share with prospective subjects. Snowball sampling thus allowed me to get in contact with hard-to-reach populations or those with elite political or social status (Cohen & Arieli, 2011).

Contact information of potential participants was generated from informants whom I built relationships with during my fieldwork in 2019, as well as those I spoke to during remote interviewing. I also drew upon publicly available information to determine relevant participants. In most research contexts this method would not be entirely adequate or reliable. However, Lebanon's humanitarian context is unique. Because (a) the crises in the nation post-Port explosion are dire and unique, (b) humanitarian response in Lebanon has historically been fragmented, and (c) the state has long been absent in welfare design and provision, contact lists were made publicly available online to facilitate ease of coordination. The names of potential participants and their emails were listed in Relief Web, Daleel Madani, Lebanon Information Hub, UNHCR Operational Data Portal, Refugee Lebanon Portal, UN websites, EU Commission websites, reports, news and blogs, and public spreadsheets and Google Docs.

3.3.2 Informed consent and confidentiality

I sought oral consent as opposed to written consent for several reasons. Lebanon is filled with security checkpoints, so during fieldwork in the nation I could not prevent documents from being handed over to law enforcement officials. Some of my participants, furthermore, could not read or write fluently, which would make reading and signing a consent form impossible for them. In these instances, I read the consent form out loud, described participation using the

information on the Participation Information Sheet, and left a copy of my contact details in case they had questions or comments. When it came to remote interviews, I sought oral consent because it would not be ethical to offload the costs of printing and scanning consent forms to already financially and time-strapped participants.

Participants had the option of remaining completely confidential and anonymous or using a pseudonym that included low-risk identifiers. Despite only presenting these two options, some participants expressed that they would like to be identified by name and/or their institution. I assessed the risk of identifying these participants (i.e., risks to their personal relationships, safety, and employment). In all but one case I supported their request to be identified. I offered all participants a \$25 e-gift card as remuneration to compensate them for their time. Most declined because they could not accept gifts in their occupation.

3.3.3 Participant observations

From September to October 2019, I travelled to Lebanon to conduct in-person participant observations that included unstructured, informal interviews. This preliminary fieldwork allowed me to test the salience of my research questions, to decipher what access would be like, and to understand who the main actors were according to locals (i.e., who I should talk to in the next phases of my research). I observed diverse settings around the country including Beirut, Ouazie, Jounieh, Beqaa Valley, Mount Lebanon, Tripoli, and Zahle. The individuals I observed and spoke to were from many groups such as NGO workers, political elites, academics of Lebanese universities, Lebanese university students, food suppliers contracted by the WFP, refugees, migrant labourers, and Lebanese nationals. I also volunteered with a Lebanese NGO, Borderless, that provides basic education to Syrian refugee children and provides extra-curricular activities and food.

Participant observation “combines participation in the lives of people under study with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data” (Fetterman, 2010, p. 37). Using this method, I was able to generate more holistic and verifiable understandings by capturing cultural or relational contributions and meso and macro factors. The combination of participant observation with elicitation methods like interviews therefore

transforms this project into an ethnography, attending to how speech both relates to and may diverge from participants' behaviours (Horst & Miller, 2012).

I also engaged in observations beyond Lebanon to get a sense of the broader, globalised context of developments in labour and its implementation and challenges. I conducted in-person and online participant observations at transnational conferences, press releases, workshops, and presentations on digitised aid delivery. Attendees were from all over the world, spanning policy-makers, practitioners, private sector experts, researchers, government officials, and advocates. Unless they mandated Chatham House rules, events were audio recorded with noteworthy points and presentations transcribed so that they could be coded and abductively analysed.

I observed and sometimes participated in the activities of participants, becoming enmeshed in local communities and social networks. I followed the same participants day after day, experiencing first-hand settings and events that were both mundane and extraordinary, professional and social, and public and private (e.g., factories employing refugees, informal refugee communities, dinners involving political elites, etc.). Doing so enabled my personal experience and understanding of diverse perspectives on Lebanese culture, politics, social cohesion, refugee living conditions, and nuances of living different regions. I thus aimed for immersion into my participants' social worlds, culture, and settings which facilitated a first-hand, empirical, richer, and more accurate understanding of the context within which humanitarian labour is enacted and adapts. I was better able to "[see] from the inside how people lead their lives... what they find meaningful, and how they do so" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 3). Immersion also enabled a deeper understanding of routines and conditions of participants' lives, how they experience events, and what unfolds from membership in social groups (Emerson et al., 2011). By immersing myself for a prolonged period I could therefore get over the 'newness' of everything in order to pick up on locals' patterns and meaning making (Fetterman, 2010). Nevertheless, as Jordan Kraemer (2021) argues, situated immersion is and was possible in my engagement with remote, online settings and peoples.⁵ I attained situated immersion when conducting remote research by utilising materials shared by my participants,

⁵ Close proximity and protracted observations are a function of privilege (Günel et al., 2020) and have been reconceptualised in light on the pandemic (Kraemer, 2021).

which “offer[ed] alternatives to ‘being there’ that [were] more participatory,” as well as by building new relationships virtually and constantly reflecting on my location in my research (Kraemer, 2021, n. p.).

Notes and photos were taken during observations to document relational and contextually-sensitive dynamics like descriptions of scenes and episodes, dialogue and social interactions, characterisation of participants, and how settings and actions were organised. I also jotted down what was unique or stood out, and how myself and my participants reacted in the social/virtual setting. I thus focused on how things unfolded rather than why they did so (Emerson et al., 2011). Note-taking while in the field facilitated thick description (Geertz, 1973) – a hallmark of ethnographic research. Thick description enabled representing participants’ social worlds and networks from their perspective (the “emic view”). In terms of my unstructured informal interviews while observing in-person, they were of value while in the field given that I could pose questions about key events, processes, or experiences as they arose in the moment. Information, therefore, vitally reflected participants’ experiences at a particular time. However, I did not audio record while in Lebanon because it was unnatural in those settings and could make some people feel uncomfortable. As soon as possible after I completed observations and informal interviews (typically at the end of each day), I transcribed my field notes, adding more detail and reflecting on my own experiences and impressions, emotions, and actions, including how they may impact the participants’ actions and my interpretations. For every hour spent observing, I tried to spend an equal amount of time adding further detail by writing supporting memos and commentaries.

3.3.4 Remote interviews

Remote interviews enabled uncovering how relevant actors understand transformations and adaptations in the labour of Lebanon’s humanitarian systems, including their experiences designing, implementing, and coordinating digital technologies and partnerships. They also enabled me to understand how perceptions and attitudes have perhaps changed since I left fieldwork, thereby elucidating transformations in the context of technosocial systems over time. Commencing in April 2021 and ending in October 2021, remote interviewing took place once I had a better grasp of Lebanon’s socio-political context from fieldwork. I conducted a

total of forty interviews via videoconferencing using Zoom and Google Teams.⁶ Twenty participants were interviewed for both case studies, though some participants work on both cases. Thirty-eight out of forty were audio recorded and transcribed with the consent of my participants. Two participants consented to note-taking only. Interviews spanned from fifty minutes to almost three hours, with most interviews being roughly one hour.

I spoke to policymakers, regulators, researchers, public welfare practitioners, transnational governance institutions, national government, donors, journalists, humanitarian staff (both NGOs and INGOs), technology experts, and academics. Beyond the actual recipients of Lebanon's humanitarian programmes (whom are too vulnerable to include in this research, especially during the pandemic), these groups all had considerable experience or knowledge of how labour is organised, implemented, regulated, and has changed. They were the most likely to have engaged in labour and leveraged sociotechnical resources in the Lebanese context, thereby providing critical insights that inform my research questions. They also had firsthand understandings of how refugees, residents, and humanitarians respond to breakdown. Interviews covered the following areas: transformations in Lebanon's humanitarian context; challenges in humanitarian aid delivery; how they strategise and respond to challenges; experiences with technology; and experiences with partnerships.

Interviews were conducted in two rounds. The first round, which took place throughout April 2021, enabled me to test and refine my interview questions before moving on to other participants who were more directly involved in social welfare. The first round also enabled the generation of contacts via snowball sampling. In the second round, which lasted from July to October 2021, I interviewed the remaining thirty participants, at which point I reached a sufficient level of saturation. Employing responsive interviewing, I asked questions in response to the participants' answers using only guiding questions, which changed according to the flow of the conversation and their personality (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

⁶ Two participants expressed their preference for a group interview.

3.3.5 Document analysis

Digital mediums and documents on labour dedicated to digital humanitarianism shed light on “the knowledges, discourses, and social processes that become concrete in technologies”, as well as how various actors represent themselves, and how problems are understood and worked on (Burns, 2015b, p. 40). Many documents offered timelines, information on project reforms, and snapshots at a particular point in time. Using these records, I could make sense of reasons behind labour as well as responses and adaptations to project designs, actors, and the organisation of aid. Documents also offered more detail that might not be possible within the timespan of an interview or observation. Digital media were important for triangulating findings from my observations and interviews. This enabled corroborating and questioning evidence across my data sources, including checking how recounted personal experiences and activities differed from official accounts. Doing so bolstered credibility by mitigating the risk of bias from singular methods and sources of data.⁷ Furthermore, some elite actors are limited (often by NDAs) in what they can discuss in an interview and offer limited response, so documents were of value in filling in these gaps. Documents therefore offered greater trustworthiness and breadth and depth of insight into my research questions.

From January 2019 to July 2023, I collected and analysed four categories of internal and external documentation relevant to humanitarian repair work. The first group was internally produced organisational documents including reports, program evaluations, impact assessments, country briefs, inter-agency situation updates, and employee training manuals that pertained to LOUISE or the Port explosion.⁸ These documents revealed unique aspects of labour such as lessons learned, funding structures, what expert knowledge was used, contextual dynamics, discussion of controversial topics, challenges and successes, partners involved, and actions undertaken (Burns, 2015b). The second group was discursive or speech-based sources including speeches, presentations, press conferences, and meeting minutes, which offered data on “how needs would be represented and communicated to the formal sector” (Burns, 2015b, p. 41).

⁷ For more information on triangulation with document analysis, see Bowen (2009), Eisner (1991), and Patton (1990).

⁸ Many are publicly available online (i.e., Relief Web, CaLP, HumanitarianResponse.Info, OCHA Lebanon website, Overseas Development Institute, etc.), but I also collected and analysed those verbally flagged or directly sent by my participants.

The third category was news and media-based, including news articles, blogs, and social media. These were helpful for shaping my inferences about repair work “through unobtrusive observations” (Spence et al., 2016, p. 669). Fourth, I examined web sources that encapsulated listservs, websites, collaborative Google Drive documents, and online databases. Web sources provide crucial insight on labour given they are used to organise workers and serve as a forum for a number of groups to discuss humanitarian responses. The latter three categories provided information from the perspective of media actors (journalists, public relations specialists, and content developers) on crisis communication and dissemination, as well as the social networks that were forged, continue, or broken. They revealed how groups disseminated information, structures of communication, and what social facts were deemed fit to broadcast to public audiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Natow, 2020).

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

I transcribed my interviews myself to gain a deep familiarity with my data and to assist the generation of codes and themes. As I transcribed my interviews, I made a preliminary list of codes that related to my research questions, reflected recurring patterns, and signalled new or unique insights that differ from accounts in academic and grey literature (see abductive analysis below). To support the efficiency of code generation and data analysis later on, I engaged in data condensation by providing brief summaries of each interview, document, and set of daily fieldwork notes. Throughout the data collection and transcription process, I simultaneously wrote analytic and integrative notes and memos, which offered reflections, made connections to literature, signalled preliminary themes, and pointed out parallels and divergences to other sources of data. Memos therefore supported data analysis early in the research process and generated analytic points that I may have missed later on when I was less immersed in my data (Miles et al., 2014).

While data analysis software such as NVivo can assist the analysis process by offering, for example, ‘cosmetic coding’ (Saldaña, 2012, p. 30) and data visualisations, these and other benefits of computer-assisted data analysis are not without their limitations. I chose to code my data by marking up digital documents and physically printed fieldnotes, transcripts, and documents, writing shortforms for each code using the comment function in Word and writing

notes in the margins of documents. Doing so, I hoped to prevent analysis that is “linear and mechanistic” in order to be more reflective about my data (Zhao et al., 2016, n. p.). This approach enhanced my familiarity with my data and thus bolstered the robustness and trustworthiness of my evaluations.

After familiarising myself with my data through transcription, repeatedly reading raw data, and memoing, I proceeded to initial coding where I read each transcript, line by line, to verify the veracity of my preliminary codes and solidify my first set of codes. At this point I created the first iteration of my codebook, including the inclusion and exclusion criteria for each code. A second round of coding, focused coding, determined which initial codes were most relevant, facilitating the refining of these codes and grouping codes together into broader categories (Saldaña, 2012). I did this by identifying codes that were the most frequent, most novel as compared to my literature, and most important according to my participants. Pattern coding enabled me to organise and more thoroughly group my codes into a more concentrated number of categories, concepts, and themes (Miles et al., 2014). I largely used pattern codes that are explanatory or inferential, drawing threads of data together based on their commonalities, connections to literature, theoretical constructs, novelty, and what participants flagged as the most salient. From this, I was able to sort and group all of my codes into themes, which included naming, defining, and refining those themes. In this step, I determined “what aspect of the data each theme captures and identify what is of interest about them and why” (Nowell et al., 2017, p.10). I compared my themes to what the literature says, which facilitated novel theoretical analysis and arguments by removing themes that were saturated in the literature.

I adopted an abductive approach to my data. This approach proved useful to avoid “the straightjacket of pre-existing concepts” and to check my understandings of these findings (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 169). I first worked to comprehensively and broadly understand existing theory and literature on poverty governance and regulation, digital humanitarianism, critical humanitarianism, and humanitarian labour. I continued to read literature throughout the writing process in order to keep up-to-date on developments in these fields and to expand the breadth and depth of my analysis. Once I achieved a baseline understanding of these literatures, I iterated between data and literature to look for instances in my data that did not fit existing theoretical frameworks and which were under-explored. As

with triangulation, this was done throughout the entirety of the research process, from the time of crafting my proposal to writing up my findings. My comparative approach facilitated theoretical discovery by “identify[ing] the conditions under which extant theoretical concepts or perspectives on generic social processes may be extended or refined” (Snow et al., 2003, p. 194). By recursively investigating novel paths from my situated research alongside theory throughout the entire research process, I contributed to and expanded existing theories, generating creative, unique, and even contradicting explanations of humanitarian labour (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). I balanced what my participants are concerned about with what I think is abductively important and unique.

I avoided spurious and invalid explanations in a few ways. My many sources of data were triangulated as a means of moving beyond the limits of account-based data and thus mitigating risks of bias and invalidity. I applied “multiple methods in the analysis of the same empirical events”, reading data from my observations, interviews, and collected documents against one another and thus capturing the complexity of technoscientific phenomena by revealing different aspects (Denzin, 1970, p. 13). Using within-method triangulation, I would observe the same phenomena (e.g., interactions of refugees at banks) on different days and with different people, and in my interviews I would ask different questions about the same item (e.g., transformations) to get a picture from different angles. Moreover, I checked my inferences with knowledgeable but detached colleagues, particularly those who are familiar with relevant areas of academic literature or those who work in the field as humanitarians. I also confirmed and disconfirmed my themes and analytic thoughts by member-checking in several follow-up interviews. Lastly, by searching for rival or contradictory explanations, I was able to ensure that my explanations were not too simplistic or biased, which made my analysis more valid and reliable (Patton, 2015).

Drawing upon the narrative approach to qualitative research (Riessman, 2007), I did not summarise many of the original quotes from my participants and observations. Rather, I left them verbatim in order to uphold the incredibly rich, complex, and personal experiences they shared. Doing this, I aimed to make these first-hand accounts as impactful as possible and to avoid misrepresenting their experiences (Samuels-Wortley, 2021; Willis, 2019).

3.5 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONCERNS

3.5.1 Limitations of remote interviews during prolonged crises

Collecting data during the pandemic mandated internet-based methods. Remote interviewing yielded numerous advantages, such as allowing participants to chat in a safe and familiar place, which made them more relaxed and open – a virtue when discussing stressful topics like crisis response (Hanna, 2012). However, unlike face-to-face interviews where it is easier to maintain participants' undivided attention and control the interview location (e.g., a quiet, private room), some participants were noticeably distracted by their setting. For instance, while working from home they were balancing carer responsibilities, and email notifications on computers proved to be disruptive (Deakin & Wakefield 2014). Risks to richness and robustness were moderated by asking participants to provide different examples in order to produce further detail (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Moreover, accessing reliable internet and mobile connections when videoconferencing with participants in Lebanon risked the robustness and quality of my research (Archibald et al., 2019; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). A few interviews cut out or were paused mid-way because participants' electricity shut off unexpectedly and/or their internet connection dropped. Nevertheless, participants called me back within roughly ten minutes, often utilising their mobile phone data. Consequently, however, at times I missed words or small segments of responses, and connectivity issues disrupted the flow of conversation so participants lost track of points that they were trying to make. I adapted by asking participants to turn off their video to improve the quality of internet connection and to summarise the main points they wanted emphasised.

3.5.2 Interviewing participants post-Port Explosion

Methodological and ethical challenges of researching crisis and conflict-afflicted areas in the Middle East are well documented (Clark, 2006; Romano, 2006). In this case, it was necessary to postpone interviews until roughly a year after the Beirut Port explosion – a common practice in research on crises, hazards, and conflict (Spence et al., 2016). It is likely that participants residing in Lebanon directly or indirectly experienced medical, mental, emotional, or economic difficulties relating to the explosion, especially (but not only) Lebanese residents. This led to a time lag between the trigger event and interviews, which likely impacted participants' recollection of the events and undeniably risked retrieval error and memory bias (Memon et

al., 1997). I prevented prolonging my research timeline by first interviewing those involved in LOUISE. By the time these interviews were completed, enough time had passed that I could reach out to those involved in the Beirut Port explosion response.⁹ When I did eventually speak to those involved in the Beirut Port explosion, many commented that, despite the stress of the event (which had not dissipated for many), the interview was cathartic, therapeutic, and helpful for them to reflect on their work and how conditions have developed.

3.5.3 Recruitment and access

Negotiating with gatekeepers and accessing elite or guarded organisations poses a myriad of challenges that researchers have strategised to overcome, like attending conferences, cold calling, and visiting offices unannounced (Monahan & Fisher, 2015). Recruitment during the ongoing pandemic rendered these more traditional recruitment strategies obsolete. For instance, I could not call prospective participants or visit events and workplaces given that most people were working from home.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the pandemic's remote working arrangements meant that many prospective participants were frequently checking their email and mobile phones, which meant that recruitment emails were well-received over email and WhatsApp. The pandemic and Lebanon's overlapping crises further complicated recruitment given that the agencies of most interest to my research – humanitarian, crisis response, and welfare – were especially overburdened. Lebanon Support, Beit el Baraka, UNRWA (the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees), and some members of UNICEF explicitly said they were facing extreme pressure at work and thus had limited time for an interview. Separate from the pandemic, some institutions were purposefully guarded. The WFP, a key actor in both LOUISE and the Beirut Port explosion response, were not permitted by their superiors to speak to researchers. Confidentiality agreements prevented access to prominent technology firms and banking sector firms as well (e.g., Ipsos and the Banque Libano-Francaise). On the whole, these obstacles were expected and did not prevent collecting data from most of the key players involved in digitised welfare.

⁹ Some participants involved in the LOUISE system were also involved in the Beirut Port explosion response. As such, I interviewed some participants closer to date of the explosion. In these instances, I made sure to explicitly flag the counselling services noted in the Participant Information Sheet and constantly 'checked-in' throughout the interview to ask how they were feeling and if they would like to keep going.

¹⁰ For a while, I was not legally permitted to leave Canberra due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In summary, this research adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic context and interrelated crises in Lebanon by shifting my methodology and methods. Rather than focusing on refugees' experiences of digitised aid, I sought to capture how workers and systems behind aid delivery have adapted in response to crises and transformations. This was accomplished by focusing on digitised cash assistance and the emergency response to the Port explosion, which together offered a more holistic understanding of Lebanon's humanitarian landscape. The transnational nature of aid required attending to multiple scales and local-global interconnections, which was made possible by studying assemblage with a multi-sited and contextualised ethnography. I highlighted the conflicting, non-linear, and heterogenous accounts of aid by preserving the messiness of technosocial phenomena. A combination of participant observations, remote interviews, and document analysis captured participants' experiences, information about the context, and facilitated triangulation of inferences about social activities. This data was analysed abductively and followed thematic coding to make sense of broader patterns. While the study's remote interviews, crisis context, and recruitment posed limitations, these issues were marginal and strategically compensated for.

The next chapter examines the UN's move to exert infrastructural power over digitised humanitarian infrastructures. In response to the constraints posed by these masculinised expressions of infrastructural power, repair work takes shape. This repair work is distinctly gendered in constituting reproductive labour that sustains continued access to and equality in digitised aid. However, it is also markedly unacknowledged, uncompensated, and is generative of offloaded burdens that reify contestations over digitised "solutions" in the sector.

Chapter 4: Repairing Digitised Aid: Monopolisation of Digital Humanitarian Infrastructures and Shifts in Labour

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2019, I conducted fieldwork at an international humanitarian technology conference to better understand how experts in the humanitarian sector understand technologies that are used for emergency assistance to refugees. I was struck by the prominence of engineers and technical specialists and how their expertise was framed as essential for improving humanitarian interventions. The most memorable and seemingly well-received presentation was a keynote presentation by a self-described “Business Guru and Master Innovator.” Repeatedly citing examples that sounded like they came from sci-fi novels, his lecture made a case for the many ways that artificial intelligence (AI) would make humanitarian work faster, easier, and cost-effective, thereby better supporting the SDGs. He referred to drones that collect whale debris and use AI to report on local ecosystems, AI to train seeing eye dogs to help blind people navigate bustling cities, and AI on a tablet to help villagers in remote areas do basic medical diagnosis without a doctor present.

An audience member was visibly inspired by the presentation and shared this optimism regarding the future of humanitarian work, stating that, “If we can put people on the moon, we can solve global poverty. It’s a matter of finding the right people to do the right stuff.” Others at the conference presented humanitarian work as requiring innovation and investment to enable these kinds of solutions to truly mitigate longstanding issues, which also meant attracting more technical experts. Technology was presented as only ever being in service of the greater good of humanity, with profit accumulation being a peripheral rather than central motivation. The error rate of these technologies was framed as both marginal and acceptable compared to the large proportion of people suffering from natural disasters, underdevelopment, and conflict. And tech experts suggested that, with further innovation, not only could they reduce the error rate, but they could also enhance accessibility to these solutions – solutions that people living in emergencies supposedly desired to use.

Other scholars have written similar accounts reflecting on the imaginaries of technocrats and tech experts (e.g., Dandurand et al., 2020). Optimistic beliefs in technology's affordances and "transformative potential" (Read et al., 2016, p. 1314) continues to circulate throughout the aid sector, which suggests that my fieldwork experience is confirmed by some scholars and representatives of major humanitarian organisations like the United Nations (UN), World Bank, and World Economic Forum (e.g., WFP, 2019a). This enthusiasm for digitised humanitarian interventions applies to more mundane forms of technology that are less publicly visible and are experienced directly by groups on the global periphery like refugees and economically impoverished peoples. For instance, the use of digital banking cards has been described as making cash delivery more efficient than in-kind food assistance and physical cash in envelopes (e.g., Doocy & Tappis, 2017). Digital identification of recipients using biometric technologies are meant to enable aid to reach growing caseloads amounting to millions of people (USAID, 2017a). "Remote-sensing technologies," which analyse characteristics without direct contact, like drones and communication technologies (Duffield, 2018), are supposed to make labour conditions safer for humanitarian workers and expand how far their efforts reach (Chernobrov, 2018). Generative AI like ChatGPT has been framed by one of the sector's leading outlets, *The New Humanitarian*, as helping to ensure that local groups are not overworked and understaffed, as it can be used to "draft social media posts, media pitches, press releases, and articles with surprising efficiency" (Roane, 2023, n. p.). Imaginaries thus frame digital innovation and enhanced access to data as an important tool for humanitarian workers to better support their objectives, fixing a broader repertoire of problems that impede humanitarian workloads.

Despite prominent narratives of "innovating out of disasters" (Mosurska et al., 2023, p. 13) and "more orchestrated workflows" (Memon, 2022, n. p.), much research shows a different story. Experiences of frontline aid workers suggest that digitisation has not reduced or streamlined their workload but has instead transformed the structures, conditions, and types of humanitarian labour (Burns, 2015a). In addition, humanitarianism is a varied institutional space with many actors; even the UN ecosystem is complex. The UN is not a singular, cohesive body. It is made up of numerous agencies with different mandates and programmes, including, among others, the UNHCR (the UN's Refugee Agency), WFP (World Food Programme), and UNICEF (the UN's Children's Fund).

This chapter examines how humanitarian workers, community members, and recipients engage in gendered repair work that sustains the delivery of digitised aid. In particular, the digitisation and automation of identity (ID) registration, cash assistance, and vulnerability targeting require work, which are the cornerstones of the UN's monetary support for impoverished refugees residing in Lebanon. As repair work, their strategies are relatively ordinary and mundane but such labour is required for managing shifts towards digitisation by compensating for technological malfunction and institutional decisions that reinforce precarity and power asymmetries. This repair work is feminised in that it is comparably peripheral, reproductive, and generative of forms of labour that are not publicly and traditionally valued as humanitarian work. In short, it is gendered in that it is the backbone of UN infrastructures that support access to lifesaving aid yet such labour is exploited and unrecognised. This gendered repair directly responds to, and is entrenched by, the digitisation of aid. Digitisation has enabled the United Nations (UN) to enact power that has affinities with monopolisation, supporting their exclusive control over collaborative digitised infrastructures and defining what counts as valued labour. In so doing, this move towards monopolisation asserts, in a symbolic sense, a form of masculine power: it enshrines control over rules and procedures, bestows ownership of humanitarian data and digital processes, and maintains authority to distribute crisis response labour in ways that selectively benefit UN agencies at the expense of humanitarian labourers. The UN's move towards monopolisation is thus an expression of "infrastructural power." While this term typically refers to the state's ability "to have full presence in the territories it rules over in order to implement its policies as desired," in this context it suggests how the UN, who are composed of state actors but are distinct, make use of digitisation to exert infrastructural power over crisis response (Cingolani, 2023, p. 276). These configurations of power ultimately operate as "technopolitics" for asserting and embodying UN control over aid (Schwenkel, 2015).

By highlighting shifts and constitutions of labour, this chapter extends existing understandings of how datafication and digitisation generate labour (e.g., Huws, 2019). The UN's move towards monopolisation reveals nuanced influences upon digital labour like imperatives to reduce duplicative aid dispersals, systemic competition in the humanitarian sector, and a vast network of actors. These come together to create labour conditions that encourage negotiations of offloaded labour, restrictions on control over work, and access to information related to aid work.

My findings shed light on two significant implications. On the one hand, the UN's global legitimacy and benevolence means that they are less obviously considered to capitalise from ownership over digital humanitarian infrastructures. Nevertheless, humanitarian data offers immense value and power, which has been emphasised by scholars like Jathan Sadowski (2019) in their discussion of data as capital. On the other hand, the conditions that constitute repair work consequently expand the distance between the UN and its subjects, cultivating divisions in partnerships between UN agencies and INGOs as well as imperatives to contest the UN's digitised solutions.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 4.2 explores monopolisation in the context of technology and humanitarianism. Using these insights, Section 4.3 draws on the empirical data, which captures three interrelated digital humanitarian infrastructures, to show how they are monopolised by UN agencies in ways that assert masculine power. These three infrastructures include cash assistance, digital ID, and poverty targeting. Section 4.4 unpacks how masculinised monopolisation has generated forms of gendered repair work that contribute to inequitable contours. Finally, Section 4.5 concludes the chapter with a summary of the key findings and implications for sociotechnical imaginaries about the affordances of digital infrastructures.

4.2 SHIFTS IN TECHNOLOGY LABOUR: FROM TECH FIRMS TO THE UN

The academic literature addresses how technology reinforces the exploitation and control of labour by shifting the nature of work. Scholars examine a number of contexts, including the globalisation of outsourced service labour (Poster, 2007), the transformation of social media users into labourers for social media companies (Fuchs, 2014a), and the platformisation of gig economy work (van Doorn et al., 2023). For example, in automated workplaces, the application of artificial intelligence (AI) has facilitated manager and engineers' desires for control over the labour of skilled workers (Kelly, 2023), and in Silicon Valley immigrant tech workers are disproportionately subject to exploitative work that upholds racial hierarchies (e.g., Noble & Roberts, 2022). Discourses of neutrality associated with technology and automated processes also obscure the human labour behind technology. Such discourse occludes the many human labourers who service and operate technologies out of public view, making it easier to reinforce precarious working conditions (Gray & Suri, 2019). Discourses of neutrality also make it

incredibly difficult to see that humans design and thus embed technologies with their own interests and biases (Benjamin, 2019).

These inequitable labour relations have happened against the background of “platform imperialism,” which scholars describe as imbricating platforms in “international power structures” that concentrate power in the hands of a few platform owners for the purpose of maintaining hegemonic power (Bannerman, 2022, p. 2). This type of power expresses monopolisation because these platform owners prioritise their access to platforms over and above others, positioning themselves to have the most to reap from enshrining such divides (Jin, 2015). While scholars note how platform monopolisation and imperialism enable private sector power, especially in the context of Silicon Valley, in the context of digitised aid, monopolistic power can be exercised by UN agencies and actors. This power is of great significance because UN agencies host some of the world’s largest humanitarian agencies and programmes. For instance, “[i]n 2017 UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP together delivered more than half of all global humanitarian cash assistance” (Berthaut et al., 2018, p. 5).

Scholars have started to investigate how the UN benefits from power derived through the digitisation of infrastructures. For instance, Monique J. Beerli (2022) describes the impact of the UN’s fixation with data accumulation as “concentrating data in the hands of the United Nations.” Similarly, Martin Lemberg-Pedersen and Eman Haoity (2021) conceptualise the UNHCR as “data brokers” in the political economy of “data-craving” to emphasise how the UN “monetize” displacement data. As these accounts suggest, the UN has demonstrated its capacity to influence an essential set of nodes within the data assemblage.

The UN has a key stake in data-related ownership rights, decision-making privilege, and coordination structures. In doing so, the UN can act as a powerful node that exercises influence in ways that can bypass other nodes in choices about the design and operation of aid delivery. To describe this power as evincing monopolistic tendencies is important for naming and visibilising how the UN can leverage its influence over digital infrastructures so that they generate advantages in their favour. As Safiya Noble (2018) argues, monopolisation enables firms to serve their own interests and prioritise what information reaches the public, although such hidden motives are often obscured by the firm’s pervasive credibility and cultural

influence bestowed by monopoly status. Given monopolisation's implications for labour, social justice, and knowledge, Noble (2018, p. 3) contends it is imperative that tech monopolies are "broken up and regulated". While, like Big Tech, the UN's dominance over digital infrastructures can be problematic, their monopolisation is distinct. It is not necessarily the direct control of businesses and manipulation of the market (Törnberg, 2023), but instead, their capacity to leverage strategic aspects of digitised infrastructures as they see fit and to disproportionately reap benefits even though other entities like INGOs and residents contribute to the operation of these infrastructures.

As will be shown, moves towards monopolisation take shape through different roles, justifications, and transformations that are enabled by digitisation. While these moves may reflect coordination and innovation, they also shift power in ways that have implications for labour. The digitisation of cash assistance in Lebanon consolidates separate cash programmes into one. This reinforces hierarchical coordination structures where UN agencies have control of decision-making and partners experience reduced autonomy and input. Digital ID requires the consolidation of databases and data processes rather than enabling separate ones, and these are led by a select few institutions. Consolidation mutates into active desires for monopolised control given pervasive competition in the sector and demands for de-duplication through the use of ID databases. Decision-making over the algorithmic poverty targeting coupled with narratives of neutral aid delivery prevents understanding of and input on the algorithm. Digitisation and datafication thereby reflect moves towards controlling key systems and infrastructure. Sometimes this is made possible by technologised infrastructures and sometimes technologised infrastructure provides new spheres where the UN can exercise their control. UN control that expresses infrastructural power thereby enables not only "technological disparities" in access to aid, but also "symbolic hegemony" to control participation, autonomy, and decision-making related to aid labour (Jin, 2015, p. 12).

The UN's expression of digital infrastructural power through monopolisation evinces masculine power. Critical political scholar Varda Burstyn (1983, p. 56) writes that "monopoly of the major positions of power in the world" represents a social configuration of masculinity. It reflects masculinity in that exclusive access to positions of social, economic, and political power have historically been enforced by men through their "conscious and systematic"

demotion of women and feminised “Others” into private spaces and responsibilities (Burstyn, 1983, p. 56). This supports how masculine groups can benefit from a surplus of authority and capital that shape systems of domination and social hierarchies, which facilitate the exploitation and devaluation of feminine labour and unfettered access to women’s bodies. These expressions of masculine power consequently enable “taking charge of the life of increasingly larger numbers of people” (Burstyn, 1983, p. 56).

In relation to my case, the UN’s monopoly on positions of power related to digital infrastructures supports their capacity to selectively grant positions of command to UN groups. In the digital age, this masculine, monopolistic power grants the UN relatively unfettered access to components of digitised assistance like bank accounts and information on algorithmic targeting as well as data on recipients – data on their bodies like biometric data, but also data on their mobility, demography, and purchasing behaviours. With this masculine power, the UN can more easily control the activities of partnering agencies, residents, and refugees. These enactments of power emerge as a form of protection, which is another quality that has been described as distinctly masculine. That is, UN monopolisation that expresses infrastructural power is framed as better delivering aid so as to protect recipients from poverty and the risks of poorly designed aid. In practice, however, participants’ accounts reflect that monopolisation loses sight of protecting recipients’ best interests and instead supports the UN’s unique capacity to enforce relatively arbitrary rules in ways that serve their own interests because they have the power to do so.

This shift towards monopolising infrastructure reflects the social and financial capital that often accompanies masculinity in society. Moves towards monopolisation enable the UN to control, appropriate, and relegate labour conducted by partnering aid agencies, residents, and refugees that facilitate aid delivery to in-need groups. Marginalised groups, especially women, often carry out under-recognised forms of labour within private domains. By utilising infrastructure to expand their reach of governance, the UN’s infrastructural control does something related but dissimilar from states in which they channel social forces in and through material practices for different ends.

The UN's influence in this space is not unlike how states articulate monopolies on force, territories, and “‘ultimate’ power or responsibility over ‘its’ subjects” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 165). In fact, it is particularly relevant in Lebanon given the strong influence of transnational modes of governance in the country. Thus, it operates as sociologist John Hoffman (1998) contends in relation to state authority: as a masculine form of (state) power. Hoffman (1998, p. 167) writes that this “force implies unity” because it “is in the nature of force that power is concentrated so that a social *relationship* between the contending parties is disrupted” (emphasis in original). In the process of concentrating power, actors can transform from a “subject” with the capacity for choice to a “‘thing’ under the control of another” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 167). As such, he concludes that such force is integral to what feminists have described as a masculine domination.

In relation to technology, Judy Wajcman (2007) writes that men's domination of technology in various sectors, like engineering and computing, is evidenced by women's prohibition from skilled technical and trade jobs in order to protect working class men's interests in these occupations. As such, capitalist structures of labour are entangled with gendered power relations that exert forms of monopolised control. Here, I explore how these dynamics take shape, how they are opposed, and their social and material costs. This chapter demonstrates that the imaginaries of innovation of being more reliable and reducing workloads actually inform a more complicated set of processes that shift where labour is located, what types of labour occur, and who engages in labour.

4.3 MONOPOLISING DIGITAL HUMANITARIAN INFRASTRUCTURE IN LEBANON

4.3.1 Digitised cash assistance

In Lebanon, there were clear incentives for unifying separate cash assistance systems. Before 2016, Lebanon's aid system had many different cash assistance programmes with their own systems, which led to inefficient allocation of funding and rendered aid delivery more confusing for recipients (Lebanon Cash Consortium, 2017). As described by a UN official, these siloed aid systems meant that recipients were getting aid from several groups at once. Maha, who manages a UN agency's health, education, and social assistance programmes, said that fragmentation fuelled inefficient, overlapping humanitarian labour and excess costs. It also

confused recipients because they struggled to understand who to contact and where to go for aid. This reinforced competition between humanitarian agencies as they each would seek to cater to a larger pool of recipients to increase donor funding to support their operations.

State donors, especially the ECHO (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations), Germany, Norway, and the UK, pushed to harmonise the cash assistance that was delivered by different UN agencies and INGOs. Proposals conveyed the need to “design a system that would collectively be more efficient and effective, both from the agency and end-user perspectives” (Pelly & Juillard, 2020, p. 10). Rather than only harmonising the process of disbursing cash, the sector overhauled the entire aid ecosystem by centralising each component and instrument of cash assistance. They centralised into “one payment card, one management platform, one targeting system, one call hotline, one appeals system and one referral mechanism” (Keith, 2017). This digitised cash assistance programme is called LOUISE, the Lebanon One-Unified Inter-Organisational System for E-Cards. Refugee recipients receive a digitised banking card (e-card) to withdraw cash from automated teller machines (ATMs) and to spend funds at contracted shops using point-of-sale (POS) terminals (Chehade et al., 2020). By unifying previously discrete actors by encouraging a range of UN and non-UN humanitarian agencies to join this integrated model as members, LOUISE supports a partnership hierarchy that reduces the autonomy and independence that actors previously enjoyed. LOUISE’s harmonisation thus sets up the foundation for monopolised power dynamics.

