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Journal

European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology, 11(1)

ISSN

2325-4823

Author

Lerch, Julia C

Publication Date

2024-01-02

DOI

10.1080/23254823.2023.2234455

Copyright Information

Peer reviewed

The Changing Meaning of Saving Lives: Cultural Understandings of Humanity in United Nations Humanitarian Resolutions, 1946 – 2018

Julia C. Lerch

University of California, Irvine

Forthcoming at *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*

May 7, 2023

Word count: 10,507

Direct correspondence to Julia C. Lerch (lerchj@uci.edu) 3151 Social Science Plaza, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA 92697.

The Changing Meaning of Saving Lives: Cultural Understandings of Humanity in United Nations Humanitarian Resolutions, 1946 – 2018

Responding to humanitarian crises is a prominent global domain, spanning thousands of relief agencies and billions of U.S. dollars. Amidst the potentially infinite needs arising in these crises, how are humanitarian priorities constructed? Existing answers are dominated by functionalist and critical perspectives, stressing obvious needs or geopolitics. This paper builds on sociocultural approaches to examine the changing understandings of humanity that underpin humanitarian priorities. Analysis of 659 United Nations humanitarian resolutions from 1946 to 2018 reveals an evolving vision of human life in crisis that shifts from initially narrow foci on displacement, survival, and livelihood towards a multidimensional vision today, anchored in rights-bearing and agentic personhood. Underpinning the evolution are striking expansions in how crisis-affected persons, and their needs, agency, and entitlements are imagined. The trends are not reducible to function and geopolitics but reflect macro-cultural shifts towards individualized and globalized conceptions of society, stretching humanitarian imaginations of a universally shared humanity.

Keywords: humanitarianism, world society, neoinstitutional theory

The Changing Meaning of Saving Lives: Cultural Understandings of Humanity in United Nations Humanitarian Resolutions, 1946 – 2018

Introduction

Humanitarian action plays a prominent role in global society. In emergencies worldwide – disasters, conflicts, and forced displacement – we find humanitarian agencies at work, attending to the needs of emergency-affected populations. Building on a long history of humanitarian practice and sentiment, the world humanitarian system emerged with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the 1860s, developed into a global apparatus with the establishment of the United Nations (UN), and experienced enormous growth in the post-Cold War decades (Fearon 2008). In 2018, global humanitarian assistance amounted to 22 billion USD and was delivered in 41 countries (UN OCHA 2019).

This article analyzes 659 humanitarian resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) between 1946 and 2018 for insight into the changing understandings of humanity that underpin this humanitarian enterprise. Existing work on humanitarianism is dominated by functionalist and critical perspectives, which see humanitarian priorities as reflecting obvious needs or geopolitical interests. In a departure, this article adds to a growing body of work that examines the humanitarian sector in sociocultural terms (Krause 2014; Dromi 2016a, 2016b, 2020; Rotem 2022a, 2022b). Humanitarian action rests on many cultural meanings, but above all, it builds on ideas of humanity (Malkki 2010; Barnett 2011). While scholars have long critiqued humanitarian equations of human life with bare survival (e.g., Fassin 2012), few analyses empirically examine *changes* in these notions: How is humanity conceived? What kind of human life is at stake? And how do these emphases change over time?

Overall, my analysis of UN resolutions reveals remarkable expansions in humanitarian conceptions of humanity over time, encompassing expanded notions of the kinds of human persons assisted by humanitarian action, the kinds of human needs envisaged as arising in emergencies, and the extent to which humans are imagined as having agency and entitlements in crises. Drawing on the world society perspective (Meyer et al. 1997), I argue that these trends are not mere reflections of material needs or geopolitical realities. Instead, they are usefully situated within broader cultural shifts towards individualized and globalized conceptions of society (Boli and Thomas 1999; Meyer and Jepperson 2000; Frank and Meyer 2002; Elliott 2011, 2014), which have facilitated expanded humanitarian elaborations of a universally shared humanity.

Despite the prominence of humanitarian action, the topic has received little attention from sociologists. And yet sociological perspectives have much to add, especially by illuminating constructionist processes in the recognition of humanitarian needs and populations. The article thus contributes to humanitarian scholarship and cultural sociology by examining the humanitarian sector as continuously evolving terrain for the world cultural construction of humanity.

Background: The World Humanitarian System

My focus is on the humanitarian system that emerged in the 1860s and institutionalized into a global field in the 20th century. The term 'humanitarian' is older and dates to the promotion of human progress across racial and national differences in the late 18th century (Calhoun 2008). These early 'humanitarian' movements set out to "address the slave trade and slavery, to establish more humane punishments, and to improve the general human condition" (Redfield 2012, 457). This era also saw Voltaire's famed appeals to identify with a distant victim via a shared humanity after the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, compressing spatial and national boundaries (Illouz 2003). A

rich literature examines these early 'humanitarian' sensibilities, situating them, for instance, within the rise of liberal society (Haskell 1985; Sznaider 1998) or imperialism (Stamatov 2013).

Notwithstanding this longer history, the establishment of an autonomous humanitarian sector committed to saving lives came with the 1863 foundation of the ICRC and the 1864 Geneva Convention (Krause 2014; Dromi 2020). Both focused on protections and care for victims of war, calling for a neutral space wherein they could be assisted without nation-state interference (Finnemore 1999). While these principles were initially controversial, the ICRC was so successful in legitimizing them that "by the late 1870s, Red Cross societies had appeared across Europe and beyond" (Dromi 2020, 3). The early 20th century brought more humanitarian engagements. For example, World War I catalyzed the founding of Save the Children, and the Russian revolution the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Russian Refugees, which later became the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (Barnett and Weiss 2008).

A more dramatic boost came after the Second World War and then again following the end of the Cold War. Several UN relief agencies were established to deal with the post-World War II emergency, and many became permanent. Some of these (like the UN Children's Fund, UNICEF) morphed into dual relief-development agencies. Mostly, however, humanitarianism solidified as a global project distinct from the budding development regime (Burde 2014). The humanitarian system grew even more in the post-Cold War era. Humanitarian assistance increased, existing organizations grew, and new organizations arrived (Barnett and Weiss 2008; Fearon 2008). Humanitarian justifications also became more salient in world politics; the 1990s saw an increase in global military and peacekeeping interventions framed in humanitarian terms (Wheeler 2000).

Developed over more than a century, humanitarian action has become a prominent fixture of the contemporary world order. Looking across the emergencies serviced by this global

machinery, one is easily overwhelmed by the enormity of human need in times of crisis. With lives, livelihoods, homes, and familiar social and political infrastructures often destroyed by calamity or left behind, it is difficult to imagine something that emergency-affected populations do *not* need. In this world of potentially limitless needs, how are the ends of humanitarian action constructed? Where do humanitarian priorities originate?

Common Perspectives

Existing scholarship on this question is dominated by functionalist and critical perspectives, stressing needs and geopolitics. A less pervasive strand centers activism.

On the functionalist side, evolving humanitarian priorities are often seen as reflecting real shifts in emergencies, with humanitarian needs and populations naturalized as given. For instance, the post-Cold War world was marked by rising concern over 'complex emergencies' (Calhoun 2004; Keen 2008), with some arguing that this era witnessed a shift in warfare: a proliferation in civil conflicts that differed from earlier wars in goals, methods, and financing (Kaldor 1999). These 'new wars' were supposedly characterized by unprecedented civilian suffering and displacement (Newman 2004).

We now know that the 'new wars' were neither entirely new nor unprecedented in their human impact (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Hironaka 2005; Newman 2004). And yet, academics, policymakers, and the international community came to see emergencies in the post-Cold War era as involving new complexities of human suffering (Duffield 2001). This discovery of complex emergencies brought a departure from an apolitical ICRC-style humanitarianism built around neutrality, now seen as naïve at best and conflict-exacerbating at worst (Slim 1997; Weiss 1999). Instead, humanitarians became involved in seemingly more political activities previously relegated

to development and human rights, treating not merely symptoms but underlying causes of emergencies (Chandler 2001; Macrae 2002).

