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# Ethnocentrism and partnership: the symbolic violence of humanitarian aid

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## Résumé

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Au Burkina Faso comme ailleurs, la différence de moyens financiers entre les partenaires du Nord et les partenaires locaux engendre des déséquilibres dans les termes de l'échange entre les contributions et les rétributions attendues par chacun. L'asymétrie intrinsèque à ce mode de partenariat-patronage est bien rendue par ce proverbe Ouest-Africain : « la main qui donne est toujours au-dessus de celle qui reçoit ». Ce proverbe exprime la violence symbolique du pouvoir que détient le partenaire qui dispose du pouvoir d'allouer les ressources financières de l'aide. Empiriquement, cette violence symbolique s'incarne dans les normes de la culture managériale imposée par la bureaucratie des grandes agences internationales. Cette culture managériale obéit à un modèle unique, profondément ethnocentrique et largement inadapté aux réalités des sociétés du Sud, le *New Public Management* qui est au centre des dispositifs d'instrumentation de l'action humanitaire sur le terrain. Notre enquête à Ouagadougou a montré que l'instrumentation de l'action était concomitante à la contractualisation des partenariats et qu'elle était principalement centrée sur la gestion administrative des dispositifs d'accès aux subventions et aux conventions de financement et sur la gestion des règles budgétaires et comptables qui organisent la redevabilité des partenaires du Sud. Or, ces dispositifs et instruments comptables et leurs modalités de mise en œuvre ne sont pas neutres culturellement. Ils produisent des effets spécifiques qui structurent l'action, ils imposent leurs propres contraintes, leurs propres logiques exogènes en fonction de normes d'action préétablies. Mais les partenaires du Sud enfermés dans les contraintes de la dépendance financière ne sont pas sans pouvoir de réaction. A la violence symbolique de l'ordre établi par les normes bureaucratiques, ils opposent diverses formes de violence systémique. In fine, l'ethnocentrisme et l'inégalité économique des acteurs construisent des partenariats-patronages structurés par des relations de coopération conflictuelle très éloignées de l'idéal égalitaire connoté par la notion de partenariat.

**Mots-clés :** Burkina, Afrique, management, partenariat, bureaucratie, violence symbolique

## Summary

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In Burkina Faso, as elsewhere, the disparity in financial resources between Northern and local partners generates imbalances in terms of the exchange between the contributions and rewards expected by each partner. The inherent asymmetry of this form of partnership-patronage is well expressed by the West African proverb: "The hand that gives is always above the one that receives". This proverb expresses the symbolic violence of the power held by the partner who is in charge of allocating financial aid and resources. Empirically, this symbolic violence is embodied by the standards of the managerial culture imposed by the bureaucracy of large international agencies. This managerial culture follows a unique model, which is profoundly ethnocentric and generally ill-adapted to the social realities of developing countries: *New Public Management*, which is at the heart of methods for implementing humanitarian action in the field. Our investigation in Ouagadougou showed that the instrumentation of action was concomitant with the contract agreements of partnerships, and that it was primarily centred around the administrative management of the means of access to grants and financing agreements, and around the management of budgetary policy rules which organise the accountability of the Burkinabé partners. However, these accounting measures and instruments, and their means of implementation, are not culturally neutral. They produce specific effects which structure action, they impose their own constraints, their own exogenous logics based on predetermined standards of action. But partners in developing countries, constrained by financial dependence, are not without their own power to react. In response to the symbolic violence of the established order maintained by bureaucratic standards, they counter with various forms of systemic violence. Ultimately, the actors' ethnocentrism and economic inequality contribute to creating partnership-patronage relationships structured by a contentious cooperation far removed from the egalitarian ideal suggested by the notion of partnership.