While LOUISE’s operation requires many actors to support its efforts, such as Anera, the Danish Refugee Council, World Vision, Save the Children, and the Makhzoumi Foundation, consolidation meant that these many actors have become managed by a few UN agencies – namely, the UNHCR, WFP, and UNICEF (Pelly & Juillard, 2020). Practically, this means that humanitarian partners who previously worked on separate cash assistance programmes sign up to work under the UN’s leadership, agreeing to have all of their responsibilities and participation rights determined by the UN. Decisions about and funding for LOUISE’s cash assistance must therefore pass through the UNHCR, WFP, and UNICEF before they reach non-UN humanitarian partners and recipients.

Even though harmonisation has been adopted voluntarily, stakeholders in interviews and in public reports have confirmed that a small but powerful group of agencies ultimately controls this aid ecosystem. Some opponents have critiqued the system for its risk of enshrining a “de facto monopoly” that is less equitable and efficacious than the preceding, unharmonised system (Parker, 2017, n. p.). For instance, Amy Louise Keith (2017), the 2013-2017 Country Coordinator of the Lebanon Humanitarian INGO (International Non-Governmental Organisation) Forum, critiques LOUISE by saying,

... larger agencies and programmes [are] naturally having more leeway to take unilateral programme decisions and influence (or disregard) the collective approach... decisions that affect the most basic support to hundreds of thousands of refugees – and thus affect the entire response – have been taken unilaterally by the agencies with the largest programmes, without consultation with and very limited explanation to other response actors or refugees.

By shifting partnership, funding, and coordination structures so that smaller and larger cash programmes are merged under UN leadership, LOUISE has reified the UN’s de facto monopolised power over aid. While donors were the driving force behind harmonisation, as will be discussed further in algorithmic poverty targeting, the digitisation of the programme has generated infrastructure (bank accounts) and management roles (banking card administrator) that place UN actors in key roles. Accordingly, they express infrastructural power that enhances their presence in Lebanon’s humanitarian response and strengthens their capacity to implement their own decisions and policies without external input.

An interviewee, Mohammad, who works closely with UN agencies on digital cash programming in Lebanon, explained this dynamic further. He described the UN as controlling recipients’ bank accounts in the LOUISE system, acknowledging bank accounts are a necessary component of the digitisation of cash assistance programs that use e-cards. The UN’s unilateral control over bank accounts and its rules consequently reduced Mohammad’s INGO’s autonomy, which he explains:

If you want to transfer money to beneficiaries through LOUISE, you are transferring it to a bank account held by WFP for LOUISE and WFP are transferring it to beneficiaries. And so, you don’t have the control over this bank account, as they are doing it on your

behalf... You have to agree on all the monitoring and all the means of verifications that they need and everything. So, yeah, there's lots of things to agree on.

Mohammad's quote offers a glimpse into what de facto monopolisation looks like in practice. The creation of bank accounts by digitising cash assistance has given the UN control of a key conduit of humanitarian programming. It removes the ability of humanitarian partners to directly provide aid to recipients. By giving the UN the authority to act as the only intermediary, the UN controls funds generated by non-UN partners. As part of this monopolised power, the UN sets the regulations and rules of digitised cash assistance, which supports infrastructural power that expands the reach and scope of their power over divisions of labour beyond their own institutions. In doing so, these digitised transformations support the UN's capability to override the autonomy of humanitarian partners.

In interviews, participants emphasised that this variation of monopolisation through infrastructural power is further reinforced by decision-making power over digital banking card management. The WFP was assigned to banking card administration on behalf of all LOUISE members. The WFP selected Banque Libano-Française (BLF) as LOUISE's banking partner, which had existing partnerships with the WFP before LOUISE (Pelly & Juillard, 2020). In the WFP's role as banking card administrator, the WFP is in charge of managing the banking agreement with BLF; liaising with the BLF about issuing banking cards, personal identification numbers (PINs), point-of-service (POS) terminals; and ensuring that aid money is delivered to recipients' accounts (Pelly & Juillard, 2020).

Marcel, a foreign UN worker who manages the UN cash assistance programme, explained how the WFP has the capacity to single-handedly make decisions about LOUISE's banking card. Marcel said that the banking manager role "puts WFP in the driving seat." By "driving seat," he means that the WFP could unilaterally select and retain the BLF without input from other humanitarian partners despite clear issues posed by the BLF. Similarly, Rima, who works for the UN and helped establish LOUISE, said this role "gives [WFP] power they don't want to lose" in that they can lead cash assistance unopposed and with less accountability to their partners. This aligns with Marcel's commentary on how the BLF "were not great in terms of providing reports and data" which were asked for by the UNHCR and UNICEF. The BLF also

took a while to install more ATMs throughout the country, which were needed to increase accessibility to cash for refugees.

As indicated by my participants' perceptions, this expression of monopolised power by the WFP has consequently enabled the BLF to underperform. The BLF was ultimately answerable to the WFP, not the full range of actors that use its services. As such, the BLF could provide sub-par services yet remain insulated from challenge or removal from LOUISE by members who were dissatisfied with their level of service. This led Marcel to characterise the BLF as being "very relaxed and sure of their position." Despite the BLF's aforementioned operational flaws, Marcel said,

WFP still pushes BLF as their favourite. My personal opinion is it's very subjectively that they believe that they're the safest and most reliable bank right now, that all other banks are compromised. The tender [for the banking partner] is a very formal thing. But still, people are behind it... we would have expected a bit more from a bank that we've been pumping with a lot of dollars for over five years.

In the case of cash assistance, the digitisation of cash assistance has created a new management role for the WFP to exert unilateral control over selecting and retaining banking partners. This new position extends the breadth and depth of the WFP's existing monopolised power over humanitarian aid. It also puts the BLF in a unique position in that it is only beholden to WFP, even though stakeholders like Marcel see it as not only profiting from the UN, but also underperforming. Rima said that this partnership structure is ultimately not sustainable: on the one hand, LOUISE partners are "hugely dependent" on the WFP to leverage their relationship with the BLF so that they perform as desired and do not drop out of the programme. On the other hand, the WFP retains considerable bargaining power if decisions are made that they disagree with. If the WFP chose to leave LOUISE because they felt their interests were not being met, she believed that the BLF would also drop out and instantaneously leave the programme without a banking partner. This would force LOUISE members to channel an unnecessary and extensive amount of time and resources into setting up bank management all over again. Ultimately, Rima believed that this arrangement contravenes the interests of recipients. It enables the WFP to leverage its unique power while retaining a banking partner that is not best suited for banking administration.

For these reasons, Marcel and Rima confirmed that the UNHCR and UNICEF disapproved of the WFP's unilateral decision-making power as the banking manager and WFP's choice to retain the BLF. They felt that the WFP's "subjective" choice to select and retain the BLF reflected the WFP's ability to enact self-serving policies that maintain their exclusive control over cash assistance and other LOUISE partners. Nevertheless, given the WFP's unique and powerful role over banking card management, LOUISE partners struggle to change and contest the BLF's behaviour and to influence the recruitment of more effective banking partners. This infrastructural power has important links to labour. Not only does this power support how some types of work (i.e., banking services by the BLF) are compensated for contributing to aid even though they pose issues; as will be shown, this is also generative of labour that constitutes repair work as LOUISE partners strategise how to enhance the quality of the BLF's performance.

4.3.2 Digital ID

Digital ID registration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon records their iris scans, fingerprints, and demographic information such as where they came from in Syria, when they reached Lebanon, what they used to do for work, education levels, and chronic illnesses. Refugee data is stored on a transnational database managed by the UNHCR called RAIS, the Refugee Assistance Information System (Janmyr, 2018). Humanitarian participants considered RAIS a significant accomplishment, as it removed several segmented databases and reconciled them into one. Harmonisation seemingly offered several benefits. For instance, the centralisation of identity data "enables UNHCR and partners to share assistance records, cross-check beneficiary lists, and host different types of data" (UNHCR, 2017, p. 1). RAIS is also synchronised with the UN's global registration database, proGres, where "refugee data from all UNHCR field offices is updated daily" (UNHCR, 2017, p. 1). By centralising identity data, RAIS enables more up-to-date data, linkage with global systems, and larger quantities of data to support more effective humanitarian responses.

Even though RAIS is framed as chiefly benefitting beneficiaries (i.e., enhanced access to aid) and workers (i.e., making their work more efficient and easier), public narratives often elide how the platform distinctly benefits the UN by giving them more control over identity management protocols and recipient data. Other scholars have argued that digital identity

systems reify state and corporate control over data by supporting their “claimed monopoly to assign and verify claimed identities” (e.g., Cheesman, 2022, p. 136).

For digital ID registration to work, humanitarianians need synchronised databases. This enables the registration, verification, and authentication of identity data across a vast range of humanitarian partners, programmes, and regions – the *raison d’être* of digital ID. Demands for digital ID registration in the aid sector have supported the consolidation of heterogeneous databases and ID data processes. But, as one of my participants, Chris, notes, centralised databases are often owned by “big heavyweights” who tend to be UN agencies and some prominent INGOs. Chris previously worked for the UN, frequented Lebanon and Syria, and now reports on their aid programmes. He suggested this was an issue because competition over digital ID infrastructures is never going to be equal or fair, nor is it going to be driven by qualities that support more effective digital ID like higher levels of insight into recipients’ lived experiences or technical expertise. Instead, in Chris’ perspective, ownership of digital ID was mainly driven by pressures from competing with other humanitarian actors. Chris explained that,

The UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF are the kind of big heavyweights – and the heavyweight INGOs are also competitive. But, at the moment, the digital ID and registration space and the related space of cash-based aid is becoming a very small group of big agencies who are dominating. So, ya, they want to compete. I mean, there’s something about [ID] registration that lends itself to monopoly, right? You don’t want multiple databases. But there’s also a question of sort of grabbing the market share.

His remarks reflect what Mirca Madianou (2019b) describes as pervasive competition in the humanitarian sector over funding, donor attention, technical expertise, and groups of recipients. Chris indicated that competition was already pervasive in the sector and continues to saturate more areas of the humanitarian sector like cash assistance. As a salient influence upon shifts towards monopolisation, Chris signalled competition coupled with the nature of digital ID processes cultivated conditions that support aspirations to unilaterally control digital ID ownership.

This competition, however, does not take place in a fair marketplace. Instead, efforts to own digital ID infrastructures support power hierarchies in the sector. Bigger humanitarian groups like the UN have an unfair advantage because they can leverage their higher levels of financial support, reputational backing, and a larger global presence as compared to smaller groups to obtain possession of digital ID infrastructure. Not only does this empower larger humanitarian groups to absorb databases held by smaller humanitarian actors, thus reducing their footprint in the sector and supporting their exclusion from digital ID; it also supports what digital anthropologist Margie Cheesman (2022) describes as “power asymmetries of platform capitalism and the asymmetrical relations of aid” that enable “exercises of power by data monopolies.”

Imbalanced rivalries entangled with efforts to harmonise multiple ID databases via digitisation has reduced the number of databases available, making them even more sought-after by aid agencies in the humanitarian marketplace. This is significant because control of the now-limited number of databases bestows immense value for those larger humanitarian institutions like the UN. As scholar of migration and borders, Martina Tazzioli (2022, p. 73) writes, such infrastructures do not simply enable the neutral, technical, and apolitical collection of data but rather they enable extraction that supports “modes of capitalisation and exploitation.” Socio-legal scholar Kristin Bergtora Sandvik (2023) explores the array of capital offered through capacities for data extractivism such as the generation of financial capital like profit and donor support, the expansion of experimental technologies to more and more vulnerable groups, the support of political agendas, and the overall shift of power towards humanitarians and their partners.

As such, harmonisation has not simply consolidated ID databases, but has actually encouraged actors to try to monopolise control and ownership of digital ID. By seeking the proprietorship of these limited but valuable digital ID infrastructures, the UN is incentivising competitive market-like practices illustrative of a form of “competitive aggression” characterised as a markedly masculine quality (Rosner, 2013, p. 69). Their competitive drive embodies masculinity, as they engender “social recognition” of their success, strength, power, and force over their competitors (Knights & Tullberg 2011, p. 400). This fashions a particularly masculine humanitarian identity in efforts to win and safeguard ownership of identity

infrastructures, one that is preoccupied with prestige, stature, and “transforming everything to objects of... conquest” (Wikhamn & Knights, 2013, p. 276). In the process, the competitors of larger organisations and the refugees who have their data extracted are concomitantly feminised. Their access to data and labour that supports ID infrastructures are increasingly subverted and controlled, thereby “silenc[ing] alternative ideas which otherwise could have had creative and disruptive impacts on the data monopoly” (Wikhamn & Knights, 2013, p. 291).

Enactments of infrastructural power support the UN’s asymmetrical value from digital practices, which concomitantly disadvantages humanitarian partners that labour to support the use of digital ID in aid delivery. Another participant who currently works for the UN to coordinate basic assistance with the Lebanese government, Yasmeen, told me about her experiences with leveraging ID data in the LOUISE platform. She referenced “de-duplication” as a core logic behind consolidating humanitarian databases. To enable cost-savings, fraud prevention, and resources to reach a larger pool of people in need, RAIS permits checking if a family is already receiving cash assistance from another agency. Marcel confirmed the drive for de-duplication by saying,

We’re lucky because we have the baseline database. So, there are no agency databases outside the UNHCR’s one for refugees. There’s only one system, called RAIS. And there is almost zero possibility of assistance duplication because it’s all run through the same database.

The aspiration to mitigate duplication by harmonising disparate databases into a single system has reinforced monopolistic tendencies in the aid sector, positioning UN actors as owners and non-UN agencies as contributors. This hierarchical structuring of labour is thus “symbolically associated with masculinity and femininity” (Mazurana & Proctor, 2015, p. 49). The UN receives value and authority from proprietorship that is distinct from its competitors. In comparison, humanitarian workers and their institutions who wish to utilise digital ID are beholden to the UN, which reaffirms the UN’s masculinity by enshrining their capacity to control the infrastructures, processes, and conditions under which digital ID labour is engaged. As a result of the UNHCR’s ownership, Yasmeen said that the UNHCR controls all data-sharing, giving them the power to decide which humanitarian partners are trustworthy enough

to participate in RAIS, which partners have sufficient data protection expertise, what types of data they can access, and what types of labour they must contribute for participation rights. RAIS thereby enables the UNHCR to define partnership parameters in digital ID, which further cements privileges that they selectively enjoy.

As shown, the drive to reduce duplicative aid by consolidating and unifying digital ID platforms enshrines exercises of control. Because the data needs to be held in one place for checking whether multiple agencies have disbursed aid, harmonisation makes it easier for one agency to monopolise ownership and control of ID data. Thus, harmonisation and monopolisation are deeply intertwined, making it difficult to have one without the other. The spillover effects are numerous. As Chris said, unlike states that can be held accountable by law and have more transparent accountability mechanisms, it is incredibly difficult to take the UN to court, to appeal their decisions, to lodge Freedom of Information requests, and to ensure that data protection authorities hold them to account. For this reason, he characterised the UN as being “literally above the law” since “almost all UN agencies are governed by diplomatic immunity.” In terms of relationships with other actors, as will be shown, UN actors are in a privileged position to implement policies and rules about digital ID. These decisions are allowed to sidestep the needs of recipients and the insights of humanitarians who are working in the field and have an intimate knowledge of the operational context and limitations of the technologies, like the encoding of discriminatory identification practices.

4.3.3 Algorithmic poverty targeting

Algorithmic poverty scoring uses variables indicative of insecurity and vulnerability. The variables are collected by an annual, nationally representative survey of refugees, the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR). Using a proxy-means test (PMT), these variables are factored into a formula used to predict individuals’ expenditure and rank their “score” against that of others. Yasmeen said that computational methods are supposed to improve the capacity to target aid to the most in need populations. In addition, by maximising information collected by VASyR, the PMT is meant to cut costs by removing the need for interviewing individuals and conducting household visits to assess vulnerability (Chaaban et al., 2018). Requiring algorithmic rather than in-person assessment was also framed by Yasmeen as giving everyone an “equal opportunity to get scored and become eligible for

assistance” because everyone with a UNHCR profile can get assessed rather than only those who were profiled in-person. Ashe, another UN worker who helped develop Lebanon’s PMT and support its integration into operations, said that donors, in particular, pushed for this predictive analytic response, as they desired something more “accurate.”

Although LOUISE has been touted as a collaborative humanitarian system, LOUISE’s targeting algorithm is largely controlled by WFP and UNHCR – the main receivers of funding for LOUISE, the owners of the registration database, and the leaders of VASyR. Several participants confirmed this and it has been corroborated in other reports. For instance, Filip Hellberg (2018) notes that the ECHO and the UK’s DFID (Department for International Development) critiqued the LOUISE programme’s automated targeting mechanism for enabling the UN to exclude participation from other stakeholders. Hellberg (2018) states that “... primarily the UN agencies have taken decisions on targeting and inclusion in Lebanon unilaterally, with no involvement of other actors in the process and with low possibilities of insight in the process.”

This participatory exclusion and opacity have excluded targeted recipients, as well. An impact evaluation on behalf of the Lebanon Cash Consortium states that “the formula is the result of statistical methods, with limited – if any – participation of targeted communities in the decision making process” (Battistin, 2016, p. 5). As such, a report by Rachel Sabates-Wheeler and Carolina Szyp (2022, p. 11) notes that Lebanon’s “targeting methods... are conducted at arm’s length – in a ‘black box’ – away from the recipients [who] are often viewed suspiciously.”

Maintaining the UNHCR and WFP’s selective control over and input into the algorithm is supposed to remove the risk of discriminatory, biased, and inaccurate eligibility assessments. I spoke to Mohammad, an INGO worker who contributes to the UN’s vulnerability scoring by collecting data on refugees in the nation. Mohammad explained that the data his agency collects is filled into an online system and sent to a research analyst who enters the data into a computerised system that automatically generates a score for each household. Mohammad said that the vulnerability scores, the formula, and how it is calculated are not shared with the field team “to make sure that there’s no manipulation of data” and so “you don’t know if they [i.e., recipients] are scoring high or low.”

In Lebanon, this expression of infrastructural power has been used to keep the targeting formula “secret in order to prevent beneficiaries from ‘gaming the system’” (Development Pathways, 2018, n. p.). This is confirmed in a report by Gabrielle Smith (2019, p. 9), which states that UN agencies have justified their decision to keep the targeting formula opaque due to concerns that “revealing variables could lead to fraudulent claims for assistance.” Claims about preventing fraudulent behaviour, and thus justifying expressions of monopolised comprehension over algorithmic poverty targeting, reflect gendered power discrepancies. Here, recipients and humanitarian workers like Mohammad are feminised in being excluded from technological work. This is made possible by framing algorithmic targeting as requiring a certain level of trustworthiness and expertise (i.e., masculine capacities) that only the UN can demonstrate (Sundin, 1996). The logics behind making poverty targeting selectively visible to the UN also assume a (masculine) tendency of protection and defence (Mazurana & Proctor, 2015); in this case, withholding knowledge of poverty targeting is presumed to better protect beneficiaries, and consequently, the credibility of humanitarian institutions.

These findings suggest UN agencies have moved to maintain infrastructural power over all aspects of the targeting algorithm. This includes the decision to implement algorithmic eligibility assessments as well as decisions about how transparent the system is to locals and humanitarian workers and how much input they are given. The complexity of algorithmic assessment coupled with the techno-optimist logic of objectivity enable the UN to exclude participation and one-sidedly set rules regarding targeting. As such, the datafied nature of this intervention provides another sphere for the UN to exercise control and set policies.

While the move towards monopolisation was secured under the pretence of fixing numerous programming concerns – especially concerns related to overburdened humanitarian workloads and inefficient labour processes – its expression of infrastructural power legitimates asymmetrical power relations. It bestows unequal power to make decisions about how aid is delivered, who participates in aid and how, and what labour is required. The next section reveals how monopolised control creates issues that Lebanese locals, refugees, and humanitarian workers must work around in order to sustain the delivery of digitised aid, maintain their autonomy, and uphold humanitarian mandates to help people in need. That is,

monopolisation cultivates localised and institutional forms of repair work that aim to mend programming issues and enhance equity in humanitarian intervention.

4.4 GENDERED REPAIR WORK IN RESPONSE TO INCREASING UNILATERAL CONTROL

This section discusses different forms of repair work that negotiate the constraints of the UN's monopolisation over implementing, owning, and making rules about digital humanitarian infrastructures. This repair work is critical in that it enables compliance with rules, compensation for dysfunctional technologies, maintenance of imperfect technologies, and sustaining equity in the aid sector. It also enables workers to assert often qualified forms of autonomy, resisting structures they perceive as limiting and even oppressive. For example, in the case of refugees and residents, their work is not treated as labour, which renders their contribution to digitised aid as not only unrecognised, but also as a freely obtainable resource. In the case of humanitarians' backstage labour, their work may be salaried, but it is out of sight and peripheral within mainstream descriptions of what it takes to implement and sustain digitised aid.

Here, I analyse how these disparate forms of labour constitute "reproductive labour" (Ferguson, 2020) because their main purpose is supporting the daily and long-term continuance of infrastructures that reproduce populations suffering from crisis. For instance, Marla who conducts research on refugees in Lebanon for third party monitoring of UN aid, said that refugees using digitised cash assistance "rely on it for their survival." By repairing interrelated digital infrastructures that facilitate access to cash assistance and advocating for aid processes that are more effective and equitable, this repair work thereby supports their survival. However, like reproductive labour, much of this repair work is outside of normative definitions of productivity (Carr, 2017) and the valuation of such labour diminishes as it gets offloaded and passed on to various workers and institutions (Parreñas, 2012) – those who do not benefit from owning and controlling digital infrastructures but whose labour nevertheless supports them. As reproductive labour, humanitarian systems depend on this repair work and without it, the UN's digitised infrastructural systems "would not be possible and sustainable" (Adams, 2022, p. 388).

4.4.1 Separating, positioning, and leveraging as repair work

INGOs do not readily accept their loss of participation rights driven by the UN's increasing control over digital components of cash transfers, such as bank accounts and e-monitoring. This push towards monopolisation has been an active deterrent for INGO partners to continue participating in LOUISE. Such control was reported as making aid delivery too cumbersome, inefficient, and restrictive due to adding rules, processes, and requirements for UN approval for most steps. As a form of repair work that addresses such burdens to humanitarian labour, Mohammad's INGO separated from the UN. Doing so aimed to regain the INGO's control over their own cash assistance operations and streamline services to recipients:

For our own funded cash assistance, we decided not to use LOUISE, to have our own service provider. This is making our implementation more simple because we have all the control on the accounts, on the money. We have all the reports directly sent to us and do not have to ask for someone to do it on your behalf or to send you these reports. We are receiving them ourselves. So, we have made this decision and we are continuing with the service provider. We thought about joining LOUISE again for this [year], but after analysing it, we didn't find lots of added value to do this. Especially because we can access an exchange rate that is almost the same [as the UN's] and with more simple implementation.

Other INGOs de-harmonised and separated from the UN-dominated LOUISE. For instance, I spoke to Amira, who works for a different INGO that supports the UNHCR's implementation of LOUISE. Because the entirety of Amira's reporting, forms, and case management decisions must be sent to and approved by UNHCR before cash is delivered, recipients are left waiting for aid for weeks. As a result, Amira's INGO created a cash assistance programme that is not funded and coordinated by UNHCR specifically because it meant they could avoid the added delays of requiring UN approval and feedback. Therefore, due to the UN's impediments in controlling LOUISE, INGOs are deliberately dedicating labour and resources towards creating their own cash assistance programmes to operate divorced from the UN's command.

Furthermore, as implementing partners, INGOs do not have much input on LOUISE. They largely implement the WFP and UNHCR's directives. Mohammad recounted how his INGO worked to increase their participation and access to information in LOUISE, especially so that

they could access more data to assist recipients better. He described his INGO's attempts to reclaim power in this way:

As an implementing partner for WFP and UNHCR, we don't really have high input into LOUISE. We are implementing for WFP and so WFP are mainly the ones who are doing the discussions and having access to everything, information and data, and all these things. So we don't have this interaction... yes, we have access to certain information and data, but we are always asking for more, to have more access, to know more about things. And we are positioning ourselves to have a good positioning, to be participating in decision making.

Here we see two important aspects of digitised humanitarian aid. On the one hand, this data/power remains in the hands of the UN agencies heading LOUISE. On the other hand, INGOs do not tolerate being left in the dark and receiving inferior data privileges and responsibilities, which impacts their capacity to meaningfully contribute to aid. So, they put effort towards 'positioning' themselves favourably in the eyes of the UN. Through 'positioning,' INGOs actively frame themselves as trustworthy, highlight their longstanding relationship with UN agencies, and emphasise that access to more data and decision-making rights is in the best interest of beneficiaries and the UN's own mandates. As such, by building up their credibility, legitimacy, and perceived necessity, INGOs engage in positioning as a form of repair work to address issues posed by unilateral rules over digitised cash assistance. This is a shift in labour by encouraging further self-advocacy in the sector.

Moreover, the WFP's unilateral decision to retain the BLF – a poorly performing banking partner – encouraged repair work in the form of adaptation and soft coercion strategies. Jack works for a UN agency in Lebanon to support their digital cash assistance programme. Jack's UN agency sought to overcome the BLF's weaknesses by tendering cash assistance options beyond digital banking cards, such as cash over the counter in envelopes and cash through money transfer agencies. Jack explained this repair work in more detail by saying it was:

... not only good because we could spread the network of delivery points. But also as a leverage for BLF to tell them, listen, if you don't improve, we look the other way. Because they want to keep us. They showed many times that they're interested in continuing this [partnership] because it's a lifeline for them.

In this case, the UN agency threatened to end the partnership and contract with the BLF, taking their business elsewhere. This strategy sought to enhance accessibility to banking sites and remove the UN agency's reliance on the WFP's banking partner. Further, by communicating to the BLF that their position as the banking partner was not ironclad, the UN agency hoped to encourage the BLF to improve their quality of service. As reproductive labour, this small but "necessary" work of planning for other modalities is critical to making cash assistance "possible on a daily... basis" and thus supporting recipients that rely on this aid modality (Weeks, 2011, p. 24).

Repair work is not always preoccupied with mending, suturing, and fusing together. In the case of cash assistance that circumscribed participation, access, and input, repair work sought separation, resistance, and standing out. Repair of digital humanitarian infrastructure is thereby paradoxical, "organising connections while also disconnecting" (Velkova, 2023, p. 434). As shifts in labour, repair work reflects how humanitarian actors are augmenting their workflows and putting effort, time, and resources into emancipating from consolidated cash infrastructures. This requires strategies to regain autonomy and set up entirely new systems with their own rules, partners, and practices. In doing so, repair labour is dedicated to expanding the distance between those controlling technology for care and those delivering care with technology.

4.4.2 Uncompensated labour compensating for technological malfunction as repair work

The UNHCR's unilateral power over digital ID gives them the power to mandate biometric information as part of the registration process and determine its rules. It became clear in my research that the process of registering ID data and meeting its requirements are particularly cumbersome for some people, especially those with intersecting axes of inequality (e.g., gender, race, and disability). Further, digital ID systems sometimes malfunction. These findings are confirmed by numerous scholarly accounts of biometric ID in welfare settings (e.g., Paragi & Altamimi, 2022).

Third-party reports and my interviews with humanitarian workers reveal many forms of behind-the-scenes work that recipients, community members, and humanitarian workers

employ to work around the burdens enshrined by UN control over digital ID. Such workarounds are not officially acknowledged in press releases and institutional discourse about the efficacy and affordances of digital ID in the humanitarian sector (e.g., UNHCR, 2018). Nevertheless, refugee livelihoods are contingent on this labour, which is invaluable to accessing life-saving aid. In reflecting assumptions that the UN will always have access to aid labour that they are not compelled to pay for, this repair work constitutes an important form of reproductive labour.

Refugees in Lebanon must validate their identity every three months as part of the UNHCR and WFP's rules on digital ID registration. Marla, who conducts third-party monitoring of UN agencies, described the challenges for recipients who must travel to WFP and UNHCR-run validation centres to record their biometric information, keep demographic information up to date, and confirm that the person with cash assistance is, indeed, who they claim to be. Quarterly validation is required even though some refugees live far from validation centres, struggle to reach validation sites (e.g., the elderly and those with disabilities), and face difficulties making the arrangements to participate (e.g., those with carer's responsibilities).

In a report on refugee users' experiences with digitised cash assistance in Lebanon, refugees recounted many forms of repair work labour involved in ID validation (SOURCE, YEAR). Refugees recounted walking long distances and paying for lengthy and expensive cab rides. There are also gendered burdens of ID validation labour, as mothers spoke about bringing their children on their journey or relying on community members to supervise them while they travel. The WFP and UNHCR have attempted to mitigate validation challenges by allowing some refugees to verify their identities at LibanPost and Cash United, which are ideally closer in proximity (Ground Truth Solutions, 2021). However, UN agencies do not compensate refugees for the time and money spent on validation, nor do they offer protection from risks they may encounter. Instead, some refugees are forced to take time off work, the expense of such travels comes out of their pockets, and they are at increased risk of being exploited and harassed along the way (Smith, 2019). These forms of informal labour are integral to digital ID yet its afflictions challenge the notion that digital assistance supports empowerment, livelihoods, and streamlined aid delivery (e.g., UNHCR, n.d.).

Refugees receive an SMS message on their phone to tell them when they must validate their identity and where to go. However, many refugees struggle to comprehend such messages. Several studies have found numeracy and literacy skill levels to be “alarmingly poor” amongst the nation’s refugee populations (e.g., UNESCO, 2020). For instance, reports by USAID (2017b) claim that roughly 17% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are illiterate, with women – especially women with disabilities – facing even more barriers to accessing education (USAID, 2017c). To decipher their SMS messages and ensure they are properly understood, recipients who struggle with literacy and numeracy seek help from neighbours and family members (Smith, 2019). This community repair work is integral to ensuring that refugees comply with validation demands and continue to access the aid they need to survive. We see here that digital ID harmonisation does not necessarily make work more efficient. Rather, by enabling its rules to be dictated by the UN, which is far removed from the lived realities of refugees, digital ID harmonisation has shifted what types of labour are required and who is responsible for supporting digital ID processes.

Sometimes biometric validation fails. When it does, the UN requires refugees to travel to registration centres again so that recipients can participate in additional forms of identity authentication. Yasmeen explain that:

Sometimes with biometrics, the iris scan doesn’t go through as some irises do not scan well. And sometimes there are technical glitches. This means the family has to show up again in-person to do another type of [ID] verification.

Beneficiaries and practitioners do not have the bargaining power to reject inflexible registration rules or to engage more amenable alternatives. Instead, the labour of ensuring that identity is digitally registered in ways specified by the UN and compensating for its failure becomes offloaded onto recipients. The onus is on refugees to go out of their way to make it work, which can be burdensome. This is an important implication of both biometric failure and unilateral rule-making regarding digital ID.

While Shoshana Magnet emphasised in 2011 that biometrics are often inaccurate and reproduce structural power asymmetries, as evidenced by Yasmeen’s statement, such discrimination is still a problem in contemporary digital ID applications. Biometrics continue to

disproportionately fail at capturing, and thus require additional repair work from, marginalised groups. Factors that compel further effort from marginalised groups to prove their identity include: race (e.g., facial scans are poor at capturing Black people), age and disability (e.g., cataracts impacting iris scans), class (e.g., those who work in labour-intensive, industrial jobs have eroded fingerprints), and gender identity (e.g., transsexual people display changing gender information and biological characteristics) (Magnet, 2011). As such, mandating digital ID registrations without any way to circumvent them consequently reflects and embeds discrimination, offloading repair work to oppressed groups who have to compensate for the technology's inability to register differences.

Huda, a researcher of digital technologies in the Middle East, recounted how biometrics failed at a post office in Lebanon because the technology stopped working. She watched refugees biometrically validate their identity at a LibanPost in Batroun, recounting that:

...there were some Syrian refugees getting their eyes scanned to get their cards topped up. And I watched the system fail multiple, multiple times and cause all these queues. And the two cashiers in the LibanPost branch in Batroun was having to reboot the system to get it to work. Yeah, it was interesting. I was like, this is not as smooth and streamlined as they sell it as [laughs].

Again, the labour of compensating for malfunctioning biometric authentication falls onto local residents. While cashiers rebooted the biometric ID systems, they had to manage the long lines of customers, quell tensions, and address concerns from patrons as they waited to access services offered by the post office. As repair work, this labour is demanded to mend digital ID when it goes wrong, but accountability for such failures is displaced to those who are mandated to comply with the UN rather than those who mandate its use.

In summary, we are encouraged to think of biometrics as leading to less work and higher quality of work. Repair work that compensates for the technology's burdens and failures is less prominent in the public consciousness. When digital ID faces issues, we are inclined to believe that formally employed humanitarians are solely responsible for mending the technology and maintaining its functionality – especially those working for UN agencies who choose to implement it and are uniquely positioned to make its rules. Instead, as shown here, refugees and community residents (e.g., store clerks, cab drivers, and neighbours looking after refugees'

children) work to ensure that biometric enrolment happens, its issues are addressed, and its functionality is restored.

These actors comprise an important but overlooked ecosystem of reproductive work. This work is essential to adhering to unilaterally mandated rules on identification – rules that are unreflective of the lived experiences of the people from which it requires compliance. By not providing the necessary material resources (e.g., taxi fare) and effort to meet this requirement, the UN becomes dependent on these unpaid workers to reproduce refugee livelihoods and the viability of ID verification technologies. As social reproduction, it also reproduces public beliefs that digital ID interventions work and are a feasible option for aid delivery, thereby reproducing the UN's own status as Lebanon's humanitarian body (Hannaford, 2019). In doing so, this division of labour reflects how the humanitarian sector can uphold globalised inequities.

4.4.3 Contestation behind the scenes as repair work labour

Several participants disapproved of the UN's decisions to target aid with an algorithm and to limit the amount of public information about it. This led to low levels of understanding of how poverty targeting works among recipients and humanitarian workers (e.g., Marla). Ashe noted that one of the biggest challenges in rolling out the PMT was explaining how it worked to refugees. Paula, who works for the EU on social protection in Lebanon, said that the formula is too complex for recipients to understand why or why they were not selected, which leads to significant frustration. A report by Development Pathways (2018) confirmed this sentiment in writing how one beneficiary explained algorithmic targeting by saying, "It is luck! The computer picks names and assistance is given to those names." Algorithmic complexity and opacity have consequently led to "community tensions between the perceived 'winners and losers' of the targeting exercise" (Smith, 2019, p. 10).

In terms of humanitarians, Ashe said that humanitarian workers asked the UNHCR and WFP a significant number of questions about the PMT. This confusion and opacity over the algorithm amongst aid workers has been confirmed by external reports, with one finding that:

Even the field staff administering the assistance in Lebanon would sometimes tell people that the programme uses random selection, or would not know what the selection criteria are, adding to the frustration of refugees... When you ask them why [targeting selects people], they say it was the computer's selection (Development Pathways, 2018).

Field workers mend the lack of transparency by answering people's questions and filling information gaps. By saying the PMT makes random and computational decisions, workers articulate their confusion about algorithmic targeting while putting the onus for disputed decision-making on the technology rather than on the UN agencies who mandate its use.

Repair work also came about by humanitarian actors opposing the algorithm's reliability, applicability, and relevance. Ground Truth Solutions (2018, p. 6) published their survey of humanitarian staff and refugees' perceptions in Lebanon, which found that 73% of refugees said targeting "does 'not really' or 'not at all' go to the most vulnerable." Ashe told me that, in her work on developing the PMT criteria, it was common for employees of humanitarian agencies to communicate to the UNHCR and WFP that they were not comfortable with implementing the PMT. Several interview participants confirmed the prevalence of these concerns amongst the humanitarian community, but each noted different aspects of the algorithm that were vocally contested in public reports (e.g., Ground Truth Solutions, 2018), to UN agencies, to one another, and to me as a researcher.

Mia, whose job involves monitoring the WFP, noted that humanitarian workers often reject the formula because the UN has not clarified how targeting operates and what it is based on, which is compounded by the algorithm's complexity and the UN's decision to safeguard the information it releases. Maha advocated for all UN agencies to remove the algorithm and instead adopt what she called "a categorical approach, which is a life cycle vulnerability approach." She said, "how do you target the poor when everyone is poor? So, it's better to target by category (children, disability, single-headed household)." Nada, a UN researcher who helped develop the algorithm, commented that there is extensive controversy over updating the targeting formula on a yearly basis. Updating and changing the algorithm's vulnerability criteria did not make sense, she said, when people who are extremely poor in Lebanon generally stay in that condition for a while and thus remain eligible for aid. Nada said that, in her opinion,

“it’s not fair if someone was in the extremely poor category and then they’re not when the formula gets updated.”

Although such opposition may seem mundane, unimpactful, and pointless, voicing concerns about the algorithm helps destabilise the algorithm’s taken-for-granted benefits as well as the WFP and UNHCR’s decision to continue implementing it. Humanitarian workers and refugees experience unique issues and burdens related to the algorithm (e.g., emotional work and added tasks) and are subject to distinct power relations. Refugees, in particular, have an enhanced risk of harm, as they are in jeopardy of being denied access to life-saving aid if the algorithm deems them ineligible. Nevertheless, their collective resistance powerfully challenges the legitimacy of digital aid infrastructures. As forms of repair work, contestation by humanitarians and refugees thus aims to mend the algorithm’s inequitable effects and sustain fairness in aid delivery.

