

Decolonizing Humanitarian Aid in the City of Kongoussi (Bam Province, Burkina Faso)

Pottery, a Know-How to Rebuild

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Abstract

Pottery is a women's craft practiced by women of the blacksmith caste in Burkina Faso. The objects produced serve multiple functions in people's daily lives. Based on the way internally displaced people (IDPs) and their hosts perceive the world — a perception that goes beyond mere survival and includes non-existential dimensions such as cultural heritage — it becomes clear that the articulation of needs by international humanitarian organizations (IHOs) is one-sided. This paper examines the importance of pottery in traditional society in Kongoussi prior to the security crisis and analyzes the survival or resilience activities proposed by IHOs to IDPs and to local populations. Documentary research and an ethnographic approach were employed. The results reveal long-standing foundations of social organization that have been disrupted by insecurity, as well as humanitarian aid that does not sufficiently take into account social realities or the diverse worldviews of its beneficiaries. More specifically, practices that confer cultural identity (pottery) on displaced populations and their hosts are not considered in the emergency or resilience activities proposed by IHOs to their beneficiaries. The logic of humanitarian aid reveals a form of neocolonialism that must be decolonized.

Keywords


Pottery, cultural, humanitarian action, decolonial

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Introduction

In 1960, 17 colonial territories in sub-Saharan Africa, including Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso, proclaimed what they called their “independence.” Sixty years later, the African peoples within France’s traditional sphere of influence (called “*pré carré*,”) and especially those of Burkina Faso, joined the front lines of the struggle to claim sovereignty and the right to equality among the nations of the world. It was more a matter of denouncing colonialism, which had transformed into neocolonialism through continued exploitation of resources and interference in political, economic, social, and cultural life... This groundswell reached its peak in Burkina Faso with the popular uprising of October 30–31, 2014, which shook the foundations of imperialism, especially French imperialism. Yet, the umbilical cord constraining the future of the people would be re-established through an unprecedented security crisis.

Burkina Faso has been shaken by a security crisis since 2015. This crisis has manifested in a surge of widespread terrorist attacks across the country, causing numerous civilian and military casualties. The insecurity has also led to massive population displacement from conflict zones toward relatively calmer zones. According to the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (CONASUR, 2023)¹, the number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) stood at 2,062,534 as of March 31, 2023. Of the 2.06 million IDPs, 494,000 are located in the Centre-North region (composed of the provinces of Bam, Namentenga, and Sanmatenga), concentrated mainly in the three provincial capitals, according to the same source. This region is the country’s largest hosting area after the Sahel. This crisis has affected every segment of the population, whether they live in urban and rural areas, and has disrupted the foundations, particularly the sociocultural organization of traditional societies.

The study of traditional societies’ knowledge shows that their production carries political, economic, and cultural issues (Sarr, 2022). These forms of traditional knowledge are deeply rooted in community life and encompass several domains, including pottery, objects made from clay. Just as weaving holds a central place in the daily lives of Berber women in North Africa (Sadiqi, 2022), pottery is an activity that punctuates the daily lives of women of the blacksmith caste in the commune of Kongoussi, through the making of objects intended for the living, the dead, and the gods. The morphological and functional evolution of these objects reflects the evolution of the societies to which they belong. Thus, the production of knowledge sustains and reproduces a political order, an economic order, and a social order (Sarr, 2022). These orders have been disrupted by the security crisis, which has led to forced and massive displacement of populations. In the “displaced camps”², whether formal or informal, the daily lives of the populations have changed significantly in terms of cultural practices, and the priority appears to be the struggle to meet basic needs (housing, food, healthcare, etc.).

To address the needs of affected populations, the country relies on International Humanitarian Organizations (IHOs), whose interventions are increasingly criticized, as their methods of intervention are perceived as unequal and tinged with colonialism (Ngouana, 2020). In the city of Kongoussi, the sites of Lioudougou and Loulouka have hosted, since their establishment in 2019, populations originating from at least three provinces³. These populations exhibit a diversity of thought, worldviews, ways of being, and distinct modes of acquiring and transmitting knowledge.

This reflection examines pottery as both a cultural and economic vessel prior to the crisis and explores the impact of insecurity on this women’s craft. Within the large *moaga* group, language serves as a unifying feature, but individual identities remain distinct. Pottery, a women’s craft tied to cosmology, is omnipresent. Whether for everyday use or seasonal rituals dedicated to ancestors and the invisible world, pottery remains an essential vessel in the lives of the inhabitants of Kongoussi.

