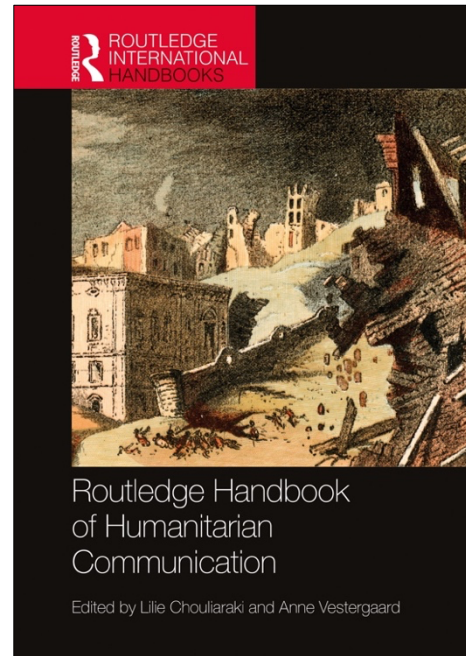Lilie Chouliaraki and Anne Vestergaard (Eds.), **Routledge Handbook of Humanitarian Communication**, London, UK: Routledge, 2021, 486 pp., $250.00 (hardback).

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Since the late 1990s, social scientists and humanities academics have shown a growing interest in an emerging field of humanitarian communication that focuses on the public practices of meaning-making that represent human vulnerability as a cause of public emotion and action. Although disciplinary foci and theoretical (and methodological) approaches have varied, key concerns can be paraphrased in terms of a paradigmatic *problématique*: whether—and if so, how—can the mediated discourses and techniques of human vulnerability cultivate a cosmopolitan public with a sense of social responsibility toward others? Recent years have witnessed enormous technological changes in the contemporary polymedia milieu, with the emergence of algorithmically infused platform societies, an increasingly complex and "wicked" global socioecological system, and widespread appeal for interdisciplinary efforts. These transformations have repeatedly pressured the critical scholarship on humanitarian communication to develop systematically.

The **Routledge Handbook of Humanitarian Communication**, edited by Lilie Chouliaraki and Anne Vestergaard, appears within the context of this shifting terrain of debate and research. The handbook is divided into three parts, consisting of 26 remarkable chapters written by 29 internationally renowned scholars who have contributed to laying the foundation of the field. It offers an authoritative, first-of-its-kind intellectual resource for clarifying plural, complex, and contentious conceptual and empirical issues. Essential to all chapters is the quest to seek measures that could theoretically, empirically, and interdisciplinarily address the three main challenges, as identified by Chouliaraki and Vestergaard, posed by the economic, political, and technological developments of the 21st century. These challenges are: (1) the neoliberal political economy of global humanitarian and human rights organizations; (2) the new politics characterized by the politicization of humanitarianism and the depoliticization of human rights, and (3) the platformization of suffering with its concomitant datafication and datacolonism of humanitarianism.

The handbook begins in Part 1 by summarizing the intense controversy around four core and concentrated humanitarian *domains*: disaster (chapter 1), development (chapter 2), human rights (chapter 3), and war (chapter 4). Each scholar vehemently expresses disquiet over those social structures that continuously produce global inequality, injustice, and poverty, and each persistently calls for more critiques within the field of humanitarian communication. This is particularly the case in chapter 2, where Helen Yanacopoulos criticizes the dominant mediators of development issues who only express the morally good on

the emotional level, without explaining the causes of structural injustices. Whilst most value-laden and duty-driven mediators have contributed to raising awareness of human vulnerability in the Global South, the Africanization, feminization, and infantilization of the fragility of the region in depoliticized narratives, in reality, establish a neocolonialist, paternalistic relationship or (re)consolidate the historical binary between the victimized Global South and benefactor North.

Part 2, "Methods," impressively highlights three key sites of mediation in empirical studies, namely audience reception (chapter 5), text (chapter 6), and production (chapter 7). Impressively, albeit nonexhaustively, Maria Kyriakidou's chapter (chapter 5) revisits the strands and trajectories of audience research in humanitarian communication, ranging from the qualitative interpretative approach of social constructionism to the quantitative hypothetico-deductive approach of realist positivism. The robust argument in Kyriakidou's chapter is consistent with her earlier series of empirical investigations, emphasizing the importance of the national sociohistorical context and specific sociocultural embedding of audience reception that might have been easily neglected in previous studies. Ethnography, as Jonathan Corpus Ong calls for in chapter 8, seems to be a vital tool for us to probe into how people's sociocultural scripts and contexts, and the politics of the everyday in their ordinary lifeworlds, shape their responses to mediated humanitarian catastrophes.

