Glasman, Joe¨l: *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs. Minimal Humanity*. New York: Routledge 2020. ISBN: 9780367464165; 260 S.

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These are exciting times for the historiography of humanitarian interventions, a topic which is high on the list of transnational and global historical research and adds important elements to our understanding of postcolonial statehood and the legitimization of foreign interventions in the name of humanitarianism.[1] To this burgeoning field of research, Joël Glasman, who teaches African history at the University of Bayreuth, contributes an important new perspective, shifting attention away from diplomatic negotiations and the analysis of expert networks towards a science and technology studies (STS) perspective. He analyzes the conditions in which knowledge about basic human needs in the modern world has been created, or what he calls the „bookkeeping of human suffering on a world scale" (p. 2). Creating a standardized dispositif to collect, interpret, and apply data on the basic needs of human beings was central not only to the task of making data globally available but also to creating a common international basis for its commensurability. Glasman convincingly characterizes this assertion of the impartiality and universality of knowledge about human needs as „a view from nowhere" (p. 4)—in other words, one that is successful in concealing behind seemingly precise scientific concepts its own social and political origins as well as the multiple layers of negotiation that went into its making.

Glasman is part of a broader trend in historiography towards situating the so-called universal knowledge of a generation of „modernizing" agents who emerged out of the Cold War to establish a new international system with its array of multilateral organizations and NGOs.[2] His fundamental concern is to call into question the idea that scientific knowledge is needed to create concepts that can then be disseminated around the globe and applied towards solving practical problems for the greater good of humanity. Instead, he argues on solid theoretical grounds for a reversal of this perspective in order to recognize the many decisions that have to be made and negotiated in order to acquire reliable data. Consequently, the author goes back and forth between an international arena and very concrete localized situations in which data is collected, classified and instrumentalized.

In a first step, Glasman's analysis takes us to the ambitious attempts of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to define „impartial human needs," a quest in which Geneva-based lawyer Jean Pictet was the central figure and which culminated in the adoption of his definition by the ICRC's General Assembly in 1965. In the context of European post-Second World War relief, it is crucial to understand that human „needology" was not depicting a problem in other parts of the world but was central to solving Europe's own humanitarian crisis.

Instead of walking the reader further down the corridors of international organizations, Glasman strengthens his argument by taking us to a case study from Central Africa. Having experienced a series of humanitarian crises in the past five decades, this region is, testament to how the definition of basic human needs has not only captured the impoverishment of migrating refugee populations but has also contributed massively to the stereotyping of a region and even the African continent as a whole. Such forms of classification interacted strongly with the logics underpinning the establishment of international aid programs, especially refugee camps. The reader learns

[1] Among many other publications, see Didier Fassin, Humanitarian Reason. A Moral History of the Present, Berkeley 2011; Fabian Klose, In the Cause of Humanity. A History of Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century, Cambridge 2021; Fabian Klose (ed.), The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention. Ideas and Practice from the Nineteenth Century to the Present, Cambridge 2016.

[2] Nick Cullather, The Foreign Policy of the Calory, in: The American Historical Review 112 (2007) 2, pp. 337–364; Susan Greenhalgh, The Social Construction of Population Science. An Intellectual, Institutional, and Political History of 20th Century Demography, in: Comparative Studies in Society and History, 38 (1996), No. 1, pp. 26–66; Daniel Speich-Chassé, Die Erfindung des Bruttosozialprodukts. Globale Ungleichheit in der Wissensgeschichte der Ökonomie, Göttingen 2013.

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how international organizations struggled to understand and monitor the border-crossing activities of large population groups, including even those which were part of traditional migration patterns. A refusal to consult local populations and their knowledge was often the only method shared by local and international experts who were working on these classifications.

Yet, it is in the following chapters where the reader comes to fully understand the importance of Glasman's STS-led approach. By exploring the history of the practice of measuring children's mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC), the author demonstrates how a small and seemingly universal object, such as a tape for measuring children's arms, can reveal multiple layers of negotiation.[3] For a post-pandemic readership, there is perhaps less of a need to explain how small objects (such as antigen testing equipment) can „mediate between concepts and practices [and] render previous decisions invisible and forgotten controversies inaccessible" (p. 92). However, the fact that the many conflicts and negotiations behind specific technologies can so quickly become invisible to a broader audience also emphasizes the importance of Glasman's quasi-archaeological approach to such questions. Taking us to the origins of the measuring technology used in the Biafran War in late-1960s Nigeria, he demonstrates how humanitarian experts often acted as „off-road universalists" who diverted the concept of human needs from moral towards technological ground. For example, when experts introduced MUAC as a new method for measuring children's nutrition levels, these results were taken as representative of the whole population and used to assess and surveil their food consumption. MUAC thus became a means of „navigating chaotic contexts" in their entirety.