1 After March 31, 2023, the government of Burkina Faso no longer published new data on internally displaced people (IDPs) on the CONASUR website ([Burkina Faso: Overview of Internally Displaced People \(March 31, 2023\) – Burkina Faso | Relief Web](#)). Data on IDPs by province are currently difficult to access for security reasons, according to the authorities, except for the implementation of development projects.

2 The sites hosting internally displaced people (IDPs) are called “*displaced camps*.”

3 In Burkina Faso, a province is an administrative division that groups together several departments and communes. Before the most recent administrative reorganization in July 2025, which increased their number to 47, the country had 45 provinces.

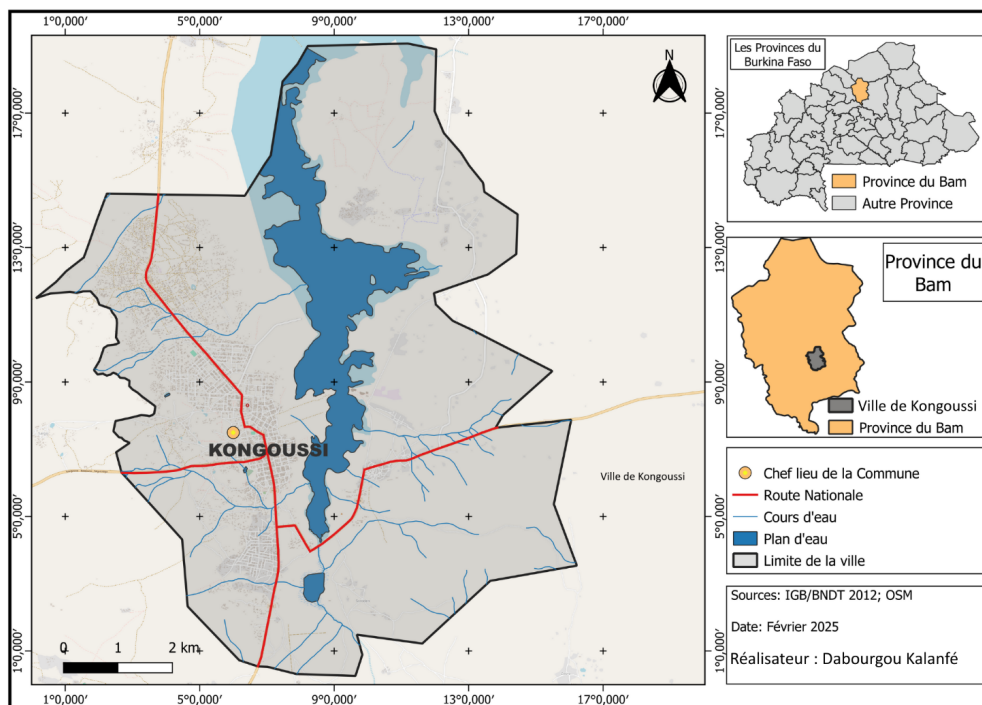
Research Area

Burkina Faso is a country rich in diverse cultures expressed through pottery, evidence of a history spanning both ancient and recent periods (Koté, 2000; 2019; Sawadogo, 2015; 2019). Cultural heritage constitutes a vast and diverse collection. It includes both tangible and intangible assets inherited from the past. According to UNESCO, cultural heritage refers to artifacts, monuments, groups of buildings and sites, as well as museums, distinguished by their diverse values, particularly their symbolic, historical, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific, and social significance. Since 2015, the country has been experiencing a security crisis marked by increasingly violent terrorist attacks. Among the regions most affected is the Centre-North, where the city of Kongoussi is located. This city was chosen, on the one hand, because of its location in an area particularly affected by the security crisis after the Sahel region (OCHA, 2024). According to OCHA's January 2024 report, Kongoussi is among the host cities that accommodate numerous internally displaced people from villages where pottery is actively practiced (Sawadogo, 2015; 2019).

The city of Kongoussi is the capital of the commune bearing the same name (map No. 1). It has seven districts and an estimated population of more than 53,627 inhabitants, according to data from the fifth General Population and Housing Census (5th RGPH) conducted in 2019 (INSD⁴, 2023, p. 38). The city has been severely affected by the crisis through the accommodation of tens of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) originating from at least four communes. Since 2019, Kongoussi has been considered a host city due to this influx of populations fleeing violence perpetrated by armed groups.