The third and final part, "Issues," is not as all-encompassing as it could be, yet it provides a valuable and productive resource to comprehend certain key themes of the present moment. The discussion is organized into three dimensions: (1) the power *politics* of humanitarian journalism, organizations, and capital platforms in global governance (chapters 9–14); (2) the humanitarian *economics* of celebrities, consumerism, marketization, and neoliberalism (chapters 15–20); (3) and the epochal spectrum from the *histories* of late modernity to the potential *futures* (as envisaged at this point in time) of digitization and posthumanitarianism (chapters 21–26). Given the variety of chapters, this part is valuable for acquiring a critical understanding of certain conversations within humanitarian communication. For example, Martin Scott, Kate Wright, and Mel Bunce, in chapter 14 ("The Politics of Humanitarian Journalism"), and Mirca Madianou, in chapter 11 ("Technocolonialism: Digital Innovation and Data Practices in the Humanitarian Response to Refugee Crises"), draw attention to the fact that digital innovation and journalistic practices may help to advance a technocratic illusion or technocolonialism in which global inequities and power asymmetries are constructed as a purely technical problem amenable to a logic of solutionism rather than as an issue concerning political and economic right. This leads to a convincing and alarming argument that technological and institutional practices could become constitutive of humanitarian crises themselves by reproducing the global asymmetries and entrenching the coloniality of power. This eloquence certainly provides insightfully critical theories for upcoming studies on technological phenomena, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality.

While the editors have made every effort to include voices and experiences from the Global South, most scholarly accounts in this handbook are still situated and conducted almost exclusively in the default Western context. It is not, therefore, surprising that the Western-centric characteristics of social sciences are rooted in the epistemological premises and the analytical traditions of Western political, psychological, and sociological theories, and fundamentally draw from frameworks of Western philosophy. Affirmatively, the Western-centric and (often) highly normative academia has been undoubtedly productive in this field: It not

only effectively reveals the dissonance and asymmetry between moral power and geographical regions but also reveals the patterns of economic and political agency that span regions of global influence (Orgad & Seu, 2014).

However, a plethora of Western-based national case studies may constitute a possible tendency toward "methodological nationalism" (Beck, 2009, p. 22) in that they ignore the endemic, interpenetrating, and proliferating nature of global crises pawned by globalization and the changing geopolitical situation (Joye, 2013). Given the changing ontology of disasters in a globalizing world, as well as their epistemological constitution through media and communications (Cottle, 2014), contemporary crises and disasters—from climate change to virulent pandemics, from financial meltdowns to world poverty, from economic risk to forced migrations—should be viewed as global phenomena that often necessitate global responses and have become profoundly reliant on transnational cultural mediation, as Mervi Pantti emphasizes in her discussion of disaster aid in chapter 1.

Unfortunately, it is particularly striking that the field has, until now, thinly focused on the non-Western rising power that is fueled by its recent economic success and rapid global impact and (semi)authoritarian contexts, and characterized by different political structures and experiences. Accordingly, Kyriakidou argues in chapter 5 that the imperative is thus to plea for more studies on non-Western cases and contexts, preferably by non-Western academics or a de-Westernizing of media and communication studies, thereby expanding analytical perspectives and bringing theories, epistemologies, and empirical research to the forefront of the studies of mediated humanitarianism (Joye, 2013). Yet, I would argue that there is a need for a more critical pedagogy, in that blindly following simplified calls for de-Westernization that are informed as an anti-imperialist strategy to nurture academic sovereignty may lead to new versions of intellectual parochialism. Scholars and analysts should pay attention to the specificity and potential incommensurability of local issues and indigenous theories. For example, the apparently clear-cut case of Chinese cosmopolitanism is unlike Kantian cosmopolitanism or the Stoic cosmopolitanism of Western genealogy, as it has a more multifarious provenance and trajectory and has shifted several times, from premodern Confucian universalism with Sinocentrism as its core belief to postsocialist "pessoptimism" (Callahan, 2010, p. 10) where cosmopolitan solidarity and nationalist xenophobia are interwoven, separated only by a fine line and easily able to trade places.

Nevertheless, like an encyclopedia, this extremely well-organized extensive anthology provides a comprehensive, integrated, interdisciplinary forum that would be of great interest to academics, policymakers, teachers, students, journalists, and practitioners, as well as general readers. But more than anything else, it highlights the need for further subdivision, systematic rigor, and greater theoretical and empirical efforts in the study of humanitarian communication.

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