Through a more critical lens, humanitarian action reflects power and inequality, serving as an extension of states' interests. For instance, observers of the humanitarian shift towards the broader stance of the post-Cold War era have linked it to donor interests. At that time, governments became more involved in humanitarian aid, long dominated by NGOs (Fearon 2008). According to some, this change turned humanitarians into handmaidens of power, tasked with (re-)building societies in line with powerful donor interests (de Torrente 2004; Lischer 2007). Here, aid projects in crisis zones are ultimately linked to security interests (Duffield 2001).

A less pervasive approach emphasizes humanitarian activism. For example, Cabanes (2014) chronicles proliferating humanitarian pursuits after World War I and highlights the pivotal importance of activism, such as the efforts by Save the Children founder Eglantyne Jebb to establish children as a humanitarian concern. Others focus on more recent shifts, examining, for instance, how activism by the NGO Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) brought a new style of humanitarianism that explicitly chastised human rights violations – a marked contrast with the neutrality stance of the ICRC (Davey 2011).

Valuable as they are, these approaches only partly illuminate the bases of humanitarian priorities. The idea that humanitarians attend to 'obvious' needs is certainly seductive. Yet it runs counter to the basic sociological insight that the perception of social problems is dependent on the socio-cultural context (e.g., Gusfield 1980). Critical perspectives on their part overlook the extent to which state interests are produced by cultural logics more than a priori rationality (Meyer et al. 1997). Similar remarks may be made about activism, which is embedded in broader cultural frames that supply it with legitimacy and meaning (Hironaka 2014).

Argument: Humanitarianism and the World Cultural Construction of Humanity

Broadening the conversation, several scholars have examined the humanitarian sector in socio-cultural terms. For example, Dromi (2016a, 2016b, 2020) traces the rise of the ICRC to religious principles that continue to shape the humanitarian field. Krause (2014) argues that the day-to-day goal of relief NGOs is to produce 'projects,' a process that develops its own cultural logics shaping humanitarian activities. And Rotem (2022a) deploys world society and field theories to examine blurring boundaries between humanitarianism and development.

This article adds to these cultural approaches. Humanitarian action of course rests on many cultural meanings, for instance regarding war and calamity. More than anything, however, it builds on ideas of humanity. The whole system is premised on the assumption that people's rights and status are rooted in a universally shared humanity (Finnemore 1999). Moreover, large swaths of the humanitarian population – refugees – fall under global jurisdiction as human persons rather than national citizens. This makes the humanitarian system a "key global terrain for the construction of the human" (Malkki 2010, 58). Indeed, scholars have long critiqued the humanitarian ethos for reducing human life to "the most restricted but also most manageable definition of life […] the simple fact of *being alive*" (Fassin 2012, 250, emphasis added).

However, limited scholarship has empirically examined *changes* in humanitarian notions of humanity: How is humanity conceived? What kind of human life is at stake? And how have these emphases changed over time? The history of ideas shows that ideas like humanity are neither primeval nor static. For example, Stuurman (2017) has traced the development of ideas positing a common humanity, contrasting with earlier assumptions of difference (see also Joas [2013] on the history of human rights ideas). In the humanitarian domain, however, such analyses of changing notions of humanity are rare, even as scholars note their importance (Barnett 2011; Rotem 2022b).

An exception comes from Finnemore (2003) who argues that the abolition of slavery and decolonization universalized notions of humanity and expanded the imagined targets of humanitarian intervention from white Christians to humans everywhere.

I build on this work through a more detailed analysis of shifts in the meanings of humanity that underpin humanitarian action, examining over 600 UNGA resolutions adopted from 1946 to 2018. To theorize these shifts, I draw on a long-standing tradition of global cultural analysis, as articulated in the world society perspective (Meyer et al. 1997). Departing from rational choice and functionalism, world society theory emphasizes the foundational role of global cultural understandings that constitute 'actors' and guide their actions, ultimately shaping global social change (Alasuutari 2015).

Most world society scholarship examines how these understandings shape national contexts. By contrast, this paper contributes to work that traces the changing content of global ideas (Inoue and Drori 2006; Koenig 2008; Buckner 2017; Lerch and Buckner 2018). Global culture is dynamic and evolves over time. This is partly because it contains tenets that reinforce each other but also compete: it valorizes the human individual but also the national state, liberty but also equality, and universalism but also diversity (Meyer et al. 1997). Shifting balances among such principles render world culture dynamic. Tendencies toward change also result from the institutionalization of global culture in world-level infrastructures, such as international organizations or global normative instruments, which offer workspaces and ingredients for the construction of new issue areas (Hironaka 2014).

I argue that humanitarian conceptions of humanity are anchored in this evolving global environment, which imbues them with "sense and moral rectitude" (Frank 2012, 485). As noted, a central humanitarian assumption is that people's rights and status are rooted in a universally

shared humanity. Without this assumption, humanitarian action makes little sense as a moral imperative, as it is not clear why human lives are worth saving or why one would have moral obligations toward strangers. The assumption itself, however, rests on cultural doctrines that have reimagined society *both* as consisting of rights-bearing human individuals *and* as increasingly global in scale, encompassing humanity. These interrelated dynamics – the individuation and globalization of models of society – have old roots. But they have intensified over time and became dominant ideologies in the post-Cold War world, with clear humanitarian implications.

The Individuation and Globalization of Models of Society: Implications for Humanitarian Conceptions of Humanity

Humanitarianism has always been embedded in doctrines of individualism. Already by the 19th century, individualism underpinned institutions from schooling to democracy, with "the universal, egalitarian individual" having emerged as "the high god of modernity" (Elliott 2014, 409). The rise of humanitarian relief is tied to this development (Rotem 2022b). Intrinsic to the humanitarian worldview is that individuals are inviolable and have worth independently of their relationships to nation-states (Finnemore 1999). Despite this long history, however, the sovereignty of the individual was long thwarted by that of the national state. For much of the modern era, individuals' rights and standing were rooted primarily in their nation-states rather than their individual humanity (Ramirez and Boli 1987).

In contrast, individualism prospered over the second half of the 20th century and reached singular global prominence in the post-Cold War era (Meyer and Jepperson 2000; Frank and Meyer 2002). The two World Wars weakened the legitimacy of the nation-state, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) codified the sacralization of the human person (Lauren

2011; Elliott 2014). Schooling of individuals expanded (Schofer and Meyer 2005), and political and economic systems built on individuals (democracy and markets) were increasingly constructed as the ideal (Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2007).

Yet it was the end of the Cold War that gave these principles global purchase (Jepperson and Meyer 2021). With the collapse of communism, (neo)liberal ideologies became dominant, and the demise of Cold War geopolitics further reduced the centrality of the nation-state. Individual choice and action came to be seen as underpinning all social, cultural, economic, and political domains (Lerch, Bromley, and Meyer 2022). Assertions of rights and entitlements based in individual humanity gained unprecedented legitimacy (Soysal 1994). While not always empowering people in practice, the post-Cold War order in principle constructed the human person as an empowered 'actor' with many rights and capacities.

Paralleling changes in other domains (see Bromley 2016 for education), this change has profound implications for humanitarian understandings of the human. By constructing elaborate individual roles and identities, organized under the general structure of personhood (Frank and Meyer 2002), rising individualism draws attention to the myriad effects of emergencies on all kinds of individuals. It also redefines other domains (like development) in relation to the human person rather than the national state (see Chabbott 2003 for education), enhancing their humanitarian relevance. Humanitarian populations are transformed from passive victims into agentic rights-bearers, and humanitarian issues become matters of rights and entitlements (rather than charity). Paradoxically, all these dynamics expand the tasks of nation-states, now responsible for ever-more dimensions of human well-being, which broadens the scope for global action when crisis-affected states are unable to fulfil those roles.