In terms of linguistic groups, there are two major communities: the Moose and the Fulani (CDP⁵, 2018). Within these two groups, several subgroups can be distinguished by their sociocultural practices. These populations primarily engage in subsistence activities such as food crop farming and extensive livestock herding, both of which are highly dependent on climatic variability.

Map N° 1: Location of the city of Kongoussi



Source: IGB/BNDT 2012; OSM

4 National Institute of Statistics and Demography.

5 Community Development Plan.

Research Methodology

As part of the analysis of the issue of heritage protection within the dynamics of humanitarian action, an ethnographic approach supplemented by documentary research was employed. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, taking into account several variables: gender, age, occupation, and participants' origins. The sample size was determined based on data saturation. In total, around one hundred individuals participated in the data collection. Interviews were conducted both individually and in focus groups. This particular mode of data production relies primarily on prolonged interactions between the researcher and the "field" being studied (Olivier de Sardan, 1995). The interviews involved, on the one hand, the heads of decentralized humanitarian action services, municipality, cultural services, and International Humanitarian Organizations (IHOs) operating in the city, focusing on the mechanisms of aid deployment⁶. On the other hand, potters, customary authorities, key community members, and consumers were interviewed. Some of them provided insights into endogenous mechanisms of solidarity, while the others addressed their administrative role in integrating these mechanisms into aid deployment. The informants were anonymized⁷ due to the security crisis and the issues related to humanitarian aid for populations in this context. Two neighborhoods, Lioudougou (Sector 5) and Loulouka (Sector 1), were included in the data collection. These two sectors were selected because of their peripheral location and their long-standing role in hosting IDPs. Analysis of the collected data made it possible to understand the modalities of humanitarian action deployment, the endogenous mechanisms of solidarity management, and the need to decolonize aid by taking into account the real needs of the affected populations. Pottery served as a socio-economic and cultural marker before the security crisis and played several roles in the lives of the people of Kongoussi.

Pottery in People's Daily Life

Burkina Faso boasts a rich and diverse cultural heritage (both tangible and intangible) spanning ancient and recent periods (Simpore, 2005; Koté, 2019). Pottery has been part of human daily life since prehistoric times. It is a vessel of information. Its evolution reflects that of the societies. Humans have used, and continue to use, it in their daily activities. The origins and history of artisans specialized in this craft are often intertwined with mythical and legendary narratives in many contemporary societies. This is why pottery plays a key role in understanding human experience.

In the province of Bam, clay work is generally a women's occupation, specifically, meaning that it is reserved for women of the blacksmith caste, who are subject to an endogamous matrimonial system (Sawadogo, 2015, 2019). For these women, pottery is more than a profession; it is an identity attribute. Production is artisanal, involving many cooking utensils used mostly in rural areas and even by some urban residents. Before the security crisis, pottery was omnipresent in the daily life of the people of Kongoussi, serving both cultural and economic purposes (Sawadogo, 2019).

Culturally, pottery is first and foremost a utilitarian craft. Local production corresponds to the functional categories intended for daily use. In a society where ancestral practices coexist with modernity, pottery remains present in the daily lives of both women and men. The vessels are used as kitchen utensils for cooking and serving meals, storing cereals, transporting liquids, and more. Furthermore, the presence of pottery in people's daily lives significantly reflects the importance of material transformation and its parallel with the human body in the cosmology of both "caste"⁸ and "non-caste"⁹ groups in Kongoussi. In the cosmology of metallurgists, of whom potters form part, the changes in the state of matter during the operational chain of pottery are linked to changes in the

6 The aid deployment mechanism refers to all the material and human resources necessary for the functioning NGO.

7 Anonymity consisted of using only the initials of the respondents' first and last names.

8 The caste group in Kongoussi specifically refers to the blacksmiths. The men work with iron, while the women are potters. The profession is hereditary and a specific attribute of this group. However, this heredity and attribute do not automatically confer technical skills. Acquiring these skills requires sustained apprenticeship over several seasons. This chain of knowledge transmission has been disrupted by the population displacements linked to the security crisis. The group also follows an endogamous marriage system.