The UNHCR and WFP enacted several strategies to remove the PMT’s opposition, repair frustration over its opacity, and remedy its miscomprehension. Because many humanitarians did not understand how the algorithm worked, Ashe said the UNHCR had to dedicate time and resources to develop “interactive training” sessions for humanitarian staff. These training sessions collected and drew upon feedback from a small group of workers, which enabled the UNHCR to educate humanitarian staff “in simple terms” and explain its “added value.” On top of enabling workers to better answer refugees’ questions, Ashe noted that the UNHCR did this to ensure that workers would buy into an algorithmic approach so that their agencies would actively use the algorithmic method. As such, the UN encouraged and persuaded acceptance of their algorithmic approach to eligibility assessments.

Efforts to educate refugees involved community engagement and refugee-specific training, which Ashe commented were top priorities for the UNHCR. The WFP and UNHCR also created a joint call centre where refugees call a hotline and receive information from help-desk operators about any component of digitised assistance. Yasmeen framed the call centre as necessary to increase inclusion pathways in “data-driven approaches” because it enables more “qualitative” and “subjective... determinations of who’s included.” A country report by the WFP (2019b, p. 16) found that in 2019, the vast majority of calls (72%) “were on targeting

issues (including appeals),” which suggests that a considerable number of refugees challenged the PMT.

As Gabrielle Smith (2019, p. 11) writes, “in acknowledgement of the imperfect nature of targeting,” as of 2018, the call centre offers what is called a “grievance redress mechanism” (GRM). If refugees believe they were wrongfully excluded from assistance by the targeting algorithm, they can call to ask for a GRM, which re-assesses their vulnerability in more detail. Yasmeen framed this repair work as a “refugee-driven approach to inclusion,” explaining that “families are basically profiled again using the data that UNHCR has, so no additional data is gathered. But this re-selection process happens based on more detailed, longer profiles of families.” Data analysts look for vulnerabilities such as female-headed households, family members with a disability, or risk of child labour. By compelling refugees to flag to the UN that their data profile counts as one of the incredibly poor, the GRM thus places the onus on refugees to prove that the algorithm wrongfully assessed their vulnerability. Put another way, GRM repair work displaces the responsibility of algorithmic misclassification from the UN to refugees.

Furthermore, in order to update the targeting model yearly, researchers use the GRM to capture which profiles have been wrongfully excluded. Combining the profiles of people submitting GRMs with the most recent data from the VASyR, Yasmeen said that in 2019, “the main household that was determined to be excluded was elderly with small household.” The UN thus relies on GRMs to maintain the algorithm and make its targeting capacity more effective. This reproductive labour is supportive of technology rather than human lives, providing the necessary data and accountability measures that fuel the algorithmic formula and keep it going. Without this labour, the algorithm would be much more difficult to maintain and stay current as the context changes.

As evidenced by the procedure for updating the formula, the algorithm requires different types of repair work to respond to its issues and support its functionality. On the one hand, repair constitutes the surveying, profiling, and data analysis labour of humanitarians as well as the efforts of help-desk workers manning the hotline to help address questions and algorithmic failure. This data labour has been described as “[a]nother downside of the PMT approach ...

[because] it is very costly and time-consuming” (Development Pathways, 2018). On the other hand, refugee repair work contests the algorithm and submits requests to be reassessed through the GRM. While humanitarian workers are compensated for their labour, refugees’ GRM labour is not. Refugees’ efforts are compelled by the need to survive rather than having to complete tasks that are a part of formal employment. Nevertheless, refugees’ GRM labour is integral for keeping the formula up to date and helping UN agencies deliver aid to broader categories of vulnerable groups in need. By recognising that the algorithm requires perpetual updating, iteration, and evolution – a core feature of broken world thinking as Steven Jackson (2014) explains – refugees’ GRM labour therefore constitutes critical yet behind-the-scenes algorithmic repair work.

The work of algorithmic assessments are much more complex than simply computing variables to support efficiencies offered by predictive analytics. While PMTs may remove the labour of humanitarians conducting interviews and household visits, there is a considerable amount of backstage labour to support algorithmic systems. Refugees and various humanitarian workers complete labour that compensates for algorithmic failures, inequalities, and opacity, which are largely driven by unilateral rules to keep the formula secret and to keep implementing the PMT despite its issues on the ground.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights how datafication and digitisation have enabled UN agencies to maintain and expand their stronghold over humanitarian infrastructures in the form of digitised cash assistance, digital ID, and algorithmic poverty targeting. Institutional and donor pressures to harmonise operations, compete against other actors, and keep decision-making powers in the hands of a select few have cultivated rationalities and conditions conducive to forms of masculinised expressions of infrastructural power resembling monopolisation. Rather than simply reducing workloads and enabling higher service standards, digitisation is much more complicated in everyday practice. Breakages and demands from UN control over digitised aid infrastructures have generated additional kinds of labour. In particular, it has constituted new and different kinds of distinctly gendered labour – labour that is reproductive and not as visible as the UN’s work as well as paid and formal employment in the sector. Such labour is often

backstage, offloaded, differently valued, and peripheral. However, without this labour, digitised aid would be hard pressed to operate and prevent further ostracisation of its workers.

These consequences emerge in stark contrast to public imaginaries that LOUISE makes humanitarian labour more efficient and “build[s] on the relative strengths of different agencies” (Pelly & Juillard, 2020, p. 15). As part of this gendered labour, humanitarian workers, and even some UN agencies, contest, negotiate, strategise, and adapt to technologically constituted monopolisation as infrastructural power to make up for its burdens and breakages. This repair work is complex and messy, cultivating considerable disagreement, diverse strategies, and unique justifications. However, it is not costed in the ways that data infrastructures are, which is why it emerges as sustainable. Despite being essential to crisis response, it is made invisible. This has consequently “transform[ed] the socio-spatial relations of work” by expanding divisions between different UN agencies and the distance between the UN and its humanitarian partners and recipients (Elwood & Leszczynski, 2018, p. 633).

The shifts in labour recounted in this chapter are not a lessening of work, nor do they always increase efficiency. Instead, the move towards monopolisation has generated different kinds of work and animosities related to labour. They are emblematic of “burden shuffling,” which Josh Seim (2020) describes as one worker shifting onerous work tasks from their plate onto another’s, likely to make their labour easier. In the case of digital humanitarian infrastructures, the labour of complying with unilaterally-dictated rules, compensating for malfunctioning technologies, and mitigating discriminatory effects are pushed from the UN onto others – especially groups that are less powerful and whom are further burdened due to these additional forms of labour. These non-UN groups, including refugees and residents, are compelled to put in the effort, time, and resources to keep digitised aid going amidst issues from its monopolisation. Some of these workers are precarious and desperate to receive aid as a means to provide for their basic needs amidst poverty. This means that they have comparatively less bargaining power to decline labouring in service of aid dispersal and are thus compelled to engage in repair work instead. By highlighting transformations in humanitarian labour and its inequities, this chapter has thus troubled prevalent assumptions about digital humanitarianism’s affordances.

Unilateral control over “technology for good” affects how we understand whose interests are served by digitising systems, how we act upon humanitarian problems, and the extent to which assistance meaningfully reflects needs on the ground. Once we better account for how a wider breadth of humanitarian “workers” and institutions labour by negotiating, compensating for, and resisting technologised aid, we can better appreciate that technology itself is not a solution for labour. Equally, technology is not the root of the issue. Rather, it is a constitutive part of the inflexible and autonomy-infringing regulatory systems that make digitised aid cumbersome and inequitable.

This chapter examines work that is often absent from public, institutional, and scholarly accounts of the labour involved in digital humanitarianism, forms of repair work that constitute invisible work. The next chapter considers the relationship between invisibility and labour from another angle: how repair work enacts tactics and logics of invisibilisation. In Chapter 5, I examine how humanitarian repair work devalues, marginalises, and degrades locals’ contributions to crisis response in ways that are paradoxically framed as being indicative of efforts to bolster inclusion and decolonisation.

Chapter 5: Invisibilising Through Repair Work: Localisation of Crisis Response

5.1 INTRODUCTION



Figure 5.1: Screenshot from an article written in *The New Humanitarian*. Source: Shuayb (2022).

There is a growing popularity of “going local” or “localising aid” among academics, humanitarian practitioners, and journalists (e.g., Peace Direct, 2021). Localisation recognises the essential role played by local actors in aid delivery and the necessity of local ownership of aid systems to help the humanitarian sector better achieve its goals (Gómez, 2021). Two interrelated perspectives on localisation suggest that localisation supports a decolonial response – that is, returning power and agency over Indigenous life, resources, and lands back to Indigenous communities in order to halt extractive practices that continue to charge colonial efforts (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

In one way, localisation means more meaningfully working with local actors, giving local rather than transnational and Northern-European actors more power and influence in aid (Hillel, 2013). In another way, proponents of localisation say it can address humanitarianism's histories of structural racism and colonial legacies (Patel, 2021). Demands for decolonial reform are thus demands to rethink where humanitarian labour should be situated, who should

carry out this work, and how local capabilities can be extended to address the sector's fragmentation. It is a form of repair work that mitigates negative consequences to affected populations, makes aid delivery more reflective of community needs, and mends the reputation of the humanitarian sector as being exploitative, exclusionary, racist, and colonial. Doing so sustains the daily delivery of aid on the ground and prevents further fallout between humanitarian actors. In fact, as the above excerpt from *The New Humanitarian* suggests (Figure 5.1), localisation has been framed as work that aims to fix humanitarianism's structural asymmetries.

On the ground, many local actors feel that such promises are hollow and sidestep meaningful input from local residents – a core focus of this chapter. Numerous local, national, and transnational humanitarians, technology experts, and government officials whom I observed and interviewed did, however, express enthusiasm for localisation as a tool of decolonisation. For example, one of my participants, Jodie, works at a major international nongovernmental organisation (INGO) as their expert on crisis response in the Middle East, with a particular focus on organising funding from political groups and civil society. Jodie echoed her INGO's passion for decolonisation as part of their funding strategy for the Beirut Port explosion in August 2020. While noting many benefits, Jodie highlights that localisation is much easier in theory than in practice:

Without sounding too Pollyanna, I'm very, very committed to local leadership of this stuff. We're only ever here as support when they need it. We absolutely do not want to be the white saviour flying in with our toolkits. And I think whilst in some ways the sector is moving forward in that regard and we're starting to really achieve that, something we saw in the Beirut instance was state donors, in particular, still place their trust in the more traditional, particularly Western, organisations over the local organisations. And I know there's a lot of challenge in that, but there's been so much work and rhetoric around placing humanitarian response firmly in the hands of local organisations. But, when it comes to the crux, we can still see that they're not willing to place their trust there. Even when you've got local actors that are as strong and proven as Lebanese Red Cross.

This quote reflects a tension. On the one hand, the shift to more meaningfully include locals is framed as repairing white saviourism and re-centring local leadership. On the other hand, for

localisation to truly work and be sincere, Jodie suggests that the sector must first address its unwillingness to remedy asymmetrical concentrations of power and longstanding legacy of prejudice against those in the Global South (Alexander, 2022). Without meaningfully addressing structural power hierarchies, localisation as repair work is poised to serve as a form of capital-enhancement for foreign aid organisations (FAOs) that can make locals symbolically more prominent but not practically so: legitimating FAOs who publicly appear to support locals but instead often sideline and invisibilise locals from leadership positions in crisis response.

In light of localisation and decolonisation debates, this chapter offers a feminist critique of localisation by examining its framings of labour and the divisions that emerge. I analyse how locals are included in transnational projects and funding, how they are compared against one another in partnerships, and how technology becomes a constitutive part of these efforts and their effects. Sociologist Erin Hatton (2017, p. 336) examines three interrelated “mechanisms of invisibility”: those that are sociocultural, sociolegal, and sociospatial. Inspired by Hatton’s (2017) work, I illuminate three “mechanisms of invisibility” that are specific to the humanitarian sector’s attempts at repair work, although such mechanisms are sure to resonate in other work settings. First, including locals in transnational projects and funding is done in an unequal way and undermines local autonomy, which sustains power discrepancies and fortifies transnational power. By amounting to “predatory inclusion” (Taylor, 2019), localisation as repair work consequently marginalises local labour. Second, as “delocalisation” (Kappler, 2015), efforts to work with locals end up favouring the ones that are similar to INGOs. Devaluing local labour by creating hierarchies between local groups thereby invisibilises characteristics of local humanitarians. Third, capacity building and its technologisation invisibilises locals by degrading their expertise, skills, and training so that they comply with transnational understandings of what constitutes (in)capacity. This is accomplished by enacting capacity building that is self-serving, paternalistic, and supports neoliberal subjectivities rather than structural change. Revealing how localisation as repair work erases, belittles, and diminishes local labour, I suggest how repair work – albeit with good intentions – can have paradoxical, disempowering, and colonising effects.

Although localisation sustains humanitarian practice, meaningful localisation is circumvented by reinforcing clear divisions between transnational and local groups. Both intentional and

unintentional mechanisms of invisibilisation create divisions that sustain FAOs' dominance over aid infrastructure and practices. FAOs continue to disproportionately be the penultimate leaders of aid, receivers and deciders of funding, and the barometers against which capacity, expertise, and trustworthiness are defined.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 5.2 provides a brief overview of the localisation/decolonisation debate to suggest how localisation seeks to enact repair and maintenance work. Section 5.3 presents my findings that signal how localisation efforts tend to have the opposite intended effects upon local power, ownership, and emancipation by invisibilising local labour in three interrelated ways. Section 5.4 concludes with a summary of my argument and broader implications for globalised power.

5.2 BACKGROUND ON HUMANITARIAN COLONIALISM AND LOCALISATION

While the rise of BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has begun to shift the balance of power in the global economy, localisation responds to how humanitarianism has historically been practiced on behalf of Western, Northern, and European institutions and nations in poorer regions of the Global South (Barnett, 2011). Aid and emergency response efforts to govern vulnerable populations often enact their political agendas, such as expanding the liberal order (Barnett, 2010) and reflect hegemonic power in accessing and exploiting a greater scope of regions and populations – especially through the use of technologies (Sandvik et al., 2017). It recognises that monetary, resource, and political value has been asymmetrically extracted, with wealthier nations expanding their terrain of governance and garnering legitimacy through the perceived benevolence of helping those in need (Wilén, 2009).

The socio-political characteristics of aid resonate within academic literature on how white supremacy, racism, and racial hierarchies are core features of humanitarianism's origins and underpin almost all facets of aid (Currion, 2020). Hiring practices, professional expectations, labour precarity, and organising principles of care, empathy, and hospitality operate to “produc[e] and secur[e] whiteness” (Pallister-Wilkins, 2021, p. 11). As a social formation,

“whiteness” refers to how white people’s beliefs, culture, and relations serve as a default that reproduces their access to social, economic, and political capital and thereby upholds white supremacy (Ahmed, 2007; Goldberg, 1993). Imagery and rhetoric of practitioners and volunteers portray (white) actors of the Global North as taking on the role of “saviours” in alleviating the suffering of, and emancipating, those in the Global South. This “white saviour complex” points to “the symbolic violence of racialised inequality” (Wearing et al., 2018, p. 501), which is particularly visible in humanitarian-oriented “volunteer tourism” where individuals pay to participate in humanitarian and development projects for a short period of time (Mostafanezhad, 2013).

It is no surprise, then, that the humanitarian sector is often characterised as imperial and colonial, with its operations framed as “civilising missions” that justify and normalise conquest by teaching Eurocentric ideas of modernity, progress, and civility (Barnett, 2011; Gordon & Donini, 2015). Coloniality not only upholds structures of power between actors; it also results in on-the-ground harms, as transnational aid actors and institutions from richer countries are far removed from the contexts they work in, so they do not have the requisite relationships with residents, they do not have on the ground experience in communities, nor do they possess cultural, linguistic, and social knowledge specific to crisis contexts (e.g., Sirolli, 2012).

Global recognition of these failures has made localisation an increasingly popular topic in policymaker circles. For example, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016 in Istanbul facilitated the release of the Charter 4 Change (Parker, 2016) – an initiative led by NGOs and INGOs to encourage locally-led humanitarian aid. The Grand Bargain, the main agreement that arose from the WHS, formally enshrined the commitment to localise as a key reform goal. In fact, “localisation has often appeared synonymous with the Grand Bargain commitment to provide more support and funding tools for local and national responders (workstream 2)” (ICVA, 2018, p. 7). Many other global commitments have since sought to bolster local leadership, access to funding, and inclusion in coordination structures such as the Charter for Change, WHS Agenda for Humanity, the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), the Principles of Partnership, the Good Humanitarian Donorship principles (Wall & Hedlund 2016), and the Transformative Agenda (Alexander, 2022).

Localisation is not simply about responding to historic asymmetries and aversion to collaborate with affected communities. Disaster management stresses that local people play important roles in crisis preparedness and prevention, as well as in supporting the relief efforts of international actors (Gonçalves, 2011). Peacebuilding and peace studies research emphasises localisation as a key way to mitigate the inefficacy of top-down peacebuilding measures and to support cultural and moral diversity, which enhances the legitimacy of peacekeeping presence in the field (Miklian et al., 2011). Humanitarian logistics literature emphasises capacity building to make aid provision more effective and locally-driven logistics preparedness to enhance sustainability, accountability, and rapidness (Frennesson et al., 2021).

While localisation is not a perfect solution, localisation interventions on the ground aim to repair the following issues that have long deteriorated humanitarian relationships and credibility as well as stifled operations. It repairs the distribution of material resources by more directly allocating and tracking funding to local actors (Caballero-Anthony et al., 2021). It repairs engrained assumptions that transnational groups have the most expertise by strengthening locals' capacity to participate in aid through training, education, and sharing knowledge (referred to as "capacity building") (Barakat & Milton, 2020). It repairs partnership and coordination structures by partnering with locals, and giving them more power to design and lead coordination (Robillard et al., 2021). It repairs the legacy of FAOs' dominating managerial roles by prioritising local leadership and local ownership of programmes and policies (Harris & Tuladhar, 2019). And, it repairs the disavowal of locals' needs and poor accountability to affected populations by shaping objectives so they directly respond to the needs of local practitioners and residents, incorporating their perceptions, and communicating more to these groups (Roepstorff, 2020). On the whole, such repair work helps maintain the durability of humanitarian systems, which thereby constitutes maintenance work.

Despite such idealised benefits, scholars have readily acknowledged the practical, political, and conceptual complexity of going local (Elkahlout et al., 2022). They highlight how localisation has largely been "low-quality," signalling the need to support "high-quality localisation grounded in solidarity and an emancipatory agenda" (Barter & Sumlut 2023, p. 849). The bulk of funding, decision-making power, and legitimacy continue to be bestowed to Northern-European countries and transnational governance institutions like the UN and INGOs

(Pincock et al., 2021). Prominent factors that are known to prevent a more comprehensive reimagining of the humanitarian system are increasingly documented, including systemic competition, extreme ambivalence to and management of risk, gaps between policy and practice, and an inability to maintain political commitment (Barakat & Milton, 2020; da Costa & Karlsrud, 2013; Harris & Tuladhar, 2019). These ideological, material, and structural factors support why researcher in political science Consolata Raphael Sulley and Professor of globalisation Lisa Ann Richey (2023, p. 403) have described decolonisation as important but “messy practices” in the humanitarian sector and humanitarian studies.

5.3 FINDINGS: INVISIBILISATION THROUGH LOCALISATION

While not all forms of localisation are disempowering, this chapter highlights how attempts to move away from transnational dominance still reify matrices of domination through processes of invisibilisation that marginalise, devalue, and degrade local labour. While Chapter 4 revealed how the masculine power of monopoly generates gendered divisions of labour in the form of reproductive labour, this chapter offers a more grounded example of the feminisation and invisibilisation of labour.

5.3.1 Predatory inclusion of local labour in partnership and funding structures

Predatory inclusion is defined as granting marginalised groups opportunities and access to services that they have typically been excluded from, “but under conditions that jeopardize the benefits of access” (Seamster & Charron-Chénier, 2017, p. 199-200). Humanitarian reforms of funding and partnership structures hire local actors, financially support locals’ operations, and distribute responsibilities away from transnational actors. However, including locals in direct service provision, implementing partner positions, and funding schemes often amounts to predatory inclusion rather than substantive inclusion. Already dominant transnational actors continue to reap disproportionately more value from local labour, as local and transnational actors receive “different forms of work that are structured in the form of a hierarchy of recognition and a division of labour” (Fuchs, 2014b, p. 24). This form of inclusion in humanitarian structures constrains local autonomy, restricts their funding, and reproduces docility. In generating locals’ submissiveness to FAOs through inclusion, this feminised and

racialised labour relation ends up making local labour more restrictive and “comparatively unequal” (Taylor, 2019, p. 5).

To capture a prime example of this, consider how the Lebanese government, civil society, and NGOs commonly partner with the UN as “implementing partners.” While there is no common or clear definition of “implementing partners,” and the definition depends on the UN agency (Bartsiotas & Prom-Jackson, 2013), it can generally be understood as any position where the UN delegates responsibilities for programme implementation and, in some cases, the UN provides such entities funding for implementation purposes (Mezzalama, 1997). In the Lebanon One-Unified Inter-Agency System for E-Cards (LOUISE), a prominent Lebanese NGO, the Makhzoumi Foundation, serves as a core implementing partner that is responsible for supporting the UN’s aid delivery by undertaking duties assigned by the UN. Duties include following up with beneficiaries and case management.

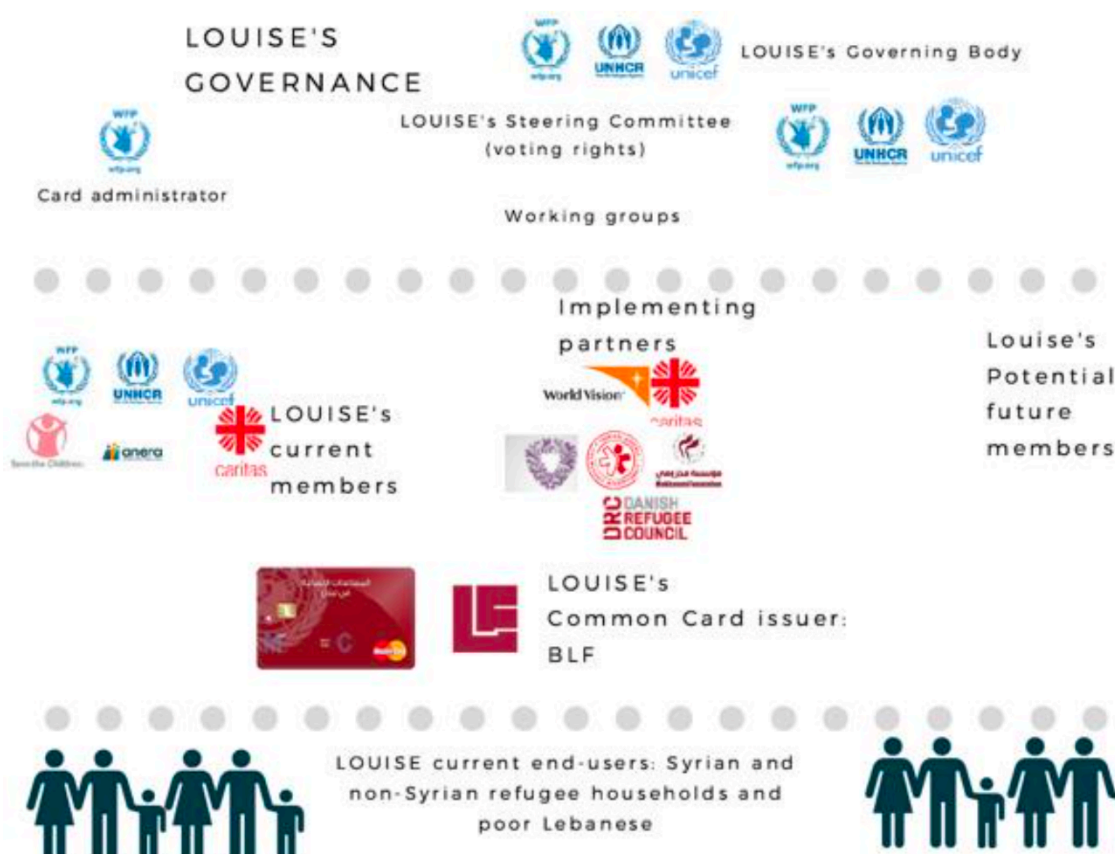
An interrelated support role relates to that of “service provision,” in which national residents participate alongside international actors to directly provide services and distribute goods to populations in need. Transnational actors commented that they are proud that they do not solely provide services and have passed the baton to locals. One interviewee from the UN, Nora, works on a range of social service programmes in Lebanon. Nora discussed how her agency works with locals by giving them service provision jobs, saying “we partner with organizations like KAFA and ABAAD and RDFL and Fe-Male... We don't directly provide any of those services. We work with [Lebanese] partners who provide those services.” In not taking over service delivery themselves, Nora saw this distribution of aid as less hegemonic, giving up their rights and responsibilities in aid delivery by sharing them with local partners.

While working with implementing partners and service providers offers an important means for locals to enter partnerships and funding structures that have long prevented their involvement, *inclusion* via these roles does not equate to *equal* partners. Although locals agree to take on such work, in being delegated to rather than delegating work themselves, these roles automatically reinforce a hierarchy through their inclusion in aid systems. The director of a Beirut-based NGO confirmed this point that inclusion has not levelled the playing field nor made locals more powerful in the humanitarian sector by telling Refugees International, “[t]he

international aid community look at us as implementing actors but not as equal counterparts” (Atrache, 2021, p. 10).

Inequality in aid partnerships renders local labour as inferior to FAOs, which constitutes invisibilisation. Further, this invisibilisation is strengthened by feminising their labour, as the work of implementing partners and service providers is ultimately still in service of FAO programmes, initiatives, and goals. Even more, implementing partnerships and service provision are contractually-bound. By institutionalising a “contractor-contractee” relationship in the name of inclusion, this division of labour supports long-standing control by FAOs (contractors) over locals (contractees) (Peace Direct, 2021, p. 33). In being short- and medium-term contracts, the temporary nature of such contracts maintains local actors’ precarity and thereby sustains their marginalisation and “disempower[ment]” (Peace Direct, 2021, p. 33). As such, rather than a reversal or rebalancing of power asymmetries in the humanitarian labour hierarchy, implementing partners and service providers reify FAOs’ predatory inclusion. FAOs continue to define labour relations and reinforce locals’ insecurity in ways that enable FAOs to benefit from precarious labour. The marginalisation of local labour has thereby “laid the basis for even greater exploitative and predatory practices” (Taylor, 2019, p. 254). As sociologist Winifred R. Poster, labour and employment law expert Marion Crain, and law professor Miriam A. Cherry suggest (2016, p. 40), the mechanism of “[i]nvisibl[isation] in this case is neither the worker nor the work, but rather the system of egregious exploitation.”

Figure 12 LOUISE stakeholders as of June 2019



Source: the authors

Figure 5.2: LOUISE stakeholders as of 2018. Source: Pelly and Juillard (2020, p. 18).

If we use the digital banking card system, LOUISE, as an example of how implementing partnerships reinforce the extraction of locals' labour, Figure 5.2 illustrates how implementing partners continue to be governed by the card administrator, steering committee, and governing body – all of which are FAOs, namely the UN's WFP, UNHCR, and UNICEF. One of my participants, Jane, explained implementing partners' marginalisation in LOUISE and other crisis response structures involving the UN. A foreigner from Europe, Jane had taken on many roles in the UN, but most recently, she led coordination in response to the Beirut Port explosion. Jane explained that implementing partners do not get to make decisions on the programmes they are involved in, and decisions with implementing partners are not made democratically based on a consensus or vote. UN agencies have the power and final say over decisions by dictating what implementing partners do, who the implementing partners are, whose feedback is considered, and to what extent.

A public Report of the UN's Joint Inspection Unit (Achamkulangare, 2021, p. iii) confirms Jane's sentiment, stating that implementing partners serve as "subcontractors or 'outsourtees'" and "the United Nations organization will always be the principal implementing actor." As predatory inclusion, these outsourced opportunities reflect extractive logics. FAOs extract a disproportionate amount of value from outsourcing their work to implementing partners because FAOs can offer their aid programmes at larger scales and access a greater pool of knowledge that is integral to humanitarian aid in Lebanon (Stibbe et al., 2018). In return for their labour, as Jane's comments and Figure 5.2 suggest, locals receive highly circumscribed labour that is heavily managed, shaped, and at the end of the day, dictated by the transnational groups. As such, transnational actors do not have to give up considerable power or even undo hierarchies of power in labour when partnering with local implementing partners. Rather than dispersing concentrations of power, FAOs actually pass on responsibilities and tasks that are far less influential and lower on partnership hierarchies, thereby invisibilising locals.

Implementing partners are, therefore, often not permitted to do more than carry out the mandate of FAOs. They are segregated to the gendered labour of support work – similar to support work of administrative staff (Clement, 1993). This vision of what counts as "partnership" reproduces a relation between the UN and local aid responders in Lebanon in which FAOs like the UN that are headquartered in largely white, European countries enact colonial exploitation of local labour by giving locals opportunities to partner in transnational aid programmes albeit in ways that are unequal and feminised. This reveals a tension in which attempts to flatten power simultaneously reinforce longstanding, globalised power asymmetries, preying upon locals' desire for visibility in transnational partnerships and access to their labour. However, local aid labour marks a departure from historical accounts of colonisation and labour. In the case of localised aid, the product of Lebanese locals' work serves the very populations and spaces that they identify with – their own communities, infrastructures, and nation. Because locals are not delivering aid to groups whom are markedly higher on social, cultural, and economic hierarchies of valuation (e.g., they are not seen to be delivering aid and care to "masters" or "employers"), but are instead publicly framed as working alongside them, participation therefore obscures the marginalisation of this labour by UN groups. As gendered relations of power, implementing this partnership therefore reinforces and obscures the invisibilisation of this labour through inclusion and participation.

Taking a closer look at the type of work given to NGOs and CSOs in transnational-local partnerships, locals are relegated to labour-heavy and administrative labour that enables on-the-ground provision of FAO aid. In being responsible for a variety of day-to-day tasks involving entering data, making phone calls, travelling to refugee settlements, and educating residents on FAOs' cash assistance technologies, FAOs offload these forms of "junior," "employee-level," and less valued labour onto locals. As predatory inclusion, FAOs benefit from not having to spend their time and efforts doing these less expert, more remedial, and more physically arduous types of work. They also avoid working in Lebanese communities, refugee settlements, and urban spaces with large populations suffering from poverty and can instead lead labour from afar in the comfort of FAO office spaces located in Lebanon and countries in the Global North.

For instance, I spoke to Kareem, a Lebanese national who leads a prominent Lebanese NGO that works closely with UN agencies and other NGOs on the cash assistance programme. Kareem's NGO is tasked with distributing and managing the UNHCR's electronic banking cards for Syrian refugees. As part of this work, his NGO staffs the centres where recipients receive the banking card, inputting their demographic information into spreadsheets, managing queues of patrons, providing recipients with their personal identification number (PIN), and training refugees on how to use the card. Kareem commented on how he and other NGOs also engage in post-distribution monitoring and validation work by visiting select refugees' homes in-person to conduct interviews. While at refugees' homes, locals ask refugees questions about their living circumstances to ascertain if they are truthful about their jobs, access to other forms of assistance, and spending patterns – factors that affect their eligibility for cash assistance. In addition, Kareem's NGO calls and sends SMS to refugees to direct them to go to validation centres where NGO employees scan their iris and ensure it matches the refugees' unique file "barcode" (i.e., verification exercise). Other NGOs evince similar kinds of bodily labour. For example, SHIELD distributes the WFP's food and SHIELD distributes non-food items for two INGOs – Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Mercy Corps – and UN OCHA to stateless populations who have recently migrated to Lebanon (SHIELD, n.d.).

While this bodily and clerical labour is indicative of clear attempts to offer partnerships to locals, locals are relegated to more amateur jobs. By including locals but in ways that segregate

them to performing more manual and labour-intensive roles as opposed to work that is considered to be more “intellectual,” “professional,” and “higher skilled,” local workers are given distinctly lesser valued gendered work. Such divisions of labour are shaped by hegemonic belief systems related to understandings of race, class, gender, etc. (Hatton, 2017), consequently invisibilising locals’ skills and the perception that they are not capable and not worthy of partaking in more than “grunt work.” As predatory inclusion, FAOs therefore reap disproportionate advantages from giving locals invisibilised, “employee level” work. With this division of labour, FAOs avoid taking on more boring and repetitive desk work that is less desirable and less reputable by encouraging locals to do it on their behalf.

In connection, this gendered work takes place on the frontlines in crisis-afflicted communities. Locals may be included in partnerships, but they complete work for FAOs outside of UN meeting rooms and headquarters – in locations that are markedly separate from FAOs like in refugees’ homes and validation centres where UN staff are rarely, if ever, present. This division of labour reinforces locals’ invisibilisation, as local labour takes place “out of sight to the employer,” the media, and popular consciousness (Poster et al., 2016, p. 191). In doing so, FAOs support predatory inclusion as they do not have to travel to or work in less esteemed, behind the scenes, and potentially more uncomfortable settings with impoverished groups.

In these labour-intensive and clerical jobs, it became clear that local groups’ service provision enshrines subservience, which marks implicit attempts by the UN to demote their labour – even if unintentional. Local-transnational partnerships mandate that locals follow directives, report back to transnational agencies, and work hard to meet transnational objectives and requests. Reinforcing the subservience of local institutions and workers to FAOs supports predatory inclusion that marginalises and invisibilises labour, as it represents a type of compromised inclusion that ultimately reinforces their control by FAOs and thus continued colonisation. Three quotes from Kareem, the Lebanese NGO representative, emphasise this. First, locals require permission from donors and the UN for most tasks. Kareem said “... we don't do anything without having the permission of the partner.”

Second, locals are compelled to report all of their activities to the UN, and if a plan changes or an issue comes up, they must always defer to the UN. This means that Kareem’s NGO cannot

make spontaneous decisions in order to adapt quickly to circumstances. For instance, Kareem stated that “if there is anything outside the work plan, we immediately inform the donor or the partner that we're facing one, two, three, please advise. Or we're facing one, two, three; in our point of view the solution is ABC. If you have any other solution in your mind, please let us know.”

Third, locals prioritise and strive to meet international agencies' demands. Kareem indicated this by saying “we try to cope with the requests of the partners or the actors in order to ensure that the implementation is up to their level and we satisfy all their needs.”

Thus, what we see is that “humanitarian governmentality is a power relationship” in which local practitioners “are required to conform to the image of the subordinate other” (Tabar, 2016, 23). The subordinate Other cultivated by locals' inclusion enshrines a dominant-subservient relationship between transnational and local actors whereby locals are compelled to be obedient, compliant, and submissive to FAOs' commands, desires, and programmes. Locals are being moulded to accept – and perhaps even approve of – this servitude in aid delivery because this is the price of their inclusion in aid. Local-transnational partnerships thereby shape subjectivity in ways that make locals more governable subjects. Partnerships are structured to mould local workers and institutions to be feminine subjects: obedient and docile, training them to be ‘good’ partners who follow, rather than set, the rules.

This subjectification that cultivates and enforces local compliance, subservience, and conformity to transnational aspirations, enables the UN to enact predatory inclusion. By mitigating locals' autonomy and capacity to deviate from FAOs' desires, FAOs retain the power to command and highly regulate locals' activities. Such servitude benefits FAOs because they retain access to a valuable form of labour that services their programmes and agendas but is hard pressed to push back or demand more power. As predatory inclusion, this reveals how the subjugation of local labour is fundamental to FAOs' ability to expand their reach of governance over more people and crisis-afflicted areas in the Global South – paradoxically, a form of colonial conquest that expands empire to new lands and populations. This labour dynamic “is a recipe for continued inequality, compromised inclusion, and unfair

outcomes” (Taylor, 2019, p. 262). Giving locals labour roles can actually define and reinforce who is powerful and powerless and who is authoritative and who is (dis)obedient.

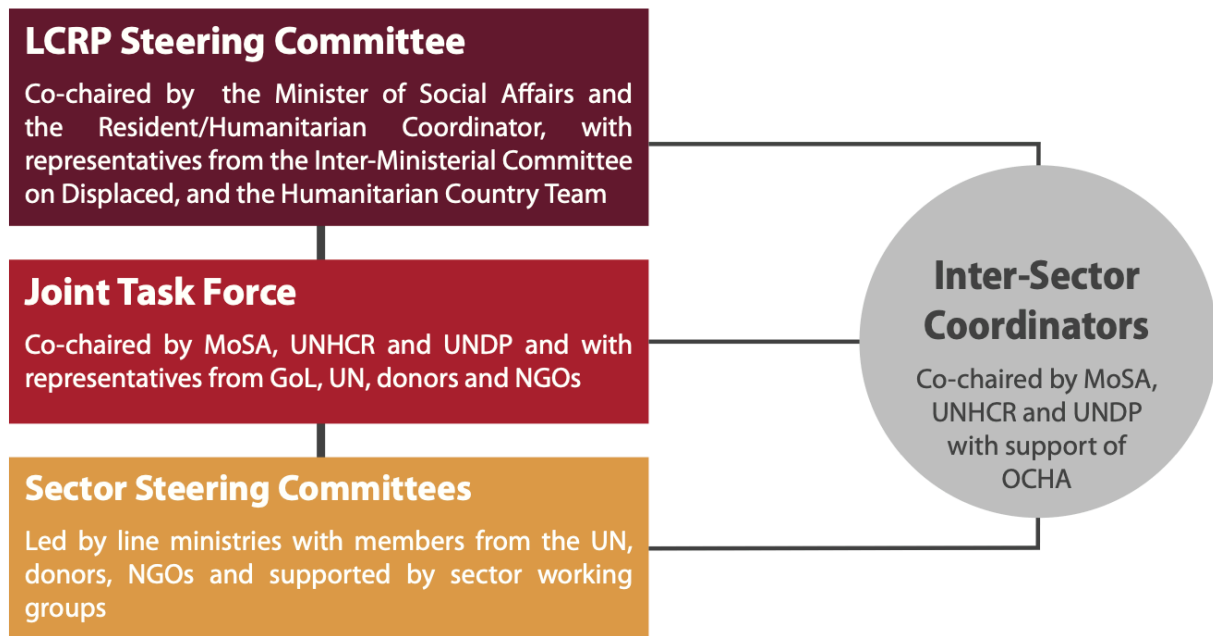


Figure 5.3: LCRP governance structure. Source: LCRP (2020, p. 185).