**Keywords:** Burkina, Africa, management, partnership, bureaucracy, symbolical violence

## **Ethnocentrism and partnership: The symbolic violence of humanitarian aid**

This paper is based on the results of research carried out by the IMAF-Université d'Aix-Marseille research group on humanitarian transition in Burkina Faso<sup>1</sup>. In the course of the investigation, the majority of Burkinabé representatives of governmental organisations and humanitarian NGOs mentioned the often problematic character of managing financing obtained through developed-developing partnerships. The repeated nature of these complaints was somewhat surprising. In fact, the notion of "partnership", abundantly used in the rhetoric of international aid and in North-South relations, on the contrary, evokes "respecting differences" and "establishing balanced relationships" between partners<sup>2</sup>. Intrigued by the recurrence of this theme, we chose to investigate it, taking as objects of analysis on the one hand, the Burkinabé partner-beneficiaries' perception of the managerial standards regulating access to funding and the control of expenses<sup>3</sup> imposed by their partner-sponsors from developed countries, and on the other hand, the justifications given by the latter for the normative imperatives that they associate with aid instrumentation.

### **A partnership where the hand that gives is always above the one that receives**

In the humanitarian action arena<sup>4</sup> in Ouagadougou, Burkinabé partners (from state organisations such as CONAREF and CONASUR, local NGOs or civil society associations) are the strategic actors contracted by the sponsors on the ground (the World Bank, UN agencies, ECHO, international NGOs) to implement programmes and to carry out actions. In Burkina Faso as elsewhere<sup>5</sup>, the disparity in resources (mainly financial) between developed-country and Burkinabé partners engenders numerous imbalances and ambiguities in terms of the exchange between the contributions and rewards expected by each partner. This particular relationship of structural inequality results in a relationship of patronage, or clientelism, far removed from the ideal of balanced relations between partners that the notion of partnership suggests.

The inherent asymmetry of this kind of relationship is well expressed by the West African proverb: "the hand that gives is always above the one that receives". This proverb describes the "structural

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<sup>2</sup> Philippe De Leener (2013) rightly observes that one of the aims of this rhetoric is to counter the numerous criticisms regarding the inefficiency of aid and the weak input from beneficiaries.

<sup>3</sup> The question of the ethnocentrism of instrumentation standards has already been raised, including in the editorial of n°24 of the *Revue Humanitaire* (2010). But the instrumentation of action was not studied empirically in this issue, nor analysed in terms of symbolic violence, as we propose to do here.

<sup>4</sup> The humanitarian action arena is a socio-political space constructed as much by the humanitarian principles on which the participation of the implicated strategic actors are based as by the managerial techniques and accounting instruments which empirically structure the process and its results.

<sup>5</sup> "Hence, in developing countries, we often speak of our financial partners in the developed world, whereas in developed countries, we will refer to our developing-country partners to name the beneficiaries of our aid" (De Leener, 2013 : 79)

violence"<sup>6</sup> of the disparity in resources inherent to the mode of "patronage", which confers a dominant power to the partner who holds the financial resources of aid. However, Burkinabé actors do not complain directly of structural violence. They complain of another form of violence which stems from the incorporation of structural violence into standards and its internalisation by the actors. They complain of "symbolic violence"<sup>7</sup>, of the standards of the managerial culture imposed by the bureaucracy of multilateral UN agencies, the European Union, and the World Bank. This managerial culture is today embodied by a unique model, profoundly ethnocentric<sup>8</sup> and generally ill-adapted to the social realities of developing countries: *New Public Management* (Minogue 2001a, 2001b ; Kulachet, 2011 ; Hibou, 2012). According to its dominant paradigm, development is growth, with technology as its motor and quantification as its measure. It assumes that people are rational actors taking individual decisions motivated by short term profit, that this profit is economically defined, and that the process happens more or less the same way the world over (Nolan, 2002: 268)<sup>9</sup>. This managerial culture, of neoliberal inspiration, is at the centre of instrumentation measures<sup>10</sup> of humanitarian action in the field, and its normative imperatives are powerful obstacles to the construction of local partnerships. Inadequate in terms of the establishment of "balanced relationships" with partners from developing countries, partners from developed countries also display inadequacy with regards to "respecting differences". As Philippe de Leener astutely observes, respecting differences raises not only the question of "resource disparities" but also that of "cultural differences". When partnerships are established, the issue of cultural differences is systematically eclipsed as those who invest try to impose their values and standards whilst denying, more or less consciously, what constitutes the specificity and the identity of the partner (De Leener, 2013: 80, 85-87).