Redefinitions of society in terms of individual empowerment constitute an important dynamic that is relevant for understanding evolving humanitarian priorities. Relatedly, however, humanitarian assumptions of a shared humanity also depend on the reimagination of society toward a global frame, positing a global human community obligated to save human lives irrespective of national boundaries (Barnett 2011; Finnemore 1999; Rotem 2022b). As with individualism, the imagination of a global humanity precedes the post-World War II era (Stuurman [2017] finds such notions as early as antiquity). The early humanitarian sensibilities in the 18th century certainly evoked such visions (Illouz 2003). But again, the nation-state long prevailed: the overarching idea for much of the modern era was that national solidarities would supersede supra-national ones (Ramirez and Boli 1987).

Yet over the second half of the 20th century and especially in the post-Cold War decades, a worldwide human community became "a matter of course" (Frank 2012, 486). The idea became immensely more tangible with the establishment of the UN (Ramirez, Bromley, and Russell 2009). The UDHR not only codified the sacralization of persons, but also boosted the idea that human rights had to be protected by the global human community (alongside the national state) (Elliott 2014). Many sectors became imagined and structured at the global level, including education (Mundy 2007) and health (Inoue and Drori 2006). World-level infrastructures that institutionalized the concerns of the emergent world society flourished: international legal instruments, intergovernmental organizations, international NGOs, global epistemic communities, and world conferences (Boli and Thomas 1999).

Like the process of individuation, this shift toward a globalized model of society properly took hold after the fall of the Soviet Union. Globalization accelerated as the world came to be envisioned as one unit for action (Therborn 2000), a change that also reflected individual

empowerment doctrines, which imagined humans capable of global actorhood. There was an explosion in global associational life (Reimann 2006). Of special relevance is the era's proliferation in world-level structures dedicated to human persons, specifically in terms of international human rights NGOs and instruments (Tsutsui and Wotipka 2004; Elliott 2011, 2014; Lauren 2011). For example, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) included 54 articles and three optional protocols. Amidst this singular emphasis on human rights, the protection of rights became a human, and thus plausibly global, responsibility.

Vis-à-vis humanitarian conceptions of humanity, this imagination of an increasingly global society enhances the legitimacy of global mobilization in the name of humanity. In tandem, it softens national sovereignty, allowing for greater global intervention (Finnemore 1996), especially when nation-states are unable to fulfil global expectations (note, e.g., the concept of the fragile state). Expanded global structures dedicated to human persons legitimate a growing array of human beings, with needs and entitlements in humanitarian crises, and authorize world society to attend to these, even flouting national sovereignty. The contrast with the earlier, more nation-centric, world is clear: "when the boundaries of one's human community extend no further than to national (or religious or racial, etc.) borders, then one's obligations to one's fellow human beings end there, too" (Frank, 2012, 487).

Countering critiques of the narrowness of humanitarian conceptions of humanity, these considerations suggest that the pressures overall have been toward expansion and change. I now turn to the data and methods that allow me to empirically examine these predictions.

Data and Methods

The paper uses data coded from 659 UNGA resolutions focused on humanitarian issues, adopted from 1946 to 2018. Resolutions were downloaded from the UN website (UNGA 2022). For each GA session, I read the titles of all adopted resolutions and used them to select resolutions focused on the following topics: humanitarian assistance or response in wars and natural disasters, refugees and other forms of forced displacement (e.g., internal displacement), and the protection of civilians in wars and disasters.

Resolutions often reoccur over time. I included these, as repetition signals the continued relevance of a topic on the Assembly's agenda, and the content often evolves. However, resolutions were excluded if they covered purely procedural issues (such as routine approvals of accounts). I also ensured that resolutions were primarily focused on humanitarian issues rather than development or human rights. That way, changes in content can plausibly be seen as evolutions within UNGA humanitarian discourse rather than stemming from the inclusion of development or human rights resolutions. For example, I omitted resolutions if their title suggested a primary focus on development or human rights, even if in the context of war (e.g., "Human rights and armed conflict"). I also omitted resolutions if their titles indicated a focus on both development and humanitarian assistance (e.g., "Assistance for relief and development of Rwanda") or if the type of assistance was unspecified (e.g., "Assistance to Belize"). Table 1 summarizes the resolutions analyzed by decade.[1]

[Table 1]

Analysis of UNGA resolutions limits my focus to high-level global discourse about humanitarian topics rather than humanitarian organizations or projects, which may precede or trail

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[1] 9 relevant resolutions were not available for download and excluded.

global discourse. However, resolutions represent key world cultural artifacts and, while not legally binding, resemble soft law. Their content forms part of "theorization" processes whereby "culturally legitimated theorists" define global ideas and ideals (Strang and Meyer 1993, 494), providing a framework of meanings that can shape the interpretation of humanitarian crises and supply fodder for advocacy and allocation of resources.

A research assistant coded each resolution using a standardized coding protocol and well-developed methodologies for content analysis (Krippendorff 2018). A series of questions sought to capture discussions of the following topics:

- *Human persons:* Which human persons are discussed as affected by humanitarian crises (e.g., women, refugees)?

- *Human needs:* Which issues/domains are discussed where people need or are provided assistance (e.g., food, health)? [2]

- *Human entitlements:* Which rights, if any, does the resolution explicitly mention? Does the resolution invoke supranational normative instruments dedicated to human persons (human rights, humanitarian, refugee instruments – examples include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or the Geneva Conventions)?

- *Human agency:* According to the resolution, which emergency-affected persons, if any, should or are providing input into the humanitarian response?

The research assistant was trained and supervised to ensure accurate, consistent, and replicable coding decisions. Initially, both of us coded a sample of ten resolutions spanning all

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[2] To ensure that needs can plausibly be seen as *human* needs we did not count needs exclusively discussed in relation to the nation-state. For example, if the resolution only mentions how much an earthquake interrupted national development without relating this to human persons, this is not coded.

decades and a range of topics to clarify/reword questionnaire items that caused confusion and to establish consistent coding decisions, thus ensuring the reliability of the coding scheme. Throughout the full coding process, we discussed any questions that arose and resolved them in line with prior coding decisions.

Once all resolutions were coded, I examined over-time trends in the resolutions' coverage of human persons, needs, entitlements, and agency. To do so, I used line graphs to display changes in the proportion of resolutions that mention a certain topic by decade (e.g., proportion of resolutions by decade mentioning women).[3] Beyond analyzing these trends in their own right, I used them to develop a periodization of three dominant frames of human life in crisis, reflecting over-time changes in how human persons and their needs, entitlements, and agency in humanitarian crises are conceived in the resolutions. My analysis is more descriptive than typical world society scholarship, but it permits a greater degree of qualitative insight.

Findings

Evolving Frames for Understanding Human Life in Crisis

The analysis revealed a remarkable evolution in how human life in crisis is understood in the UNGA humanitarian resolutions. We can distinguish three consecutive frames, summarized in Table 2: from "managing displacement," to "survival and livelihood," to "multidimensional, rights-bearing, and agentic personhood." The shifts from one frame to another unfold gradually and are not always neatly separated. But there is a clear progression, reflecting changes in how human persons and their needs, entitlements, and agency in humanitarian crises are conceived. I

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[3] I did not focus on *how often* a topic is mentioned, easing concerns that patterns reflect changing resolution length.

begin by summarizing these broad patterns and describing examples. I then present descriptive quantitative evidence from the content analysis.

[Table 2]

In the earliest decades, roughly spanning 1946-1950s and the 1960s, the image of human life in crisis can be described as "managing displacement." Discussions of human persons and their needs are mostly one-dimensional. The main persons are refugees and displaced persons, who feature heavily. Mentions of other categories of persons (e.g., children, civilians) are very sporadic. Matching this one-dimensional conception, the main human needs relate to refugees' legal status and settlement (such as asylum, repatriation, integration, permanent solutions, or [non-]refoulement), along with generic needs (e.g., "suffering"). Mentions of other needs, for instance relating to basic needs like food, or to safety and livelihood, are sporadic. There is minimal acknowledgment of human entitlements, with rare mentions of normative instruments and hardly any discussions of rights. Notions of human agency are mostly absent.