In some cases, locals do receive leadership roles. However, as predatory inclusion, local leadership in partnerships is limited and such “inclusion was only allowable by maintaining other forms of exclusion” (Taylor, 2019, p. 254). That is, exclusion from leadership roles that are not reliant on others or managed by FAOs. For instance, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) is led by MoSA and co-coordinated by the UNHCR and UNHDP (LCRP, 2019). However, in these leadership positions, locals tend to be supervised or co-managed by FAOs, which indicates that locals do not receive completely autonomous leadership. Figure 5.3 illustrates how the entire LCRP governance structure is saturated with UN involvement and supervision.

Of course, UN supervision of Lebanese leadership is not secluded to sector working groups. For example, Lebanon’s Emergency Response Plan states that “[s]ectoral coordination will take place under the leadership of designated UN agencies’ lead and NGO co-lead” (World Bank, 2020a, p. 17). As a form of predatory inclusion, the localisation of the LCRP is akin to a parent-child relationship in which locals receive advanced responsibilities and tasks but are

always under the observation of, and guided by, a “guardian.” In fact, the very condition of being allowed to participate in and take leadership of the LCRP is predicated on approval from this UN “parent.” As this evidence suggests, in the process of receiving more power, NGOs and Lebanese government groups are still being directed by UN agencies.

This parent-child conditional leadership structure is confirmed by my participants’ experiences of LCRP’s working groups that coordinate aid to refugees in Lebanon. For instance, Jack and Marcel are foreigners who work together in Lebanon for a major UN agency on the nation’s cash assistance programme. While MoSA engages in governance by supporting “oversight and guidance to the development of sector response strategies” (LCRP, 2020, 182) and they allocate “unearmarked funding” (LCRP, 2020, 35), MoSA’s leadership is notably more constrained and restricted than FAOs. Jack said decisions about basic assistance can be made without the Lebanese co-chair’s approval. And, in contrast to MoSA, the UNHCR must be involved in every decision affecting the basic assistance working group. Marcel commented that this circumscribed leadership applies to the food security group as well, since governance decisions must always be made in tandem with the UN.

Thus, as predatory inclusion, conditional leadership enables FAOs to covertly maintain their influence and authority over decision-making. This indicates that MoSA’s leadership role is perfunctory, as they do not necessarily receive the control and ownership that is often bestowed to leaders. All of MoSA’s assessments and choices are contingent on FAO approval, which covertly washes local leadership with inferiority, dependence, and thus, femininity. In contrast, FAOs are still treated as having a higher propensity to make rational, autonomous leadership judgments that are in the best interest of humanitarian stakeholders. So, although these leadership roles make Lebanese actors much more influential than they were in the past, the fact that locals’ leadership positions are heavily entangled with and reliant on FAOs means that they continue to take on marginalised, feminised labour roles with conditional benefits.

Obscuring locals’ marginalised status with seemingly managerial titles like “co-chair” and “steering committee” is instrumental to covertly erasing local actors from leadership. As predatory inclusion, the UN profits in a few ways from this invisibilisation. As predatory inclusion, the UN cultivates an advantageous reputation and image, one that assumes they are

actively working to bolster local leadership and thus support the decolonisation agenda even though they still retain the ability to silence local contributions. This offers value by enhancing the UN's global standing in comparison to other humanitarian actors who do not actively offer leadership positions. It also enhances the UN's relationship to donors as it appears as though they are committed to donor pleas for localisation and wider commitments in the sector like the Grand Bargain.

This is particularly salient in Lebanon, as several participants noted donor preference for localisation. For instance, INGO director, Nisreen, who manages the INGO's entire country programme, commented that at the donor level "there are a lot more requests by donors to work in consortium." Nisreen also said that donors pool funds for humanitarian agencies that "prioritise local partners and leadership by local partners." In reinforcing this façade of leadership, FAOs thereby benefit from a stronger competitive advantage that can translate to economic capital such as increased access to funding and favourable publicity. The maintenance of exclusionary and colonial power relations between humanitarians in the Global North and Global South without having such colonised structures interrupted, contested, and reformed consequently strengthens power inequities through inclusion.

Shifting from partnerships to funding structures enables further insight into how transnational agencies invisibilise locals in efforts to work with them. For example, Nora made a point to frame her UN agency's activities as distinct from other UN organisations that habitually transfer funding to INGOs instead of local actors. In implying that they better achieve the localisation agenda, Nora eagerly and proudly described her agency's efforts by saying, "where we can we try to only partner with Lebanese organisations." While her UN agency funds several Lebanese groups and gives locals more welfare delivery responsibilities (e.g., directing walk-in clinics), the funding that Nora's UN agency provides has strings attached in that it comes with the condition that her UN agency maintains its say. This funding acts as an entry point for the FAO to, as Nora said, "oversee [local work] ... and engage with them on the quality and direction of those services."

By placing regulatory and legal restrictions on funding, FAO donors get to direct, as Nora said, the "quality and direction of those services," providing advice and input that steers the flow of

local operations. This supervised funding confers regulatory power to transnational actors over local groups. As a result, locals are not given freedom and free rein to use the money and to deliver aid based on how *they* define needs and quality of services. This not only directly contravenes localisation rhetoric that claims locals know the context and needs best – it also consolidates power asymmetries in favour of transnational actors who act as managers of local operations through their localised funding. Therefore, funding that hopes to ‘go local’ consequently silences and thus invisibilises locals by reducing their control over aid delivery.

Upon closer scrutiny of FAOs’ attempts to repair partnership and financing structures, I argue that the benefits that locals reap from their inclusion are delimited, conditional, and reinforce existing disparities in power. Localisation does not foster self-governance and leadership as the centre of power stays with international organisations. Locals still support and serve FAOs by taking on inferior positions under their directorship, working in service and subservient roles that regulate their activities and enshrine their dependence. However, localisation obfuscates the marginalisation and gendering of this labour in seeming both inclusionary and progressive. In doing so, localisation invisibilises and silences local workers and their labour as well as hides intersecting processes of marginalisation that are endemic to predatory inclusion.

Such inclusionary practices are thus both a step in the right direction, and, as predatory inclusion, they are exploitative and unequal, enabling participation while simultaneously maintaining humanitarianism’s historic power disparities. As predatory inclusion, the power may have shifted through localisation, but the benefits of localisation reform are comparatively less for local practitioners and residents as compared to benefits for FAOs like the UN and INGOs. Findings therefore suggest that locally-driven changes to programming, funding, and policies “alone are rarely, if ever, enough to undo deeply ingrained cultural, social, economic, and political assumptions that shape our society” (Taylor, 2019, p. 254).

5.3.2 Invisibilisation through delocalisation: Devaluing ‘localness’ by creating hierarchies between groups

This section illustrates how localisation invisibilises locals by reifying power asymmetries *between* local and national Lebanese humanitarian groups. Through attempts to secure their inclusion in humanitarian programming, locals enact “delocalisation” (Kappler, 2015). By advantageously repositioning their identities as closer to foreign actors, locals cultivate themselves as being distanced further from the Lebanese government’s propensity for co-optation, corruption, and manipulation and as having higher operational standards than “Other” local actors. That is, Lebanese CSOs, NGOs, and community groups replace their local identity with a Western-European, foreign, or transnational identity. On the one hand, this whitewashes and feminises NGOs by supporting the belief that local structures are deficient and require external help. On the other hand, this also “den[ies] any kind of hybridity and connectedness between local, national and international actors” (Kappler, 2015, p. 880). As a result, I find that delocalisation enacts invisibilisation by devaluing characteristics and behaviours associated with “localness.”

A couple of FAOs noted that they actively work with local organisations by partnering with them and transferring money to them. But, their partners are noticeably larger, more infamous local groups such as the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC), Lebanon Support, and KAFA. These “big ones” mimic INGOs. Nora characterised these types of NGOs by saying they are “similar to INGOs in their systems and structures and they know the humanitarian sector well.” Such features were valuable to FAOs. For instance, Jodie said that her INGO could be confident that INGO-like local groups “operate in a way that meets humanitarian standards.” In comparison, Jodie said that “spontaneous local groups” – meaning those that organically and loosely come together in response to a crisis like the Port explosion – were “full of goodwill and purpose and it’s great but they also don’t understand how anything works... [they] don’t really know what they’re doing and then perhaps aren’t operating in a way that’s going to achieve better humanitarian outcomes.” Jodie went on to say that the involvement of these civil society actors “really slows things down” which “cause[s] some tension” between practitioners. Perceptions about smaller local groups’ inexperience and their stark differences to agencies like the UN and INGOs was thus framed as producing inefficiencies and fragmentation.

As comments by participants like Nora and Jodie reveal, FAOs highly rate local groups that “walk and talk” like an INGO. That is, they have a preference for and tend to work with local groups that mimic FAOs’ organisational structures, knowledge systems, and procedures. This is because they devalue locals whom are unfamiliar with the transnational aid system, devaluing and feminising their contributions by associating them with caring practices that are unqualified, untrained, and unorganised. Condescendingly, local actors are seen to act out of the kindness of their hearts rather than make productive contributions. In homogenising what counts as humanitarian standards and outcomes, these examples of “knowledge politics foreclosed multiple ways of understanding” what constitutes desirable and effective humanitarian action (Burns, 2014, p. 56). This is accomplished by implying that a) locals do not operate at a high enough level, b) FAOs define these standards, and c) meeting such standards requires modelling FAOs by erasing qualities that make local humanitarians distinct. Such classifications of value reify two interrelated hierarchies: one hierarchy ranks FAOs higher for having a more valued skill set and local groups lower for having a devalued skill set, and another hierarchy ranks local groups higher for modelling INGOs and local groups lower for operating in dissimilar ways.

Local actors replicate these hierarchies in choosing whom they partner with and selectively distancing themselves from local-to-local partnerships. Kareem, the NGO staff member, said,

Working with local actors or local authorities is completely different than working with international actors. We prefer not to work with local actors unless they have the same standards as us. We know [all of] the local actors so we know the credible ones... we are considered credible and our credibility opens a lot of doors for us... So, for us, thank God, UN agencies and international donors knock on our door for partnerships.

In noting that locals are markedly distinct from transnational groups and preferring transnational partners due to perceptions of higher standards of service, Kareem participates in Othering Lebanese locals. He suggests that locals tend to offer a lower quality of aid as compared to FAOs, which devalues local work habits, characteristics, and what it means to be local even though his group is itself local. Differentiating his NGO from “Other locals” by highlighting that FAOs have taken note of their credibility and superior work history, Kareem takes on, and frames his NGO as closer to, whiteness. As a form of what some scholars have

called “identity work” (Snow & Anderson, 1987), Kareem tries to conform and “act the part” (Poster, 2007, p. 285) by curating a white and masculine identity that is seemingly more aligned to FAOs’ own racial and gendered qualities. That is, he attempts to be perceived as more similar to FAOs that are predominantly from Western and European nations and have greater aptitude (Olivius, 2016). This delocalised identity position enhances the NGO’s perceived authority and legitimacy within the humanitarian community, which mitigates the likelihood of being excluded from aid partnerships.

This presents a paradox: on the one hand, delocalisation fosters transnational-local partnerships by bolstering locals’ public image and removing their affiliation to “illegitimate” and “ineffective” local actors – partnerships that disincentivise localising aid. On the other hand, delocalisation simultaneously supports perceptions that international organisations are more proficient than local groups. This reinforces a devaluation and invisibilisation of local humanitarian contributions by favouring transnational actors and enshrining rankings of reputation between local actors. In doing so, delocalisation “select[s] and cultivate[s] relationships that produce emergent forms of hierarchy” which relegates those that cannot strategically perform transnational qualities to the lowest rungs (Irani, 2019, p. 3). Interestingly, this hierarchy is also tactical for FAO access to future partnerships. For instance, Adrian works on digitising social protection for the UN in Lebanon. Adrian said that because her agency is new and they need to build up the perception that they are “adding value,” they only work with local groups that “have proven to have a good relationship with the UN.” In suggesting that locals with a history of partnership with the UN can help legitimise her agency, Adrian attaches value to locals capable of working with FAOs and simultaneously suggests these partners are “less local” because they have been vetted by other UN groups. Ordering practices that devalue and invisibilise locals who are disassociated with transnational groups are therefore strategically enacted by both local and transnational groups.

Rapid response, in particular, is not conducive to working with smaller and “more local” humanitarians such as informal community groups or NGOs without global status. When unexpected emergencies erupt, humanitarians must act as fast as possible, making existing relationships a core asset. One humanitarian data scientist who works for a non-profit organisation that operates around the world, Josh, explained that his organisation worked with an ongoing partner, the LRC, when reacting to the Beirut Port explosion. Josh stated that “rapid deployment of the UNDAC [UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination] teams and the A&A

[Assessment and Analysis] cell means that you tend to focus on working closely with the UN teams and the Red Cross.”

Despite working with the LRC and its Lebanese employees, thereby including locals in rapid response operations, it is noteworthy that Josh’s organisation chose to work with a larger, national group rather than smaller grassroots initiatives. When I asked why this was the case, Josh said that UN teams, INGOs, and tech experts have repeatedly worked with the LRC on preparedness simulation trainings. The LRC thus has existing relationships and lines of communication with these transnational groups. The LRC are also familiar with the UN’s rapid response protocols, can be mobilised immediately with little training, and are already embedded in transnational humanitarian architectures. For these reasons, Josh considered the LRC to be better positioned to participate in transnational coordination structures as compared to less familiar local groups.

While these dynamics facilitate locally driven coordination and aid delivery, they also provide little impetus to prioritise community-level groups and to negotiate and build a response structure with more locals from the ground up. Such partnership preferences and relational histories mean that transnational actors are inclined to contact and work with these more well-established Lebanese groups – groups who have experience with transnational whiteness and contribute to its circulation in the Global South. This is not to say that smaller local groups are completely excluded. Josh also said that working with smaller local groups does happen eventually, but it does not happen immediately and they have much less engagement on the whole. After reflecting on local partnerships, Josh said, “I think there might be more to be done there.” As such, localisation efforts can cement globalised power asymmetries by ordering local groups and being highly selective.

Furthermore, not only are the LRC a larger Lebanese group, but they are also a quasi-transnational actor. They are located in Lebanon, focus on responding to Lebanese crises, and employ primarily Lebanese residents. However, the LRC are the national chapter of the International Committee of the Red Cross’ (ICRC) network whom the LRC coordinates with and are accountable to. Since arms of the IFRC are supporting, consulting with, and intervening in the LRC’s work, the LRC have enhanced legitimacy as compared to less institutionalised and less famous Lebanese humanitarian actors. This global status cements my contention that

localisation creates hierarchies *between* local groups, siding more with those that are closer to INGOs and Western-European institutions in their structures, protocols, and notoriety.

Local hierarchies are not inconsequential – they have direct repercussions for who receives funding, partnerships, and awards. For example, ABAAD – a UN Economic and Security Council-accredited civil association – works to support gender equity throughout MENA. ABAAD boasts donors and partnerships including UNICEF, UN Women, Global Fund for Women, the Norwegian Embassy, International Rescue Committee, World Bank Group, and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The CSO has also received awards like the UNHCR Innovation Award, Silver London International Award, and the Gold Effie Award, among many others (ABAAD, n.d.). I am not implying that this recognition is unwarranted; they deserve such recognition, and it is incredibly important to make strides towards lifting up local groups in the Global South. But, in comparison, most spontaneous community groups do not get much more than praise – if they even get recognised at all.

Several participants noted that donors are often unwilling to fund these lesser-known community groups. As part of this hesitancy, donors are unwilling to retroactively reimburse locals for the humanitarian labour and the money they spend out of their own pockets on aid such as food and urban reconstruction. This is evidenced by Jafaar, an INGO worker who responded to the Beirut Port explosion and provides cash assistance in Lebanon. Jafaar told me about his INGO's attempt to convince donors to compensate Lebanese residents who delivered emergency aid to those affected by the Port explosion. His INGO tried to:

... make a grant retroactively applicable so that I [the INGO] can go back to civil society that spend the little money that they had on the Beirut blast and I can reimburse them for the costs that they incurred during cleanup activities and fixing up houses... You're ensuring that those organisations that went in there first have a chance to recover and remain relevant and at the table. I was not lucky with making sure that they recover from their own financial and administrative exhaustion of responding.

Unlike larger Lebanese humanitarian actors, smaller and informal groups struggle to secure funding from donors. Because locals' labour and contributions to emergency response are devalued in comparison to more transnational actors whom have existing ties to donors, civil

society ends up paying for such responses themselves. This not only disproportionately disadvantages local emergency responders as compared to transnational actors who can more easily justify and secure compensation for their efforts; it also invisibilises the labour, costs, and toll incurred by local responders.

As this evidence has shown, technically, yes, localisation occurs. However, localisation is highly preferential – sorting and selecting those that are similar to, mimic, and behave like transnational, elite actors from the Global North. This encourages local groups to fit the mould of transnational humanitarians rather than supporting their unique practices and knowledge systems and validating that they are crucial first responders in their own right. By regulating and curating the behaviour, identity, and public image of NGOs, CSOs, and community level groups, locals are encouraged to act like INGOs or else they risk being exempt from coordination and financing structures. Local-transnational partnerships thus seek, whether advertently or inadvertently, to impose transnationality upon local actors – a form of global citizenship that embodies white and masculine characteristics. Concomitantly, “localness” that is associated with inferiority and femininity becomes augmented, erased, and invisibilised. However, because some locals are ultimately involved in humanitarian partnerships through localisation, hierarchies enshrined by invisibilisation are left “implicit” and “deny its existence, leaving the problems it raises unaddressed” (Irani, 2019, 3).

In sorting and prioritising some local humanitarian actors, the local and transnational are treated as opposites. This dichotomy has been problematised by many scholars like Sally Engle Merry (2015) for not appreciating local-transnational entanglements. For instance, some local groups have complex and transnational regulatory structures, and they may be registered in multiple countries (Al-Abdeh & Patel, 2019). This dichotomy is also unstable because, as shown here, local agencies are encouraged to take up transnational structures, norms, processes, and work patterns. In favouring qualities and actors that share a likeness to FAOs, localisation therefore cements hierarchies between FAOs and local groups and between different local groups. This invisibilises locals who are “more local” and also serves to erase the contributions of local groups in comparison to out-of-state actors more broadly.

5.3.3 Invisibilisation by degrading local skills: Logics and technologies of capacity building

Disaster studies scholars have critiqued the humanitarian sector for prioritising innovation and new solutions over locals' existing emergency response institutions, strategies, knowledge systems, and relationships. By not leveraging “already existing resources” at the local level, “the humanitarian system is claimed to fail” (Roepstorff, 2020, p. 287). To fix this, the humanitarian sector emphasises “capacity building” or “capacity strengthening,” which refers to creating, supporting, improving, and accrediting the skills of local actors. The targets of such training – which is often led by FAOs – are NGOs, civil society, shelters, government, military, and law enforcement. Capability building and strengthening are framed as expanding locals' repertoire of activities and keeping them up-to-date on developments in the humanitarian sector. Such coaching aims to support nationally-led crisis response – enhancing the quality of local aid, making locals more responsible for managing funding, and improving cooperation between all actors (EU ECHO, n.d.). In Lebanon, the digitisation of capacity building training is promised by INGOs to enhance access to such initiatives, especially access to accreditations, experts, and increased visibility to the global humanitarian community. Despite good intentions that enact paternalism, as will be shown, capacity building has the potential to reinforce locals' invisibilisation through the degradation of their skills.

My participants explained that in Lebanon there is a strong desire amongst the international community for capacity building. Jafaar said that, as a “developing” country, Lebanese civil society groups have less access to transnationally-recognised training and certifications as compared to aid groups in Western-European nations – training and certifications that most INGOs and UN agencies require for partnerships. Several FAO participants also framed capacity building as crucial for enabling the nation's sovereignty. For instance, Jane, the UN representative, said that such training has the potential to make the country less dependent on foreign intervention, making the country's government and aid groups more autonomous and capable of taking care of its own residents.

Nora spoke to me about her experience of working with local Lebanese groups. She emphasised that local groups do a great job at managing walk-in clinics where women can get legal aid, awareness raising sessions, self-defence classes, and case management for more serious cases. In connection, she recognised that local groups have the legitimacy that is

required to operate in specific areas, as they found, for example, that you cannot simply have a Beirut organisation operating in Bekka. Despite excelling at meeting the needs of Lebanon's most vulnerable, Nora's UN organisation still engaged in capacity building with these local groups. In recounting how these capacity building efforts are tedious, she revealed that the true reason for capacity building was that it serves the UN's regulatory needs and requirements:

We have to put in a lot of time and it becomes a political commitment on our part to work with some of these smaller NGOs because it takes up so much more time. We now have two people whose only job is to work with these NGOs on building capacities in their offices. Two days a week we work with them on their financial reporting and trying to build them up. Because we came to realise that we couldn't just make this rhetorical statement that we were going to work with these new emerging civil society groups. It just wasn't working. We weren't passing our audits and they needed more help. So we hired two people that that's their only job.

This quote highlights that the UN worked on capacity building *not* because the local group lacked the ability to deliver a sufficient quality of aid, or because locals risked harming in-need populations, or because it was important to give locals the skills they require to deliver aid long-term and independently. Instead, the UN agency engaged in capacity building due to their own needs – so that they could pass their own audits and reporting standards. As paternalistic care, the need for support with financial reporting and auditing requirements are thereby defined by transnational actors rather than being strictly based on the needs of, or requested by, local aid organisations or the vulnerable populations they cater to. Paternalistic capacity building logic thereby invisibilises two dynamics: by offering support, it erases comprehension of locals' existing skills and it hides how capacity building can be self-serving and value-adding for transnational groups by meeting their own standards, procedures, requirements, and regulations more than that of locals.

Paternalistic capacity building is premised on the idea that FAOs have a responsibility to take local training into their own hands by educating these backward populations. For instance, the dissemination of INGOs' specialised knowledge about transnational aid delivery is considered to better support locals' integration into transnational humanitarian efforts – an aim that is supposed to ultimately serve the best interest of local groups by improving and enhancing their

knowledge. However, doing so automatically degrades locals' skills because it implicitly considers INGOs to have more advanced knowledge. This deskilling of locals both reflects and enshrines NGOs staying in a submissive, infantile, and "Othered" position. For instance, consider the comments made by Jane, who works for a different UN agency. She remarked that INGOs have a large stock of employees who have worked in many different positions and contexts. For this reason, in her opinion, INGOs have the expertise, experience, and knowledge to understand humanitarian lingo and processes. Jane said:

INGOs know very well when we are saying a "multi sectoral assessment." They know very well what the "projectisation of a humanitarian response plan" is. They know very well what sector coordination is and what is expected from this coordination.

Because Jane perceives INGOs to have a large volume of the "right" kind of knowledge that is necessary for working with transnational groups on humanitarian aid, Jane's UN agency encourages INGOs to share this knowledge with local groups. Capacity building led by INGOs, in Jane's perspective, is thus framed as incredibly valuable for fostering locals' capability to understand humanitarian lingo, procedures, and structures that are common to the global aid system:

[Capacity building] encourag[es] partnerships between international NGOs and national NGOs because they [NGOs] need to be getting the know-how. So, the partnership is always useful because one [the INGO] is bringing the know-how of how to be working on this. Meanwhile, the other one [the NGO] is growing up.

By enabling locals to "grow up" with INGO teaching or coaching, Jane suggests that locals' skills are weak, immature, and underdeveloped. She suggests that this deficiency merits being taught INGO skills and knowledge, which not only aspires to fit locals into the transnational mould, but also positions INGOs as having more skills and knowledge than locals' skills and knowledge. By naturalising INGO proficiencies, which are symbolic of a higher level of economic and social value, INGOs and FAOs like the UN make such divisions appear innate and intrinsic "rather than manufactured through... [institutional] effort" (Hatton, 2017, p. 340). These categorisations of skill mean that locals' capacities to contribute to transnational partnerships are degraded and thus feminised. This gendering dynamic is instrumental for

acting in the name of paternalism, or suggesting that training by INGOs serves locals' best interests.

This logic structures the relationship between locals and transnationals as one of superiority and authority and the "Other" as abject, deficient, and in need of guidance. This recognition only visibilises some types of proficiencies as being valuable and correspondingly degrades, feminises, and invisibilises locals' skills. The "right" or "best" types of skills required for collaborative aid delivery are thus defined by transnational actors, which locals are encouraged to accept and replicate. This enacts a paternalistic mindset in which Western-European groups intervene in locals' education based on the assumption that this training is helpful or "useful" if local groups hope to better contribute to transnational partnerships. In "discount[ing]" and "disregard[ing] the views of those they intend to help," FAOs' "sense of entitlement can owe... to a derogatory view of the people" they hope to support (Barnett, 2012, p. 519). Therefore, capacity building that belittles local knowledge by insinuating "the need" for FAO interference simultaneously entrenches impeding on locals' "liberty of action" as well as the degradation and consequent invisibilisation of their capacity (Barnett, 2012, p. 487).

Paternalism is, however, unsurprising. As Michael N. Barnett (2012, p. 485) argues, it is an organising principle of the humanitarian sector given its emphasis on protection, care, and the "impulse to intervene for the greater good." Nevertheless, it is important to point out how paternalistic rescue continues to persist in localisation efforts, which are premised on being opposed to colonisation, control by historically authoritative figures, and flattening power hierarchies. In the opposite manner, the paternalism of capacity building is contingent on Othering locals to "conform to an image of" being unqualified and underskilled, which effectively "denies their ability to be 'active agent(s) in their [own] emancipation" (Tabar, 2016, p. 18).

The technologisation of capacity building contributes to attempts to align locals with transnational perceptions of what counts as "expertise" and "up-skilling." While being similarly well-intended, the digital platform is a product of and constituted by hegemonic beliefs about locals' skills as being in need of development. The digitisation of capacity

building thus enacts and disseminates understandings of locals' mediocrity in the name of better supporting their humanitarian initiatives and making them more autonomous.

Consider, for example, a digital platform that was created by an INGO with the goal of bolstering local NGOs' competitiveness, reputations, networking possibilities, and skills. The platform offers eLearning to train local NGOs on relevant topics such as do no harm, how to incorporate ICTs into humanitarian work, and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse. Participating NGOs receive a certificate to confirm their training. Although this platform helps locals receive funding and partnerships, thereby enabling local participation in aid, these certifications support the colonisation of aid. Transnational groups get to dictate and make decisions about what skills need to be developed, what accreditations are (in)valid, and what kinds are expertise are valued. These accreditations, which aim to better market NGOs to donors and transnational partners, are not necessarily reflective of on-the-ground needs but instead reflect transnational actors' and donors' perceptions of what constitutes capacity, despite evidence that grassroots movements have been highly effective on the ground. In fact, the idea that local actors have been effective, but were simply not receiving enough credit and praise, was part of the reason behind this platform in the first place. Antoine, who worked for the INGO, said that his agency created the platform because they recognised that locals were doing good work and making a change but were not getting the recognition, funding, and partnerships they deserved.

Furthermore, the very existence of NGOs is threatened if they cannot write strong proposals for grants, which are quite competitive. In interviews with Antoine, he emphasised the high demand for proposal writers amongst local groups. Antoine said, "it costs a lot to hire a professional expert to write a proposal," noting that it "is a big amount for a local organisation that is struggling." The digital platform aims to help with this by teaching proposal writing to local organisations to enhance their chances of securing funding. The platform also connects local humanitarian groups to experts offering pro bono services for proposal writing and promotional work. Thus, this digital platform brings together eLearning and professional networking to meet local and national groups' needs. Doing so attempts to address power hierarchies in humanitarian funding allocation by making them more competitive for funding,

which ideally will shift funding, decision-making, and operations away from foreign actors towards domestic residents.

However, this feature of the digital platform simultaneously sustains existing funding reception inequities. It responsabilises local actors to take charge of their own funding, which reifies competition in the humanitarian economy and fosters an “entrepreneurial culture” as a means to support equality and enable access to capital. These neoliberal dynamics seek to make locals more viable and marketable in order to receive funding, which does not dismantle the very structures that maintain transnational dominance in funding allocation. That is, digitally-driven capacity-building does not convince donors that funding should go to local groups, nor does it directly disseminate funds to local groups. By doing this, capacity building platforms erase ‘localness’ in the hopes of replacing it with a more amenable identity. This, in turn, invisibilises local emergency responders by reifying understandings that they are ineffective without accreditation.

On the whole, capacity building defines and institutionalises transnationally-skewed ideas of “whose knowledge counts,” ... “whose capacity needs to be strengthened [and] in which ways,” ... and “whose understanding of humanitarianism should guide humanitarian action” (Roepstorff, 2020, p. 291-292). Even though it is done in the name of local emancipation and needs-driven aid, it is a repair strategy that is fundamentally biased and constituted by systemic prejudice against local actors. Capacity building therefore does not truly value local knowledge, nor does it truly honour the local way of doing things – which localisation and decolonisation claim to do. Instead, it both masks and preserves hierarchies of knowledge shaped by hegemonic belief systems in which INGO expertise is asymmetrically valued over and above local expertise.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter analyses how localisation as a form of repair work has disenfranchising and invisibilising effects. By implementing strategies to include locals in transnational partnership structures, leadership roles, and funding, FAOs enact predatory inclusion. Local workers and their contributions are consequently marginalised and silenced. Differential valuations of local

groups may be well-intended but they are found to support processes of delocalisation. By enshrining hierarchies between local actors and preferring those that identify closer to transnational actors, localness becomes devalued and invisibilised. Lastly, capacity building efforts and their digitisation reflect paternalistic logics about local training. The consequent degradation of local skills and knowledge reify the disproportionate visibility of FAO expertise.

Invisibilisation is fuelled by processes of gendering interrelated to technology premised on inclusion, Global North-South relations, and implicit social beliefs about expertise in labour. This assemblage contributes to the invisibilisation of locals' labour in ways that reinforce hierarchies of power. Although localisation processes see themselves as mending issues with financing, coordination, partnerships, and skills training, localisation unintentionally reifies the invisibilisation (and thus colonisation) of local groups by Western-European actors. However, because localisation appears inclusionary and progressive on the surface, localisation "dehistoricises and depoliticises" the erasure of local labour (Phan, 2019, p. 25). In being paradoxical and contradictory, localisations' repair work capacity is limited. Findings trouble linear narratives of localisation, suggesting the need to question the assumptions and structural constraints underpinning the localisation agenda.

I found that even though localisation claims to disavow colonisation, it is actually keeping its structures in place. Localisation of partnerships, funding structures, labour roles, and capacity building reinforces and fortifies these legacies through new and old, digital and non-digital systems and practices that are rhetorically predicated on "inclusion," "opportunity," and "evening out economic resources." Commitment to "go local" is in rhetoric and documents rather than on-the-ground practice. Even though locals are becoming more than spectators, they are not equal and they are certainly not leaders. Much of the sector is still top-down even though local participation and support are technically achieved, albeit in imbalanced ways that still give transnational agents disproportionate power and influence. In fact, partnering with local groups can be a legitimisation tool – appearing as though decolonisation of aid is underway in order to use local identity "as an economic and political resource" (Kappler, 2015, p. 10). In this way, localisation can "fill a particular function in peace operations, which is to increase the operations' legitimacy without containing a precise substance" (Wilén, 2009, p. 338). As

such, the space for local, national, and civil society groups to lead humanitarian systems is being transformed, but it is not necessarily growing.

This chapter reveals how repair work has contradictory effects that reinforce abjection and harm. The following chapter follows this trajectory. Focusing on a particular form of gendered labour, I illuminate and analyse how repair work that intends to care for those impacted by the financial crisis is complex in being harmful. While it intends to maintain wellbeing and the viability of aid labour, it also prolongs suffering through stop-gap measures.

Chapter 6: Palliative Care as Repair Amidst Financial Crisis

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The reverberating effects of Lebanon's financial crisis fractured infrastructures, community relationships, and supply chains that the humanitarian sector relies upon to deliver aid. By spurring issues like hyper-inflation, fuel shortages, and frequent electricity blackouts, humanitarians struggled to complete even the most basic tasks. For instance, they were hard pressed to power their offices, send emails, disburse cash, and implement humanitarian technologies (Chehayeb, 2021).

I interviewed humanitarians who were managing financial crisis-related problems to understand how they picked up the pieces of aid interventions distressed by these conditions. Their accounts revealed what I found to be depressing yet unsurprising: similar to reports, the “humanitarian catastrophe” was so severe, and resources and options were so limited, that humanitarians held short-term, modest repair goals (Leonhardt & Yar, 2021, n. p.). In other words, they were not trying to solve systematic issues, enact procedures in support of long-term goals or survival, or improve residents' quality of life. That is, they did not aim to change the conditions that reify inefficiency, precarity, and poverty. Instead, they prioritised minimally compensating for breakdown with a range of splintered strategies that assuage suffering just enough to make it through the short-term. While humanitarians may be familiar with short-term rather than longer-term harm reduction strategies, many humanitarian participants were unfamiliar with the gravity of constraints posed by the financial crisis. What they found is that, in Lebanon, even the most essential infrastructures, materials, and institutions were depleted, consequently making many humanitarian initiatives unviable and unworkable.

The humanitarians I spoke with explained how they did what they felt they could to keep beneficiaries alive and prevent the breakdown of aid institutions. An interview with a representative of a major INGO, Ramsay, illuminates these attempts to sustain the survival of aid labour and lives amidst countervailing pressures. Ramsay leads operations and has worked

in crisis response for over a decade. As such, he had a deep appreciation of issues affecting the nation's residents, as well as concerns of the aid sector:

We never imagined that the government will not be able to pay for fuel and that fuel will not be available in the market. We never imagined that medicine will not be available in the market. We never imagined that bread would not be available in the market. So, if you look at the basic needs for the people, it's not there anymore. It's the impact of the economic crisis. Even in cases of war, we used to have basic needs met in certain areas or across the country, or there was a way to be able to secure this. But, now there isn't. So, the biggest challenge that we are facing at this stage is that there's a lot of uncertainty with very minimal solutions that can be provided to just be able to survive this period.

Due to the unprecedented limitations and unpredictability catalysed by the financial crisis, humanitarians like Ramsay found it increasingly untenable to care for residents' welfare, accepting survival as the only feasible outcome.

This approach to crisis response does not neatly fit more traditional ways of thinking about poverty governance. Dominant accounts tend to emphasise punishment, paternalism, or responsabilisation or a mixture of these approaches as a means to ease the threats posed by poverty. In these cases, the ultimate aim is to eradicate suffering from poverty by either denigrating and containing their behaviour or by conditioning them to take care of themselves. In contrast, given the pervasiveness of institutional, policy, and infrastructural breakdown in Lebanon, the nation's humanitarian interventions evince a form of care that sustains rather than reduces suffering.

This chapter examines how humanitarians respond, particularly how they compensate for and are limited by overlapping crises and institutional failures connected to the financial crisis. I argue that the repair of humanitarian issues related to the financial crisis was restricted to "palliative governance" – a term coined by Anthony DiMario (2022) to capture tactics that moderate the risks of harms and postpone death in light of a lack of more impactful options. A palliative approach to humanitarian repair, what I call "palliative repair," sustained the survival of refugees, poor and injured Lebanese, and humanitarian institutions through "minimalistic solutions, frontline improvisations, and stopgap policy measures" that by no means fully

protected against harm (DiMario, 2022, p. 3). This entailed easing, though not relieving, symptoms of suffering; keeping humanitarian institutions from going under; and ensuring humanitarian labour is viable, though not efficacious. Even though well intended, palliative repair strategies exposed refugees, poor and injured Lebanese residents, and humanitarian workers to community violence, social inequities, further destitution, and risks of injury and detainment. These tensions reflect a core yet paradoxical feature in which there is “simultaneous exposure and protection” of those subject to palliation (DiMario, 2022, p. 2). Palliation reveals how repair work sustains varying degrees of damage, injury, and precarity, which helps in understanding the relationship between care, poverty governance, and repair.

By discussing how exposure to harm is unevenly dispersed, I examine how palliative governance disproportionately affects those at the intersections of marginality and reflects unequal valuations of labour. Choices about how to care for, and thus repair, humanitarian issues led to connected decisions about who is kept alive and who is left to suffer, as well as who can acceptably suffer more and for longer periods of time. In doing so, I highlight selective and often unequal decisions to disallow livelihood for some, which was often framed as necessary for the sake of the Lebanese – the majority or “citizen” – population. Such choices are not borne out of malicious intent but are the product of breakdown – negotiating scarce resources, limited options, and dwindling conditions that require acting fast and often haphazardly.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 6.2 outlines scholarly framings of poverty governance to illustrate how palliative governance fills gaps in understandings of care. Section 6.3 examines three areas of repair that evince palliative governance: welfare responses, community responses, and institutional responses. Section 6.4 concludes with a summary of the findings, including how they highlight broader implications for the global humanitarian system.