How does this happen empirically? It is a complex process of bureaucratic drift, well summarised by the concept of the "implementation gap" (Olivier de Sardan, 2014: 4), which manifests itself in disjunctions and translations<sup>11</sup> between the declared humanitarian principles which justify action, and their implementation in partnerships. Indeed, when humanitarian aid programmes are

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<sup>6</sup> Structural violence was first theorised by Johan Galtung (1969, "Violence, peace, and peace research" *Journal of Peace Research*, 6 (3) : 167-191). Its ordinary forms of expression in Africa have been described by Joseph Boute (1998, "Ordinary violence in subsaharian cities", *Cahiers de l'UCAC*: 39-60). Structural violence expresses a relationship of domination inherently linked to the hierarchy of legitimate social relations which unequally distribute resources of power and authority over the control of resources between dominant and dominated social positions in all social structures.

<sup>7</sup> The general theory of symbolic violence was developed in the 1970s by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron to express the internalisation of structural violence; it is the cultural dimension which is expressed by classification, standards and hierarchical principles adjusted to the order and hierarchies produced by social institutions and considered as legitimate. In this case, it is expressed in the management standards imposed by international agencies.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of ethnocentrism expresses the tendency to privilege the values, standards and cultural forms of the cultural group to which one belongs. Ethnocentrism is a generator of symbolic violence in intercultural interactions and exchanges.

<sup>9</sup> The management model of New Public Management, which refers as much to states as to public and private organisations, is one of the modes of expression of the globalisation of international financial capitalism dominant today.

<sup>10</sup> The notion of instrumentation of action refers to the set of problems raised by the choice and use of tools (techniques, means of action, and measures) that make materialisation and implementation of governmental action possible (Pierre Lascoumes and Patrick Le Galès, 2005 : 12).

<sup>11</sup> For example, the introduction of ISO standards of certification in the humanitarian sphere transforms humanitarian aid into a "product" or "service", and its beneficiaries into "clients" (Alagbe, 2012: 6). International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) "The importance of standards", [iso.org/iso/fr/about/discover-iso\\_why-standards-matter.htm](http://iso.org/iso/fr/about/discover-iso_why-standards-matter.htm).

implemented and partnerships for action contracted, the humanitarian objectives are translated by partner-patron-sponsors into instruments, measures and procedures which comply with the standards of New Public Management. These measures and accounting instruments, and their means of implementation, are not culturally neutral (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2005). They produce specific effects which structure action independently of its stated objectives (Lavigne Delville, 2015), they impose their own constraints, their own exogenous logics according to predetermined frameworks for action; the famous "tried and trusted responses"<sup>12</sup> that impose standards and accounting measures on Burkinabé partners which must satisfy the accountability imperative<sup>13</sup>. The investigation in Ouadagoudou has revealed that, whichever the developed-country partner concerned (a multilateral agency or a large NGO), the instrumentation of action is primarily centred around the administrative management of the means of access to grants and financing agreements, and on the management of the budgetary policy rules which organise the accountability of Burkinabé partners. Consequently, Burkinabé partners' access to humanitarian financing and grants resembles a normative obstacle course, since the process of instrumentation tends to select partners according to their supposed ability to comply with the standards of the technical management model which is imposed.

### **The symbolic violence of "the hand that gives"**

The normative ordeal begins with a call for proposals which demands an extremely strict response format, which respects procedures determined by management and financial rules, but also by a well-defined way of thinking (Hibou, 2012: 73-74). As a result, the small humanitarian associations that we met were not able to attract the sponsors' attention. Their members, sometimes poorly-educated, not connected to the Internet, have no experience with the mechanisms of calls for proposals and financial management. They experience difficulties in understanding the administrative jargon used. Not mastering the language, temporalities and codes of the bureaucracy of aid, it is impossible for them to have access to the calls for proposals.