9 In non-caste groups, unions are free, and practicing a profession is not subject to any constraints.

human body. Metaphorically, Gosselain (1999) describes these changes as wet/dry, soft/hard, hot/cold, dull/sharp, in relation to those of the human body (menstruation, pregnancy, the appearance of baby teeth, circumcision). Transformations thus occur within the same body at every stage of human life. A patriarch (Z. R. S.¹⁰) from the blacksmith caste explained that, for an adolescent, for example, it is only after the circumcision ritual that he is considered a man. In addition, during childbirth, a pot is used to bury the *naaba* or *zânre* (placenta). According to S. R. R.¹¹, this act links the newborn to the earth from which they are believed to originate. Traditional care practices given to newborns to protect them from malicious speech, the evil eye, and illness are only effective if the herbal infusions are prepared in a clay pot, according to K. M. T.¹². She adds that, in popular belief, iron or aluminium heat up too quickly and may alter the decoction and make the baby sick. Thus, it is essential to use pottery to avoid illnesses in the newborn.

Even among those who can afford containers made from other materials, pottery remains a cultural marker. In cases of twin births, special twin pots (attached and of identical size) are made for newborns who are considered supernatural beings endowed with special powers (Damoué, 2020). Equal treatment of twins is a ritual practice, justified by the desire to preserve their intrinsic equality (Ouédraogo, 2020).

Marriage marks a new beginning in the life of a young man or woman, a stage during which pottery also plays a role, according to K. N.¹³. Indeed, a new pot (a jar used to store water in the bridal room), which symbolizes this new beginning, is a long-established human practice in traditional *moaga* society as a whole, without distinction between socioprofessional groups.

In Kongoussi, according to the information gathered, pottery is most visible during funeral ceremonies within the blacksmith caste, although other groups also use it. The practices of revealed religions are not considered in this study. However, the boundary between different practices is often thin, since the same populations stand at the crossroads of several religions. Religious syncretism is a reality for these populations. Choices are made according to the issues at hand. The mortuary bath, the placement of offerings, and burial are all stages during which pottery is omnipresent. For the burial of clan patriarchs, pottery is used: notably a jar-coffin designed to hold an entire body, and pots meant to receive offerings. When a potter dies, a terracotta is used as a funerary stele to mark her grave.

According to several archaeological studies, pottery has accompanied the dead for several millennia in Burkina Faso (Andah, 1973; Kiéthéga et al., 1993; Ligané, 1995; Koté, 2000). Kongoussi is among the zones where such research has been conducted. For newborns, graves are marked with a pot whose base is perforated. Pottery also has a ritual dimension. During seasonal rites dedicated to ancestors and deities, the vessels used are exclusively made of clay. In this sense, pottery expresses the historical and cultural dynamism of the past and present societies of Kongoussi. The relationship between humans and clay is so profound that the Bible recounts that God created humans from this material (Manga, 2013). Beyond its ritual and cultural roles, pottery also plays an economic role.

In Kongoussi, pottery is an income-generating activity for women potters (Sawadogo, 2019). The revenues generated from selling pottery vessels provide them with a degree of financial autonomy and allow them, when necessary, to meet the most urgent needs of their families (Sawadogo, 2015). These revenues help to purchase basic necessities (maize, millet, rice, oil, soap...), clothing, shoes, or jewelry. They also contribute to fulfilling other basic social needs, such as healthcare and education, especially for children.

In a nutshell, pottery is a multifunctional activity in the city of Kongoussi. Its functions are economic, cultural, and ritual. For this reason, it is passed down from generation to generation. Unfortunately, the security crisis is putting it under severe strain. Faced with the influx of plastic, iron, stainless-steel, and aluminium containers distributed to IDPs by IHOs, and with the impossibility of working

10 Patriarch of the *Yônyoose* clan, interview on 22 November 2024.

11 Blacksmith, interviewed on 28 December 2024.

12 A potter over 80 years old, interviewed on 27 December 2024.

13 Internally displaced person (IDP) from a non-caste group, interviewed on 20 December 2024.

with clay, potters are witnessing their industry — a source of income and an identity marker — gradually disappear, leading to a progressive erosion of their expertise. Humanitarian organizations are numerous in the city of Kongoussi, and their actions extend across multiple sectors.