A 1957 resolution entitled "International assistance to refugees within the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees" illustrates this narrow frame (A/RES/12/1166). The resolution mentions only refugees and needs relating to their status and settlement; for example, it notes "solutions for the problems of refugees through voluntary repatriation, resettlement and integration." Beyond, it only raises generic issues, such as "projects for assistance to refugees." No rights or instruments are referenced, and we see no participation discourses.

Roughly beginning in the 1970s and encompassing the 1980s, we see a slightly expanded vision, captured by an imagery of "survival and livelihood." Discussions of persons remain one-dimensional, dominated by refugees and displaced persons, although there are growing mentions of generic human victims (e.g., "people," "victims"). But we see a growing differentiation in

human needs. Issues relating to refugees' legal status and settlement as well as generic needs remain prominent, but we see growing emphases on basic needs (e.g., food, medicine) and safety, as well as education and economic livelihood (e.g., employment). That era also sees growing acknowledgment of human entitlements. References to normative instruments remain stable but there are growing references to people's rights, which also become more differentiated (e.g., women's rights). Discussions of human agency, however, remain mostly absent.

A 1983 resolution focused on similar topics as the previous one ("Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees," A/RES/38/121) illustrates this tentative expansion. In terms of human persons, it remains one-dimensional, invoking primarily refugees and displaced persons. Likewise, discussions of displacement-related needs remain (e.g., "voluntary repatriation is the most desirable and durable solution"). But we also see concerns with physical safety; for example, the resolution notes armed attacks on refugee camps. Vis-à-vis human entitlements, it invokes refugees' "rights" as well as the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. We see no participation discourses.

A 1982 resolution – "Situation of refugees in the Sudan" (A/RES/37/173) – in turn illustrates the emergent emphases on basic needs and livelihoods. Vis-à-vis human persons, it is one-dimensional (i.e., refugees) and it contains no mentions of rights, normative instruments, or participation discourses. However, the needs invoked are broadened, encompassing shelter, food, and even education.

In the latest decades, roughly encompassing the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, we see a culminating notion representing "multidimensional, rights-bearing, and agentic personhood." Conceptions of human persons are now multidimensional. Numerous humanitarian populations are discussed, not only refugees, but also, for instance, local or national populations (e.g., "the

Rwandan people"), the category of civilians, or stateless persons. Likewise, numerous social groups are depicted (e.g., children, women, persons with disabilities). Articulations of human needs in crisis are also multifaceted, including not just displacement-related, survival-based, and livelihood needs, but also psychosocial issues, discrimination (e.g., racism), and gender-based violence. Notions of human entitlements are extensive and differentiated: by the end of the period, resolutions routinely invoke rights and normative instruments, and we see many rights spanning persons (e.g., children's rights) and needs (e.g., right to education). Finally, the latest period sees novel emphases on human agency, with resolutions calling for affected populations' input into humanitarian responses.

A 2017 resolution entitled "Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees" (A/RES/72/150) continues the theme of previous examples but exemplifies the recent multifaceted vision. It discusses a range of persons, including refugees, displaced people, stateless persons, internally displaced persons (IDPs), aid workers, children, women, and persons with disabilities. It also covers many different needs. Concerns relating to displacement are maintained (e.g., "travel documents for refugees"), and there are references to basic needs (e.g., "food rations," "emergency shelter") and livelihoods (e.g., "primary and secondary education," "open labor markets to refugees"). But we also see newer issues, spanning "sexual and gender-based violence," "racism," and "gender inequality." The resolution mentions human rights and refugees' human rights; it also references six normative instruments (e.g., the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants). And, importantly, it calls for the participation of refugees in planning and implementing responses to displacement.

In sum, we see a clear evolution, facilitated by expanding conceptions of human persons, their needs, entitlements, and agency. I now present quantitative trends in each of these categories.

Expanding Conceptions of Human Persons

Along a first dimension, the evolving frames of human life in crisis are demarcated by expanding conceptions of human persons. Figure 1 shows this by depicting the proportion of resolutions in each decade that discuss various persons as affected by humanitarian crises.

[Figure 1]

As shown in the top-left panel, early resolutions primarily mention refugees and displaced persons,[4] in line with a frame of "managing displacement." The decadal averages are just below 80% in the earliest period (~1946 to 1960s) and remain very high throughout. Mentions of other categories of persons (described below) are very sporadic in these early decades.

Beyond refugees and displaced persons, the only category that grows noticeably early on is that of unspecified human victims (e.g., references to "people" or "victims"). As shown in the top-right panel of Figure 1, these references develop in the second period – roughly spanning the 1970s and 1980s (here termed "survival and livelihood") – and maintain an upward trajectory. Even as discussions of human *needs* stretch beyond displacement during this period (see below), conceptions of human *persons* remain undifferentiated and thin.

The main persons featuring in the resolutions in the first two eras are thus defined by their dislocation from the nation-state – refugees – or consist of generic humans. Individualized and globalized conceptions of society apparently remain tamed until well into the second half of the 20th century, with world cultural myths continuing to idealize "a world of bounded and sovereign nation-states" (Jepperson and Meyer 2021, 297). Conceptions of individuals' status remain

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[4] It is impossible to consistently determine whether "displaced persons" refer to people displaced beyond borders or within them (later termed IDPs). If considered separately from the "refugee" category, the line for displaced persons increases in the 70s and begins flattening out in the 1990s as the IDP category emerges (see below).

tethered to national boundaries (e.g., Moyn 2010), and the reach of the global human community is inchoate, restricted to persons falling between the cracks of nation-states.

In the latest decades, the picture changes enormously. Reflecting a frame of "multidimensional, rights-bearing, and agentic personhood," many humanitarian populations and social groups are articulated, as the post-Cold War era brings the broad ascendance of individualized and globalized visions. The bottom-left panel of Figure 1 highlights humanitarian populations. Local or national populations affected by emergencies (e.g., host communities, Rwandans) and unspecified civilians (e.g., the civilian population, civilian victims) are sporadically mentioned in the early frames. But they grow immensely in the 1990s and beyond. Beginning in the 1990s, we also see differentiated views of displacement, with increasing emphases on IDPs. Connected, stateless persons surface in the 2000s. And concerns about humanitarian personnel (e.g., aid workers) increase rapidly beginning in the 1990s. By the latest decade, IDPs are mentioned in just under 60% of resolutions, personnel in about 40%, civilians in just under 40%, local or national populations in around 30%, and stateless persons in about 10%.

Conceptions of personhood also expand in terms of social groups, as shown in the bottom-right panel: children/youth, women/girls, men/boys, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities. There are sporadic mentions of children in the 1950s, linked to UNICEF. But this dissipates and remains sporadic; it is only in the 1990s and beyond that we see a remarkable upward trend in mentions of children. Similarly, discussions of women/girls occasionally emerge in the 1970s and 80s, but only flourish beginning in the 1990s. Meanwhile, mentions of men/boys, the elderly, and persons with disabilities begin to grow in the 2000s. By the latest decade, just under 50% of resolutions mention children and the number is similar for women/girls, just under 40% for persons with disabilities, just under 30% for the elderly, and roughly 15% for men/boys.

Altogether, conceptions of personhood shift from a one-dimensional and generic notion towards a highly differentiated vision in the post-Cold War era. Interestingly, new human persons are layered atop existing ones, but the latter mostly do not fade away (e.g., refugees remain prominent).[5] This produces expansion, as shown in Figure 2, which charts average counts of how many different categories of persons a resolution invokes by decade. Until the 1990s, the line is almost flat, reflecting the limited emphases on human persons in the earliest two frames. But it takes off during the third era. By the latest decade, resolutions on average discuss around 5 different types of human persons.[6]

[Figure 2]

A cultural context that sacralizes individuals and imagines a global humanity has thus facilitated an elaborated conception of the humans at the center of humanitarian action. The change unfolds in a non-linear fashion, reflecting the intensification of individualized and globalized doctrines in the post-Cold War period (Jepperson and Meyer 2021). These findings resonate with existing analyses of the "profusion of individual roles and identities" (Frank and Meyer 2002, 86) across social domains. For example, school textbooks shift to depict society as a growing array of individual persons and likewise the change is starkest in the post-Cold War era (Lerch et al. 2017). As society becomes envisioned in terms of individual personhood, many individual roles and identities are recognized, and they become frames through which the human experience is understood. In tandem, we see growth in international structures that define and legitimate new

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[5] The analysis revealed only two categories of humans that fade without achieving prominence: families and students (not shown in figures). Students are sporadically discussed in the 1970s/80s (highest proportion around 12%; total mentions: 37) and then decline. Families are sporadically discussed in the 1980s/90s (maximum of around 8%; total mentions: 39) and then decline. The fact that these more collective entities (especially families) never prosper and eventually fade is in line with my argument about individuation (see Elliott 2014 on how human rights protect individuals more than collectives).