6.2 PALLIATIVE GOVERNANCE AS A FORM OF POVERTY GOVERNANCE

Poverty governance scholars draw attention to how attending to the needs and risks of the poor constitutes “a problem of governance” that requires management (Soss et al., 2011, p.1). Three primary explanations contemporarily dominate explanations of poverty governance:

punitivism (Maki, 2011), paternalism (Dee, 2013), and responsabilisation (Bielefeld, 2018). Punitive governance minimises ‘risks’ posed by impoverished populations by coercing subjects with the use of punishment tactics and punitive institutions (Wacquant, 2009). A paternalistic approach to social security influences behaviour under the guise of being in their best interest, making subjects submissive, obedient, and self-regulating in the process (Schram et al., 2008). Fuelled by neoliberal governance, paternalism and responsabilisation are deeply intertwined, with the latter referring to efforts explicitly aimed at encouraging recipients to take responsibility for their own well-being and to undertake their own strategies to generate income (Bielefeld, 2018). While scholarly accounts offer important insights into, for example, how these logics increasingly demand the use of surveillance technologies to monitor and predict behaviour (e.g., Breckenridge, 2005), these conceptualisations of poverty governance can limit explanations of how the poor are regulated amidst emergencies and institutional failure. As the quote in the chapter introduction illustrates, sometimes none of these apply. In DiMario’s (2022, p. 6) words, sometimes care workers simply aim to keep the poor alive in light of “the failure of other forms of governance.”

At its core, palliative governance explains how poverty, vulnerability, and suffering are regulated by simply delaying death but not doing much more. Institutional and policy breakdown constrain existing governance strategies (e.g., limited resources and dysfunctional policies), riddle aid with issues, and lead to poverty assistance that does not meet its aims. These predicaments prevent the application of alternatives that better alleviate hardships related to poverty, support the poor’s independence, and enable more seamless integration of impoverished populations within society. For these reasons, palliation is not a comprehensive relief solution attuned to *saving* lives. Rather, through the convergence of fragmented institutions, discourses, strategies, and technologies, palliation tends to enact band-aid interventions to momentarily ease injury, quell symptoms, and only minimally reduce risk. Although enabling the continued survival of recipients, life is still exposed to violence, inequity, and harm. As a result, palliation often prolongs suffering and does not change root causes that generate harm (DiMario, 2022). The fact that palliation can enact both injury and protection, paternalistic control and independence through responsabilisation, or care and discipline suggests that these tensions can exist simultaneously. Therefore, palliation is not an exclusive form of governance: it can include other approaches to poverty governance.

By extending the concept from its initial conceptualisation, I offer the following contributions to scholarly understandings of care, poverty, and humanitarian governance. First, given the transnational character of humanitarian intervention and Lebanon's heavy presence of out-of-state actors, crisis response in the nation serves as an exemplar of *transnational* palliation. Lebanon showcases the unique influence of worldwide collaborations and non-state institutions like (I)NGOs, UN agencies, banks, and private sector actors in shaping palliative outcomes alongside – and sometimes in conflict with – the state. Second, not just beneficiaries but also aid workers and institutions experience palliation, adopting repair strategies to stay afloat, in order to deliver the bare minimum aid and continue working in the short term. Labour is thus central to the ability to palliate, but labour is not limited to just employees. While humanitarian workers' labour aims to sustain the viability and longevity of their own institutions, it also aims to support the palliative labour of non-traditional workers like beneficiaries. Third, I examine how technology and surveillance enable palliative strategies framed as solutions. This contributes to existing literature on how care is constituted by technosocial relations (e.g., de la Bellacasa, 2017).

In this case, palliation emerges as enacting care. This not only evinces how palliative governance is reflective of typically devalued and uncompensated gendered labour, competencies, and knowledge that are required for treating illness and fragility and sustaining one's environment (Duffy, 2011). It also sheds light on the nature of palliative labour, showcasing that care is central to how gendered labour relations come to be and are continuously (re)built rather than “existing in a vacuum” (Young & Rosner, 2019, p. 330). A feminist approach also reveals that palliation is applied to and uniquely impacts groups who experience cross-cutting forms of marginalisation and oppression. Accordingly, my analysis explores how palliation can work against *and* uphold intersecting matrices of domination. In this case, it is particularly pronounced along lines of age, class, disability, gender identity (including transgender identity), migration status, and nationality. I unpack this by offering a situated understanding of palliative care, one that reveals how those subject to palliation are uniquely positioned in relation to intersecting axes of marginality and oppression. This markedly feminist approach to palliative governance therefore contributes to understandings of repair work, care, and poverty governance more broadly – mapping its interrelationships, complexity, messiness, tensions, and heterogeneity. This helps highlight the ramifications of

care – who we care for, how we value care differently for some, harms of care, restrictions on carers, and lived experience of caring and being cared for.

6.3 PALLIATIVE REPAIR AS FINANCIAL CRISIS RESPONSE

By enacting palliative repair in response to Lebanon's financial crisis, humanitarians minimised the chance of casualties, applied stopgap solutions, dressed social wounds, patched holes in operations, and plugged bleeding to stop further loss of life – sometimes quite literally. Given that needs kept rising but the level of resources was finite and shrinking, humanitarian workers lowered their expectations for care. People like Max made this clear. He is an early career researcher who provides empirical data for the regulation of the United Nations' (UN) digital cash system in Lebanon. Max said that the situation was so dire that they could only hope to keep people alive, "not to live with dignity, but just to survive." This was a pervasive sentiment that essentially encouraged humanitarians to only focus on their own survival and that of their beneficiaries – a bare minimum level of care and livelihood.

Findings shed light on the resources, relations, and conditions that make and constrain palliative repair work. Palliation is influenced by wide-ranging interrelationships between policymaking, technology, systemic discrimination, community outrage, geopolitics, private sector partnerships, and political decrees. The uncertainty of how the financial crisis continues to play out, most importantly, shapes palliation, which leads to under-vetted and inadequately planned responses that can prolong poverty, abjection, and power imbalances. Three areas of emergency support capture these dimensions: The first discusses welfare – namely, cash and employment assistance – as minimally repairing effects of the financial crisis. The second reviews how community-level responses were formative to palliative care for Lebanon's residents. The third section, institutional palliation, considers how aid institutions, workers, and their labour are cared for and maintained at low but functional levels.

6.3.1 Welfare as palliative repair: Currency, cash, and employment assistance strategies

Cash assistance is usually predicated on being palliative – that is, often, it is not supposed to be enough to bring recipients out of poverty, be enough to live on long-term, or take the place of employment. In most cases, as public policy and social work scholars have traced (e.g., Carruth & Freeman, 2021; Danziger et al., 2016; Seefeldt & Sandstrim, 2015), recipients are

still encouraged to seek jobs as a means to stretch welfare budgets and discourage welfare dependency. This can pose concerns as there are well-known impediments to employment for refugees and the poor, such as employment discrimination and exploitation by employers (e.g., Kelley, 2017). The cash assistance payment in Lebanon is relatively small (approximately \$22USD/month), especially when considering the financial crisis's impact in terms of increased inflation and goods shortages. In fact, interviewed humanitarians characterise the amount of cash assistance as “nothing anymore” (Marla, researcher for the UN in Lebanon) and “not enough” (Amira, head of a basic assistance unit of an INGO in Lebanon). For instance, Kareem, a staff member of a Lebanese NGO stated, “yes, the inflation really, really impacted us in a very bad way. So now the amount that we are providing as emergency cash is not sufficient. We are also coordinating with our partners to increase the amount of emergency cash. So, this amount will be sufficient for the beneficiaries, for the refugees, so they can get food, they can pay at least rent, get medications.” In other words, even the higher cash amount that they are advocating for is both inadequate yet necessary to stave off hardship.

The palliative value of cash assistance is not an arbitrary amount. Marcel, who works on cash assistance for the UN, explained that the UN uses information from e-card expenditures at WFP-contracted shops, in combination with statistical data from the statistical office, to calculate what they call a “Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket” (SMEB). Statistical and calculative means enable UN agencies to evaluate roughly how much a family would need to survive in Lebanon on a monthly basis. As the words “survival” and “minimum” suggest, this average basket of goods is palliative to its core. Given the stagnation of humanitarian funding around the world, the bare minimum needed to survive is all that the sector can provide in many cases (Development Initiatives, 2022a). By spreading funds as thinly as possible, humanitarians strive to maintain the existence of as many recipients as possible.

Humanitarians depend on factors such as the stability of a nation's currency, availability of bank notes, and exchange rate in order to maximise the value that recipients receive from cash assistance. However, the financial crisis “broke” all of these characteristics for the Lebanese Pound (LBP), sometimes referred to as the Lebanese Lira. As economist Ambika Kandasamy (2022, p. 137) writes, the rapid deterioration of the exchange rate and the nation's multiple exchange rate system means “the lira has depreciated by more than 80 per cent, as of November

2021, against the U.S. dollar since January 1, 2020.” This recession made cash assistance less impactful, as basic goods were more expensive and there was a greater loss on the transfer value. As a result, participants, including Nisreen, an INGO country director, said the donor community and UN, in consultation with INGOs and economists, debated dollarising the cash response or shifting the currency from Liras to U.S. dollars (USD). They spent several months debating and analysing the risks, benefits, and mitigation measures that would transpire from using USD. After over three months of deliberation, many humanitarian agencies operating in Lebanon harmonised their currency by switching from LBP to USD.

The following two examples related to dollarisation – changing the main currency to USD – reveal a cornerstone characteristic of palliative repair: simultaneously exposing subjects to harm and suffering while protecting them just enough so they do not perish. In particular, it reflects that cash assistance “broken” by the ramifications of the financial crisis was repaired with dollarisation only to the extent that suffering is regulated “within a tolerable range” (DiMario, 2022, p. 25). Even though refugees would still experience poverty, dollarisation was perceived as providing a higher level of care – bettering recipients’ chances for survival as compared to keeping assistance in Liras. Liras were conceived to undeniably increase the chance of extreme poverty (eventually leading to extreme distress), so dollarisation’s risks were framed as reasonable and tolerable in comparison to their other options.

As part of the debate to dollarise or not dollarise, refugees were characterised as though they only need the bare minimum financial support to survive. A comment from a UN representative illustrates this clearly. Rima is a Lebanese national who currently works for a UN agency and in a previous role with the UN she helped develop the LOUISE system. In her view, a driving reason why the UN did not automatically adopt dollarisation – and thus why the implementation of dollarisation was so delayed – is because some stakeholders of the international community, especially the UN, argued that the poor only require the bare minimum: sustenance and survival but not a reasonable quality of life beyond this. Rima explained the delay to dollarise assistance in the following way:

... the UN had to analyse the person, concept etc., because they have actors standing against dollarisation. To be very honest there are things that I don't understand. Part of it

is a colonial mind. “Why are you giving poor people US dollars? Just give them Lebanese Lira, they’re poor, all they need to do is eat.” And that is beyond insulting.

As evinced here, the UN and its donors believe that cash assistance only needs to provide enough support to prevent hunger and malnutrition, a palliative repair conception of caring through aid. Catering to risks posed by extreme poverty or providing a higher standard of care – which would improve refugees’ quality of life and work towards eradicating suffering – was framed as beyond the purview of cash assistance to poor people.

Although the UN is cash-strapped and this factors into their assessment to dollarise, the dollarisation debate was fundamentally fuelled by an understanding of poor people as worthy of a palliative currency. This reflects anthropologist Peter Redfield’s (2005) observations that it is more acceptable for refugees and residents of disaster-stricken development zones to be subject to just living, no dignity, and no improvement of life circumstances. Not only does this palliate subjects at the micro level in terms of limiting what and how much individual refugees can purchase to support their basic needs; it also palliates at the macro level because, as Rima said, it ignores the demand for dollars in the local Lebanese market.

In their debate over the currency of cash-based assistance, the UN and its partners expose what Rima frames as a “colonial mind” or colonial logic. With this mindset, humanitarian actors enact a power dynamic in which they wield their control of financial assistance to dispossess the undeserving poor populations in Lebanon. By advocating for an undignified value for cash assistance, lives are sustained while inequities like lesser purchasing power are simultaneously enforced upon the nation’s stateless, extremely impoverished residents – a palliative logic that would not be so easily applied to residents of more wealthy countries in developed areas. In fact, scholars like Christine Sylvester (2016) argue that the tendency to treat recipients of development support in this way is a core feature of postcolonial regimes. By being embedded in and producing colonial formations of care, the UN’s choice of cash assistance currency legitimates that it is acceptable to care for recipients in a palliative way. Decisions by out-of-state elites, even when unintended, can maintain undignified living conditions and uphold systems of marginalisation.

Dollarisation is not a robust repair strategy in and of itself. Failure of the financial system fostered underground sites of governance where the lives of beneficiaries are still exposed to danger. Person-to-person exchange of USD to Lira was still taking place throughout the country even though it was explicitly outlawed (Azhari, 2021). And, Nadine Kheshen, a coordinator of a Lebanese NGO network, reported to *The New Humanitarian* that she has “seen incidents of refugees being harassed when collecting aid at banks, so there needs to be some thinking about how to protect people” (Newsom, 2021, n. p.). Dollarisation as repair enacts palliation in simultaneously exposing recipients to risk, but also aiming to support their bare minimum level of survival.

As Azhari (2020, n. p.) explains, “the black market [exchange shops] is the only way most people in the country can currently swap rapidly devaluing Lebanese pounds for increasingly scarce US dollars.” These dealers have a far better rate than banks, even though this rate is reported to change hourly and change based on the specific shop and dealer/employee. The push to dollarise cash assistance is fundamentally premised on the idea that recipients will exchange their USD on the black market. That is, dollarisation in Lebanon needs the black market to repair the loss of value. Participants like Marcel, UN staff, and Ramsay, INGO staff, reported that this is the case because legitimate banks offer poor exchange rates in which refugees get far less in Liras than they would on the black market. This was confirmed by Victoria, an EU citizen who works for the EU in Lebanon. Victoria said that selling USD on the black market enables refugees to get “so much more money” in Liras, so the hope is that recipients will at least get the actual value of the money and lose far less than if they went to a legitimate bank or exchange office.

Humanitarians like Ramsay explicitly recognised that cash assistance provided in USD encourages both the black market rate – which maintains hyperinflation in the nation – and informal black market practices. Even though it is a pervasive practice, black market exchange is illicit/illegal. The government has been cracking down on black market vendors with forceful raids and arrests by Lebanese security forces that push the dealerships even further underground (MEE, 2020). In fact, Carl, a Lebanese resident, explained his experience as parallel to “a drug deal” because his most recent transaction “took place outside a shuttered shop, was negotiated through a car window, and involved swapping currencies inside a rolled-

up newspaper” (Azhari, 2020, n. p.). There are, thus, several bodily and psychological risks involved in engaging in black market currency transactions. Refugee recipients risk coming into contact with Lebanese authorities when they bust exchange shops and currency dealers. Sometimes these exchanges are incredibly informal, occurring outside of shops. For example, some currency dealers ride around Lebanon on a motorbike carrying a bag of money and conduct currency exchanges in alleyways or in people’s homes. When money exchanges go wrong, they can be incredibly dangerous for one’s physical safety. There have been many instances of gunfire, theft, stabbings, and murder (AlJoud, 2023). So, beneficiaries are compelled to engage in distressing practices – those that are uncomfortable, illegal, and dangerous that can risk their lives and the chance of criminalisation or interactions with police that could risk their migration status in the nation.

Although compelling participation in the black market could mean the difference between survival and extreme poverty, such transactions increase protection risks. This is a core characteristic of palliative care – not just maintaining a minimum level of survival, but also positioning subjects closer to death by putting them in contact with risks such as injury, adversity, and other roads to extreme poverty. This tension was apparent to one of my participants, Amira. She is a Lebanese national who leads a basic assistance unit at an INGO in Lebanon. Amira explained that such under-the-table encounters are a major threat to “the most vulnerable” beneficiaries, especially “women, the elderly, and the disabled”:

How am I supposed to give this person, who has a protection concern, an amount in USD that then they would have to go to the black market in order to exchange it to get the actual value of it. Right? Here, they would have to go through the black market. So I’m putting them further at risk and we’re talking about vulnerable people here. This is a protection concern.

On top of the risk that currency dealers will give them an unfair rate based on pervasive refugee discrimination (which could also sustain poverty levels), growing crackdowns on currency exchanges means that dollarisation increases refugees’ chances of engaging with law and security authorities while in transit to, or at, exchange shops. For refugees, this entails safety repercussions as they are at risk of repatriation, detention, and poor, harmful, and violent

treatment including torture by authorities – amounting to what observers frame as human rights abuses (Amnesty International, 2021).

The United Nations and black market exchange shops constitute some of the core institutions involved in the simultaneous support and precarity of refugees through cash assistance. These institutions and other humanitarian partners like INGOs utilise surveillance and banking technologies like automated teller machines (ATMs) to offer palliative care that aims to repair obstacles to financial access.

Prior to the Lebanese financial crisis of 2019, most people in Lebanon could use any ATM around the country to support their banking needs. However, when the financial crisis began, banks started limiting their services. Lebanese residents and refugees were restricted to using their banking cards at specific banks. Given that the Banque Libano-Française (BLF) is the UNHCR and WFP's only financial service provider, that shift meant refugees on the UNHCR and WFP's digitised cash assistance could only use BLF banks and ATMs – a conundrum noted by Yasmeeen, a Lebanese national who works for the UN to coordinate basic assistance with the Lebanese government.

Another Lebanese national, Mohammad, commented that this deeply impacted digitised cash assistance for refugees. As Mohammad said, refugees were thus concerningly “limited to very few, very, very few ATM machines” across the country because the BLF “is not part of the big network”, so those part of the network do not provide banking services to those “who are outside our network of trust.” Marcel, who works closely with the BLF in the UN's delivery of cash assistance, indicated that the BLF only had roughly 200 ATMs at the time when banking services shut down. Banking access restrictions were even worse for those in rural areas far from major city centres as the BLF's ATMs “are not evenly distributed,” which Marcel noted as a concern for humanitarian agencies like UNHCR. According to Mohammad, this limited “100,000 beneficiaries in the Bekaa Valley” to only five ATM machines to withdraw their money.

Yasmeen commented that limited banking sites “was challenging because a) coverage wasn’t very wide; there were some areas in the Bekaa, for example, where there were no ATMs, so you would have to travel from Aarsal to Zahlé [approximately 70 kilometres] to get to an ATM, which is an hour and a half drive; b) there was a lot of overcrowding at ATMs, which, when COVID came, was another issue” because overcrowding risked spreading the virus. The financial crisis spurred an interconnected electricity crisis, which challenged the veracity of banking technologies (Kassem, 2022). Sporadic electricity with frequent blackouts for hours or days at a time led to unreliable ATMs that were not working all the time (Chulov, 2021). Reports from humanitarian participants like Jack, Marcel, and Rima indicated that ATMs would power off mid-transaction, swallow cards, or temporarily shut down during power outages. ATMs would also fail to dispense cash despite logging that cash was dispensed in its digital system.

Making banking even more difficult, there were reduced bank hours, and ATMs at branch offices closed at 1PM to save electricity, translating into an even shorter window to get cash. Off-site ATMs were accessible outside of working hours but were subject to generators and intermittent/dwindling power supply, so humanitarians reported being uncertain if ATMs would continue working in the future. In addition, many could not withdraw cash or access cash in their bank account because the government froze all savings in banks (Sherlock, 2022). For those able to withdraw money, there was limited availability of banknotes as importers were running out of cash and banks instituted strict controls on how much foreign currency you could withdraw from your own bank account – concerns that were highlighted by Jack and Nada.

As a result, Mohammad commented that residents were worried that no currency would be left in ATMs, which caused fear that others would take the last stock of cash, leaving people unable to purchase the goods and services they need to survive. This mentality fuelled hostile activities, assaults, and an unprecedented surge in armed bank heists so that bank clients could access the money in their own personal bank accounts (Al Jazeera, 2022; The New Humanitarian, 2022). These socio-economic dynamics spurred further overcrowding, long queues, and fights at banking sites – making them far more unsafe and aggressive than they were in the past.

Humanitarians employed repair strategies to compensate for the failure of the government that led to the collapse of the banking system and banking providers like the BLF. In doing so, they hoped to at least maintain the banking technologies, institutions, and infrastructures that the sector's digitised cash assistance relied on. Reparations evinced two primary and interconnected features of palliation. One, reparations were driven by the desire to preserve life that was at risk of death – that is, they facilitated access to a very small amount of cash assistance that was nevertheless essential but did nothing more than delay extreme poverty. Second, these care strategies were inherently limited in efficacy, which, as DiMario (2022, p. 15) explains, “forms a boundary that defines palliation as a category.” The repairs to be described enabled survival but only in “limited, contingent way[s]” by adopting responses to the financial crisis that were minimalistic, technologically simple, short-term, and unsustainable (DiMario, 2022, p. 19). Many repairs were even dysfunctional and exposed subjects to harm, yet conditions in the nation were so dire that humanitarians did not have many other, more effective strategies at their disposal. Jack, Maha, Mohammad, and Rima revealed four main repair work strategies.

First, the UN and its partners would communicate with the refugee community to let them know where ATMs were impacted by power outages and let them know of alternate sites that they could go to instead. Sharing this knowledge was essential to prevent anger at banking sites and wasted time and fuel costs spent on travelling to banking sites that were inoperable.

Second, as a strategy targeted to lowering chances of overcrowding, which increased the risk of fights and long queues that prevented access to entitlements, humanitarians repaired using UX design. They changed the interface of the ATM screens to make it more accessible and faster for refugees to withdraw their cash sums. This was accomplished by adding picture icons to make comprehension of each option on the screen easier and quicker to identify. They also enabled the manual entry of the amounts as opposed to pre-set amounts that would require several transactions to withdraw the desired amount out of their accounts.

The same risks were mitigated by a third strategy: installing more ATMs in areas where there were none. The UNHCR and WFP advocated to the BLF to set up an additional 20 ATMs around the country, and these ATMs were installed over one year.

Fourth, humanitarians staggered when payments were released. Pre-financial crisis, refugees were paid on one day each month. But, given the aforementioned risks of overcrowding like spreading COVID, hostility, and long queues, they had to make the payments over even more days. Jack said that they made the payments over 23 working days. Given the clear evidence of extreme harm and death from social tensions related to the financial crisis (e.g., ACLED, 2022), spreading payments aimed to ease community conflict by making refugees less visible to the Lebanese public when they queued to withdraw cash. As noted by Jack and Rima, a smaller queue would call less attention to the fact that refugees were able to withdraw cash in a society where Lebanese could not access their savings but refugees could access cash. It was also a more equitable solution, as spreading out payment dates aimed to stifle overcrowding that was particularly dangerous for women, the disabled, and the elderly.

While staggering payments attempted to evoke invisibility, a fifth strategy, ATM monitoring, evoked the regulatory and disciplinary power of visibility. Referred to as “crowd control teams,” field teams composed of UN agencies partnered with NGOs had personnel monitor ATMs in-person on a daily basis. They operated across all regions of Lebanon, but especially in the North and the Bekaa, where there were fewer ATMs available and thus a higher risk of overcrowding. As Amira said, ATM monitoring in the Bekaa was particularly important because of numerous reports of tension and conflict between refugees and host communities.

Although surveillance is discussed in welfare literature as being disciplinary (e.g., Maki, 2011) and paternalistic (e.g., Dee, 2013), in Lebanon we see that crowd control teams were foundationally implemented for palliative repair. They had several tasks and intended effects that, at their core, modestly aimed to only prevent death when accessing cash assistance during the financial crisis. Jack said that crowd control teams reported where power outages occurred and for how long, and if cards were swallowed by the ATM. They also sought to prevent illness and death from the pandemic by distributing masks and hand sanitiser and organising the crowd to enforce social distancing. Humanitarians hoped that the presence of crowd control teams would ease the risk of tensions and conflict by those stuck in long lines, which would ultimately lead to transactions being speedier. In support of this aim, crowd control teams provided guidance on ATM use and ensured people did not have difficulties using ATMs. In connection,

their authoritative presence sought to deter assaults and harassment, or at the very least prevent it from escalating, which would help make banking safer.

Importantly, however, crowd control teams could not actively stop fights and harm. Mohammad said that they were “[j]ust watching if there are problems.” If there was an altercation, crowd control groups were not permitted to directly intervene. Instead, they could only document the event and report it as soon as possible to police or community officials, which suggests that refugee well-being was certainly still in jeopardy at ATM sites. By reverting to human-driven surveillance, we see a simplistic, non-digital, and relatively non-innovative solution. Augmenting banking technologies and relying upon surveillance intervenes in a limited, indirect way to enable bare minimum protection and access to bare minimum cash assistance that helps ensure survival.

In sum, existing cash-based assistance was in desperate need of repair. Its banking technologies, infrastructures, and sites were severely compromised by interconnected issues related to the financial crisis. As care strategies that sought to maintain at least semi-functionality, these repair strategies were both necessary but insufficient endeavours (DiMario, 2022). They repair access to cash assistance, but they will only work as long as: there is electricity to operate ATMs; as long as there are banknotes to fill ATMs; as long as there is enough fuel to get to ATM sites or fuel does not become even more costly; and as long as social tensions do not become further aggravated by further extreme poverty and worsening anti-refugee discourse from the government desperate to bolster their legitimacy. These repair strategies are all dwindling but uncertain in Lebanon’s future, making them conditional, shaky stop-gap repairs – temporarily staving off death but they are in no way sustainable, durable, reliable, and long-term.

Furthermore, they do not fix potential risks to refugees living in hostile communities with extreme poverty, but rather, they only stave off some risks of banking practices until other risks arrive. Refugees attend temporarily repaired banking sites but are released back into the same context and conditions that engender their suffering and extreme poverty. Subjects are still exposed to death outside dangerous banking sites and repair does not change conditions that facilitate extreme poverty. In other ways, they actually prolong suffering by fostering

conditions that are supportive of injury and precarity. For instance, they are unable to stop attacks on refugees with monitoring efforts, but also by making them travel to banking sites, which is incredibly costly, time-consuming, takes away time from work, and heightens their risk of coming into contact with law officials and passing through security checkpoints.

6.3.2 Intersectional concerns of palliative repair: Women's unemployment, trans women's healthcare, and conflict sensitivity

DiMario (2022) claims that palliative strategies are contextually, temporally, and spatially specific in order to emphasise that palliation does not constitute a homogenous set of practices. Despite this statement, DiMario (2022) does not unpack how palliative care strategies are disproportionately applied. Drawing on interviews with humanitarian workers in Lebanon, I continue to shed light on how palliation's capacity to alleviate suffering is constricted by intersecting structures of oppression that sustain and even exacerbate precarity for some more than others. In this section, I consider how discrimination against women, transgender folks, and refugees combine with poverty and residency in a crisis-torn country to support palliation that is closer to death for intersectional oppressed groups. This analysis thus signifies how barriers, opportunities, and experiences of palliation are unique to the individual and their position in relation to axes of marginality as well as how palliation is entangled in structures of oppression.

Disaster response literature recognises the distinct struggles and harms faced by women and girls in crisis contexts such as higher chances of homelessness, unemployment, violence, and illness (Stevenson et al., 2022). Gender and intersecting axes of oppression also play a major role in preventing women's access to humanitarian aid. For example, women have less access to mobile phones and humanitarian aid is rarely tailored to the mental, social, and bodily needs of queer women (DRC & UNICEF, 2021). Given gendered patterns of marginalisation, there has been a rise of funding and programming that is gender-targeted – albeit it is still not enough (Development Initiatives, 2022b).

Nora, who works for the UN in Lebanon, explained how the nation's financial crisis impacted women in unique ways:

The economic crisis has been tough for women in Lebanon, for anyone in Lebanon, but also for women because there's less resources. Women are leaving the labour market. And we've seen that in numbers much higher than men so that they can take up all the unpaid care. But also, as companies lay people off, they wanted to lay off women first because, of course, women are always the secondary breadwinners and Lebanese men work in every household so they can lay women off first.

Cultural norms of male superiority, gendered parenting norms of women as carers, and rising unemployment due to the financial crisis fuelled an environment in which women were disproportionately pushed out of the workforce (Mourtada & Melnikas, 2022; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010). Coupled with evidence of systemic discrimination against women in the workplace in Lebanon (Hejase et al., 2013), humanitarian provision of social protection for women, such as cash-for-work initiatives, became necessary. Repair was consequently needed so that women could continue to be supported, yet such repair was limited to palliation.

Consider the following quote by Nora in which she noted that women's disproportionate withdrawal from the workforce was posing an acute risk to gender equality. As an emergency measured fuelled by a sense of demoralisation, her agency hoped to stop further leakage of women out of the workforce:

... one of the things that was hard and frustrating is that people felt there had been momentum so long and change was so hard fought. And then all of a sudden with one economic crisis all of those gains rolled back so fast. Then all we were doing is trying to cling on to the few women that were in the labour market. We were no longer talking about women-owned companies or whatever it was. We were just like just retain the women where they were. So I think there was a lot of demoralisation in terms of all of the ground that had been lost on women's rights.

In a palliative state, employment services for women have similarities to cauterising a wound in order to prevent bleeding and further infection. In this case, as a form of care under pressure, they hoped to stop the leakage of more women into unemployment and to maintain job security for the few who remain employed. Humanitarian workers recognise that they cannot prevent the social and economic suffering of women. As compared to men who had a better chance for

survival in the workforce, the financial crisis compounded by discrimination against women meant that all humanitarians like Nora could do was keep the few within their grasp employed. The organisation adopted a strategic, palliative mentality – retention rather than improvement, sustaining rather than saving – so that they could extend the chance of *some* women’s survival. Humanitarians’ broader goal of, and progress on, women’s rights had to be let go. Structural changes like cultivating women-owned companies, or improving the livelihood of a greater portion of women, are almost impossible under palliative conditions that require minimalistic, band-aid solutions. Instead, the end goal is doing what you can to offer minimal support that staves off immense poverty for some vulnerable peoples.

While humanitarians on the frontline struggle to mitigate grave risks to women, those humanitarians who work to care for the LGBTQIA+ community face distinct constraints on their palliative strategies. The care they can offer is heavily constrained – arguably even more constrained than it would be for more normative groups (i.e., straight, cis-gendered men). This is because Lebanon has laws and social and cultural norms that punish and ostracise sexual differences and what policymakers deem to be deviant sexual behaviour (Myrtilinen et al., 2017).

I remotely interviewed a representative of a Lebanese NGO, Sami. Sami supports the LGBTQIA+ community and people living with HIV by facilitating a range of services such as access to medical care, counselling, and in-kind distribution of goods. In discussing their response to the Beirut Port explosion, Sami recounted a heart-wrenching story in which they strategised how to facilitate emergency medical assistance for a trans woman who was severely injured by the blast. Although this palliative repair strategy was important for strategising how to overcome transphobia in society and the health system’s collapse related to the financial crisis, the nation’s social, cultural, and legal prejudice limited the options available to Sami. Sami’s palliative care could not alleviate extreme and long-term suffering.

Before presenting Sami’s story, I will provide some context as to why the trans community are limited to accessing medical palliation that is even closer to death as compared to palliation for more normative groups. Trans discrimination and violence are pervasive throughout the Middle East, including in Lebanon. Spurred by the dominance of Christianity, Islam, and the

acceptance of anti-trans culture, trans gender expression is both penalised and criminalised (Whitaker, 2011). Members of the trans community and activists are often arrested, detained, imprisoned, and subject to violence and torture (Nagle, 2020). This context encourages trans exclusion from education, employment, housing opportunities, and health care, as well as a heightened risk of arbitrary arrest, questioning, surveillance, and vicious beatings at checkpoints throughout the nation (Human Rights Watch, 2019). For these reasons, as Sami noted, hospitals often refuse to tend to the trans community out of fear of breaking the law and contravening prominent cultural norms, which has reinforced their restricted access to health care.

Palliation closer to death was also limited by the financial crisis, which severely strained the nation's health sector. I spoke to Jaad, a doctor who works for a UN agency in Lebanon on COVID response. Jaad noted that the financial crisis had forced hospitals to prioritise patients and to cut their services. This is because they cannot afford electricity costs and have difficulty maintaining the refrigeration of medicine. In connection, currency devaluation from the financial crisis has "shrunk the value of existing wages," so "[h]ealthcare workers were asked to work longer hours for reduced pay, fuelling a greater exodus of workers as work and life became untenable" (Kawa et al., 2021, p. e177). Combined with the strain posed by COVID and the Port explosion, everyone in the nation struggled to access minimally adequate medical attention. However, access to health care and hospitals was noticeably even more limited for those who have been historically rejected from reasonable access to health care in Lebanon, such as the trans community (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

In this context, Sami was forced to resort to *wasta* to compel a hospital to perform surgery for a trans woman. *Wasta* is a form of social capital that is pervasively leveraged in the Arab world. In Arabic, it translates to the practice of drawing upon one's family and friends to access essential resources like health care, welfare payments, and employment (Baranik et al., 2023). Martyn Egan and Paul Tabar (2016, p. 262) refer to *wasta* as converting social capital "into actual resources" such as economic capital or promises for a favour in the future. Sami's frontline experience of leveraging *wasta* is arguably the most blatant example of palliation: simply preventing a deeply injured trans woman from dying, but not being able to do much more due to institutional, social, and crisis-related constraints that were out of their control.

Wasta would enable the trans woman to live with a little less suffering from her injuries. However, she was still far from living with dignity as her conditions were not improved, her body was permanently maimed, and her employment as a makeup artist remained in a state of extreme precarity. Sami explained:

*... a trans individual was severely injured by the explosion. So all her body is covered by, what do you call it, like scratches. So you don't have skin anymore, it's all over, all covered. She used to be a makeup artist and she lost her eye. The Ministry of Health didn't want to cover her eye surgery and she was losing her eye. They just covered what they called "lifesaving interventions" so they just kept her alive. She stayed in the ER for a month but they didn't want to cover her eye surgery. I had to go and look for political parties that have an influence or that can sponsor, or you know, the *wasta*, the Lebanese way. And then one of the political parties talked to one of the hospitals that sponsored her surgery. And this is what happened. Her surgery is happening and I think she is now at the hospital having one of the surgeries to be done [emphasis in original].*

Wasta-as-repair protected the trans woman, as she was finally able to get at least one eye-saving surgery from the hospital. This access to lifesaving intervention quite literally maintained the trans woman so that she was stable but deeply maimed – essential medical care that would at the very least enable her to survive her injuries but did not permit her to live with a level of bodily integrity that would be afforded to most who are recognised as deserving such medical treatment. This surgery was not plastic surgery or even an attempt to recuperate her lost eye. The Ministry of Health only approved enough bandaging, stitches, and blood transfusion so that her heart would remain beating. The NGO worker explained that, if the patient was cis-gendered or did not identify with the LGBTQIA+ community, the Ministry of Health would likely have sanctioned medical assistance to fix her eye and attend to her other injuries without having to resort to *wasta*. Instead, the trans patient received the bare minimum – a lesser tier of medical assistance that sustained what would likely be a life-long disability that would impact other areas of her life like employment. This maintained the make-up artist's vulnerability to death as an intersectionally oppressed trans woman living in Lebanon.

The uneven and unfair distribution of medical resources based on prejudice, law, and overlapping crises thereby constrained the palliative possibilities that Sami had available and

the degree of palliative care afforded to the trans woman. As a longstanding strategy in Lebanese society to use social connections to access scarce or difficult to reach resources (Egan & Tabar, 2016), *wasta* suggests how palliative strategies can require back-room improvisations. Intersectional oppression compels repair that is constricted to unofficial aid channels and community relationships. Relationality is therefore central to palliation – sometimes more than formal structures, technologies, and aid programmes. In sum, this example suggests that palliation has scales; it varies in being closer to death or to survival. More “effective” and “comprehensive” palliation (i.e., attending to their eye) is disproportionately available depending on one’s intersectional positionality related to, for instance, class, gender, and sexuality.

Refugees and the trans community share some similarities in terms of being demonised and less protected by legal and social systems as compared to the Lebanese “majority.” Since a mass exodus of Palestinians fled to Lebanon in 1948 (Weighill, 1997), Palestinian and Syrian refugees have been forcefully targeted with harmful legal, policy, and discursive strategies that aim to tarnish their reputation and access to human rights. Political elites spread vilified rhetoric that refugees are deviant, conflict-prone, and the source of all the nation’s hardships (Al-Faour, 2022). Refugees have been a key source of political power in the wake of the contemporary financial crisis. The political elite scapegoat refugees in the hopes of saving what is left of their demolished legitimacy and moving critical attention away from their corruption and misdeeds (Baylouny, 2020). Attempting to shift residents’ anger from politicians to refugees, the political elite spread dangerous myths that refugees are a weighty economic burden, are behind the nation’s debt and crumbling infrastructure, and take resources away from “deserving” but suffering Lebanese (Brun & Fakih, 2022).

These sentiments were confirmed by my fieldwork experiences in Lebanon at the beginning of the financial crisis. At the time, many Lebanese residents I spoke to felt that refugees had nothing but a negative impact on the economy and were primarily responsible for Lebanon’s economic downturn. Omar, a Lebanese government official supporting the nation’s social safety net, confirmed this almost two years later in a Zoom interview. Omar confidently stated that “more than 70% of all the conflict between the hosting communities and the displaced are because of competition over jobs and economic reasons.”