The Humanitarian System in the City of Kongoussi

The organizations operating in the city of Kongoussi include national and local administrative structures, United Nations agencies, as well as local, national, and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). International Humanitarian Organizations (IHOs) respond to calls for solidarity by contributing to the management of populations affected by the security crisis (Djohy, 2020). They undertake emergency or resilience initiatives in line with their areas of intervention. These areas include CASH (monetary transfers), WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), food provision (food and nutrition security) and non-food items (temporary or sustainable shelters, various construction materials), health and psychological support, education, and the protection of mothers and children (Djohy, 2020).

The United Nations system plays a key role in managing humanitarian crises in situations of war or insecurity. Through several of its structures, it provides technical and financial support and contributes, through specific assistance, to the implementation of various projects and activities in favor of affected populations and vulnerable groups (Djohy, 2020, p. 101). Thus, IDPs affected by the security crisis in Kongoussi receive multiple forms of support across different sectors.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2023) focuses particularly on children, prioritizing health, psychosocial, and educational care. The World Food Programme (WFP) often focuses on food assistance and plays a key role in mobilizing and distributing food supplies, as well as in nutritional support when it deems such intervention relevant. As for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it is known in the area for its humanitarian response in providing access to emergency shelters.

In addition to the UN system, other international humanitarian organizations intervene in the fields mentioned above within the context of the security crisis in Kongoussi. These include the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Save the Children, Welthungerhilfe, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Solidarités International (SI), Médecins du Monde (MdM), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Plan Burkina, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), among others. Each organization has its local representation and operates according to its own intervention plan. However, they also interact when it comes to providing cross-sectoral solutions. Most activities are aimed at ensuring survival or resilience for IDPs and host communities. The usual interventions consist mainly of distributing food supplies and/or “dignity¹⁴ kits” to improve the living conditions of beneficiaries. However, NGOs such as Welthungerhilfe (WHH) stand out by engaging in activities that promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence among different communities in hosting areas. M. K., one of the organization's representatives, explained that the Community Day is organized in collaboration with “la Direction provinciale de la Culture des Arts et du Tourisme, des services de l'Action humanitaire” (*Provincial Directorate of Culture, Arts and Tourism, Humanitarian Action services*), and the city's administrative and customary authorities.

This event is an annual initiative held in Kongoussi aimed at promoting social cohesion, peaceful coexistence, and community resilience (both IDPs and host communities) in a context of security crisis. According to K. M., “the objective of this initiative is to enable different social groups to come together and showcase their cultural wealth: knowledge and know-how such as clothing and culinary arts.” This is why many actors in the international humanitarian community now agree that humanitarian responses must be built on the values and institutions of the populations affected by disasters (UNESCO, 2011). In any case, the least that can be said is that this so-called international solidarity does not sufficiently take into account the cultural context in which it is deployed. It even clashes with it at times. We know that IHOs have principles and codes of conduct.

¹⁴ According to OCHA, dignity kits are composed of materials that meet the daily needs of men and women, enabling them to live with dignity.

Unfortunately, these principles and codes are designed far from local realities, which explains the difficulty humanitarian workers face in understanding and integrating them. Can they do so, and do they even want to? No one has yet provided an answer to this question. Yet, the way populations understand solidarity is not the same everywhere and cannot take the same form.

Aid also exists in the traditional context of Kongoussi. It is called *sōngre*¹⁵ in Mooré, language of Bam Province in Burkina Faso. In its broad sense, *sōngre* refers to endogenous mechanisms of solidarity, human rights, psychosocial care, and the transmission of cultural knowledge and know-how, and so on. These forms of solidarity and cultural practices are the product of Africa's historical, political, and economic transformations (Aina & Moyo, 2013). This cultural, ecological, economic, and political diversity reflects dynamic social entities in constant evolution over time (Aina & Moyo, 2013). Aina and Moyo also explain that:

Philanthropy, whatever its definition and whatever form it takes, does not operate in a vacuum. It exists and is expressed within a social and historical context. History, politics, culture, and economics all define, to varying degrees, the different forms of philanthropic experience found in any society or group of societies.

The humanitarian practices conceived and implemented by International Humanitarian Organizations (IHOs) and their local partners may not align with the specificities of different communities. The practices currently observed in the city of Kongoussi seem to confirm these issues, particularly in the assessment of humanitarian needs among IDPs and host communities.

Discussion

Humanitarian aid amounts to several million dollars (OCHA, 2024) and is directed primarily toward basic social services. Hence, the relevance of questioning why humanitarian interventions are so complex.