The next step, reserved for more experienced NGOs, consists in satisfying the administrative conditions of eligibility and in respecting the procedures that verify the application's conformity to the call for proposals, as well as submitting to an analysis of technical and financial quality. The financial base required by the standards of eligibility for the large financing programmes is such that only governmental agencies and a few large Burkinabé NGOs can satisfy it. Indeed, they must be in a position to mobilise from their own funds a contribution of 5 % to 10% of the requested budget, and to wait for the closing of the programme and the validation of the technical reports to receive the final 20% payment. Sometimes, even governmental humanitarian agencies like CONASUR<sup>14</sup> have met with difficulties in advancing the funds required by the World Bank (source CONASUR, Ouagadougou, 2015).

In order to build "efficient operational partnerships" in Burkina Faso, the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) decided to finance only those

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<sup>12</sup> Philippe Lavigne Delville (2015) observes that this bureaucratic inertia is common in large international organisations. It manifests itself by a bureaucratic resistance to the understanding of complex local realities which might call into question the predetermined frameworks for action. In fact, a certain degree of blindness to the realities on the field ensures a continuity of roles for the actors and organisations inside and outside of the system, but it also makes it more difficult to adapt to changes, learn from others or simply recognise needs that have not been met.

<sup>13</sup> The importation of "systems of standards" is standardised in the same way in the development sphere. (Olivier de Sardan, 2014 : 4-6).

<sup>14</sup> National Committee of Emergency Rescue and Rehabilitation.

organisations which have "a sound and rapid financial absorption capacity", because the sponsor wishes that the sums invested in emergency action be absorbed quickly. ECHO therefore "pre-listed" European NGOs by making sure that they respected the three fundamental principles of humanitarian aid: independence, neutrality, and humanism (source ECHO, Ouagadougou, March 2015). But in so doing, ECHO transgressed its own rules which "normally" stipulate a European call for bids. The justification given for this transgression was that this call for emergency action would not have made it possible for ECHO to verify that the selected NGOs respected humanitarian principles, "since this verification is time-consuming". And ECHO does not have the time, since in case of emergencies, there is a lot of money to pay out very quickly! On the other hand, these private NGOs which have a "sound and rapid financial absorption capacity" live off the business of aid, their first objective being the satisfaction of the sponsor, as opposed to humanitarian action or its impact on beneficiaries. Consequently, Burkinabé partners encounter great difficulties in gaining direct access to international financing. When they do succeed, they fall into the hands of international financial brokers who either impose themselves as intermediaries to obtain European funding, like the "Global Mechanism", or who are imposed by the sponsor, like the UNCDF, a financial and project-coordination agency imposed by the PNUD to manage the funds allocated to the Permanent Secretariat of Non-Government Organizations (SPONG) in Ouagadougou. The hierarchy of contractual "Russian dolls" through which a multilateral sponsor (HCR or ECHO) imposes sub-contracting with an international management structure, which in turn imposes an implementation partnership with the local NGO, is a great source of frustration for the latter.

Indeed, it is in the course of this complex process of financial instrumentation that the partnership is transformed into patronage. In the end, the local partner is reduced to the simple role of executor, bound to accept additional costs in equipment, salaries and indemnities for imposed experts or expatriate consultants, and especially, in administrative management costs that are absorbed by the intermediary management structure imposed by the sponsor. Unable to escape from these financial arrangements and the costs they incur, local partners can ultimately only access the remainder of the funding (20% to 50%) which was initially allocated, the other part (50% to 80%) being used to finance the intermediary management structure and the salaries of international experts assigned to this structure<sup>15</sup>. The imperatives of financial and management control imposed on Burkinabé partners by large sponsors in order to have access to international humanitarian aid financing is such that 50% to 80% of the amounts allocated to them do not reach their destination. This aspect of structural violence has disastrous consequences on the morale and commitment of local partners. As a result, it feeds the crisis of trust and suspicion regarding international humanitarian aid.

When the partnership is established and financing finally obtained, the obstacle course is not yet over. The most constant normative constraints alluded to by local partners (agents of the Burkinabé Red Cross, SPONG and national governmental organisations such as CONAREF and CONASUR) are the procedures of justification intended to satisfy financial accountability requirements. It is not the principle of bureaucratic control over the attribution and employment of financial aid that is contested, so much as its organisation, the complexity of the management rules for the grant, and the onerousness of the monthly audits decreed by the different sponsors, that are seen as problematic. As several Burkinabé partners emphasised, the checks involve a maze of complex rules

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<sup>15</sup> Philippe Lavigne Delville (2015) observed the same measures in the financing of aid and development in Niamey (Niger).

and changing procedures which coexist, intertwine, and often contradict each other, leading to confusion.