[6] The following persons were mentioned extremely rarely and are not graphed: soldiers (3 mentions), migrants (4 mentions), farmers (2 mentions), the poor (9 mentions), minorities (8 mentions), and teachers (2 mentions).

categories of individual persons as global concerns. For example, we see a surge in individual

entities (e.g., children) protected by human rights treaties (Elliott 2014). The progression of frames

in the resolutions suggests that these dynamics have transformed the humanitarian sector,

legitimating an expansive set of human persons as humanitarian concerns.

Expanding Conceptions of Human Needs

Along a second dimension, the evolving frames are underpinned by expansion in the

human needs envisaged as arising in humanitarian crises. Figure 3 graphs the proportion of

resolutions in each decade that discuss various issues or domains in which victims of humanitarian

crises are impacted or need assistance.

[Figure 3]

As shown in the top-left panel and reflecting the prevalence of refugees in the earliest era

("managing displacement"), early conceptions of needs mostly relate to refugees' legal status and

settlement (such as asylum, repatriation, resettlement, integration, or [non-]refoulement). Roughly

60% of resolutions mention these issues in the earliest era and that proportion remains relatively

constant. Beyond such displacement-related needs, the same panel shows that the earliest

resolutions primarily discuss unspecified help or needs (such as assistance or suffering); decadal

averages hover between 70 and 85% in the earliest period and remain similar throughout. Other

issues (discussed below) are mentioned (for instance, there are emergent concerns around

protection[7]), but compared to displacement-related or generic notions, other needs are limited.

As with human persons, the nation-centric tendencies of these early decades are thus on

display. Legitimated attention by the world humanitarian system is largely focused on the needs

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[7] Protection can refer to protection of civilians but also specifically to refugees' protection needs due to their unique legal status, suggesting that its early nascent presence may be in line with the frame of "managing displacement."

that arise in the interstices between nation-states, as people spill across national borders. It is a rather limited vision of human needs in crisis, in line with an overarching frame of "managing displacement" and reflecting the still circumscribed influence of individualism and globalism in the immediate post-World War II decades.

Over time, however, the range of human needs stretches. Already in the second era (1970s and 80s, "survival and livelihood"), we witness a tentatively broadened vision. As shown in the top-right panel of Figure 3, conceptions of basic needs and safety begin to grow in this era and continue to expand throughout. Basic needs include emergency-affected people's shelter, housing, and sanitation, concerns with food, nutrition, and water, and issues relating to medicine and health. In terms of safety, we see increasing emphases on physical safety (e.g., death, violence) and protection issues (e.g., protection of affected persons).[8]

Beyond these survival-based needs, livelihood issues also gain importance in the second era. As depicted in the bottom-left panel of Figure 3, this era sees growth in concerns with schooling and higher education as well as economic livelihood issues (e.g., employment, work). Their ascent is more muted than survival-based issues, and education grows more noticeably than economic livelihood. Still, the middle decades are characterized by a broadening notion of human needs in crisis, no longer restricted to managing displacement, but also aiming to secure human survival and basic livelihood.

The vision in the intermediate period is thus more expansive, moving global humanitarian attention beyond the interstices of nation-states. Cultural pressures that sacralize individual life manifest in growing emphases on survival-based tasks (i.e., basic needs and safety). But they also begin orienting humanitarian concerns beyond survival, reflecting growth in the domains seen as

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[8] As noted, protection could be categorized with issues relating to refugees' unique legal status. However, given its broader meaning (protection of civilians from violence), I consider it as its own category of safety.

important for individual development as individualism gains purchase. For instance, individualistic frames begin to redefine developmental tasks – like education – in terms of human rather than national development (Chabbott 2003), recasting them as nascent humanitarian concerns. Yet the vision in the intermediate period remains limited, as suggested by the lower emphasis on livelihoods versus survival. The continued influence of nation-centric models precludes far-reaching notions of global responsibility towards human needs in crisis. As charged by longstanding critiques (Fassin 2012), the primary focus is on a limited goal: securing survival.

As we shift to the latest period, however, a more balanced conception emerges, matching the overarching frame of "multidimensional, rights-bearing, and agentic personhood." A more recent set of issues begins to grow (see bottom-right panel of Figure 3). This encompasses concern with psychosocial issues in emergencies (e.g., psychological effects of war) as well as with discrimination (for instance, gender inequality) and racism (e.g., against refugees); we also see violence redefined in personhood terms, with novel articulations of gender-based violence on the rise. These concerns are nascent in the earlier periods, but they prosper in the recent-most era.

The earlier concerns are maintained and, in many cases, continue to grow. But mentions of the different needs are more equally distributed, producing a more balanced vision that considers the whole person. By the latest decade, displacement-related needs are mentioned in roughly 60% of resolutions; the percentages are 60% for shelter, 40% for food and health, 70% for safety and protection, 30% for education, 40% for economic livelihood, 40% for sexual- and gender-based violence, and 20% for psychosocial issues and discrimination. While imbalances remain, this is a much richer representation of the human needs arising in emergencies.

As before, newly defined human needs are added, but do not replace earlier ones, lending further support to an imagery of layering and producing expansion. Figure 4 illustrates this by

charting average counts of how many different categories of needs a resolution invokes by decade. We see barely any change in the first era (1946 to 1960s) when resolutions mention on average two kinds of needs. There is a small increase in the 1970s and 80s as conceptions of needs broaden, but the proper take-off comes in the latest period. By the 2010s, resolutions on average mention more than 5 different types of human needs in emergencies.[9]

[Figure 4]

We thus see the rise of a vision that constructs increasing domains of human life as requiring humanitarian salvation; it emerges tacitly in the middle decades, but fully takes shape in the post-Cold War era. These findings echo analyses in other domains. For example, UNICEF in the post-World War II decades concentrated on child survival, but by the end of the 20th century, it emphasized a holistic idea of childhood as a "complex process of self-actualization through physical, cognitive, and psychological development" (Schaub, Henck, and Baker 2017, 306).

Intensifying individualism, especially in the post-Cold War era, has provided one footing for these changes, constructing new dimensions of individual well-being of potential humanitarian concern. This includes issues (like education) that have a long history but were earlier seen as national rather than individual needs (Chabbott 2003). Other issues (like gender-based violence and psychological harm) were less recognized in earlier eras, but they become concerns as ideologies of individual personhood take hold (Pierotti 2013). The recent humanitarian attention to psychological needs resonates with existing work on the role of individualism in propelling the proliferation of psychologists (Frank et al. 1995).

And yet the shift towards a globalized frame has provided footing as well, producing a proliferation of world-level structures dedicated to various domains of human life, especially in

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[9] The following issues were mentioned very rarely and are not graphed: cultural preservation and language issues (8 mentions), family reunification (13 mentions), and recreational activities (2 mentions).

the hyper-globalized post-Cold War era. For example, global movements arose to promote health and education for all as key national tasks (Chabbott 2015), to be substituted by the global community if need be. Case studies indeed show that growing concern about education in emergencies resulted partly from global efforts to promote education for all, which revealed large education gaps in emergencies (Lerch 2023).