First, humanitarian structures often consider survival in a traditional sense, as consisting only of material and psychological needs. Second, the funding sources for humanitarian action — whether donations that come from individuals or institutions — carry and reflect ideological and political principles. Emergency needs are also defined according to humanitarian standards inspired by the worldview of those who give.

Often, the distribution of certain items and food supplies does not produce the intended impacts. However, the emergency situation forces beneficiaries to put up with it. Therefore, philanthropy, regardless of its definition or form, does not operate in a vacuum. It exists and is expressed within a social and historical context (Aina & Moyo, 2013). History, politics, culture, and economics define, to varying degrees, the different forms of philanthropic experience observed in any society or group of societies, explain Aina and Moyo. This is because giving, whether to help or to transform, is an expression of political and economic relations. The forms and practices of giving are socially constructed and modified (Aina & Moyo, 2013). According to these authors, gifts are often expressed and defined by the ways in which history has shaped relations between groups and individuals, and therefore their social positions, their access to and opportunities for wealth, their material and cultural assets, as well as the relations of power and privilege. Institutionalized forms and practices of giving, and the social relationships they produce, are neither innocent nor neutral (Aina & Moyo, 2013).

Finally, beyond armed conflicts, wars of aggression, and struggles for territorial annexation motivated by economic or geostrategic interests, the issue of acculturation among economically vulnerable populations remains unresolved. In this sense, humanitarian action can be perceived as a tool of colonization. This neocolonialism is expressed through the mechanisms by which humanitarian aid is deployed. Beyond the issue of survival that it addresses, aid frequently imposes new and exogenous habits, as well as forms of dependency on beneficiaries. Returning to the specific case of pottery, the observation is that IDP sites and the homes of host communities are now flooded with

¹⁵ *Sōngre* means “aid” or “help” in Mooré language.

plastic, iron, or aluminum containers. The potters, who no longer have access to clay, are losing their property, their knowledge, and their know-how. During cultural and religious ceremonies, communities replace clay pots with plastic ones distributed by humanitarian actors. Certain cultural practices are simply no longer perpetuated. The chain of transmission is therefore broken.

From this perspective, it becomes relevant to talk about the need to decolonize humanitarian aid. It must surely be possible to design humanitarian action that take the context into account, to promote solidarity while respecting local cultures, and to intervene without breaking the chain of knowledge within communities. The security crisis has reinforced the humanitarian fabric in the most affected areas, such as Bam Province, across several sectors including education, health, WASH, CASH, and nutrition, and so on. Beyond these sectors, in contexts of security crisis, culture is also an essential lever, the support of which would make it possible to better organize community life both in hosting areas (displaced camps) and within host communities.

Indeed, tangible and intangible heritage is a living expression of knowledge and know-how, cultural legacies that must continue to be transmitted even in times of crisis. This is why humanitarian action should no longer be limited to distributing food, various items, or promoting social cohesion, but should also incorporate processes for transmitting and safeguarding knowledge and know-how in order to preserve collective memory. It is relevant to show that studying the links between culture and peace allows us, in emergency situations, to better understand the dynamics of insecurity and to propose intervention scenarios adapted to cultural realities (human behavior). Beneficiaries are often satisfied with what is offered to them in material terms. Yet UNESCO's Constitution (2002; 2011; 2016) is based on the fundamental idea that culture, by encouraging understanding and mutual respect among populations, plays a crucial role in ensuring that suspicion and mistrust between nations no longer lead to war, as in the past, because, as UNESCO states, "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed" (UNESCO, 2005). However, culture, supposed to contribute to a more peaceful world, finds itself threatened by war through the destruction of the tangible and intangible heritage that embodies it. Thus, war has always been a danger to the integrity of cultural practices.

From a synchronic perspective, humanitarian action in its current form has great potential to improve the living conditions of populations affected by conflict. However, the terms and conditions vary depending on whether the aid is for emergency interventions, intended for the immediate survival of the affected populations, or longer-term interventions aimed at enabling vulnerable communities to independently meet their basic needs (Djohy, 2020, p. 89). Yet, when it comes to building a cultural identity, host communities and IDPs take time to come to terms with disruptions and reconstruction. Lynch (2022) situates in terms of sustainability and partnership as new concepts. The value of cultural heritage lies not only in cultural expression itself but also in the wealth of knowledge and know-how transmitted from one generation to the next. This transmission has significant social and economic value for both IDPs and host communities. Protecting cultural heritage is therefore crucial in promoting cultural diversity, social cohesion, and reconciliation, especially during armed conflict (UNESCO, 2016).