Since the financial crisis, social instability for the nation's residents has skyrocketed to untenable levels. Hostility, community conflict, physical aggression, and harassment between refugees and Lebanese host communities continues to escalate, including several counts of refugee camps being set on fire by Lebanese villagers as well as beatings and shootings (e.g., Prentis, 2022). In line with anti-refugee sentiment, Lebanese residents feel that refugees have been prioritised by the international humanitarian community. A common plight of the Lebanese is that they have been sidelined, forgotten about, and favoured less than refugees who, unlike the Lebanese, have access to social assistance. Maha, who manages a UN agency's several welfare programmes, said that Lebanese residents would often make statements like, "Why are we receiving nothing and why are Syrians receiving cash?" when Lebanese were suffering from poverty, too." Marcel, who also works for the UN, elaborated on what could be described as the notion of "refugee favouritism":

... the transfer value has become very close for refugees to minimum wage, and over even salaries of some civil servants. So they're [Lebanese] saying, you know, 'you're giving away this money for free, while people have to work.' Like a policeman has to put his life on the line to earn slightly more, if not the same [as refugees]. So, these are the issues we're dealing with. And there was also a lot of tensions on the ground because of this, because the refugees are perceived to receive a salary from UN.

The humanitarian sector, therefore, considers the "security risk" for Syrian beneficiaries to be quite high.

For these reasons, the Lebanese government and international humanitarian community believed that the sector could not continue providing assistance to Syrian refugees but simultaneously tell Lebanese that they were not allowed to have the same. They believed that doing so would ignite further conflict, tension, and chaos. Given that social stability was worsening in the country, with growing protests, violence, and anger, they were worried that giving USD to refugees would cause a civil war. This is evidence of the securitisation of refugees – linking cash assistance to imminent threat of conflict and security risks to residents (Jaskulowski, 2019). By securitising refugee groups in the nation, humanitarian and government officials claimed that there was a need for what many called a "conflict sensitive

approach.” Protection was a specific concern for refugees, as the sector was already witnessing a lot of protection concerns and issues with refugees in the Bekka and North –most notably when they were in possession of USD in a context with such a severe shortage of dollars. This context not only risked national stability and refugee safety, it also posed questions about culpability and accountability. As Amira, an INGO worker claimed: who, then, is responsible for violence and tensions that result from social assistance to refugees, especially cash in USD?

Humanitarians had to repair the risk of further stoking refugee-host community relations and worsening the nation’s perception of refugees. That is, they had to repair the threat of humanitarian-perpetuated harms – a common repercussion of humanitarian intervention, especially in conflict settings (Khaled, 2021). There was an absence of alternatives in such a crisis-laden context, especially because, as Nahed said, the sector was “getting a lot of pressure from the government to get more aid to the Lebanese instead of refugees.” Nahed, who works for the UN on coordination between agencies, said that the sector did not want to provide assistance directly to Lebanese because they conceived this to be the government’s job. For this reason, the sector largely agreed they could not replace the government out of fear it will not reform. But, as Nahed indicated, this led to a tension. At the same time, humanitarians could not sit back and avoid acting when they see the rise of such acute humanitarian needs. Rima expressed the same tension by saying,

...you’re providing assistance in rapidly deteriorating local currency. But also you are not allowed to change the transfer value or increase it to offset severe loss in purchasing power and rapid inflation pressures because that needs to be done before with the permission of the Ministry of Social Affairs. And they prevented that because they want you to provide assistance to Lebanese. So unless Lebanese get the assistance they would rather everyone else not. Which is already a policy that is very tragic say the least.

Therefore, the sector was stuck between a rock and a hard place with very limited options to reduce protection risks to refugees and prevent humanitarian-perpetuated social instability. In this context, it would make UN agencies look bad if refugees received USD while Lebanese did not, and it would further tarnish their reputation if social tensions were stoked by their foreign intervention.

Here, interests of state legitimacy, foreign humanitarian legitimacy, and the humanitarian imperative to “do no harm” become entangled and aligned through decisions to palliate refugees. The humanitarian sector adopted a governmentality of triage, which is characteristic of palliative governance. Triage occurs when workers take a utilitarian approach to helping those in need by acting according to this question: “Who is most likely to be saved with a limited amount of time or resources?” (DiMario, 2022, p. 7). As an inherently temporary technique to serving acute needs, triage has parallels to social sorting, in which groups are categorised and treated differently based on their risk characteristics. In Lebanon’s financial crisis, social sorting in relation to social tensions meant that Lebanese were sorted in a preferential way. The Lebanese were treated as being fundamentally different from refugees so that Lebanese residents justifiably received dollarised assistance, whereas refugees would not receive dollars until a much later date.

As part of a “conflict sensitive” approach “to ease the tensions” related to Lebanese not accessing USD, to banks being closed, and to the broader financial crisis, the international community agreed that dollarisation would take place in phases. For instance, the ESSN loan is a social safety net program funded by the World Bank. Rima said that this “\$226 million loan will be dollarised. The Lebanese will supposedly be getting dollar denominated social assistance, then you can gradually move Syrian refugees to dollar denominated assistance as well.” Maha had similar experiences, noting that, “when this large scale World Bank social safety net program is disbursed in dollars, then we’ll comfortably move Syrians back to that. We are very cautious and aware about how to prevent any potential conflict.” Furthermore, the NPTP (National Poverty Targeting Programme) is implemented by the WFP, which is the nation’s first social safety net program catering to Lebanese. The NPTP was also dollarised according to Paula, an EU representative. Jack said that this delayed the UN’s dollarisation of cash assistance because they had to wait for at least a few weeks before they could consider offering refugees the same kind of high-value currency.

UN agencies supporting refugees prevented the use of USD by switching their assistance from USD to Lebanese pounds. Maha noted how shifts in these discussions about currency meant that her UN agency had to adapt but in ways that disproportionately impact Syrian refugees’ livelihoods:

... we used to disperse U.S. dollars to Syrians. We converted to the Lebanese pound, which is now really making a lot of issues for beneficiaries because the Lebanese pound really lost its value. But anyway, the reason for switching the currency was the security risk or to avoid such security risk. Now we want to move back to U.S. dollars because of the devaluation of Lebanese currency to really maximise the value of the transfer, transfer value for beneficiaries.

As Maha's comment reveals, there was an assumption and prioritisation of the security risk posed by giving refugees USD. This led to refugees receiving far less in value with their cash assistance that remained in Liras. In one way, switching the currency of cash assistance in favour of the Lebanon population evinces palliation by hoping to recondition and suture social-community tensions that arose out of the financial crisis. Namely, this strategy sought to intermittently mend community relationships related to the Lebanese peoples' anger that refugees receive more cash assistance than the growing population of poor Lebanese. In another way, palliative effects are reinforced in that Syrian refugees are left to suffer with a currency that was recognised as inadequately supporting livelihoods.

In phasing dollarisation, cash assistance was repaired by enacting selective and unequal decisions: selectively upholding palliative levels of aid for refugees (i.e., changing aid to Liras, which amounted to bare minimum survival). Doing this meant that Lebanese could receive better, more adequate aid sooner (i.e., changing aid to USD, which had more impact upon alleviating poverty). Refugees were given access to a lesser form of assistance so that the majority of the Lebanese population had a better chance at living.

This evidence suggests that palliative governance can be prejudiced based on immigration status and nation of origin. Although the international community claimed that refugees would eventually receive USD, in the meantime refugees were allowed to slip further into extreme poverty. Delaying or phasing livelihood-enhancing currency was permissible because refugees were thought of as worthy of a palliative level of care. As opposed to the masses, it was more acceptable for refugees to only live at the level of survival with extreme poverty sustained by Liras. These findings suggest that, in making decisions about who receives palliative aid and who receives more-than-palliation, populations are treated differently. Migrant and non-

migrant groups receive different levels of palliation based on how much the government vouches for or vilifies them, based on whether they have access to existing social assistance, based on how permissible it is to decrease their care, and based on institutional failures heavily intertwined with institutional legitimacy crises.

Taken together, these experiences reveal how the maintenance of subjects' survival is not the same for everyone. Rather, palliative governance intersects with structures of oppression to cultivate different levels of, and different constraints upon, repair work and care. Intersections of poverty, gender identity, transphobia, migration status, and living in an underdeveloped and crisis-laden country constrict survival strategies for some more than others and make it harder to fix structural issues in long-lasting ways.

6.3.3 Institutional palliation: Keeping humanitarian agencies and labour (temporarily) alive

Palliative analyses focus on how subjects of poverty governance, like those with drug addictions and refugees, are kept alive by care work. Workers are only considered in their capacity to side-step obstructions and strategise acute relief, including how being forced to palliate impacts their attitude (e.g., frustration, being inspired to do better, preventing being let down) (DiMario, 2022). Contributing to DiMario's (2022) concept, my findings show that palliative strategies of maintaining a bare minimum existence apply to care institutions and their labour. In Lebanon, workers of INGOs, NGOs, and the UN employ palliative repair to prevent humanitarian institutions from ending even though their continuation in the future remains uncertain; keep workers employed although they are working in abysmal conditions that continue to deteriorate; and keep operations viable even though they are only capable of offering the smallest fraction of aid for the short-term. Humanitarians' labour has been extended or doubled, as they are forced to keep both beneficiaries *and* themselves alive. This is reified by the contemporary funding environment in which funding needs are growing but "funding growth has stalled" (Loy, 2022, n. p.).

The financial crisis directly led to nationwide fuel shortages (Cornish, 2021). Fuel prices subsequently skyrocketed, forcing residents to either live without petrol or wait in long lines for several hours in the hope of purchasing even a quarter tank of overpriced petrol (Reuters,

2021). A representative of a major INGO operating in Lebanon, Ramsay, said the lack of fuel has deeply impacted their operations. He held a bleak view of the longevity of their operations, as he foresaw that worsening conditions would inevitably halt some of the INGO's aid like cash assistance and the distribution of in-kind goods. At the time of the interview, Ramsay described being able to momentarily palliate operations – adopting strategies that compensated for the collapse of the fuel system so that the INGO could marginally function for at least another week:

Until now we did not put any activities on hold. We already have the plan until next week that we are able to function with the minimum that is required. Because you have to consider we have 80 cars that need fuel. Luckily, our employees own private vehicles that they are able to fill up so they are able to reach beneficiaries. When they need transportation for work, they just charge the trip on the project... So, there are still mitigation measures that would keep us going until the end of next week.

The never-ending jeopardy of operational death compels a short-term view of survival, one in which survival is defined week-to-week. Many humanitarians in Lebanon do not aim to survive in the long-term, nor to improve the quality of their operations. They merely aspire to fix issues just enough so they can survive the present and get through the week. A short-term outlook on survival and the unpredictability of Lebanon's crises justifies stop-gap, backup measures where agencies rely on employees' personal resources – in this case, their personal cars – so that they can at least momentarily exist to provide life-saving aid. By using employee vehicles, workers who live close to one another could carpool to work and pay for fuelling a smaller number of cars as compared to the INGO's regular fleet. Personal cars are less expensive than using company cars because employees are permitted to fuel their own cars with the black market rate of fuel, whereas the INGO strictly prevents supporting the nation's black market for gasoline and diesel. Thus, worst-case scenarios from the financial crisis have led humanitarian workers to enact improvisations that enable humanitarian aid to continue, but only in the short-term.

Being able to function enough that care work can even minimally persist requires negotiating or strategically working around institutional policies. Ramsay articulates this by saying how taxis, like personal cars, enabled staff to work around his INGO's prohibition against

purchasing fuel on the black market. By using taxis instead of their INGO's cars, humanitarian workers could leverage a policy loophole that enabled access to cheaper transportation and thereby stretch their already limited budget:

... [we are] troubleshooting on a daily basis. Another contingency plan that we use is taxis, so third-party service providers. For example, we had a trip to Tripoli last week or at the beginning of this week on Monday and the team took a taxi there. The taxi drivers were able to get the gasoline from the black market. We are not able to get fuel from the black market and this is a limitation but it is in line with our policies, procedures, and principles. So we mitigate this risk [to our work] by working with third-party service providers that are able to offer us the service that we are not able to do ourselves.

Pre-financial crisis, Ramsay's INGO would not have used taxis for work. But since transportation is essential for humanitarians to carry out their operations, humanitarians had to look for other options to maintain the endurance of their operations even though taxis may not be the most sustainable solution. Taxis now serve as an important resource for humanitarians in Lebanon to adapt to the untenable cost of fuel and its shortages while licitly working within the confines of their policies so their operations can continue. As such, crisis contexts in the Global South reveal how palliation sometimes requires contracting the private sector for aid operations to endure amidst infrastructural failure.

The head of a local NGO who works on social assistance with the UN, Kareem, described a similar experience of palliative repair. He had more of a day-to-day view of palliating institutional life or temporarily keeping operations and their labour alive. Kareem staved off threats to the lives of his recipients (i.e., adapting so they could continue to deliver access to basic assistance) and the survival of his NGO by adopting mundane yet impactful repair strategies like reducing office hours to conserve electricity, using only batteries to provide energy, and switching to vehicles that require less fuel like motorcycles:

My dear, as I said before, the lack of fuel, delivering food parcels to people, we used to have cars delivering food parcels to people. Now we are using motorcycles. Maybe later on we're gonna use bicycles [laughs]. Now I'm blessed that I have electricity and Internet talking to you. Yesterday I had a meeting. I couldn't join because I didn't have Internet. Now I have generator that is running on fuel. I don't know if the fuel will be enough for us

to run our day. Maybe at some time of the day we will shut down the generator and we will work on batteries. These batteries will serve us for 2-3 hours and after that we're gonna shut down our operations. So these are the challenges that we are facing. We reduced our working hours from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, to 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM, in order to save fuel, in order to save energy. Because the electricity is not provided to us by the government. It's not provided to us by the Ministry of Power or whatever they call it. So these are the main challenges that we are facing. Today I reached my office using my car. Tomorrow I don't know if I have the luxury to use my car.

In this account we see how humanitarian workers like Kareem “commit a significant amount of labour to redressing heightened risk of death caused by institutional” failures, like those of the government and electricity sector (DiMario, 2022, p. 13). These repair strategies do not prevent the death of humanitarian operations. Indeed, some days institutional death feels imminent, like when Kareem’s NGO does not have a stable enough internet connection to join videoconferencing meetings. Ad-hoc repair of workplace issues like dwindling fuel, electricity, and Internet only postpones the absolute death of their humanitarian labour. It sustains work but work is by no means secure and its infrastructural impediments are not solved.

Although it is still an important achievement to get through the next few days or just the day itself, all palliative successes are a “permanently temporary achievement ... when threats to life exist in forms more diverse, durable, and beyond the scope of anything they can address with the resources available to them” (DiMario, 2022, p. 15). Kareem acknowledges that such repairs are not going to last. They will have to eventually halt their work (i.e., concede to the death of their workplace) when these repair strategies eventually run out of material resources and critical infrastructures dwindle further. Repair strategies, as evidenced by Kareem, can be perceived to have an expiry date.

Even employees of transnational governance institutions are palliating their work. Nahed, a UN employee working on coordinating different agencies in Lebanon, notes how she struggles to operate enough to do her work. She repairs connectivity issues so that she at least has the bare minimum that is required to conduct mundane tasks like making calls, sending emails, and typing documents. Nahed said:

During the weekend there were some explosions in Akkar and we were in the Akkar region. We have been following up the response there with the Lebanese Red Cross. And I had no electricity for two consecutive days, like zero, zero power. My laptop was about to die. I was following up on my phone, sometimes recharging from a cafe or something, so it was very challenging. But now I guess OCHA is going to provide us with some UPS' [uninterruptible power supply] or something, like just to be able to manage the minimum standards.

Failing energy infrastructure forced improvisations by seeking on-the-spot sources of electricity in cafes and the UPS. These temporary sources of electricity are bandage types of repair that offer the minimum amount of support needed to provide care in light of worsening conditions that limit their work. Although these repairs are important and necessary by easing the challenges associated with decaying national infrastructures and worsening work conditions, such repair is not a sustainable fix. Given dwindling access to fuel for electricity generators and the growth of power outages, these solutions are limited by the availability of electricity for cafes and the longevity of the charge of the UPS. Nahed's palliative strategies only slow the progress of operational death and do not prevent it. Bare-bone repairs like these will eventually require more permanent solutions, as well as solutions that improve the quality of work conditions for humanitarians.

As the experience of humanitarian workers suggests, humanitarian institutions themselves experienced palliation. Workers barely stave off the complete halt of humanitarian work with provisional reparations and short-term views of survival. They are forced to endure near-institutional death with less than adequate resources. Only scraping by with minimalistic, rather than comprehensive, repair, sets the stage down the road for the eventual termination of programming that leaves beneficiaries unassisted. This situation leaves workers feeling powerless, draining their hope that conditions will improve. It makes them “fully aware of their inability to secure clients' lives in a lasting, meaningful way” (DiMario, 2022, p. 16). For instance, Kareem said their current conditions are “really depressing, and it really makes you feel that all you accomplished over the past years has just gone away.” Nevertheless, some expressed a mixture of hope and pessimism that their workplace resources would expand and

their limitations would eventually be alleviated. For instance, Zain said, “I hope soon it will get better even though I doubt but I hope that.”

6.4 CONCLUSION

Lebanon’s transnational humanitarian response related to the financial crisis extends DiMario’s (2022) analysis of palliative governance. It reveals a range of actors that come together to facilitate, support, and stifle repair work directed at institutional, policy, and infrastructural breakdowns. These actors include but are not limited to NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies, government, taxis, hospitals, and technologies. Their contributions to repair work in support of welfare delivery generate conditions that require caring for various vulnerable groups and humanitarian labour by implementing makeshift and minimalistic solutions. These strategies were critical for keeping community relations from falling further into turmoil, poverty and disability from worsening, and aid institutions from ceasing to operate. As mundane and often boring tactics that operate largely outside of public consciousness to support care work in Lebanon, such care work takes shape in the backstage of humanitarian response. Nevertheless, as shown, it has been vital to supporting the persistence of emergency response on the ground.

While these strategies sought to smooth discomfort and minimise some risks, palliative repair work did not address the sources of suffering or improve conditions. By analysing the intersectional implications of palliative repair, my analysis appreciates how care work is selective and operates by defining who is (un)worthy of more adequate forms of support. Unearthing the situated, diverse, and uneven experiences of palliation sheds light on the influence of people’s unique marginalisation within intersecting social structures of class, gender, migration status, sexuality, and so on. That is, some groups are palliated more and better than others. Collectively, my findings illuminate care from a unique vantage point. I analyse how care as repair work addresses and sustains suffering in ways that are inextricably entangled with structures of power. These insights both add to and complicate understandings of the relationship between care, repair work, and the governance of precarity.

In this chapter, palliative care as repair work reveals affective repercussions like hopelessness and how workers anxiously negotiate constraints on their labour. The following chapter continues this trajectory by analysing how humanitarians compensate for burdens posed by regulatory ritualism. Repair work that responds to such burdens generates different forms of repair work that include emotional labour, which I discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Negotiating Regulatory Ritualism as Repair Work

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Through this research, it became clear that many workers understand regulation – especially efforts to expand regulation – as a barricade to achieving the objectives of humanitarian action, but nonetheless important. Humanitarians in Lebanon regularly make strategic decisions about and take on added work based on regulatory conditions that flow from geopolitics and bureaucratic order (Erkoc, 2017). These perspectives contradict donors and transnational humanitarian groups like the UN and Oxfam that imagine regulation as minimising the risks of humanitarian action and enhancing the quality of crisis response (e.g., Oxfam, 2013).

For example, Jodie is an employee of a major INGO who worked to gather funding for emergency response to the Beirut Port explosion. Jodie framed strict conditions regarding for whom, where, and what assistance is channelled as being unrelated to what is best for crisis relief. I saw this dimension come out as she discussed how Lebanon's regulatory context parallels other conflict contexts receiving transnational aid:

If you look at Syria, state donors only want to fund what they perceive as humanitarian response. Giving out food kits, shelter kits, water, that kind of thing. But they do not want to do anything that could be perceived as propping up the Assad government. So, they can't do things like shelter rehabilitation or water system rehabilitation, which are all sorely needed. But no donor wants to fund that.

In short, she conveyed that humanitarian work is often impeded by cumbersome regulatory requirements. These include excessive clerical work, growing risk aversion, and forced compliance with regulations that do not reflect lived experiences of both staff and recipients. Such regulatory requirements subsequently overshadow humanitarians' ability to engage in more impactful work – that is, delivering lifesaving aid.

As this chapter explains, such reflections illustrate the challenges of what regulatory scholars call “regulatory ritualism,” which entails “the ritual of pretending to solve a problem by writing a new rule ... while losing focus on achieving the goals or outcomes themselves” (Braithwaite, 2008, p. 141, 144). Regulation can be understood as any effort to steer and direct behaviour, from formal rules and standards like law to informal and non-codified forms of power like social regulation (Braithwaite, 2017). Here, it emerges as more of a technical exercise, a recital that cultivates the image of responsible workers and that action is being taken to address problems (Charlesworth, 2010; Melgaço & van Brakel, 2021). According to participants, rules and protocols proliferate even though they are seemingly hollow, do not enhance the quality of activities, and lack clear implementation plans. Despite failing to meet purported aims – and sometimes not intending to meet aims at all – ritualistic regulation is nevertheless politically and institutionally valuable. This is because the spectatorship, symbolism, and reassurance offered by regulation can enable rule-setters to achieve external legitimacy, comfort the public, and fortify the normative order (Čada & Hoření, 2021).

This chapter illustrates how participants saw the embrace of many regulatory practices, technologies, and logics as filling a ritualistic and performative role. That is, it is more about applying institutionally acceptable regulations rather than meaningful rule setting that facilitates effective and accountable humanitarian activity. Digital platforms, digitised cash assistance, and surveillance technologies, in particular, are perceived by humanitarians as contributing to the enforcement of regulatory ritualism in the humanitarian workplace by promising to help manage worker and recipient behaviour. Workers recounted negotiating and contesting the burdens and constraints on their conduct that are reinforced through regulatory ritualism, which amounts to repair work that keeps aid delivery going in practice. Some of this repair work is gendered in that it involves emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) and demands that humanitarian workers address relational and interpersonal tensions with their colleagues, donors, and recipients (i.e., hermeneutic labour; Anderson, 2023). Findings reveal that ritualism not only troubles regulatees but also the people working in the regulatory system, which reinforces divisions between the needs of bureaucrats, staff, and recipients.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 7.2 reviews trends and cultural shifts that have shaped the sector’s embrace of regulation over the years, which includes surveillance

technologies that promise the achievement of regulatory logics. Section 7.3 presents my empirically-informed findings by detailing three forms of regulation that generate regulatory burdens that compel repair work. Section 7.4 elaborates on how these forms of ritualistic regulation create and reinforce forms of domination – self-evident, normalised, externally imposed power that demands subjectivity and restricts self-determination (Young, 1990). Finally, Section 7.5 concludes with a discussion of how participants’ reflections point to patterns of domination, which indicate the broader significance of regulatory ritualism in the sector.

7.2 SHIFTS IN HUMANITARIAN REGULATION

Before the 1990s, organisational principles of humanity, impartiality, and independence were presumed to be evidence of morality and a lack of political interests. This helped prevent deep investigation into humanitarian misdeeds (Barnett, 2005). However, the 1990s marked the beginning of dedicated efforts to make significant strides to control behaviour and define standards of practice. As Stuart Gordon (2020) documents, the sector has increasingly adopted a precautionary approach as a form of risk management, to which strict policy and regulation have become central. Risk aversion has encouraged a range of different strategies to enhance the accountability and quality of humanitarian assistance, such as the “rights approach” and “contingency approach” (Hillhorst, 2002). While regulation has become increasingly institutionalised and datafied (Johns & Compton, 2019), critiques suggest that regulation risks becoming a goal itself, which sidesteps equally important interrogation of the effects of such accountability mechanisms (Sandvik & Jacobsen, 2016).

Beyond staff and organisational accountability, regulation increasingly targets the intended recipients of aid and residents living in humanitarian contexts. Refugees, for example, are informally and formally managed through an array of institutions that are state, international, market-based, and (trans)national (e.g., host community sanctions), which extensively regulate their employment, land access, economic activities, access to social assistance, and mobility (Betts et al., 2017). In terms of downwards accountability, otherwise known as Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), the sector has sought to enhance accountability to recipients in order to make aid safer, responsive to subjects’ needs, and accountable to institutional donors’ demands (e.g., Walker & Maxwell, 2014). However, these measures have been critiqued for

necessitating definitions of who constitutes a recipient and what benefits they are entitled to amass, revealing ritualism in being “a mechanistic response to often unspoken anxieties” (Roddy et al., 2015, p. 199).

For these and other reasons, the design and assessments of the suitability of regulation are in need of desperate reform “because it loses touch with what it was meant to achieve,” says Niger’s UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, Louisa Aubin (Alexander, 2023, n. p.). Others have made similar observations about regulatory burdens in the aid sector. Jacob Kurtzer (2019a), Deputy Director and Senior Fellow with Humanitarian Agenda, claims that aid agencies are forced to devote an extensive amount of time and staff to comply with perpetually growing legal and regulatory obligations, which drain resources available for aid. Scholar of humanitarian studies Dorothea Hilhorst and her colleagues (2021, p. 373) contend that extensive accountability systems risk fatiguing workers and “becoming overly burdensome at the expense of implementation capacity.” Humanitarians consequently lose trust in such unnecessarily cumbersome regulation, even though, as regulatory scholars argue, trust is central for regulatory effectiveness (Braithwaite, 2020) and for societal acceptance of emerging technologies (Nelson & Gorichanaz, 2019). In sum, regulation strays from its stated purpose, which is to strengthen the efficacy and accountability of providing material assistance to those stricken by natural and man-made disasters.

As part of concerns about unnecessary regulation, scholars have observed regulatory ritualism in many workplaces beyond the aid sector (Strathern, 2000). As evinced from this case, as digital platforms and technologies become more central to everyday work, they inevitably implicate the nature and practice of regulatory ritualism. Here, surveillance technologies shape the execution and enforcement of regulatory ritualism in the humanitarian workplace. Tracking, monitoring, and coordinated watching calms anxieties by presenting “hard proof” of the ability to restrict “risky” and “cost-inefficient” worker and recipient behaviour (Ball, 2010). In being “loaded with symbolism,” omnipresent, and offering real-time monitoring, digitised surveillance promises the compulsion to self-discipline via the illusion of control (Melgaço & van Brakel, 2021, p. 247). As will be discussed, regulatory ritualism and what has been observed as “technology theatre” combine to produce a significant regulatory burden from the perspective of my participants. Technology theatre refers to using technology to make people

feel as though a problem is being addressed but eliding solving the problem in question (McDonald, 2020).

7.3 REPAIR WORK RESPONDING TO RITUALISTIC REGULATION

Humanitarian workers' experiences of regulation illustrate that the capacity of regulation to meaningfully improve aid effectiveness and its accountability has been overestimated. The "workers" I am referring to are a diverse group: they include regulation enforcers and regulatees who must adhere to regulation, enact regulatory practices, and use regulatory technologies in their jobs. They do not make decisions about how regulation should be designed and what it should demand. They are largely assistants, supervisors, technical specialists, country and operations directors, and coordinating and programme officers working for the UN and (I)NGOs, most often residing in Lebanon. Workers also involve recipients who strategise how to navigate this incredibly restrictive landscape.

I proceed by illustrating three forms of ritualistic regulation: reporting platforms and practices; conditionality of humanitarian activities and recipient spending; and mandatory administrative protocols. As institutionally accepted tactics – acknowledged as best practice and deeply engrained in humanitarian culture and systems – regulations are compulsively mandated while abandoning the intention to genuinely achieve goals (Merton, 1968). Or, in the case of conditionality, regulations are instituted to achieve geopolitical goals, which are prioritised over publicly asserted regulatory goals. Regulation is shown to exist in an interconnected, mutually reinforcing relationship with its technologies, which strengthens the cultivation of regulatory burden. Regulation justifies the rollout of technology, and technology enables the implementation of regulation – both without sincere intention to what is needed to genuinely alleviate suffering within humanitarian contexts.

In response to the burdensome and inequitable effects of regulatory requirements, humanitarians have to engage in repair work that negotiates the imaginaries and constraints of regulation. Workers either go through the motions of complying or find workarounds that circumvent regulation's restrictions on their choices and behaviour. A distinctly gendered demand of this repair work prompts many humanitarians to manage the relationships put under

strain between recipients, donors, and other humanitarian colleagues. This is what Ellie Anderson (2023) calls “hermeneutic labour,” which is a form of care labour that has historically fallen upon women. Hermeneutic labour involves managing multiple sets of desires in order to resolve conflict by understanding others’ feelings and motivations and conveying one’s own feelings in an appropriate manner so as to nurture and support interpersonal relationships (Anderson, 2023). As part of this repair work, humanitarians engage in emotional labour, which “is the silent work of evoking and suppressing emotion – in ourselves and in others” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 333). Emotional labour resulting from humanitarian regulation seeks to manage emotive reactions to unfair conditions upon aid labour.

Although regulation was framed as labour-intensive and subjectively designed, humanitarians are not fully opposed to regulation. Many participants emphasised the value of regulation in weeding out irresponsible partners and ensuring that evidence-based recommendations are operationalised. Rather, there is a need to be more selective of regulation and mindful of the burden it poses or else ritualism risks (re)generating the very operational issues it seeks to solve and the suffering it seeks to alleviate.

7.3.1 Reporting and monitoring: Regulatory platforms and reporting requirements

Regulatory technologies, or RegTech, digitise “manual reporting and compliance processes” in the hopes of addressing operational challenges like decentralised data collection and collaboration with remote actors all around the world (Arner et al., 2017, p. 371). Web-based reporting platforms are prevalent in the humanitarian sector and are one form of RegTech. Yasmeen works for the UN to coordinate social assistance with the Lebanese government. She said that, for over five years in Lebanon, (I)NGOs, UN agencies, the World Bank, and technology experts have adopted several different reporting platforms when delivering cash-based assistance and responding to various other crises. Reporting platforms include ActivityInfo; Humanitarianresponse.info; Who, What, Where (3W) Portal; and the Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS).

As emphasised by my participants and scholarly literature, donors find reporting platforms attractive for offering “evidence of ‘impact’” so that humanitarians can justify their presence and access to funding (Madianou et al., 2016, p. 961). The surveillance features of these collective platforms promise that humanitarian undertakings are more organisable, trackable,

legible, accountable, and controllable. This regulatory landscape collectively reflects that humanitarian undertakings are “quite heavily monitored,” a comment made by Paula who works for the EU on social assistance in Lebanon.

Even though reporting appears to place checks on programming, stretch budgets further, and improve informational awareness, as my interviews reveal, this reporting can often be ritualistic. Tokenistic reporting platforms are mandated “without considering whether deploying such tools would aggravate the people or trust relationships involved” (Macdonald, 2020, n. p.), which compels affective consequences by frustrating workers and diminishing their trust and faith in the added value and feasibility of reporting. Work-wise, regulatory ritualism takes important time, resources, and personnel away from life-saving activities – the mandate of humanitarian institutions and the sector at large. The consequence is that “at the macro-level” the proliferation of ritualistic reporting leads to a “system of rules” that is “unreliable and unserviceable for regulatory purposes” (Braithwaite, 2008, p. 144). As a result, humanitarians engage in emotional and hermeneutic labour as repair work that aims to mend the strained relationships between workers compelled to engage in reporting so that regulation can persist. To make this argument I focus on de-duplication reporting platforms as well as crisis- and partner-specific reporting software and practices.

“Duplication” refers to delivering assistance more than once to the same person or for the same needs. It is considered to be a major constraint upon the sector’s impact; in fact, the WFP estimates that 16% of all humanitarian aid is duplicative (Haffar, 2022). In Lebanon, practitioners track refugee assistance on RAIS by searching information like refugees’ UNHCR file numbers and phone numbers, but up until the Port explosion, such a platform did not exist for Lebanese and migrant populations. The Port explosion was a completely unexpected event, so countless humanitarian groups were unexpectedly and quickly enrolled to provide assistance. In response to this immediate upsurge in humanitarian aid, the WFP and the “cash task force” (established in response to the Port explosion) sought to coordinate and regulate overlapping aid by piloting a de-duplication platform that used blockchain technology. Here, workers reported on *all* types of recipients including residents, not just refugees, in order to limit repeated claims.

Of crucial importance, this experimental platform was implemented too late in a short-term response – after roughly four to six months of emergency response to the Port explosion. Reporting on emergency assistance for de-duplication purposes is relatively inaccurate, and thus futile, if it is not started at the beginning of disaster relief. In order for de-duplication to “work,” humanitarian groups require information on recipients’ histories of accessing aid (i.e., if they have accessed aid, when, and what kind of aid). Given this information was only available post hoc – after aid had already been disbursed – and the Port explosion was only a short-term response, it would have made sense to forgo de-duplication reporting requirements. However, because humanitarian partners are increasingly encouraged to implement and harmonise de-duplication (e.g., ODI, 2015), it would go against habit if the Port explosion response did not follow suit. As my participants’ experiences demonstrate, the de-duplication platform thereby reflects ritualism because the means to achieve institutionally approved goals were nonsensical yet prioritised over and above the goal itself (i.e., the likelihood of actually de-duplicating). The platform was more of a performance that some effort had been taken to attempt de-duplication. By making this regulatory technology wholly insincere and customary rather than well-planned and goal-driven, it was therefore unnecessary and ritualistic.

The ritualistic character of reporting was echoed by countless humanitarian participants responding to the Port explosion. Humanitarians framed this delayed regulatory platform and the labour it required as useless. Zaina is an INGO worker in Lebanon who advises on protection for refugees and host communities. Her comments reflect other participants’ disapproval of the de-duplication platform by saying,

They created this de-duplication tool halfway through the response ... They were asking us to use it and it was just too much work. The response was going to end anyway in like four months or five months anyways. I mean, it doesn’t really make sense.

The goal of de-duplicating aid does not align with the timing of the platform’s release. Its late deployment meant that the platform could not adequately deliver on its purpose. As a result, the platform lost its helpful potential and could not achieve the whole reason it was being implemented: to mitigate duplicated disbursements in order to organise aid and cut costs. Therefore, the perspectives of participants regarding the temporality of reporting indicate that the de-duplication reporting platform was ritualistic in serving more as a “technical exercise of

creating responsible” staff members and practices rather than having meaningful impact (Charlesworth, 2010, p. 11).

Another participant who works for the UN and held a senior role in managing LOUISE, Rima, confirmed how the timing of de-duplication made it useless. She signalled this ritualism by pointing out another reason as to why it was ritualistic. While she appreciated that it was the first time that this specific platform was created, in Rima’s perspective, this did not compensate for the fact that it did not actually serve the “interest of the very same populations we are trying to protect.” Rima explained that there was a major time lag between when “big actors” started their interventions in response to the Port explosion because they could mobilise funding and offer aid quickly, and when the de-duplication system was later made available. Since these more prominent humanitarian groups started dispersing their funds before the actual system was in place, they were not able to properly de-duplicate their aid because so much assistance had already been delivered.

Moreover, the platform was initiated even though it had well-known flaws that made it unreliable, which thus obstructed achieving its regulatory purpose. Given that many de-duplication platforms came before this one in Lebanon and elsewhere (i.e., it is not the first of its kind), the ease at which the system could be intentionally and unintentionally circumvented was well-known to regulators. For instance, Mohammad, who works for an INGO in Lebanon on cash assistance, noted that it would be nearly impossible to detect duplication if a household registered for aid a second time under the name of a different household member. That is, the platform could only verify duplication if the *same* name was registered more than once. In addition, it was not possible to update recipient data frequently enough to capture if family composition changed. For example, they could not track if someone got married, had a child, or had a family member move in – all of which would impact duplication assessments. These well-known “holes” in data were notable, so the platform painted an erroneous and incomplete picture of repeated claims. In defeating its purpose, the platform was not implemented in the spirit of sufficiently meeting de-duplication. Therefore, regardless of the unobtainability of de-duplication, the regulatory platform, or “institutionally-approved means,” was nevertheless instituted.

As further evidence that the de-duplication platform reflects a preoccupation with expanding (flawed) regulatory control rather than an obsession with achieving its purposes, there is considerable evidence that de-duplication does not necessarily support accountability and cost-savings. For instance, a study by the World Bank confirmed that a sixth of foreign aid disbursements ends up in offshore accounts of elites (Andersen et al., 2020). As such, the platform may mitigate some cost leakages, but de-duplication itself is “neither the source of nor the solution to the problem” (Macdonald, 2020, n. p.). In comparison to this loss of roughly 15%, Zaina stated that the amount of aid given to recipients is so minuscule that it does not merit the effort required to regulate it. The trivial amount of aid funding “saved” by de-duplication reporting is so minimal that the regulation becomes meaningless; that is, catching cases of duplication does not substantially cut costs or reinforce accountability. While she said that the duplication of some emergency assistance (and thus lost cost savings) is always inevitable, the means are not proportionate to the end goals of accountability and cost-savings. The choice to deploy the platform thereby echoes technological ritualism mixed with regulatory ritualism by “[f]ixat[ing] on a technological fix that misses the problem” (Braithwaite et al., 2007b, p. 221). The effect is that the humanitarian system continues enforcing regulation that is not deeply concerned with broader “regulatory objectives,” leading to regulation that becomes “a costly measure” (Braithwaite, 2006, p. 18).

In response to the burdens posed by ritualistic reporting platforms including but not limited to the de-duplication platform, humanitarians engage in forms of repair work that are famously studied as being gendered. I review two forms of such repair: emotional and hermeneutic labour. As my participants’ experiences of repair work reveal, overlapping and excessive reporting platforms combine into a larger system of reporting that has become unserviceable and unworkable – a core consequence of expansive regulation that amounts to ritualism (Braithwaite et al., 2007b).