Expanding Conceptions of Human Entitlements and Agency

Along a final dimension, the progression of frames is underpinned by expanded notions of human entitlements and agency in crisis. Figure 5 plots the proportion of resolutions that explicitly mention rights, that call for crisis-affected people's input into humanitarian responses, and that reference supranational normative instruments codifying human entitlements. Table 3 provides further insight by charting what rights are mentioned by decade.

[Figure 5 and Table 3]

As the Figure shows, the earliest period ("managing displacement", 1946-1960s) sees hardly any emphases on rights or participation. References to normative instruments that codify human entitlements are also sporadic (under 10% in 1946-50 and just under 20% in the 1960s). Table 3 further illustrates that only few rights are discussed in the earliest decades, primarily the rights of refugees and generic human rights.

These findings match the thin notion of human life in crisis characterizing this period, with nation-centric tendencies undermining extensive acknowledgments of people's rights, entitlements, or agency. These patterns fit with scholarly findings in other domains. For instance, the initial post-World War II global infrastructure in education de-emphasized universal educational rights and instead privileged national development discourses (Mundy 2007).

As time proceeds, however, we see the stamp of cultural forces that endow individuals with rights stemming from their humanity, to be globally protected. Already in the second period ("survival and livelihood," ~1970s and 80s), a subtle shift arises. There are growing references to rights, which hover between 20 and 30% of resolutions and likely reflect the delayed influence of human rights treaties adopted in the late 1960s (e.g., the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), and the 1970s and 80s (e.g., the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women). Table 3 provides further insight. We see a proliferation of generic references, including rights, equal rights, inalienable rights, fundamental rights, basic rights, and legal rights. But we also see references to specific rights, encompassing the right to return, the right to self-determination, women's rights, the rights of displaced persons, the rights of asylum-seekers, property rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights. All the while, the rights of refugees and human rights persist.

And yet, as before with human needs, the expansion in this intermediate period is limited. As Figure 5 shows, we see no further growth in references to normative instruments, nor do we see emphases on agency. Lending further support to a non-linear imagery of change, it is only in the post-Cold War period that these empowerment discourses blossom.

It is in this latest era that we see the biggest shift, warranting an overall depiction in terms of "multidimensional, rights-bearing, and agentic personhood." Mentions of rights and normative instruments take off beginning in the 1990s. By the 2010s more than 70% of resolutions mention rights and just over 60% invoke supranational human rights, humanitarian, or refugee instruments. This era also sees the arrival of participation discourses. These make inroads only in the latest decade when close to 40% of resolutions highlight the importance of emergency-affected people's input. For example, a resolution from 2018 entitled "Assistance to refugees, returnees, and

displaced persons in Africa" (A/RES/72/152) discusses the importance of the "full participation" of women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities in identifying protection risks.

Returning to Table 3, we see a continued proliferation of rights during this final period, spanning both persons and needs. Many, though not all, of the rights previously mentioned continue to be invoked. However, we see new discourses as well. The 1990s add the following rights, of which many endure: children's rights, the rights of the elderly, the rights of minorities, and the right to asylum. In the 2000s, the rights of IDPs and returnees and the right to an adequate living standard are added. Finally, the most recent decade sees further additions: the rights of people with disabilities, of girls, and of boys, and the right to education, to freedom of movement, to residence, and to land.

In sum, the broadening understandings of human persons and needs have been accompanied by a more qualitative change: the crisis-affected human person has been re-imagined as an individual 'actor' with rights and globally enforced entitlements. Again, the biggest shift happens in the post-Cold War era. Issues earlier acknowledged as concerns become rights, lending them greater force. For example, while concerns with education arise in the intermediate era, it is only in the latest period that education in emergencies is conceptualized as a right (see Table 3), with a 2010 resolution (A/RES/64/290) dedicated to defining "the right to education as an integral element of humanitarian assistance."

Although humanitarian rights are not new (Cabanes 2014), individualism and globalized visions of society have reconnected humanitarianism with human rights, following their earlier differentiation (Rotem 2022b). Stressing both individual sanctity and global responsibility, the human rights regime indeed serves as *the* exemplar of the intersecting processes of individuation and globalization and their impact on the humanitarian enterprise. Again, the findings align with

other domains; for instance, global health and education efforts become framed in terms of rights (Chabbott 2003; Inoue and Drori 2007). In the post-Cold War world, "rights talk seeped into every nook and cranny of world affairs" (Barnett, 2011, 167).

Discussion and Conclusion

The humanitarian goal is to save human life, conceived as universally sacred. How this life is imagined, however, has changed over the past 70 years – at least in UNGA resolutions. In a globalized world infused with individualism, the human being at the center of humanitarian action has become more multi-dimensional and empowered, with more needs, rights, and agency. The evolution is not linear, with the pivotal shift only taking place after the Cold War ends.

The transformation is puzzling from conventional perspectives, illustrating the value of my arguments. In functionalist terms, it seems unlikely that early crises did *not* affect women, people with disabilities, or the elderly. Nor is it likely that they avoided psychosocial harm. Similarly, it is difficult to reduce the patterns to state interests. How, for instance, does attention to gender-based violence serve these interests? And while activism has surely stretched humanitarian concerns in some settings (Robins 2009), the consistency of the expansion across multiple dimensions of humanity suggests this is not the full story.

My arguments explain these puzzling changes by situating them within a world cultural context. Through this lens, evolving humanitarian ideas are constructed by macro-cultural shifts that have individualized and globalized our conceptions of society, ultimately facilitating extended elaborations of a universally shared humanity. World society scholars have long highlighted these shifts, but few have traced their humanitarian impacts (but see Rotem 2022b). My findings show that sectors like humanitarianism – long rooted in individualized and globalized models – have

been transformed as these models became globally dominant. Future analyses could trace these transformations in other sectors built around the human. For example, while psychology has long centered the human person (Frank, Meyer, and Miyahara 1995), how this human is imagined has likely changed along similar lines.

My findings further highlight the non-linear ways in which changing global ideas can unfold. The world society literature treats World War II as the watershed (Meyer et al. 1997), but the end of the Cold War may be equally important. Emphases on human sanctity and a global community nourish humanitarianism from the beginning, legitimating efforts for refugees and generic humans and stretching the discourse toward survival and livelihood. However, the starkest shifts arrive post-Cold War, with a culminating notion of multidimensional and agentic personhood. Global ideational changes may thus follow a non-linear pattern, with post-World War II shifts only gaining full force after the demise of Cold War geopolitics (Jepperson and Meyer 2021). Future analyses could extend these insights to other sectors, addressing critiques that a world society lens leads to simplistic assumptions of linear 'progress.'

A world society lens also expands how we theorize constraints on humanitarian action, often seen in technical or political terms: a lack of resources or will (e.g., UNOCHA 2019). A world society perspective instead highlights their cultural basis. For one, humanitarian visions are rooted in global culture more than practical realities, rendering shortcomings inevitable. For example, aspirations of agency may outpace real possibilities, considering the power differentials between aid workers and affected populations (Milner, Alio, and Gardi 2022). More fundamentally, constraints to humanitarian action arise from limits in world cultural imaginations. Humanitarian needs can be invisible until macro-cultural changes lead to their 'discovery;' for instance, gender-based violence was ignored until globally constructed as a rights violation

(Pierotti 2013). Future research could study such world cultural constraints on humanitarian priorities more explicitly or examine other domains. For example, some environmental problems remain hidden until a world-systemic conception of nature emerges (Hironaka 2014).

A global cultural lens also offers alternative ways of conceptualizing the effects of humanitarian action, often reduced to 'impacts' (e.g., number of people fed or sheltered – see, e.g., UNOCHA 2019). The account here points to underappreciated cultural effects. For instance, the growing focus on a multifaceted humanity is likely to reconfigure the meaning of war and disaster, redefined as human trauma by individualistic emphases on psychosocial issues (Fassin 2012). Again, this insight extends to other domains. For example, as macro-cultural shifts cast students as 'actors' rather than passive knowledge recipients, the meaning of education changes, now geared toward abstract skills more than substantive knowledge (Lerch, Bromley, and Meyer 2022).