In the following section on the history of the so-called Sphere Project to define basic needs, Glasman seeks to emphasize how important it is to analyze new knowledge in its historical context. It is not wholly surprising to see that the criteria by which basic needs were defined was not in fact the result of an exchange of scientific arguments but rather the product of a highly politized debate among representatives from different countries within international organizations, as the author retraces in detail. Defining universal standards was only possible by reaching „decisions by apparent consensus," with their potential applicability in different contexts around the globe receiving less consideration.

The fifth chapter shows in fascinating detail how international organizations and NGOs stepped into the role of the state (in this case Cameroon) by enumerating the refugee population. Glasman refers to Fred Cooper's interpretation of the post-colonial state as a gatekeeper that has been constructed more to provide access to natural resources than to administer to the needs of its population. Through the example of refugees from the Central African Republic in East Cameroon, he succeeds in showing how the UNHCR's new „open-air bureaucracy" created a range of „trust issues" between enumerators and the refugees whom they were counting. The author applies anthropological methodology to bring to light how interviews generated ambiguous results that nevertheless had to be converted into reliable data.

The final chapter builds directly on these findings by exploring institutional conflicts—in this case, between the UNHCR and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA). It records how the interpretation of data, mediated by new algorithms, produced a common understanding of a region in need. Interrogating the study designs that led to these conclusions, Glasman demonstrates how these were often circular and directed attention to regions that supposedly suffered from a lack of food supply while overlooking smaller pockets of undernutrition. Still, the opportunity to use big data and sophisticated methodologies always seemed more appealing to international organizations than asking local people directly about their needs.

It is clearly one of the core achievements of Glasman's book that he presents a history

[3] Similar approaches can be found in Chikako Takeshita, The Global Biopolitics of the IUD. How Science Constructs Contraceptive Users and Women's Bodies, Cambridge/MA 2011; Jessy Olszynko-Gryn, Technologies of Contraception and Abortion, in: Nick Hopwood, Rebecca Flemming, Lauren Kassell (eds.), Reproduction. Antiquity to the Present Day, Cambridge 2018, pp. 535–551.

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of human „needology“ not from the perspective of one of the shiny international arenas but from a region defined as „in need“ of humanitarian intervention. This allows the author to connect an impressive historiographical account of the emergence of the use of anthropological indicators with seemingly unrelated social conditions in Central African refugee camps. As such, this also allows him to demonstrate how such criteria opened up new opportunities for the „targeted populations“ to act upon their own classification. Technicity (as expressed, for example, in the form of MUAC) not only acts as evidence of domination (Fassin), but it also allows itself to be appropriated, instrumentalized, or renegotiated, as Glasman demonstrates in the case of enumeration and classification processes in the Kenzou refugee camp in East Cameroon. At times, however, the narrative that emerges here depicts local people as lacking agency, and the close reading of the negotiations that went into the making of the Sphere Project remains an exception in a book that often does not name the experts behind the application and negotiation of specific techniques. A more rigorous interrogation of agency on various levels might have yielded even more comprehensive insights into Central African perspectives, going beyond his descriptions of local population´ astute manipulation of inappropriate categories and their reluctance to respond to the questions of international enumerators.

Nevertheless, the achievements of this study are far more important than its shortcomings. In particular, it is Glasman's sound use of theories from different academic disciplines that makes this book such a fascinating contribution to international historiography. For readers who are not familiar with the specific Central African context, the most impressive parts of Glasman's analysis are his attempts to turn his book into a multilayered history of technologies and techniques of identification and enumeration and the role that such biopower tools have played in the creation of international governmentality. Glasman's work thus provides the reader with very convincing and fresh perspectives that relate the local to the global in unique ways. As a consequence, reading Glasman is highly recommended not only for sociologists, global historians, political scientists, anthropologists, and STS researchers but also for practitioners in the field of humanitarian interventions.

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