Zaina offers a prime example of the emotional and relational labour of repair work that she requires to negotiate ritualistically implemented and overlapping platforms. As emotional labour, Zaina and Yasmeen read the mental state of their partners so that they can react accordingly to produce a desired result: encouraging reporting behaviour so that they and others can continue with their work in service of recipients. Zaina claimed that she struggled to get partners to report on ActivityInfo (n.d., n. p.) – an “information management software used for partner reporting, monitoring and evaluation and case management.” The platform

reports on aggregate figures per district so that agencies know how many families have been assisted in a particular area. Because ActivityInfo's demands overlap and are layered with other regulatory platforms and practices, reporting has "added a lot of demands" that have become incredibly challenging to manage. Participants including but not limited to Zaina reported that, as a result of so many different reporting requirements and systems, many humanitarian groups submit their reporting incredibly late. To manage this, Zaina said,

... we were kind of harassing our partners to report. "You have to report on Activity Info." "If you don't report on Activity Info, just give us the number, we will report on your behalf."

As Zaina's quote reveals, she and her colleagues offer to complete and submit reports for partners. Other humanitarians recounted similar types of repair work. In particular, Yasmeen complained that she spends too much time contacting partners to remind them to submit their late reports. By encouraging partners to complete reporting requirements and submit on time, Zaina and Yasmeen hope to put pressure on their colleagues to get them to report on time and comply with demanding and tedious reporting requirements. This work requires emotional labour. It involves reading their colleagues' mentalities, interpreting their emotion, and trying to get their partners to feel a particular way about reporting – or as Hochschild (2012, p. 7) says, they are enacting emotional labour that involves attempts "to produce an emotional state in another person." For instance, Zaina and Yasmeen emphasise the urgency of regulation, which attempts to get partners to take reporting seriously and to care about it enough that they quickly labour to meet regulatory demands.

By reading their partners' attitude regarding reporting and strategising how to induce reporting-supportive mentalities, emotional labour aims to produce a desired result. It hopes to inspire reporting behaviour so that staff can prevent further interruptions in their work and thus complete their responsibilities. This reveals how, as Hochschild (2012) points out, emotional labour is more than simply modulating one's own feelings. Emotional labour is also about how emotional labourers manage other people's emotions and the broader system of shifting emotions (Hochschild, 2012).

While this gendered labour gets jobs done and is fundamental to supporting regulatory infrastructures, such labour strategies are historically unrecognised as a type of work. Furthermore, this work is also unfair and reflects “the exploitation of emotional labour” for the benefit of humanitarian bureaucracies (Hochschild, 1983, p. 329). Such repair work may be integral for regulatory systems but it also exemplifies that regulatory bureaucrats are not accountable for ritualistic regulation. Instead, those on the ground are forced to make up for burdens that transpire from ritualistic reporting mandated by bureaucrats, resulting in workers like Zaina and Yasmeen being forced to take on extra work that makes their own workload even heavier and more onerous. As such, workers on the ground who are required to report and comply with reporting have to pick up the slack in order to make ritualistic reporting workable. As a relational repercussion, it generates relationships in which humanitarians like Zaina and Yasmeen must parent their other partners to report. Such parenting fosters animosity between practitioners because they must continuously pressure and nag each other, which was framed by participants as unwanted but necessary given the cumbersome nature of regulatory layering.

At the same time, Zaina and Yasmeen recognise that workers are struggling to keep up with the demands of reporting on worker time, energy, and workloads. Humanitarian staff’s experiences of stress and contempt from excessive reporting have been confirmed by several scholars. For example, Hugo Slim (2015, p. 222), scholar of ethics, war and humanitarianism, finds that humanitarian workers in Mali are often “more anxious about their reporting than people’s actual problems.” Similar affective consequences apply in Lebanon, which reveal how humanitarians struggle with emotional work and how they engage in hermeneutic labour.

For instance, Yasmeen and Zaina engage in hermeneutic labour by interpreting and discerning their colleagues’ mentality, feelings, and emotional posture regarding reporting. Yasmeen was particularly attentive to workers’ frustrations with layered reporting. She reads, recognises, and expresses this frustration by saying,

... it is heavy on some partners to report because there are different reporting requirements and different platforms. You have RAIS, then you have something somewhere else for something else. So, for partners, reporting is frustrating.

Another emotional and bodily response to excessive reporting, namely exhaustion, was recounted by Zaina. She, too, engaged in hermeneutic labour by deciphering the affective costs of reporting that had become unmanageable. In speaking about the de-duplication platform, she said:

... the problem is the sector was asking too much on the reporting side and on attending some coordination meetings. So I think this was really exhausting... way too much back and forth, a lot of reporting tools... it was very disorganised, very chaotic.

Zaina and Yasmeen's quotes suggest how their hermeneutic labour uncovers the existence of regulatory ritualism. As hermeneutic labour, they interpret the bodily and mental strains and feelings of their colleagues as a way to discern issues that impede their work and morale amongst workers. In being exhausting, daunting, and strenuous – consuming their energy, time, and institutional resources – the experience of participants highlights the costs of ritualistic platforms. Insincere, ritualistic regulatory design and technologies impose affective and material repercussions. Such consequences reinforce negative perceptions held by workers who struggle to negotiate the regulatory burden that impacts not just reporting but also their non-regulatory work. Reporting systems have thus become ritualistic in that they are untenable and indefensible “for regulatory purposes” (Braithwaite et al., 2007b, p. 258).

Overall, the experiences of humanitarians in Lebanon reveal that staff are irritated not because they must comply with regulation but because fragmentation and excess of reporting have cultivated a messy regulatory environment that makes reporting unmanageable. This indicates that reporting technologies and practices make exaggerated promises of effectively supervising programming. As participants conveyed, reporting generates issues that go against what it is supposed to do – adjusting processes so they are more cost-efficient, faster, and de-duplicated. Reporting and its technologisation reflect the implementation of taken-for-granted regulation without reflecting on its added value and highly strenuous repercussions.

In doing so, reporting technologies and platforms in Lebanon reflect Braithwaite's (2008) observations about regulatory ritualism: that reporting does have the potential to work well, but it fails in practice because the many regulatory practices and rules must compete for a limited amount of humanitarians' time and resources with many other regulations. The

affective, resource, and bodily costs of reporting mean that regulatory goals are not feasible and produce more harm than good. Mandating so much reporting may appear to donors and the public that action is being taken to repair issues. But, in duplicating work, being excessive, and draining already-strapped capital, perfunctory, redundant, and fragmented reporting evinces ritualism rather than necessity. As a consequence of being ritualistic and insincere, workers lose confidence in the added value of reporting.

Regulations, at their core, are interested in shaping behaviour, but different kinds of regulation shape behaviour in unique ways. This section showed how reporting *compels* regulatory behaviour. Conditionality, in contrast, regulates humanitarian intervention by *prohibiting* behaviour. This latter type of regulation also applies to formally applied humanitarian staff as well as humanitarian recipients. As compared to staff, recipients are not paid an income to negotiate (ritualistic) regulation, but nonetheless are forced to engage with it and strategise how to overcome its burden in order to better meet their interests and ease access to aid.

7.3.2 Conditionality: Performative constraints on humanitarian activities and recipient spending

“Conditionality” refers to entitlements that are provisional on fulfilling certain responsibilities and/or avoiding certain behaviours (Dwyer, 2004). It enforces compliance with a carrot-and-stick model of regulation. In Lebanon’s aid sector, conditionality performs security, comfort, and reassurance that eases donors’ distrust of groups who are spending their money, regardless of whether such rules are grounded in proof or achieve their ends. As the following evidence reveals, humanitarian staff and recipients apply rudimentary forms of repair work to mitigate the harmful effects of ritualistic conditionality. These forms of repair, however, end up either being unsuccessful or simply sustain hollow regulatory systems due to donors’ power to restrict alternative responses.

Increasingly strict and politicised conditionality make it more difficult to target relief efforts to where needs are best served, risking recipients’ access to essential assistance and their quality of life. The proliferation of controls on humanitarian activities echoes Braithwaite’s (2008, p. 144) observation about regulatory ritualism: that it enables donors “to pick and choose an

enforcement cocktail tailored to meet their own objective.” That is, contrary to beliefs that more regulation curbs the discretion of rule-makers, the proliferation of conditionality rules ends up expanding donor discretion to dictate the design of humanitarian regulation and programming. Motives behind conditionality are often an attempt to achieve political agendas and align humanitarian aid with donor values. Self-interested conditionality fuelled why many staff did not have faith in the veracity of conditions, as they emphasised that conditionality was often incongruent with a needs-based approach to assistance and did not meaningfully make aid any more responsible or effective. As will be shown, the proliferation of ritualistic conditionality parameters solidifies “a climate of mutual distrust” between donors, humanitarian workers, and recipients, which obstructs meaningful collaboration between these groups (Čada & Hoření, 2021, p. 131). I now highlight these dimensions by first examining conditional demands on humanitarian activities and then conditions on recipient spending with digital banking cards.

A report titled *DENIAL, DELAY, DIVERSION: Tackling Access Challenges in an Evolving Humanitarian Landscape*, states that donor constraints are acutely apparent where “counterterrorism agendas and humanitarian action coincide” (Kurtzer, 2019b, p. 19). Indeed, restrictions on humanitarian funding based on counterterrorism measures have increased over the years (Gillard et al., 2021). The following quote from a UN worker working in Lebanon demonstrates that donors use security to restrict the location and recipients of humanitarian aid. Conditionality mitigates fears that donors will be accused of funding terrorism – accusations that have geopolitical consequences.

Maha provided an example of how conditionality is ritualistic in being “political” rather than accountability-driven. This ritualism benefits from structures of power that reinforce donor domination. Maha is the lead representative of a UN agency in Lebanon that works on a wide variety of humanitarian and development programmes dedicated to marginalised groups. Maha framed donors’ counterterrorism sanctions as requiring staff labour to calculate donors’ “reservations and their political agendas” because:

Some donors have restrictions whenever it comes to the activity of some humanitarian partners on the ground and on the areas, groups, or beneficiaries that will receive [donor] donations. It's more of a political issue with the donors... it's usually the areas that are

controlled by non-state actors. Some areas where they are controlled by Palestinian political parties within camps or things like that.

Setting conditions on humanitarian interventions is ritualistic in fostering “the appearance of toughness in favour of reforms that deliver more substance” (Braithwaite, 2008, p. 142). This is the political dynamic of Michael Power’s (1997) “rituals of comfort” of the audit society (Braithwaite et al., 2007, p. 220). In the humanitarian sector, rituals of comfort – a core feature of regulatory ritualism, as argued by Čada and Hoření (2021) – reassure both donors and the public. In terms of the former group, conditionality comforts donors that they will not come under fire for funding terrorist activity, which could *hypothetically* risk national security and public safety. However, in doing so, Palestinian refugees are blocked from accessing aid not “because of the acts they perform but rather from loose associations with groups perceived as ‘terrorists’” (Marín & Ali, 2021, p. 536). Given this racialised stigmatisation, conditionality provides a sense of security not by protecting lives, but by protecting against threats to donors’ political agendas and public image.

This is confirmed by Nahed, who works on civil-military coordination and humanitarian access for UN agencies in Lebanon. Nahed said, “of course they [donors and UN agencies] refer to their political agenda at the end of the day [when setting conditions].” Conditionality on humanitarian activities and funding unsurprisingly, therefore, reinforces the racialisation and securitisation of marginalised groups like Palestinian refugees.

In terms of conditionality that discriminates against providing aid to refugees out of fears of supporting terrorists, conditionality performs to the global public that, as a security practice, rules on humanitarian activities prevent supporting “risky” groups and locations. This rule is successful because it secures the public’s confidence in donors’ ability to control migrants (Čada & Hoření 2021). In actuality, however, such regulation does not meet this aim by facilitating national and global security; they are not meaningful conditions on aid. In fact, not one of my participants felt that donor conditions fostered national security or achieved counterterrorism mandates. Conditionality-as-regulation, therefore, performs a security ritual – or as security scholars call it, “security theatre” – in which security mechanisms are designed to make the public feel safer but they are actually a waste of effort and money (Schneier, 2008).

In combination with a legacy of exclusionary racism towards residents of the Middle East and security rituals that maintain US-Israeli militarism over Palestinian peoples (Kumar, 2017), it is clear that donors use strict conditions to not only meet their self-interested motives but also to implicitly uphold global regimes of discrimination.

Given that conditionality-as-regulatory ritualism prevents people from going against conditional demands on aid – or, as Young says (1990, p. 31), “exclude[s] people from participating in determining their action or the conditions of their lives” – humanitarians are limited in the ways that they can respond to issues posed by conditionality. Nevertheless, I spoke to one UN worker who found a subtle way to engage in repair work that sought to counteract the harms of conditionality so that aid could be channelled to groups like Palestinians. Nahed worked on a paper that analysed conditionality demands imposed by donors. As repair work, she used this paper to speak to other humanitarian institutions in ways that they understood with the ultimate goal of hoping that this modality would better resonate with donors and humanitarian practitioners so that they would realise that conditionality is often arbitrary and self-interested rather than conducive to humanitarian organisations’ mandates. Conducting an empirical analysis of conditionality’s pros and cons by drawing upon her institution’s experiences, she used data to highlight how conditionality serves geopolitical motives and disproportionately targets racialised groups based on donors’ security agendas and geopolitical allies more than serving the needs of at-risk populations.

While Nahed said that she did not get support from donors and departments within her institution to publish the paper, it is nonetheless an important form of repair work that sought to enable aid to be channeled to those groups at the periphery. By illuminating how conditionality is often designed without the intention to meaningfully improve the quality of aid delivery and reduce genuine threats to the sector, her paper made a small contribution to efforts to mitigate racist and oppressive repercussions of conditionality. This strategy reveals how repair work does not always work, and in fact, sometimes it may not actualise, but such efforts are still crucial to repairing harms that prevent critical systems from operating.

In addition to the UN, donors exert immense and concerning regulatory power upon INGOs through demands to “screen” recipients. “Screening” refers to checking before aid is dispersed

that recipients are not sanctioned by counterterrorism measures, such as sanctions by the EU. As Gillard et al. (2021, p. 531) contend, state donors like the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), transnational governance organisations like the “Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) and inter-governmental organizations such as the EU via DEVCO [Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development] have started including requirements to screen final recipients of programmes it funds.” Jafaar states that screening is not simply based on “due diligence” or “procurement regulations,” which is what those outside of the sector likely expect. Rule-setting is much more complex and politicised, leading to the domination of humanitarian activities without genuine intention to serve at-risk populations.

To explain how recipient screening is ritualistic rather than meaningful, Jafaar provided a hypothetical scenario. Jafaar works for an INGO in Lebanon to provide cash assistance in response to the Port explosion. He discussed how delivering aid amidst an emergency is already incredibly challenging. Since his organisation is going to be distributing an incredibly large sum of funding, they need to spend an incredibly large amount of time and resources to deliver this as transparently and fairly as possible while grappling with the contextual challenges that come from the emergency they’re responding to. Donors’ conditions on funding, he said, only add more burdens to their already cumbersome labour.

A major encumbrance arises when donors ask their INGO to screen recipients against a particular data set. He gave an example by saying that if he was a French organisation, donors may ask for recipients to be screened against state-held databases like a database held by the French treasury simply because it is required by law. This screening does not actually make aid delivery more robust or secure and it has no added value. From Jafaar’s perspective, such conditions pose a regulatory burden that only makes his job to deliver aid amidst crisis even more laborious. He said, “and so you try to find a middle ground. You find out that even though you don’t want these financial organisations to screen them because it will derail your needs-based argument, you find out that because of Lebanese law, they still have to run screening anyhow. So it’s not your organisation doing it, it’s the financial organisation doing it.”

This “middle ground” is where Jafaar enacts a subtle form of repair work. Given that the INGO has no choice but to comply with donors’ demand to screen recipients if they desire continued access to donor funding that sustains humanitarian intervention, the most that Jafaar’s organisation can do to respond to conditionality is assert their mandate. That is, Jafaar’s INGO asserts that they have a strict internal policy against vetting because they are dedicated to delivering aid in the most impartial way possible – determining eligibility to aid based on recipient need rather than donor-specific criteria. His labour put into negotiating with the donor thus reflects a passive form of repair work that is needed to ensure his organisation can stay true to their mandate of neutral aid delivery and to mitigate the well-known harms of delivering aid in a biased manner.

While this labour does not eradicate oppressive conditionality, it is nonetheless important labour that is needed in order for aid to go on within the confines of the contemporary humanitarian system. As repair work, it is completed with the intention of adapting to limitations on humanitarian activities posed by conditionality demands so that aid can be delivered to a portion of the intended recipient population. This reveals that repair work is a balancing act requiring dedicated negotiation so that humanitarians can stick to their own principles and meet recipients’ needs while also complying with laws and donors.

Despite this repair work, we see that getting humanitarian workers to follow rules like screening requirements has become an end in itself, regardless of whether these rules are for the greater good (Čada & Hoření, 2021). Screening conditions are incredibly demanding, forcing practitioners to balance their many other tasks with these additional rules in the middle of emergencies. It is ritualistic because screening is not needed for better or more accountable aid delivery, and in fact, it makes humanitarian work more cumbersome and less equitable. Donor conditions on screening recipients requires extensive labour from INGO workers to comply with demands that compete with one another – restrictions from donors, rules from the government, and guiding principles of their sector. Now, I move on to reviewing how recipients themselves navigate regulatory ritualism related to conditionality.

Digital banking facilitates tracking as a form of regulation. A digital track record of where money is spent and what it is spent on, coupled with the ability to restrict certain purchases,

makes cash-free aid incredibly valuable for welfare programmes that often set strict rules on what recipients can purchase (e.g., Bielefeld, 2021). In Lebanon, the LCRP offers an “e-card” food voucher for Syrian refugees that limits funds to be spent on approved food items at WFP-contracted shops. By enabling the setting and enforcement of rules on purchases, conditional welfare is touted as an effective strategy by preventing the following fear that was conveyed by a Lebanese government official, Omar: “that if cash is provided the husband, who might be drunk or an alcoholic, will go and pay for alcohol or cigarettes and not provide his family with assistance.” Although this quote is from a Lebanese government official, this fear is shared by donors, practitioners, and transnational governance institutions. An INGO worker, Ramsay, for example, had the same perception, stating “there *are* caregivers and family members who are doing unethical things or bad behavioural stuff, for example, the father might buy alcohol with the cash assistance.” Even though many assistance providers have moved towards unconditional cash, many still worry that purchases made with cash are difficult to monitor.

On the one hand, conditionality is designed to improve the impact of aid; that is, it tries to ensure that funding goes towards fulfilling the essential needs of poor families. On the other hand, restricting expenditure on “non-essential and “unapproved” goods aims to dissuade “deviant” and “illicit” habits that cause further strain on the nation’s health infrastructures, police, and social fabric. Moral regulation is thus an underlying yet blatant motive behind conditionality (Chunn & Gavigan, 2004). The “risk” of certain groups and their propensity to commit illicit activities serves as ammunition to legitimise restrictions on recipient spending.

Like the “welfare queen” stereotype (Nadasen, 2007), the “alcoholic refugee husband” stereotype is discriminatory, racialised, classist, and sexist. It concretises the belief that impoverished Syrian and Palestinian refugee men are inclined to engage in deviant behaviour and misuse funding in ways that do not support their family. The trope fuels policing and disciplining purchases in ways that make it harder to meet the needs of poor peoples. Families need to be able to tailor purchases to their unique needs. Experts have confirmed that food can actually be secured by many poor groups in Lebanon, especially farmers and those living in rural towns. As suggested by Omar and Maha, other expenditures, such as those on medicine, utilities, and rent, better address poverty yet they are not possible with conditional welfare. Conditionality is thus performative and loaded with symbolism: acting as if strict limits on

purchases safeguard the livelihood of refugee families and the integrity of the host nation, even though the addition of such regulation has the potential to exacerbate refugee vulnerability.

Conditional limits on cash grants for those impacted by the Beirut Port explosion provide an example of the tension between donors' regulatory demands and recipient needs. Donor rules on how cash can be spent do not foster more impactful use of humanitarian funding. Reflecting ritualism, conditions actually serve donors' desire to heavily regulate, set strict rules, and to profoundly scrutinise and limit welfare recipients' behaviour. A perfect example of this is provided by Ramsay, who leads operations for a major INGO in Lebanon and has worked in the humanitarian sector in different roles for over a decade. Ramsay described how there is a preference to use modalities other than cash because they are easier to enforce donors' conditions on spending:

... one of the main challenges in cash assistance is that you can't track if they're gonna spend money on the purpose that it was given for. And we've had this in the Beirut explosion response. We had something we called "providing cash assistance for home appliances." It's \$600 for appliances that people lost during the explosion. But consider a family that gets the cash for appliances to buy a refrigerator, but they don't have food to put in the refrigerator. They will not buy the refrigerator because if they buy a refrigerator, they're not able to put food in the refrigerator in the first place.

What is best for addressing immediate and family-specific needs (i.e., food) is not reflected in donor rules on how cash grants must be spent (i.e., appliances). This example reveals donor domination via ritualistic forms of conditionality. Domination through ritualism arises in that recipients are compelled to use their cash grants to purchase equipment that is quite literally useless, removing their autonomy and capacity to best meet their needs. While these intimately disciplined purchases do not meet objectives of supporting those affected by the Port explosion, it does enable humanitarian institutions to meet the pledges they have made to their donors. As such, conditionality is poised to better serve the interests of donors who are far removed from the lived realities of welfare recipients. At the end of the day, however, it is evident that these forms of conditionality do not meet the genuine interests of marginalised groups who the funding, regulation, and intervention are meant to serve.

Interestingly, the monitoring of how recipients spend cash grants has become a form of repair work. Ramsay described how his institution chose to distribute donor funding in cash form as opposed to cheques or in-kind goods, but that they justified cash grants by completing post-implementation monitoring. By visiting recipient households and asking how they spent the money, the INGO is able to confirm whether the expenditure of the \$600 cash grant has complied with conditionality demands. “Tracking” the purchase with in-person monitoring thereby permits the INGO to sustain the delivery of cash grants while simultaneously meeting conditionality obligations to their donor. As repair work, this strategy does what it can so that families in distress still access some form of aid, albeit in ways that are less meaningful than unrestricted cash grants and in ways that reinforce the pervasive desire for intimate surveillance of welfare recipients.

Conditionality thereby compels burdensome labour that puts practitioners in a tug of war between donor demands to regulate spending and what recipients individually require. Ramsay explains this competing relationship in the form of a tension. On the one hand, he said “as an organisation, we are credible to our donor. We have the promise that we made to our donor that this money is going to appliances. If people go and buy something else with it, then this is not allowing us to follow through on the promise that we made to our donor.” And on the other hand, by complying with ritualistic conditionality that reinforces command over the purchasing behaviour of recipients and humanitarians’ own capacity to choose how they distribute aid, he said “we’re not contributing to the dignity of the family, but rather we’re just giving them the assistance as we see fit, not as they need.”

This example illustrates how ritualistic conditionality rules compel an important yet difficult form of repair work labour from humanitarians. As hermeneutic labour, humanitarians are forced to decipher the interests and motivations of both donors and recipients. Through this deciphering work, humanitarians like Ramsay determine if and how these competing interests can be reconciled so as to maintain their relationship with both groups of stakeholders. This is heavy on workers’ psyche; they have first-hand insight into what recipients’ urgent, vital needs are, and can thus understand where funds are best placed, but are still accountable to purposeless mandates such by donors.

Regardless of this valuable knowledge, practitioners and recipients are restricted by the commands of their “higher ups” who are removed from the ground and thus set disingenuous and unnecessary purchasing rules. This discourages humanitarian practitioners who are in a tough position as they must implement regulation even when they do not agree with it. As such, amounting to ritualism, the proliferation of and emphasis on conditionality has lost sight of broader humanitarian goals: alleviating the suffering of those in need (Braithwaite et al., 2007). This goal is not achieved because the desire to implement conditionality as regulation overshadows, and is prioritised over, delivering on the actual objectives. This has led to an expansion of conditionality logics and practices without cause, merit, and purpose. Therefore, the design and implementation of ritualistic conditionality reflect a fixation on the means of accomplishing goals rather than actually solving aid delivery issues.

Another implication of conditional welfare spending is that recipients get less value from their grants. Recipients of the UN’s digital banking cards reported wanting to purchase subsidised goods because they are much cheaper, which enables recipients to maximise their limited amount of welfare money. However, given that the Lebanese government wants to preserve the limited amount of subsidised items for the Lebanese poor, they have prohibited refugees from purchasing most subsidised goods. This logic is programmed into the digital banking card. As Mohammad said, the card prevents refugees from making digital transactions with the card at shops that are not contracted by the WFP. While refugees have over 500 shops to choose from, these shops primarily stock unsubsidised items and shop owners have been instructed to prevent the purchase of subsidised goods using the UN’s digital banking card.

As such, on the one hand, digital banking card technology is imbued with the social logic that discrimination against refugee recipients is acceptable and that excessive discipline of welfare recipients’ conduct is warranted and necessary. On the other hand, the banking card helps enforce conditionality, which reveals how the banking card is a powerful actor that is capable of action. Its programming and ability to communicate with cash registers at local shops reinforces the regulatory burden over welfare recipients by shaping overly constricted purchasing behaviour, acting out government decrees, and compelling discriminatory behaviour at local shops. Because recipients have the option of withdrawing cash from their banking card, Mohammad observed that some have used this cash to buy subsidised goods. As

a strategy to work around unreasonable conditionality limits on welfare spending, this repair work sustains refugees' access to a greater amount of aid and enables a more meaningful achievement of humanitarian objectives to help mitigate insecurity.

Repair work that goes into accessing non-digitised welfare (i.e., cash) so as to circumvent digital controls on the card used to be an effective strategy to enable recipients to avoid being detected as welfare recipients who are required to purchase more expensive, subsidised items. However, since Lebanon has a cash shortage and because ATMs are hard to reach and operate, many end up using the digital banking card for its POS capability. And, as Omar states, the use of cash instead of banking cards does not necessarily solve the problem “because of the liquidity of the money and the inflation that it creates if we provide the cash.” These reasons add further credence as to why conditionality is ritualistic. Limits on spending make it look like rules are implemented in recipients' best interests. On the ground, however, such regulation does not achieve its aims; there is no evidence that restricting purchases to WFP-contracted shops prevents illicit behaviour (e.g., Cambanis, 2021) – only that it limits purchases of less costly, essential items, which fuels the marginalisation of refugees. Ritualistic conditionality is therefore made possible by subjective and selective considerations of “risks” and “issues” that regulation and its technologies must tackle.

Mandating and implementing conditionality become more important than the efficacy and helpfulness of the rule itself. The notion that conditionality has ritualistic logics has been supported by others. For instance, there is evidence that conditionality does not work in terms of creating more responsible recipients (Borchgrevink, 2008) or increasing public support of the regulator (Dasandi et al., 2022). Even though conditionality is ineffective and struggles to meet its aims, resisting conditionality is simply not an option for most humanitarian agencies that rely upon such funding. This is especially the case given that “funding isn't keeping up with the needs” (Loy, 2022, n. p.), and UN funding for non-Ukraine operations has dropped significantly in recent years (Fassihi, 2022). The ritualism of conditionality thus relies upon donors' capacity to dominate spending in order to coerce the obedience of humanitarian workers and recipients. Documentary ritualism, which is discussed next, evinces similar attributes in which regulation enforces tokenistic rather than meaningful compliance.

7.3.3 Documentation: Mandatory bureaucratic and administrative protocols and rules

Since the 1990s, the aid sector has witnessed growing bureaucratisation, managerialism, professionalisation, and marketisation (Fiori et al., 2016; Rességuier, 2018). Humanitarians are increasingly mandated to conduct administrative and clerical work to prove their “managerial and technical capabilities to administer, monitor and account for project funding” (Choudry & Kapoor, 2013, p. 9). Examples include filling out forms to warrant all expenses (including those that are miniscule), having to check the compliance of all personnel and external partners (no matter how time-consuming and resource-sapping), and submitting layers of approvals to “higher-ups” to review requests (no matter how excessive such approvals are). Administrative work aims to reinforce the credibility of humanitarians’ activities, turning them into “qualified” and “professional” workers who can be trusted with aid money and to intervene in crisis contexts (Walker & Russ, 2011). Formalising and quantifying administrative procedures thereby attempts to assess, reduce, and eliminate humanitarian risks (Ungsuchaval, 2016). The growing adoption of information communication technologies for administrative work supposedly adds additional benefits to aid labour, reducing the cost and slowness of clerical activities and service delivery (Mubaraka, 2013).

As participants described, the routinisation of bureaucracy garners unnecessary and ceremonial administrative requirements. This has been confirmed by research in different contexts, like a 2008 peer review of the UNHCR conducted by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), which found that “UNHCR staff complained of being bogged down in paperwork and constrained by bureaucracy” (Türk & Eyster, 2010, p. 167). Similarly, the International Rescue Committee’s Deputy Director of EU, France and Germany Strategic Partnerships, Jean-Yves Penoy, and his colleagues (2017, n. p.) found that the administrative aspects of these partnerships have begun to draw substantial time and resources away from the people that the institutional donors are trying to help.

Proliferating excessively burdensome clerical work evinces a specific type of ritualism, “documentation ritualism,” in which workers must endlessly document compliance with even the smallest of protocols. As Braithwaite (2008) finds, extensive documentation does not result in better or more welfare assistance, but it serves as a ritual of comfort by confirming that action has been taken to put checks in place. Documentation ritualism reflects David Graeber’s

(2013, 2015) idea of “bullshit jobs”, namely “extra” administrative tasks that involve following rules and procedures that unnecessarily occupy a huge portion of work time. I find that Lebanon’s humanitarian community are regulated through ritualistic, “bullshit tasks” that do not always add value, but they do add feelings of discontent and futility about workers’ jobs – especially in regards to their autonomy and ability to impactfully alleviate the suffering of those in crisis. The quality of humanitarian action is diminished, fuelling what Hugo Slim (2020, n. p.) calls “task-impact distance,” in which bureaucratic demands create “long chains of cumulative actions” that mean work takes even longer to make an actual impact.

Several INGO representatives emphasised how bureaucrats prioritise and obsess over the *completion* of administrative requirements rather than the *added value* of administrative requirements. Giving compliance more attention creates obstacles that delay the *raison d’être* of humanitarian work – assisting vulnerable groups.

For instance, when talking about their biggest challenges in responding to the Port explosion, Zaina pinpointed the “very exhaustive internal procedures” mandated by their organisation, partners, and donors. She said such work in practice actually “add[s] additional restrictions and barriers” to their work. This is because administrative protocols for minute tasks and approvals like the disbursement of a one-off lump sum of cash to a family are not only time consuming and delay their other activities; they also *prevent* lifesaving activities because such administrative protocols are overly strict, thereby contravening the achievement of broader humanitarian mandates.

A different INGO worker, Jafaar, shared this sentiment that bureaucratisation reinforced inefficiency, which limits their capacity to deliver lifesaving work. He stated that on a daily basis, “we’re actually spending most of our time on administrative procedures, bureaucracy, paperwork, and compliance issues.” Here, “bullshit tasks”, namely the proliferation of ever more administrative and managerial techniques, have taken control of Jafaar’s work time. In order to adhere to INGO structures and policies, he has no choice but to comply. This division of Jafaar’s work time reflects a “ballooning” of the administrative work over and above “reduc[ing]... working hours” or improving the quality of work (Graeber, 2013, p. 2). Instead, they “take people away from the heart of their jobs, forcing them to undertake administrative tasks, follow rules, respect procedures” (Hibou, 2015, p. viii). Because documentary

requirements are “taking too long,” Mohammad noted that “in the meantime more people are falling into poverty.” In reflecting on bullshit tasks of documentary ritualism, administrative protocols have actually become not only “pointless” (Graeber, 2013, p. 2) but even harmful because they can exacerbate humanitarian needs in an already dire context of growing crises.

As these accounts suggest, humanitarians are confronted with predicaments in that they must comply with excessive administrative requirements, which inhibits them from committing to delivering emergency aid to vulnerable people. “In ritualised compliance” with administrative demands, humanitarians are consequently forced to “[meet] technical requirements for documentation [which] supersedes or substitutes for meeting regulatory goals and attending to deep principles” (Heimer & Gazley, 2012, p. 857). Such administrative work, therefore, mandates “surface compliance [that is] decoupled from day-to-day practice” (Heimer & Gazley, 2012, p. 853). So, although administrative requirements reflect participation in accountability measures, in practice, they deflect critical attention toward the burdensome impact of regulatory obligations (Charlesworth, 2010).

As the previous evidence suggests, humanitarians strive to maintain the daily operation of aid by complying with excessively burdensome administrative protocols so as to not cause further issues that would delay aid. This constitutes repair work that is limited by power over, or domination over, their work practices. A major consequence is that in regimes of documentary ritualism, the genuine promotion of rights and care are of less interest and get lost. Jafaar’s comment on humanitarian bureaucracy evinces this burden of documentary ritualism, in which workers may be “get[ting] the documents right” but they are getting “the care wrong” (Braithwaite et al., 2007, p. 221):

...for any expense over \$100 I have at least 14 members going through it. There has to be a requisition. There has to be a financial review. There has to be a procurement, revision and budget compliance. A manager has to approve it. Is that the most efficient? If the private sector worked the way we did, they’d never get anything done. I had policy procedures that, not because of the disaster situation, but because of our legislation, required that I signed certain documents with a blue pen. So, I am asked why haven’t I come up with the most innovative way to deliver cash, while on the other hand, I have

policies that demand that I sign certain documents with blue pens. And this is the world that we're stuck in.

This quote illustrates how Jafaar engages in repair work by superficially complying with documentary ritualism. While using a blue pen and mobilising over a dozen staff members to review miniscule expenditures reflect the ritual of administrative documentation, it is required to keep cash delivery going amidst regulatory excess. Nevertheless, the consequences of documentation ritualism fall onto workers. As Jafaar's comments reveal, unnecessarily burdensome administrative rules take time and resources away from improving the delivery of cash. In doing so, documentation ritualism has strayed from its intended purpose of strengthening aid – an irony that Braithwaite (2008, p. 146) characterises as “the ugly face of ritualism.”

My participants framed many mandatory administrative protocols as ritualistic in reflecting arbitrary rule-making for the sake of having rules rather than being practical (Braithwaite, 2008). I am not saying that all administrative rules and requirements are unnecessary, but that the strictness and frequency at which they are applied are unnecessary. This has made administrative requirements lose their radical potential for accountability and turned them into “a more technical exercise of creating ‘responsible’ workers – and even this aim is not necessarily being realised with administrative demands (Charlesworth, 2010, p. 11).

In response to the domination of documentation ritualism, humanitarians can sometimes employ relational qualities of flexibility and spontaneity. Like in many social relationships, avoiding being rigid and fixed on one's own needs, desires, and methods enables healthier interpersonal relationships. And, of course, since aid delivery is premised on relationships – with colleagues, recipients, partners, donors, infrastructures, and technologies – to be able to adapt and be flexible in relationships can translate into more genuine aid delivery. In the case of crisis response for the Port explosion, the atypical, abrupt, and unexpected nature of the Port explosion gave several humanitarian groups the green light to side-step these regulatory restrictions and rituals. Doing so, they could be more flexible with aid delivery, which led to delivering aid faster and delivering the types of aid that were needed most at the time.

For instance, Zain works for an NGO in Lebanon to support gender inclusion through a range of initiatives like cash and education. He said his NGO could use their funds as they saw best, which meant delivering aid that, under normal circumstances, would require significant amounts of approval. He was not the only humanitarian with this experience but his account offers a clear example of regulatory flexibility as repair work:

... we used those funds to procure hygiene kits for COVID at the beginning, and then food after the blast. With the economic crisis we provided shelter for people, we distributed water, we distributed blankets, and we distributed mattresses. So those things that are not in our typical scope, we could step into activities that we are not used to... we could shift our priorities.

Zain's example provides evidence of what a future with less documentation ritualism would look like. As repair work, they took advantage of the blast being exceptional and removed red tape that typically prevents responsive humanitarian action. By letting go of documentary protocols that would previously have been a hindrance to delivering aid, their regulatory flexibility meant they could deliver aid in an efficient manner and deliver goods and services better reflective of the needs of residents in crisis rather than sticking with the pre-approved forms of aid that agencies typically offer. In being flexible, Zain was able to better support the needs of recipients, which consequently supports his INGO's working relationship with their recipients.

Overall, the proliferation of administrative demands reflects the perseverance of rules even if they are excessive, unwarranted, and reduce practitioner and recipient wellbeing. Documentation exhaustion – which is fostered by ritualistic rules rather than rules borne out of necessity – takes away from the capacity to deliver life-saving aid, or at the very least, to deliver it in a timely and cost-efficient manner. As a result of documentation ritualism, humanitarian organisations are exceeding “slow, risk-averse, procedural, [and] indecisive,” ruled by managers not frontline workers who are best positioned to make decisions about how to assist affected communities (Slim, 2015, p. 13).

7.4 DISCUSSION: REGULATORY RITUALISM AS DOMINATION

Existing accounts of regulation and its interrelationship with technology evince “arbitrary forms of interference and coercion,” which are a core feature of domination (Chung, 2005, p. 328). Domination, as “power over,” constitutes a particular type of power relation in which agency is restricted without upholding the welfare of subjects of power (Einspahr, 2010; Vrousalis, 2021). Participants’ reflections suggest that ritualistic regulation and its digital tools enact domination. They point to the restriction of choice, constraints on behaviour, and reinforcement of demands for accountability in a top-down manner. As a consequence of domination, staff and beneficiaries are hard-pressed to enact their own choices and take courses of action that they believe are fitting.