Of course, evolving humanitarian priorities are not purely about ideas. Other processes are involved and recursively interact with ideational changes. Changing ideas manifest in changing organizational patterns, budget allocations, and contexts of intervention, and are in turn shaped by them. The world humanitarian system over time shifted from the post-World War II emergency in Europe into low-income countries (see Rotem 2022a for UNHCR), a shift that likely both reflected and reinforced world-level humanitarian discourse around basic needs. Similarly, organizations likely served as motors and reflectors of the discursive changes; for example, the World Food Program was founded in 1961 and MSF in 1971, matching the discursive periodization of food and medical needs. An analysis of evolving humanitarian projects, settings, and organizations would usefully illuminate these processes.

Remaining questions notwithstanding, this paper offers broad contributions to our understanding of humanitarian action and global ideational change. Critically, none of the trends

are irreversible. They are dependent on the cultural configuration of world society that developed over the past 70 years, especially the post-Cold War era. There are currently clear cracks in this order, manifested in a global democratic recession, Brexit, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Principles of human sanctity and globalized frames are increasingly under duress, including via (ethno-)nationalist and populist attacks on refugees. It remains to be seen whether these developments will shrink global humanitarian visions.

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Tables and Figure Captions

Table 1. Sample of UN General Assembly humanitarian resolutions

Decade	N of resolutions	Percent of sample
1946-59	48	7.28
1960-69	32	4.86
1970-79	55	8.35
1980-89	153	23.22
1990-99	132	20.03
2000-09	139	21.09
2010-18	100	15.17
Total	659	100.00

Table 2. Evolving frames for understanding human life in crisis

	Managing displacement	**Survival and livelihood**	**Multidimensional, rights-bearing, and agentic personhood**
Discussion of human persons	Mostly one-dimensional: • Refugees, displaced people • Isolated mentions of other types of affected persons	Mostly one-dimensional/generic: • Refugees, displaced people • Generic human persons • Isolated mentions of other types of affected persons	Multidimensional: • Broad array of humanitarian populations and social groups • Generic human persons
Discussion of human needs	Mostly one-dimensional/generic: • Needs relating to refugees' legal status, settlement • Generic needs • Isolated mentions of other types of needs	Growing differentiation: • Legal status, settlement • Basic needs, safety • Education, economic livelihood • Generic needs	Multidimensional, targeting whole person: • Broad array of legal, physical, psychological, and livelihood needs • Generic needs
Discussion of human entitlements	Minimal acknowledgment: • Some mentions of normative instruments • Mentions of rights mostly absent	Growing prominence and differentiation: • Growing mentions of rights, stable mentions of instruments • Growing specification of different kinds of rights	Extensive and multidimensional: • Many mentions of rights and instruments • Broad array of rights spanning persons and needs
Discussion of human agency	Mostly absent	Mostly absent	Growing prominence: • Emergent emphases on participation and input

TIME →

Table 3. Rights mentioned by decade, 1946-2018

|	1946-59	1960-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-09	2010-18
Rights of refugees	■		■	■	■	■	■
Human rights		■	■	■	■	■	■
Equal rights			■	■	■	■	
Inalienable rights			■	■	■	■	
Right of return			■	■	■		■
Right to self-determination			■	■			
Rights				■	■		■
Fundamental rights				■	■		
Basic rights				■	■		
Legal rights				■	■		
Women's rights					■	■	■
Rights of displaced persons					■	■	■
Rights of asylum-seekers					■	■	
Economic, social, and cultural rights				■	■		
Property rights				■	■	■	■
Children's rights					■	■	■
Rights of the elderly						■	■
Rights of minorities						■	■
Right to asylum						■	■
Rights of internally displaced						■	■
Rights of returnees						■	■
Right to adequate living standard						■	■
Rights of people with disabilities							■
Rights of girls							■
Rights of boys							■
Right to education							■
Right to freedom of movement							■
Right to residence							■
Land rights							■

Figure Captions and Notes
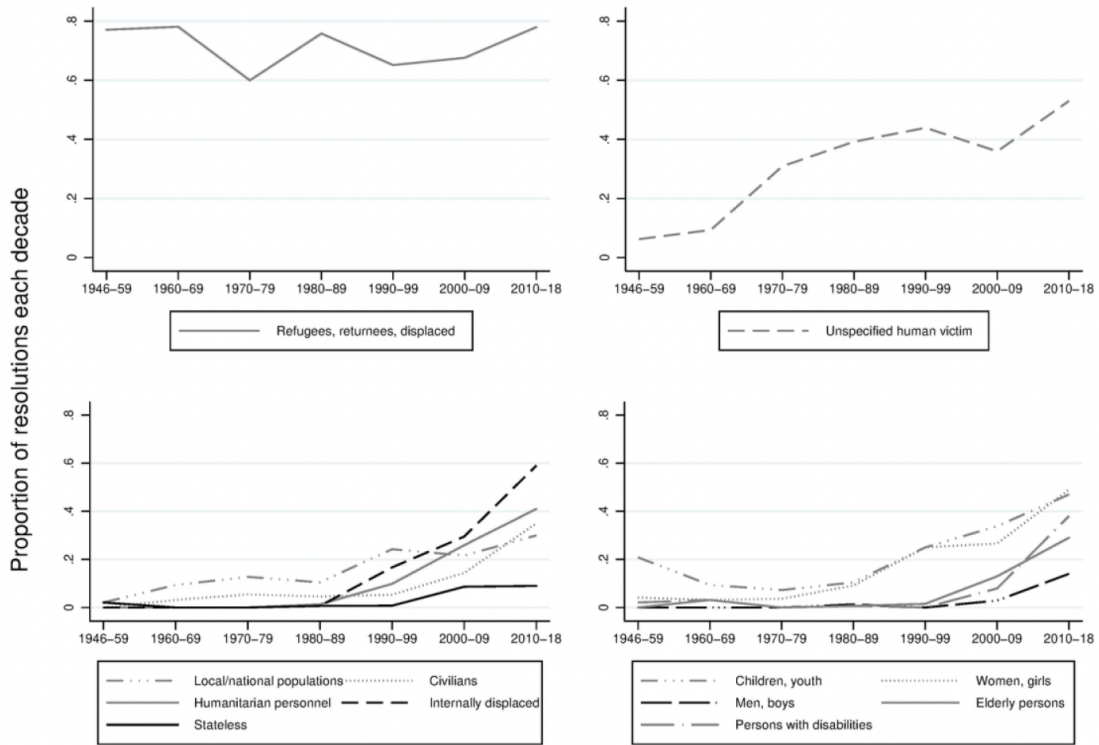
Figure 1. Expanding conceptions of human persons in need
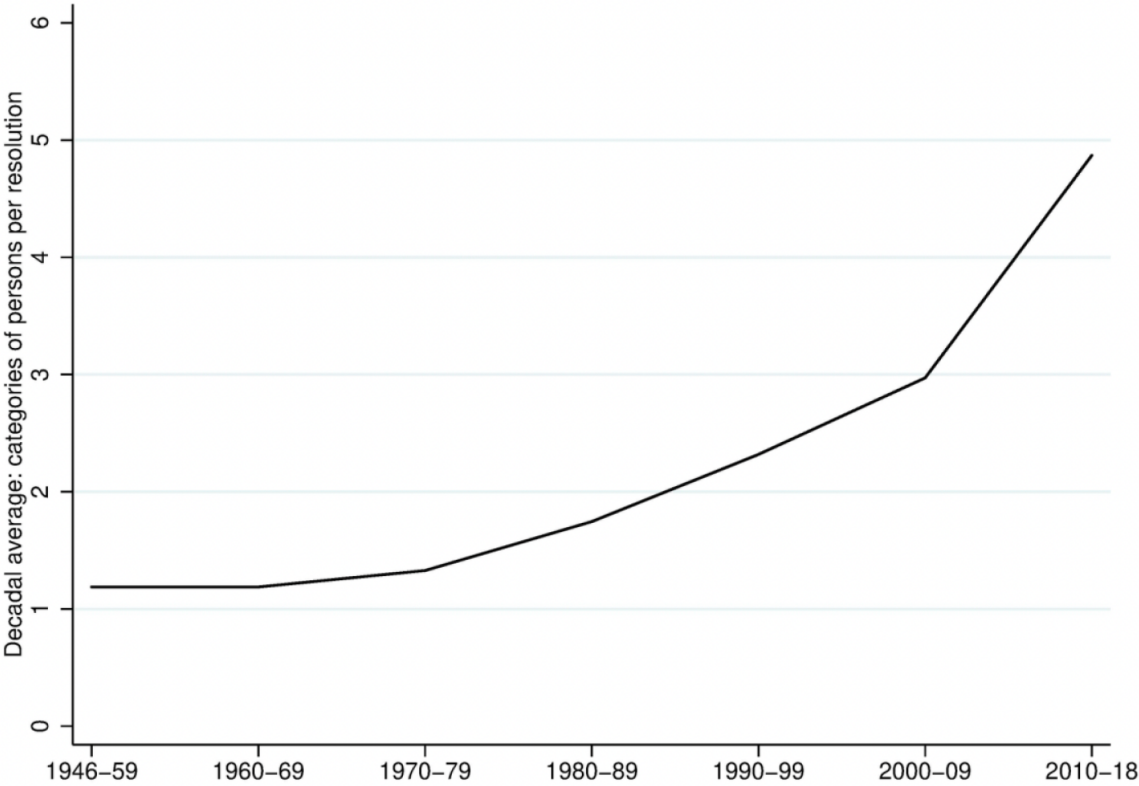Note: Returnees are refugees who have repatriated.