Cultural expressions — whether originating from a neighboring village, a distant community, or newly adopted by groups recently settled in a given region — are all part of intangible cultural heritage insofar as they have been transmitted from generation to generation, have evolved in response to their environment, and help provide a sense of identity and continuity, linking our past to our future through the present (UNESCO, 2011).

Cultural heritage does not raise the question of whether certain practices are specific or non-specific to a particular culture. It contributes to social cohesion, nurturing a sense of identity and responsibility that helps individuals recognize themselves as members of one or several communities, as well as of society at large.

From this perspective, IHOs can help preserve cultural identity by supporting potters in reconnecting with clay work. Pottery is an activity that requires large quantities of water, energy (fuel for firing the pots), physical endurance, and, most importantly, solidarity throughout the entire production chain. This is why displaced potters could first be organized into cooperatives. Such a gathering

would allow them to pool their efforts, share their technical knowledge (since they come from diverse backgrounds), optimize the use of inputs (clay, water, fuel), and reduce the risks of accidents associated with this activity.

Furthermore, from a social cohesion perspective, potters gathered in such cooperatives would learn to interact and accept one another. These collective spaces could also be used to develop additional activities to improve their living conditions.

Secondly, ecological considerations also come into play in pottery. Indeed, the influx of IDPs in Kongoussi increases pressure and overexploitation of natural resources. That is why modernized equipment, such as kilns, could be a solution to fuel scarcity. Finally, innovation is an essential factor to ensure the sustainability of pottery. This involves making products more attractive in terms of shape and decoration. The objective is no longer just to produce utilitarian objects but also to create items with aesthetic value, encouraging the population to see pottery in a new light. Pottery embodies values such as cohesion, ecology, education, health, and solidarity. It is therefore likely that certain IHOs will recognize in it the very principles and ideals they promote. Before concluding, one question deserves to be asked, especially since it has never been definitively settled: What exactly is “the decolonial”?

The term “decolonial” is relatively new in public and scientific debates. As such, it requires clarification regarding its semantic boundaries and conceptual content. Is it a new form of Pan-Africanism? A new version of *négritude*? Or is it similar to what is known as anti-imperialist¹⁶ struggle, namely the resistance of peoples against the international capitalist order? In any case, the introduction of the “decolonial” into the field of NGO cooperation and humanitarian work is very recent. The first study we were able to consult on this subject dates back to 2024 and is entitled *Study for the Implementation of Decoloniality in the International Solidarity Sector, Burkina Faso*. This report, produced by NGOs such as Broederlijk Delen (BD), RCN Justice & Démocratie (RCN J&D), and the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp (IMT), describes development relations between the Global North and South. It analyzes solidarity actors’ existing/dominant structures, strategies, and modes of thought in the development sector, within a context where Africa has reached a state of awakened consciousness accompanied by profound political and social transformations. However, the report presents the same gap that we highlight here: it does not define what “decolonial” actually means. Yet, the scientific use of a concept requires a rigorous definition. It would therefore be necessary to reflect seriously on this issue.

Conclusion

The security crisis has led to massive population displacements, directly or indirectly affecting the continuation of ceramic production as both a cultural know-how and an economic activity for potters.

The humanitarian system has strengthened with the arrival of international humanitarian organizations that support the Burkinabè government in assisting populations affected by the security crisis, notably through food distribution and other essential goods. Among the principles governing the deployment of humanitarian action, the protection of cultural heritage is not listed as a priority in emergency contexts for affected populations, whether internally displaced people (IDPs) or host communities.

The humanitarian system, focused primarily on survival and resilience, therefore does not meet all the needs of the populations. The endogenous crisis-management mechanisms outlined by certain NGOs are oriented more towards social cohesion or peaceful coexistence, through rapprochement, reconciliation, and the alignment of positions. However, this promoted dynamic of cohesion does not appear to resolve the fundamental issues linked to the root causes of the crises; rather, it delays them through a precarious lull.

¹⁶ Since 2016, certain organizations have been holding events called “anti-imperialist days” to denounce issues related to inequalities in the cooperation between African states and major imperialist or former colonial powers.

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