Establishing regular financial statements and intermediary reports in compliance with standards demands verifications and corrections which are time-consuming, which in turn often delays the payment of the second instalment: "They even ask us for documents of proof that do not exist in Burkina Faso, like paid invoices on headed paper with the supplier's identification number" (Burkinabé Red Cross, Ouagadougou, March 2015). In Niger, Philippe Lavigne Delville (2015) observed the same problem; a considerable amount of energy is spent reviewing the accounts, finding documents of proof (quotes, pro forma, order slips, contracts, delivery receipts, attendance sheets), and completing satisfactory financial reports.

The protests of local partners highlight an essential aspect of the bureaucratic character of partnership-patronage relationships: for humanitarian bureaucracy, it is only respecting procedures that count (Hibou, 2012: 112). The predetermined intervention programme and schedule must be respected, as well as the accounting standards, even if they are partially impossible to respect, as is often the case when the action takes place in isolated locations where it is impossible to establish regular invoicing, for example. So, in order to satisfy the normative imperative of supplying accounting documents necessary for the justification of expenses, it is not rare for them to be drawn up *a posteriori*, at the risk of engendering an "industry of false invoices". As Philippe Lavigne Delville subtly observes, the industry of false invoices is possible because the demands of financial accountability in the bureaucracy of aid are not concerned with the relevance or the reality of the expenditure, "but only with the fact that it complies with expectations, was made within the rules, and is justified by an accounting document deemed admissible by the auditor" (Lavigne Delville, 2015: 207). Hence, for the agents of the European Union, good governance is when the the rules and procedures of management are respected<sup>16</sup>. The bureaucracy of the "hand that gives" is satisfied when a programme unfolds without apparent conflict, where the anticipated activities are carried out according to schedule and where the money is paid out according to the standards and budgetary forecasts established in the logical framework.

The process described above demonstrates the symbolic violence of the financial instruments, accounting measures and aid instrumentation procedures imposed on Burkinabé partners. Not only does "the hand that gives" deny the ethnocentrism of the measures and procedures it imposes, it also denies the unique socio-cultural aspects of "the hand that receives". Therefore, the "differences" observed between self and other are usually interpreted as shortcomings, deficiencies or lacks. These shortcomings and other deficiencies are often presupposed, as in the case of the imposition of an international structure of financial management by the sponsor to manage the aid funding that is allocated. One of the forms, among the most pernicious but also the most frequent, of the symbolic violence of certain developed-country partners is the contempt they display, or the forms of abuse of power or harassment they practice, in the face of certain partners from developing countries' inexperience regarding the jargon, codes and standards of the bureaucracy of aid, or their

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<sup>16</sup> It is therefore not surprising to learn that most of the local traineeships financed by the big agencies and international NGOs concern the transfer of social engineering techniques adapted to this model of management, such as "accounting and project management on external funding", or knowledge of the "objectively verifiable indicators" of the logical framework. It is during these traineeships that the standards of "good governance", and the rules of procedures which will serve the monitoring and evaluation of action, are transferred to local partners.

lack of understanding of the temporality of calls for proposals or of the mechanisms of financial management. This symbolic violence, silent and ordinary, has taken hold in developed-developing humanitarian partnerships. Its defining characteristic is that it is a violence without a culprit in the legal sense, since the economic and statutory inequalities on which the relationship of domination are based are written into the juridical-legal provisions of the partnership contracts.

But the "hand that receives" does not remain passive; it responds to the symbolic violence of the "hand that gives" with the "systemic violence"<sup>17</sup> of the "hand that receives".