Figure 2. Conceptions of human persons in need: overall expansion
Note: The line shows average counts of how many different categories of persons a resolution invokes by decade, encompassing the categories from Figure 1 plus families and students.
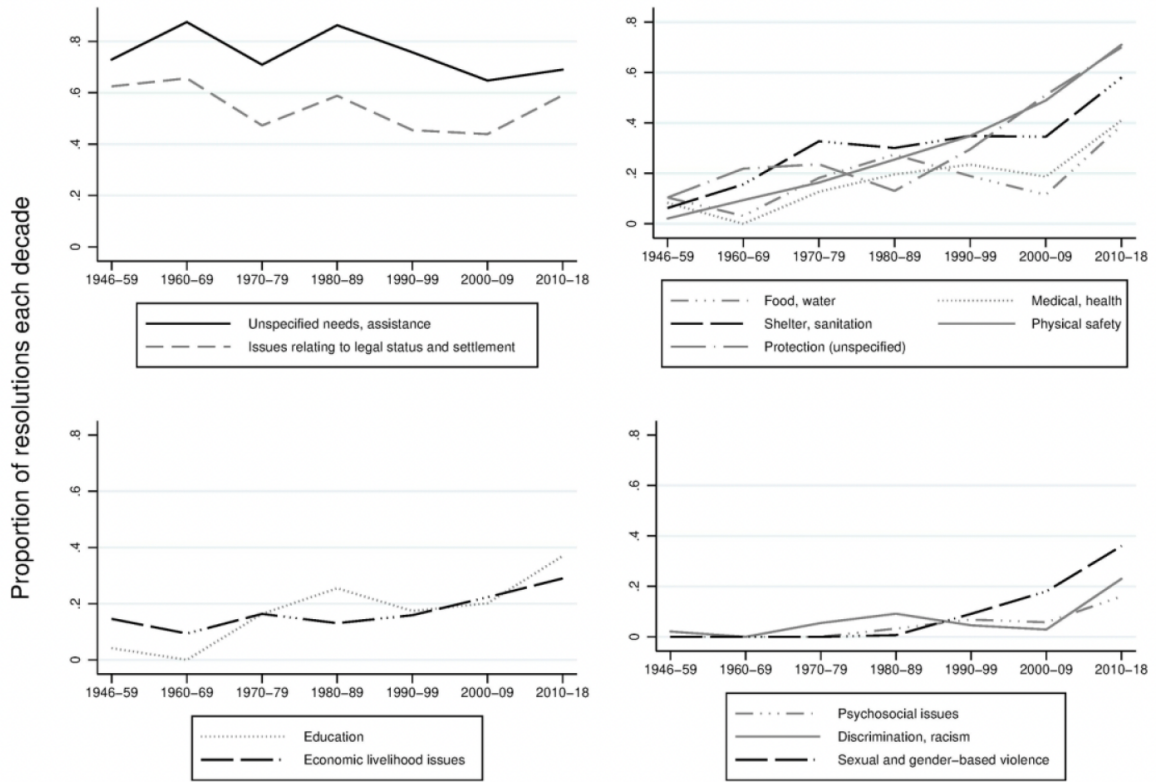
Figure 3. Expanding conceptions of human needs

Figure 4. Conceptions of human needs: overall expansion
Note: The line shows average counts of how many different categories of needs a resolution invokes by decade, encompassing the categories from Figure 3.
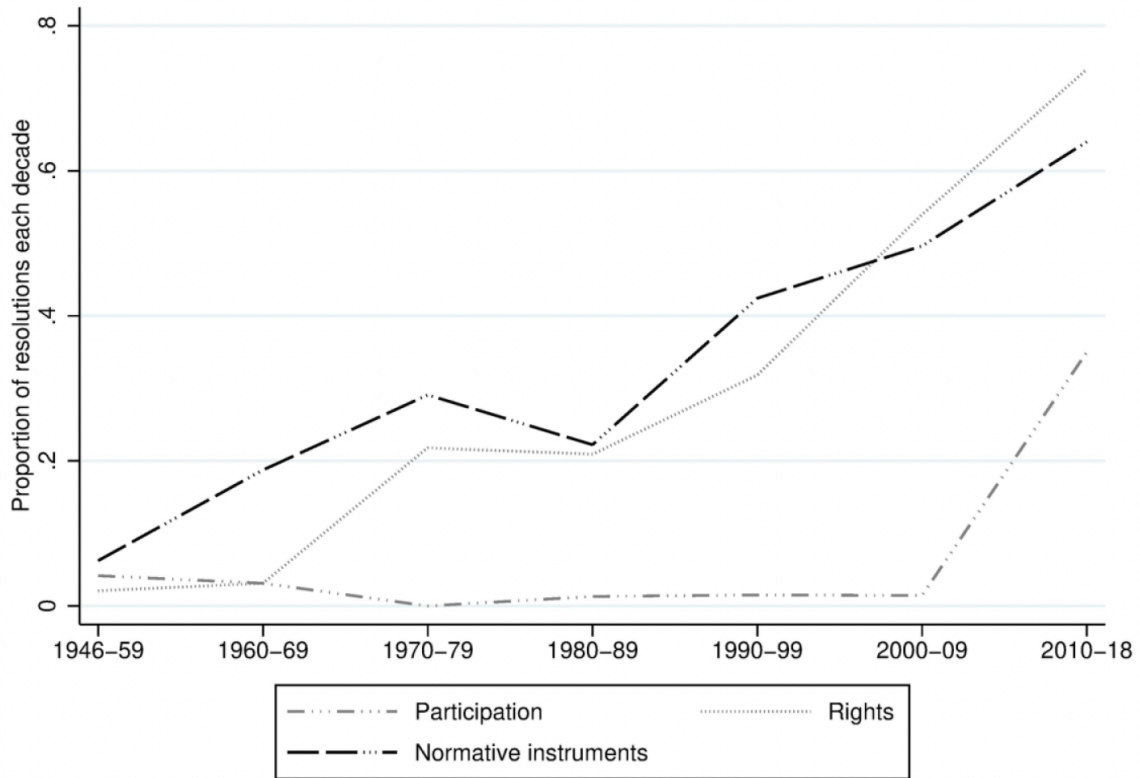
Figure 5. Expanding conceptions of human entitlements and agency
Note: Normative instruments include supranational human rights, humanitarian, and refugee instruments (such as conventions, covenants, treaties, or declarations).