For instance, the perspectives of my participants provide evidence that reporting platforms and administrative requirements direct and steer staff conduct without giving them the capacity to choose their own activities. Staff cannot remove or avoid excessive and ritualistic regulations that dominate their time and workflow. Instead, they are forced to grapple with the delays, excess labour, and affective and material costs of reporting and administrative tasks. Often, their compliance is habitual and reflects the use of gendered and unrecognised labour such as emotional and hermeneutic labour. It is no surprise, then, that the proliferation of insincere and draining regulatory requirements – or, “hyper-regulation” – is unwanted by many humanitarians. As stated by Zaina, “... there are a lot of things asked by the sector. We were asking a lot from partners, and this is not something they necessarily want to do.” Not only does this quote reflect that regulation tends to add excessive and needless work to their already full plates; the lack of enthusiasm and perspective that Zaina and others do not choose to report reveals a domination stance. Staff are coerced to comply and take on added labour even though they disapprove of it.

Conditionality reflects a different kind of domination. Conditions on humanitarian assistance are set under the auspices of “care,” “counterterrorism,” and “fraud prevention,” acting as though it deters “irresponsible” conduct for the sake of recipients, residents, and other stakeholders. This benevolence is supposedly beyond critique (Temple, 2010). However, as my evidence has shown, such language camouflages that audit culture through conditionality is fundamentally dependent upon “hierarchical relationships and coercive practices” (Shore &

Wright, 2000, p. 62). Tiered relationships of power can be observed in conditionality in Lebanon's humanitarian context, particularly via domination that is asymmetrically exerted by donors over humanitarians and recipients. Donors enact domination by wielding their financial influence to obstruct decision-making about how programmes are designed, how funds are spent, and who gets sorted and excluded from aid. Constrictively shaping such behaviour subjectively serves donors' interests over what is best for regulatees' work and wellbeing. Conditionality is therefore inseparable from domination because it is fundamentally premised on using authority over regulatees to "exclude people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions" (Young, 1990, p. 31).

Looking at the specific actors enacting domination adds further weight to how such regulations are implemented without genuinely intending to deliver on the public-facing goal of the regulatory initiative. For example, the choice to roll out the reporting platform was not driven by the goal of effectively de-duplicating aid. Instead, as Rima claimed, the RegTech was influenced by the WFP's unilateral decision-making as the technical lead and their desire to continuously digitise regulation so as to appear credible and accountable in the eyes of their donors. As such, the de-duplication platform was perceived as being implemented regardless of whether it would effectively de-duplicate aid. As evidence of a relation of domination, the WFP thereby unjustly used their power over other humanitarian groups to compel the implementation of RegTech that simply could not deliver on the intention and goals behind the regulation.

In the case of conditionality, participants emphasised that conditionality is more in line with donors' political agendas, prejudice, and geopolitical interests. To secure these goals, donors enact a form of "class domination," in that they constrain people's decision making by making decisions about where and how "to invest their capital – a distributive decision" (Young, 1990, p. 21). This power asymmetry reinforces the ability for conditionality to be ritualistic, as rules that do not actually improve aid quality, accountability, or cost-savings can be instituted with little contestation and resistance. Instead, as domination, conditionality rules restrict workers' ability to deliver aid and recipients' access to aid based on their first-hand understanding of need. By doing so, ritualistic conditionality oppresses these subjects of conditionality by

limiting their capacity for “self-development,” self-determination, and agency (Young, 1990, p. 15).

In these divisions of labour, bureaucrats and funders are uniquely positioned to choose regulatory directives and make decisions about regulatory design. As coercive power that reinforces the use of coercive technologies, such domination feminises staff and leads to differences in experiences of power. Staff are forced to engage in gendered labour like emotional and hermeneutic labour. Even more, gendering takes shape as staff and recipients must pick up the slack behind the scenes when constrictive rule-setting backfires with consequences like stress and overly costly food items. Even though their repair work reflects clear expressions of agency and sometimes even resistance to domination (e.g., writing papers and attempts to access subsidised food), these gendered relations serve to reproduce inequality through regulatory work.

Domination thereby generates the exploitation of gendered labour. Bureaucrats, likely unknowingly, rely on this labour to manage humanitarian staff and to meet publicly-framed humanitarian goals like providing disaster response to impoverished groups in Lebanon. Domination through ritualistic regulation is also exploitative in that it extracts value primarily for those who make the rules rather than those who enforce rules and comply with rules. This not only reinforces inequitable relations in the sector, but because the repair work that I have recounted through this chapter is not formally recognised as labour, it continues to not factor into donor and bureaucrats’ assessments of the costs of accountability measures. Thus, domination has noteworthy, gendered consequences for labour and the sector more broadly.

In terms of relational repercussions and cohesion in the sector, domination makes it harder to align the needs of humanitarians (i.e., implementers of ritualistic regulation, those who are mandated to be complicit and controlled by regulation), the deciders of regulation (i.e., bureaucrats and policymakers who decide on regulation and enact domination), and the objects of regulation (i.e., the recipients they promise to help). This is because domination reinforces a top-down relationship in which competing needs, interests, and motivations cannot be collaboratively negotiated. Rather, domination forces humanitarians to choose whose needs to

uphold and whose to leave behind. Ultimately, staff are compelled to balance their duties to humanitarian institutions and donors over and above populations in need.

Domination through regulatory ritualism also reduces trust in the veracity and value of regulation. Regulatory scholar Valerie Braithwaite (2020, p. 255) discusses “trust” as an integral feature of strong and resilient regulatory relationships, defining it as “a relationship in which one accepts that another party will pursue courses of action that are consistent with one’s expectations and that will not undermine one’s position.” Regulatory ritualism strains relationships between regulators, humanitarian institutions, and their workers by encouraging staff to pester, supervise, and watch one another in order to meet regulatory demands. It also enshrines regulators’ lack of trust in humanitarian workers, reinforcing the logic that humanitarians fundamentally require intimate scrutiny in order for programs to remain on track. And, it makes it harder for humanitarian workers to trust that regulators are implementing sound regulation, or “doing what the organisation is supposed to do” rather than ritualistically demanding duties out of habit (Braithwaite, 2020, p. 251). This generates strenuous and tense relationships premised on suspicion. Further, by straining humanitarian workers and cultivating a tense work environment, such a relationship is not durable or healthy for cooperative humanitarian governance.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Although regulation strengthens the appearance of responsible aid, resourcefulness, and accountability, participants’ reflections on their work present a different picture. Humanitarian workers express feeling micromanaged through strict regulations. They highlight that excessive regulatory controls on their behaviour lead to resource-consuming procedures, affective strains, and stifled coordination amidst crisis. These collective burdens and their relations of domination are so considerable that they question whether or not “regulatory objectives” are genuinely being met (Braithwaite, 2006, p. 18). The impediments posed by regulations on humanitarian work on the ground stifle staff and recipients’ faith in the positive attributes of regulation. In short, regulatory ritualism is framed as not supporting aid delivery, as it limits access to essential aid for society’s most vulnerable.

Digital technologies and platforms are crucial actors in this regulatory environment. Regulators view digitisation as a means to remotely pressure and shape regulatees on a large scale. This promise of control, often in the name of cost-savings, does not always serve the intention of making aid more responsible and impactful, which thus enables the implementation and enforcement of regulatory ritualism. A logic embedded in the use of RegTech in this space is “risk.” A high chance of misconduct is presumed to justify the rollout and digitisation of regulatory ritualism, especially the inclination to track behaviour and data – surveillance features embedded in regulatory technologies. Monitoring, however, does not only take shape in digitised regulations because administrative protocols could be said to create intimate records of humanitarian activities that make it possible to audit, understand, and ultimately command humanitarian behaviour.

While technology is purported to bolster the efficacy of regulation, it does not and arguably cannot address many accountability issues. From the perspective of my participants, technology does not actually curb humanitarian behaviour; rather, data and technologies have well-known gaps that make it difficult to deliver on its promises (e.g., Pink et al., 2018). In relation to reporting platforms, for example, it was clear that potential recipients can very easily work around de-duplication even if such circumventing is not intentional. In terms of conditionality, recipients can simply withdraw cash to access goods. In addition, as indicated by reporting, conditionality, and administration, regulation can actually produce more harm than good because it prevents access to goods and processes that would more efficiently complete humanitarian tasks and meet the unique needs of individual refugees. As illustrated here, regulators that do not consider the perspectives and needs of regulatees and regulatory enforcers can reinforce exclusion, discrimination, and strained work relationships.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This thesis has traced forms of labour that are devalued and overlooked yet are nonetheless integral to sustaining humanitarian interventions. As detailed in the chapters of this thesis, repair work entails minimalistic, routine, and unexciting responses to aim to restore the functionality aid disbursement. This constitutes some of the most impactful, pervasive, and common types of work in the humanitarian sector. Repair work responds to humanitarian breakdown, fragility, and decay are generative of forms of feminised labour that both navigate and replicate power relations. By seeking to repair impediments to aid programming, fractures in working relationships, and core infrastructures, repair work is critical to supporting lifesaving aid to society's most precarious.

This research, as a situated study of labour, aids in unearthing who is working behind the scenes out of public imaginaries. Adopting a feminist approach generated an in-depth understanding of how unacknowledged aid responses unfold on the ground and the specific circumstances that shape them, which helps illuminate structures of power that imbricate everyday labour. Lebanon is an ideal site to study these dynamics; the prevalence of disrepair from overlapping crises maps onto the nation's own colonial history and regimes of oppression that circulate through transnational disaster response and technologies of care and control (Kassem, 2020). Examining two cases of aid, digitised cash assistance and emergency response to the Beirut Port explosion, this thesis analysed how humanitarian repair work interfaces with the devaluation and manipulation of labour but also reflects creative expressions of autonomy that serve to question unjust practices. This on-the-ground labour reflects negotiations of power asymmetries that maintain interconnections, dependencies, conflicts, and asymmetries that are fundamental to how aid labour is structured and conditioned. Focusing on repair work serves to actively locate and illuminate where and how breakdown permeates the humanitarian sector. In short, repair work is deeply significant for making humanitarian landscapes liveable, workable, and fair, even if it does not get recognised as such. Conceptually, repair work contributes to our comprehension of how aid is materially and immaterially produced outside of and within formal humanitarian procedures.

Although this thesis has not focused solely on gender-specific dynamics among the identities of participants, it maintains a feminist sensibility through its focus on overlooked and unappreciated labour that sustains a larger system. This labour can be understood as feminised because, through relational processes, labour becomes aligned with gender as a social practice rather than gender as a static identity marker (Pullen & Simpson, 2009). Feminised repair work is unwaged, adopts feminine tasks like care and social reproduction, and is hierarchised in serving others who disproportionately extract value from appropriated labour. This feminist analysis has, in turn, traced who is engaging in forms of largely unacknowledged labour, including palliative care, relationship management, and other forms of work that are often not formally recognised as constituting labour. These dynamics can thus still be understood through the lens of gender: Gender, here, serves as an analytic tool “for theorising structures more than subjects” (Young, 2005, p. 22). In particular, it illuminates “a multi-faceted social structure that works in relation to other social structures, [and] produces complex and sometimes even contradictory” experiences of oppressive power (Einspahr, 2020, p.15). This thesis’ feminist approach to repair work therefore offers a new lens to understand how power structures are reflected in and through the sector’s labour relations. In doing so, this research has made an original contribution to critical humanitarian scholarship by actively demonstrating the utility of feminist approaches in situated contexts of significant humanitarian concern.

In highlighting the gendered consequences of repair work, each of the empirical chapters presents findings that complicate commonplace understandings of how the humanitarian sector should be improved, innovated, and amended. Humanitarianism does not emerge as neatly organised and linearly improving; it is constantly transforming through situationally specific breakdowns, how breakdowns are understood, and how they are acted upon. Each of the substantive chapters has revealed how humanitarian repair work not only reflects inequalities and mundane forms of labour but also reconfigures the humanitarian landscape. For instance, Chapter 4 examined how digital infrastructural power is generative of offloaded work. This enables transferring the onus to manage breakdown onto workers who do not control such infrastructures. By enabling United Nations (UN) agencies to accumulate value from uncredited and underrated work, repair work thereby reveals new routes for extraction. Chapter 5 revealed how the localisation agenda, as a form of repair, is changing how local actors are selectively valued. Despite seeming inclusionary, predatory inclusion, delocalisation, and

paternalism support mechanisms of invisibilisation that reinforce continued colonial dynamics and locals' exclusion from labour structures.

Chapter 6 uncovered a novel perspective on humanitarian strategies, from crisis response to palliative care as repair work. Palliation suggests that humanitarian work was preoccupied with maintaining survival rather than fixing systems or striving to meet humanitarian objectives. This reconfigures where harm is located and how it is managed, and offers evidence that questions the limits of care work. Chapter 7 analysed how broader shifts towards more regulation in the sector are generative of forms of emotional, relational, and other kinds of mundane labour that react to forms of domination. These practices reflect the dynamism of humanitarian labour, in that workers and non-human actors, including but not limited to digital infrastructures and platforms, are continuously interacting to constitute humanitarianism in action.

Relatedly, a core contribution of this thesis has been identifying and capturing the many kinds of labour enacted within the everyday of humanitarianism and how such labour is differently experienced. As a marked shift from literature that emphasises official politics, elite actors, and large-scale reforms and programming (see, for example, Zetter, 2021), these findings emphasise the salience of mundane spaces, actors, tasks, strategies, and relations to humanitarian labour. My empirical analysis has uncovered types of gendered humanitarian labour that have not yet been investigated. Although feminised repair work takes on unspectacular forms, these findings suggest that the effects of humanitarian repair work are quite spectacular. That is, repair work is incredibly powerful and has a wide reach of influence. It enables access to life-saving aid and advocates for more equitable structures and accountable decision-making. In doing so, this analysis has illuminated much-needed critiques of harmful and broken-down practices and institutions that make crisis response less responsive to crisis.

This chapter summarises the contributions of the thesis, considering the four dimensions of repair work that stand out across the analysis. First, technosocial systems figure in each of these chapters as a core area in which repair work is enacted, negotiated, and made unequal (8.1). Second, regulation and governance operate as key sources of social, technological, and institutional control (8.2). Third, repair work interfaces with and sustains divisions in the

humanitarian sector, which suggests broader tensions in humanitarian governance (8.3). Fourth, inequality is part and parcel of repair work in humanitarian interventions—it compels repair, is generated by repair, and complicates understandings of repair (8.4). These dimensions will be examined in more detail in the following sections. I conclude with final reflections and future research (8.5).

8.1 THE DIGITISATION OF AID

Findings in this thesis evince the implications for labour related to broader shifts to digitise and dataify humanitarianism. In particular, in these digitised environments, technology and humanitarian firms are promising efficiency, streamlining work, and cutting costs, yet their technologies are generative of material burdens, delays in accessing aid, and the insecurity of recipients. Formal contracts do not account for or compensate repair work, which toils to restore, counteract, and pay for the issues reified by digitisation. On the one hand, deficient recognition of such burdens is partly related to “our capitalist society” in which “we tend to value work that we can see” (D’Ignazio & Klein, 2020, p. 178). On the other hand, these dynamics speak to a broader form of extraction and invisible labour politics embedded in the use and imbalances of digitisation, which other scholars have claimed transfer power in the hands of actors like humanitarian institutions, states, and corporations (Sandvik, 2023).

Chapter 4 focused on digital humanitarian infrastructures, including digitised cash assistance, digital identification (ID), and automated poverty targeting. It traced how these digital infrastructures created repair work that constituted forms of reproductive labour and recruited a broad range of workers into the reproducing digitised infrastructures. Such labour was deeply entangled with inequality; it distributes material costs to more marginalised groups and directly responds to the loss of autonomy felt by humanitarian staff and refugees. Chapter 5 examined a capacity-building platform, which, as a form of repair work, aimed to mend partnership structures that tend to exclude locals. Paradoxically, however, this platform reinforced the degradation and control of local labour by foreign aid organisations (FAOs) like the UN and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). Specifically, by reinforcing assumptions that FAOs are more skilled and should determine standards of what counts as accredited labour, the platform shaped valuations of labour alongside the digital cash assistance programme, which marginalised and exploited labour in its selection of partners. The design

of these systems reflected FAOs' beliefs in locals' inferiority and incapacity, ultimately contributing to their invisibilisation. Taken together, these chapters illustrate that technology can perpetuate invisible work in the aid sector—relegating “Others” to labour that is uncompensated, operates imperceptibly, and constitutes denigrated, supportive, and gendered work.

The sixth chapter on palliation examined how repair work related to digital banking technologies like automated teller machines (ATMs) and the currency of digital cash assistance led to the palliation of suffering. However, as shown, these forms of repair work merely postpone suffering, making it differentially manageable for some. Chapter 7's digital technologies contribute to shaping labour that is highly active but also repressed. This chapter focused on RegTech and the conditionality of digitised cash assistance. Ritualistic and domination effects driven by donors' and bureaucrats' push for technologised regulation compel important constraints on humanitarian labour. Such constraints consequently generate repair work that struggles to compensate for strict demands from coercive technologies, which requires managing strained work relationships, competing interests, and emotional labour.

Collectively, the four analysis chapters of this thesis capture how repair work does not simply respond *post hoc* to breakdown in digital technologies and infrastructures. Instead, digitisation and repair work co-shape one another. For instance, the choice to digitise is driven by repair work, and similarly, the choice to repair is driven by digitisation. As an example, the capacity-building platform was driven by the social logic that locals require proof of their skills in order to mend inequitable partnerships. But equally, this social logic is shaped by the notion that digitisation can help solve complex social problems like colonisation of the sector. Digitisation and repair work are deeply entangled and often co-constituted in practice. In this case, it would be impossible to disentangle the two when engaging questions related to the organisation, behaviour, and material dimensions of humanitarian labour.

This thesis illuminates social hierarchies, valuations, and regimes of power underpinning digital humanitarian labour. Feminised labour found in this thesis is not simply devalued and rendered peripheral even though it is central to humanitarianism—it is generative. That is, it reproduces digital infrastructures and data, forms tactics of (im)perceptibility applied to digital

humanitarian work, reinforces precarious work conditions for those facilitating care related to digital aid, and actively employs technology to compel work that has lost meaning and purpose. Failure to appreciate the repair work that goes into digital aid technologies has important “implications for opinion formation and decision-making in other contexts” (Ford et al., 2023, p. 14). For instance, there is the potential to reify opinions about humanitarianism that do not give credit to those who take on dangerous and labour-intensive work. It can also foster opinions that misunderstand who the beneficiaries of extractive labour are. These misleading views have noteworthy repercussions: upholding exploitative enterprises, silencing voices on the ground, neglecting communities in need of support, and commandeering workers’ time and resources in ways that contribute to burnout. Therefore, this thesis has shown that it is integral to recognise the devalued and gendered nature of digital humanitarian labour.

Even though repair work is often devalued, these findings highlight the agency of actors and labourers involved in digitised humanitarian aid. Repair workers frequently engaged in dissent, disagreement, and workarounds as part of their everyday engagements in humanitarian systems. They actively struggle with, negotiate, and contest oppressive relations through their labour, asserting forms of autonomy that also reveal their recognition of non-human agency. In other words, my participants were very open about the fact that they saw forms of technology influencing their behaviours, attitudes, and institutions. As such, their labour both responds to and is constituted by technosocial systems. Given that many of the technologies examined here are applied in sectors beyond welfare and humanitarianism, such as policing, border control, e-government, and supply chains, the implications can inform studies of other sectors.

8.2 A CASE STUDY FOR ADVANCING FEMINIST APPROACHES TO REGULATORY GOVERNANCE

This research has made a small contribution to the larger field of humanitarian governance by encouraging a stronger focus on grounded and situated experiences of regulation and governance and revealing experiences that question the legitimacy of well-known human and non-human regulators. Governance is central to understanding how and why forms of power are enacted in the name of achieving objectives. This is particularly true of mundane forms of governance such as repair work, which employs ordinary tactics, materials, and relations in order to organise and manage breakdown (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013). Mundane governance

is also central to understanding who and what engages in governance that might not be recognised as authorities shaping the course of events. Consider, for example, the case of refugees and workers who seek to exert power through their labour in Chapter 4. They may not be considered influential or high in status, but they continue to engage in governance by activating nodes within techno-social networks and seeking to influence other actors to make institutional behaviour accountable. Highlighting their influence attests to the importance of situated studies that examine governance closely in micro settings.

Another mundane dimension of repair work is how it takes shape and unfolds in intimate spaces, like workers visiting refugee homes to decipher and deter fraudulent behaviour. It leverages mundane objects as governance tools, like augmenting ATMs in order to influence banking practices. It relies upon mundane relations, like leveraging allies in the community through *wasta*—that is, drawing upon one’s social network for access to social goods—to make access to healthcare for transgendered people permissible. And, it utilises routine forms of information for governance purposes that are produced by inequitable divisions of labour, such as collecting refugees’ complaints in order to maintain algorithms without compensating refugees’ unpaid labour. Characterised as being ordinary and everyday, these contours indicate how repair work labour constitutes an integral form of mundane governance.

These mundane forms of governance also illustrate the importance of regulation, which reflects broader shifts whereby power increasingly operates by regulating behaviours from a distance rather than directly controlling entities (Parker & Braithwaite, 2003). As emphasised in my interviews and fieldwork with humanitarian staff, regulation was a central theme throughout this thesis. Regulation, as scholars acknowledge, is of central concern to support “demands for better, fairer, more efficient, and more participatory systems of governance” (Braithwaite et al., 2007a, p. 1). For these reasons, this research’s insights on regulation align with a feminist approach to humanitarian labour that attempts to highlight inequities and advance more just approaches.

The substantive chapters unpacked the many ways that regulation implicates humanitarian repair work amidst overlapping crises. Chapter 4 revealed how issues with humanitarian infrastructures encourage humanitarian workers to regulate the UN—by leveraging, separating,

and contesting. This social regulation aims to counteract the inequities and breakages of infrastructural power with monopolistic tendencies. In Chapter 5, I examined how localisation as repair work led to the regulation of local actors' behaviour, decision-making power, and participation rights. Chapter 6 took a different approach to regulation by focusing not on the regulation of actors like people and institutions but on the regulation of decay and suffering. Palliative care repair work led to the management of risk by debating and moderating who suffers, for how long, and under what conditions. The final substantive chapter focused on regulation as its analytic focus as well as drew upon the concept of "regulatory ritualism." It revealed how RegTech, conditionality, and administrative regulations led to workers being hard-pressed to secure their objectives and interpersonal relationships amidst such meaningless yet dominating regulation. Together, these chapters revealed how regulatory systems, practices, and logics increasingly interface with larger, more globalised processes—like digital transformation, localisation, palliative care, and audit culture.

As evidenced by my analysis of repair work and its regulatory contours, the thesis adopted a broad view of regulation. Rather than approach regulation as formalised or legalistic forms of control like rules or standards (e.g., Dean, 2014), the empirical chapters conceived of regulation as any attempt to influence, change, and manage behaviour (see, Parker & Braithwaite, 2003). This approach enabled drawing upon insights from regulatory studies and adjacent fields like global governance and surveillance studies. Doing so was important for making regulation perceptible even when it is not readily apparent or it does not fit traditional conceptualisations of "regulatory power." Correspondingly, my analysis was one of the first to apply regulatory governance insights to studies of repair work (for an exception, see Webber et al., 2022). This focus enabled highlighting logics embedded in how people make sense of their work—the desires to drive outcomes, create influence, and monitor the activities of groups considered to be at risk of contravening goals. It aided in unpacking relationships between labour, control, and welfare and to consider how forms of digital and non-digital surveillance shape repair work practices.

8.3 THE TENSIONS OF REPAIR WORK

While repair work aims to mend breakages, fix issues, and fill gaps to restore order, it simultaneously reifies divisions in the humanitarian sector. In other words, even though it

reflects attempts to mitigate breakdown, such labour contributes to breaks in relationships, knowledge, institutions, and groups of people. It is important to understand the inseparability between breaks and mending so as to fully appreciate the implications of repair work labour.

Consider, for example, how repair of digital and data-intensive humanitarian infrastructures expands the distance between the UN and its humanitarian partners and refugee recipients, which is the focus of Chapter 4. The control of cash assistance, digital ID, and algorithmic targeting encourages repair work in the form of opposing, separating, and emancipating from UN programming. Refugees are forced to fill gaps in ID data and mend its malfunctioning as compared to the UN who relieve themselves of engaging and paying for such labour. The algorithmic assessments enable the UN to evade responsibility and create distrust in the UN's capacity to determine aid eligibility. Offloading and creating animosity about aid labour thereby reifies rifts in relationships and makes closeness and accountability even more difficult.

In Chapter 5, I have shown that while localisation aims to sustain humanitarian practice, its inequitable partnership models invisibilise local labourers and their work. Locals are included but only in lower tiers of funding and partnership arrangements. They may be selected for aid delivery, but such selection devalues and washes the value of "localness" with transnational features. Efforts to build local capacity innately enshrine a gendered "Other" whom is characterised as distinctly deficient, and thus in need of training, as compared to transnational actors whom are positioned as coaches, teachers, and standard sett(l)ers. Repair work actually cements divisions between locals and FAOs, which consequently reifies the colonial power dynamics it seeks to dismantle.

Chapter 6 revealed how repair strategies amounting to palliative care classify and divide the recipients of humanitarian aid. As migrant populations, refugees are classified as deserving lower qualities of palliative care and longer durations of suffering. Demarcating refugees in this way, the humanitarian sector was able to justify how they could grant Lebanese citizens access to more impactful aid first. This publicly recognisable partition of refugees from Lebanese citizens insulated the nation's government and transnational humanitarian community from critiques levied by heavily impoverished Lebanese nationals who felt sidelined and saw themselves as suffering more than refugees. By evaluating populations'

differing levels of deservingness, palliative care-as-repair reifies tensions in which they are both caring for and disenfranchising populations at the same time. They are both supportive and nurturing as well as harmful and oppressive.

In the final substantive chapter, regulatory ritualism counteracts humanitarian attempts to facilitate aid delivery and manage working relationships. Domination compels humanitarian workers to negotiate promises to, and choose between, various stakeholders. These stakeholders are humanitarian staff (i.e., implementers of ritualistic regulation, those who are mandated to be complicit and controlled by regulation), the deciders of regulation (i.e., bureaucrats and policymakers who decide on regulation and enact domination), and the objects of regulation (i.e., the recipients they promise to help). Together, these three groups are pressed to reconcile and harmonise their distinct interests due to excessive control and burdens posed by regulatory ritualism that exerts domination. This reflects a paradox in which support for regulation grows amongst the deciders of regulation, but in doing so, thwarts humanitarian goals of helping those suffering from crisis.

Paradox is thus endemic to repair work. Cymene Howe and their colleagues (2016) contend that “paradox” is integral to conceptually and materially unpacking infrastructures. In this case, digital humanitarian infrastructures are steadfast and long-lasting as much as they are fragile and transient. Infrastructures are built and come together to mitigate risk just as much as they generate new kinds of risk. Infrastructures reproduce and construct as much as they dissolve and decay. In my case, the paradox of repair work tells us that we cannot simply implement reforms to make labour equal or fair, whatever that may mean. This is because power asymmetries have not been fully eradicated but are instead (re)distributed and (dis)placed elsewhere. As a result, people on the ground are forced to navigate the tensions of repair.

Accordingly, this thesis contributes to existing literature on “technosolutionism.” The term refers to the underlying belief that technology has the capacity to solve social problems (Morozov, 2013). However, by understanding the tensions of technosocial repair work, this thesis has contributed further evidence to why beliefs in technosolutionism do not and cannot account for the complexity of technosocial phenomena. Rather than (social) “problems” and (technological) “solutions” being opposite ends of the spectrum, the contradictions of repair

highlighted here suggest that they bleed into and influence one another. Illuminating the contingency of technosocial relations suggests how restorative work is embedded within and creates relations and subjectivities that support (de)stabilisation in technosocial systems.

This character of humanitarian repair work helps us understand how such labour and its supposed technological “solutions” continue to reify inequitable and laborious forms of humanitarianism that have been well documented in critical humanitarian literature for decades. Humanitarian repair is conducted with benevolent intentions and the aspiration of alleviating suffering yet, as shown, it has the potential to concretise longstanding forms of exploitation, destitution, conflict, and claims-making. Scholars like Graham Hancock (1989) and David Mosse (2004) have identified and observed these sets of tensions in relation to humanitarian governance and poverty alleviation for decades. Their work suggests that it is a long-time dilemma that do-gooders in the aid sector contravene the interests of their stakeholders, especially those who are marginalised by existing structures of marginalisation. My findings here suggest how historical tensions between doing “good” and doing “bad” uncovered by scholars like Hancock and Mosse (2004) become reconfigured in the contemporary moment as they take shape in highly situated interactions.

Such reconfigurations, especially those that involve the use of data and technology, complicate existing imaginaries of reform, solutions, and even equity in the humanitarian sector. For instance, the reconfigurations noted throughout the thesis complicate and contradict the World Economic Forum’s proposal for three strategies to fix funding (WEF, 2019). To view reform and its technological tools as primarily offering solutions does not reflect the findings of this thesis—that each attempt to repair and maintain, in turn, reflects and creates further divisions and tensions.

8.4 TECHNOSOCIAL SYSTEMS AND INEQUALITY

This research makes a contribution to understanding contemporary formations of inequality by scrutinising what it costs to engage in repair work, how it shapes social understandings of difference, and the breakdown it responds to. Focusing on the labour and labourers of repair work was central to how I captured repair work’s power disparities and precarity. In studying

how labour is constituted, enacted, and challenged, I revealed multiple work relations throughout the humanitarian system that react to inequitable hierarchies and regimes of valuation. This includes the backstage labour of formally employed people or “staff” (e.g., employees of humanitarian organisations, local shop workers) as well as non-traditional labourers (e.g., refugees, community members, family members) who are not formally employed to support crisis response. Making these categorisations even more complex, some staff are explicitly employed by the humanitarian sector (e.g., INGO employees), whereas others may be formally employed but they work for enterprises that are not principally concerned with crisis response (e.g., taxi drivers). I have shown how seemingly distinct labourers enrol in repair work but are differently compensated, acknowledged, and governed.

In another way, this thesis has emphasised how certain forms of repair work aim to counter contemporary inequalities. The thesis has detailed different strategies, such as advocating for fairness in algorithmic decision-making (Chapter 4) to the labour that goes into keeping women in the workforce (Chapter 6). Nonetheless, despite these efforts, my findings reveal how power dynamics are often upheld in everyday life, which many others have framed as colonial and imperialistic (e.g., Duffield & Hewitt, 2013). While these characterisations are relevant, this thesis gives an in-depth examination of how these globalised power asymmetries are sustained. The thesis closely attends to how people practically navigate structures of power. It highlights how ordinary work can become the conduit for structures of power like colonialism, even as local actors try to manage and resist them.

Power in this context is cross-cutting; it is not linear. For example, sometimes INGOs are being dominated, and sometimes they are the ones exerting power. Power relations are ever-changing. Even though power in repair work is disproportionately afforded to some, especially UN agencies, donors, and INGOs, it is not as simple as characterising labour as being borne from the top-down power of humanitarian designers upon recipients. As shown, more “elite” actors often try to control agencies within their own organisations as well as one another. For instance, there are competitions between the UNHCR, WFP, and UN Women, which contribute to profit-seeking motives and policy-making that do not best reflect needs on the ground. The same applies to INGOs, civil society groups, and beneficiaries—for example, as captured in Chapter 6, Lebanese residents actively framing refugees as not deserving aid. Power is also enacted by non-human actors like technology, currency, and physical infrastructure, which

fundamentally shape the interactions of repair work. In sum, this thesis shows how, in the process of navigating power relations, humanitarian labour evinces shifts in the governance of precarity in which actors beyond states and markets are formative to the delivery of aid.

8.5 FINAL REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The insights offered in this thesis about humanitarian labour suggest that many workers' experiences are not only negative, but also disenfranchising. Many of the humanitarians I spoke to continue to navigate growing poverty, defunct political systems, discriminatory policy making, cross-border conflict, growing social tensions, and the erasure of migrant rights. This demanding context impacts the resources, agency, and accountability structures available to conduct meaningful repair work. Such limitations help explain why several of my participants reported that people “are losing patience and losing hope entirely” (Nora), and that many felt “nothing will change because the same people stay in power with the same mentality” (Kareem). As a result, humanitarian organisations have had to consider providing assistance for their own staff, so that staff can deal with the distress and hopelessness that is often endemic to being a humanitarian—which includes living in a place where colleagues continue to lose their homes, offices, and loved ones from disasters.

Scholars continue to report how humanitarian workers and civilians suffer from immense trauma, long-term consequences to mental health, and poor overall health related to stress (e.g., Rizkalla & Segal, 2019). These negative well-being outcomes are a result of not simply experiencing and working within disasters but also directly related to work demands, such as long hours, complicated tasks, unreasonably heavy workloads, and limited organisational support (e.g., Brooks et al., 2015). Women, in particular, are reported to have higher rates of burnout and stress than men in the humanitarian sector given they overwhelmingly take up direct service provision over management and leadership roles, and they continue to struggle to balance their aid work with parenting obligations (Korff et al., 2015). Given the aforementioned findings that women labourers disproportionately struggle with maintaining health, equity, and employment during crises, and given this thesis emphasised the gendered implications of repair work labour, future work should be dedicated to the gendered and intersectional implications of humanitarian well-being, welfare, and coping strategies. This is particularly important because current understandings are limited. How do humanitarians

create bonds and relationships to sustain their well-being? What routines do they take up to keep themselves afloat? Are there any technological resources (e.g., apps or videoconferencing) that enable them to persist? A repair work lens could prove useful to understand what actions are already being undertaken to maintain humanitarian livelihoods.

Correspondingly, Gemma Houldey (2022) dedicated a book to ending what she calls “burnout culture” amongst humanitarian organisations and their employees. Her book suggests that chronic burnout and staff turnover are not simply the product of working in a high stress environment, but are also rooted in questions of power, autonomy, [and] security (Houldey, 2022, p. 2). This suggests the need to move beyond psychology to understand the structural inequalities plaguing humanitarian worker wellbeing.

This thesis contributes by generating knowledge that centres the perspectives of those who are often pushed to “live within, between, and at the margins” (Enns et al., 2021, p. 11). It does this by re-centring localised practices in the Middle East—a region on the periphery of global policymaking, which has been subject to vilification, securitisation, and historic oppression by Western European superpowers (Kumar, 2020). At the time of writing, the Middle East has re-entered the forefront of public consciousness—a set of concerns that cannot be disentangled from the grave injustices against Palestinian people by the Israeli settler colonial state. As Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said (1979) writes, representations of the Middle East tend to suggest the region and its people are unprogressive and frail, which positions the West as superior in assuming that the East and West are opposites. In heeding these claims and centering the periphery, this thesis offers an up-close examination of the types of inequalities, labour relations, and forms of agency that operate on the ground amidst Lebanon’s many crises.

Taken together, my analysis has revealed that the inequities of labour cannot be fully discerned by looking at it from a macro scale. Donna Haraway (1988, p. 581), feminist scholar and historian of science, inspired situated research like this thesis in claiming that it is neither desirable nor possible to explain the world from a universalist perspective—“the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere.” Doing so poses many issues, such as denying the subjective and constantly changing nature of knowledge based on everyone’s unique positionalities, and does not allow for actors to have agency. The many forms of labour and their relationships to

structures of power become visible when looking close enough to discern the multiplicity of perspectives and positionalities of people engaging with humanitarian repair work. Localised research like this thesis is therefore productive for making claims about structures of power in Lebanon's humanitarian system by looking at repair work from a number of grounded perspectives in great detail rather than offering totalising accounts.

There are, however, limitations to this work. When first embarking on this research, I initially hoped to study the firsthand perspectives of wide range of refugees, including those of Palestinian refugees. I could not access refugee populations in person due to travel restrictions implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, increasingly strict restrictions into tented settlements, and growing security risks to refugees. To gauge some of their experiences, I largely drew upon second-hand accounts from humanitarian workers and reports from refugees in grey literature. These accounts tend to shed light on a particular group of refugees—those from Syria—and undeniably missed important contextual information and unmatched perspectives.

Future research should engage more deeply with refugees and their experiences in the field to ascertain how they negotiate breakdown and engage in repair work. This would enable insight on a wider group of refugees in the nation, including people of Palestinian, Iraqi, Sudanese, and Ethiopian heritage (UNHCR, 2023). Future research should also consider additional forms of migration and migrants such as migrant labourers, stateless peoples, asylum seekers, and the diaspora community. In connection, while I focused on the influence of, for example, intersecting structures of oppression like migration status and classism, my data pointed to deeper intersectional concerns for members of the LGBTQIA+ community, elderly, and disabled, amongst other marginalised identities that could not be fully unpacked in this thesis. Given the difficulties in accessing nuanced data, further research should engage in situated research of intersectionality in disaster response through the use of participant observation, photovoice, and other forms of data collection that get at individuals' daily lives. Collectively, by capturing a greater range of groups via firsthand engagement, we can gain a richer empirical perspective on how people with different positionalities experience the mundane of crisis response.

In sum, this thesis has captured how repair work is central to supporting humanitarian aid delivery. Such work is often feminised, devalued, and improperly compensated. An in-depth focus on labour helps enable further scrutiny on the forms of gendered work required to survive humanitarian conditions characterised by persistent disrepair. By focusing on backstage labour on the frontlines, we can generate a more robust understanding of what it takes to deliver aid, who is included, and who is left behind.

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