### **The systemic violence of "the hand that receives"**

In general, the ensnaring of partners from developing countries into the financial dependency of aid precludes all attempts at overt opposition or head-on revolt (Olivier de Sardan, 2014 : 2). This imprisonment by constraints generates diverse reactions. A number of actors succumb to a kind of resigned submission. Several sources, however, have indicated that local actors submitted to pressure from monthly accounting audits suffered from "burn-out" (OXFAM, SPONG, Burkinabé Red Cross, Ouagadougou, August 2015). This condition of suffering is the expression of a conflict which has been unable to find an institutional or dialogical solution, and which comes to resemble a frustrated subjectivity or self-censorship (Bouju and de Bruijn, 2008, 2014). Other actors cease to believe in the importance of the roles and missions which have been entrusted to them<sup>18</sup>. To protect themselves and yet continue to remain masters of their own fate, they favor duplicity and craftiness in their partnership relations. They pretend to adhere to principles whilst simultaneously distancing themselves from standards, swindling through the creation of opportunistic associations or "briefcase" NGOs, by feigning, exploiting, diverting: "when implementing aid distribution, the imported standards, considered to be illegitimate, are bypassed and circumvented as much as possible by the actors involved" (Olivier de Sardan, *ibid*). Though extremely frequent, these tactics of duplicity and cunning submission are ill-documented.<sup>19</sup> They are an expression of informal opposition, a normative withdrawal or a civic disengagement (Bouju and De Bruijn, 2014). They express the "systemic violence" which certain (dominated) developing-country partners set up in the face of the symbolic violence of the established order of the (dominant) developed-country partners<sup>20</sup>. Systemic violence is not collective, since it can be reduced to an aggregation of individual behaviours, and it is not ostentatious, even though its manifestations provoke disapproval and its consequences can be observed in most partnerships.

<sup>17</sup> Systemic violence is a reaction to symbolic violence. Characteristic of the dominated classes, it has an endemic character structured by illegitimate, sometimes illegal representations and social practices, which provoke moral disapproval but do not entail sanctions against their perpetrators. It was first studied in Africa by Joseph Boute (1998), and more recently by Jacky Bouju and Mirjam de Bruijn (2008, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> "In this context, asymmetry stands out as the motivation of the relationship: the more unequal the relationship, the greater the leeway afforded to the partners in the lower position" (De Leener, 2013: 83).

<sup>19</sup> Cunning dependence and voluntary submission as relational strategies in rural and urban societies in West Africa have been highlighted for some time (De Leener, 2013 note 6: 83). One could cite Colette Le Cour Grandmaison, 1972. *Femmes dakaroises: rôles traditionnels féminins et urbanisation*, Abidjan, University of Abidjan. Emmanuel Seyni Ndione, 1987. *Dakar, dynamique urbaine d'une société en grappes*, Dakar, ENDA, "Etudes et recherches" series, n°109-110-111. Jean-François Bayart, 1989. *L'État en Afrique: la politique du ventre*, Paris, Fayard. Pierre-Joseph Laurent, 1996, *Le don comme ruse: une traduction anthropologique de la coopération au développement*, doctoral thesis. Institut d'études du développement, Université Catholique de Louvain.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. James C. Scott, 1985, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale University Press: xvi.

The social anthropological research conducted by the IMAF research group on humanitarian partnerships in Burkina Faso covered only certain specific aspects of these partnerships, namely the symbolic violence of the normative confrontation which presides over their implementation, the strategies adopted by developed-country and Burkinabé partners on these occasions and the perceptions that they have of them. However, in so doing we have been able to show that the reality of humanitarian partnerships is far removed from the humanitarian ideal of "respecting differences" and "establishing of balanced relationships" reiterated by the rhetoric of international aid and developed-developing relations. In Burkina Faso, as elsewhere (Olivier de Sardan, 2014 ; Lavigne Delville, 2015), the most common mode of partnership is built upon a relationship of patronage characterised by a paradoxical mode of "contentious cooperation"<sup>21</sup>. Cooperation because the partners are (apparently) driven by common objectives, and contentious because of the radical asymmetry of each party's financial resources and thus the respective power of each partner, and also because of the reciprocal forms of violence that this inequality engenders. The "symbolic violence" of developed-country partners and the answering "systemic violence" of developing-country partners contribute to a prevailing climate of suspicion and mistrust, each partner feeling that they are being used as a means by the other to obtain goals of their own which are not, in any event, explicitly part of the partnership contract (De Leener, 2013 : 83). The notion of partnership is therefore absolutely inadequate and this mode of relationship for developed-developing aid founded on financial and cognitive dependence between partners-clients-beneficiaries-locals and partners-patrons-sponsors-internationals ought to be qualified differently.

Others before us have raised the question of violence and ethnocentrism<sup>22</sup> at the heart of humanitarian action (Keen 1998; Schimmelfennig, 2001; Ambrosetti, 2008; Rowley et al, 2008; Stoddard et al, 2009; De Leener, 2013). The humanitarian workers who intervene in refugee camps are also aware of the symbolic violence of the confrontation between their own values<sup>23</sup> and standards of action and those of the refugees (Keen, 1998 ; Duffield, 2004). Many acknowledge that the problem stems not only from the culture and social inequality of populations receiving assistance, but also from the culture and modes of action of emergency humanitarianism: "practices that are predicated on a platform of moral virtue, but at the same time reproduce harsh social, economic and political asymmetries." (Gould 2004: 1). This aspect of the ethical problems which arise in emergency humanitarian action and the management of refugee camps is well documented (Tallio, 2005, 2006; Denefe and Vincent, 2007; Hours, 2007). The originality of our approach has been to show that the symbolic violence of aid is not restricted to the ethnocentrism which saturates interactions in the field during emergency action, but that it is also practised higher up, in the national humanitarian arena, at the heart of the instrumentation processes of developed-developing partnerships, and that it provokes reactions of systemic violence in turn from local partners.

<sup>21</sup> Alain Touraine, 1993. *La voix et le regard: sociologie des mouvements sociaux*. Le livre de poche, Coll. Biblio/essays, Ed. Du Seuil: Paris.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. the editorial of n°24 of the *Revue Humanitaire* (2010), which asks whether we should "de-Westernise" humanitarian aid. But in this issue, the instrumentation of action was neither empirically studied nor analysed as structural violence, as we propose to do here.

<sup>23</sup> A value is a persistent belief that a specific mode or conductor of existence is socially preferable to another (Milton Rokeach, 1973. *The Nature of Human Value*, The Free Press).

## A normative proliferation to regulate violence?

Recently, due to the increasing incompatibility between international humanitarian responses and the actual nature of the problems which they address, victims' reactions have become less ordinary, but also less systemic, as the reactions of open violence towards "white" humanitarian actors observed in recent years show<sup>24</sup>. Faced with this problem, international institutions attempt to control and regulate the symbolic violence of emergency humanitarian action<sup>25</sup>. The big UN agencies, the European Union, and large international NGOs are therefore working individually on the one hand to better define the principle of humanity (which can be divided into "assistance" and "protection"), and on the other hand, to broaden it (by including "peace-building, capacity-building and development") (Leader, 1998). The commendable objective of this regulation work is to improve the respect of humanitarian principles in action. Unfortunately, the "solidarity without consensus"<sup>26</sup> which drives the big agencies causes initiatives to further fragment, which manifests itself in an unprecedented normative proliferation.

The list of normative measures devised by the humanitarian sphere is impressive. At the macro level, there are the great powers (EU countries, the United States, Canada, Japan and Australia) who finance international humanitarian aid and who signed the Declaration of Stockholm in 2003 regarding the principles and good practice of humanitarian aid, which recalls the objectives of humanitarian action and fixes the principles of its implementation. At the micro level, the normative commitment is manifested by the increasing importance of normative procedures, summarised in manuals, handbooks or guides which are now part of the action toolkit that NGO partners must scrupulously follow at the risk of not obtaining the funds required. Amongst these are the ALNAP tools (*Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Partnership*), the "Rose des vents" tool by Compas Qualité, "Synergie Qualité" by Coordination Sud, the SPHERE manual<sup>27</sup>, reformed in 2015 by the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), etc. The bureaucracy of the big UN agencies and of Brussels is not to be outdone. We will only mention here the "Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations" which takes a census of around 160 standards applicable to field operations concerning the assistance and protection of refugees and displaced persons (Alagbe 2012 : 4-5).

One can observe the extraordinary contrast between the inflation of normative measures produced by developed countries' humanitarian bureaucracy to regulate the symbolic violence associated with emergency aid in the field, and the total absence of reflexivity concerning the symbolic violence of the management standards imposed by this same bureaucracy on its partners in developing countries.

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<sup>24</sup> To the extent that, in order to minimise problems in the field, most agencies today resort to national agents or experts of the same "colour" (source ECHO, Ouagadougou, March 2015).

<sup>25</sup> The assessment that the humanitarian order is determined by old international laws is well-established (Finnemore, 1996; Eberwein, 2005; Schloms, 2005; Ambrosetti, 2005, 2008; Jemczyk, 2015). But most of these works only deal with constitutive standards of the international humanitarian order with regards to the rights and obligations of parties in armed conflicts, of governments as a whole as parties in humanitarian conventions and organisations. They do not concern the ordinary principles of humanitarian action.

<sup>26</sup> Phenomenon by which the members of a society recognise the same references and symbols, but interpret them differently (Kertzer, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> "Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standard in Disaster Response", Project SPHERE, Geneva, 2004: 8.

## Conclusion

Much has been written about humanitarian principles, but what actually becomes of these principles in the complicated and opaque world of procedures of aid instrumentation by the agencies is much less documented than the ethical problems encountered by emergency action in the organisation and management of refugee camps, for example. In fact, no one precisely knows how humanitarian principles are or are not respected when partnerships are being built and in their daily management in the field. Even though, in Ouagadougou, the big agencies maintain that they verify the respect of humanitarian principles by the NGOs with whom they form partnerships, the principles of the humanitarian code are not always restated in calls for proposals, in the provisions of partnership contracts or in the planning out of actions. However, since the Red Cross has ceased to become the only institution to produce humanitarian standards, the big UN agencies, the European Union and the large international NGOs work individually to better define the principle of humanity (now divided into "assistance" and "protection"), and to broaden it (to include "peace-building, capacity-building and development"). These new directions manifest themselves on the one hand, by the declaration of secondary ethical principles such as autonomy, charitable commitment, but also accountability, competence, reinforcement of local capacities, justice, etc., and on the other hand, by a normative proliferation which seeks to regulate action in practice.

In conclusion to this analysis of the symbolic violence prevailing in developed-developing humanitarian partnerships, we have tried to show that it is less a problem of regulation in the sense of the "production of rules" than a problem of regulation in terms of the "implementation of rules". It is not therefore a quantitative problem of "normative shortfall", but a qualitative problem of "normative ethnocentrism". The question raised in the editorial of the *Revue humanitaire* (2010) – namely, whether it is possible to avoid ethnocentrism whilst preserving the fundamental values of the humanitarian principle – remains highly relevant. The most direct means of returning to the humanitarian principles of respecting differences and establishing balanced developed-developing relations would be to abandon patronage relationships and to build real partnerships (Bernard, 2010) based on more reflective, participative relations which respect cultural differences and the contingencies of both developed and developing actors (Harroff-Tavel, 2005). Anthropology can accompany this process of rebuilding partnerships by attempting to decode and translate the namely Western cultural references concealed at the heart of the "rational" standards, measures and procedures of aid instrumentation. This cooperation with the humanitarian sphere is possible because the anthropologist and the humanitarian actor share a certain moral vision of the world, "that of a unity of mankind justifying on the one hand the interest to study it, and on the other, the desire to help" (Fassin, 1995 : 75).

Lastly, in conclusion, we specify, if it needed to be said, that the relations of symbolic and systemic violence that we have described in humanitarian partnerships are neither specific to Burkina Faso, nor characteristic of the humanitarian sphere. Our research on humanitarian partnerships in Burkina Faso revealed a much more generalised reciprocity in relations of symbolic and systemic violence in partnerships than we had initially imagined. Not only is the sphere of development not exempt, but our universities and European research institutions and many other public and private administrations also suffer from the symbolic violence exercised by the now hegemonic bureaucratic model of New Public Management.

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