Introduction *

SAMA MAMMADOVA
Harvard University, Department of History

In *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge*, Miri Rubin writes: 'With most social acts, gift-giving shares the quality of reciprocity and exchange, while, on a personal level, it portrays one's identity'.[1] This observation captures the premise of this special issue: that our approach to giving and receiving help represents a crucial part of our identity because it reveals our place in this world—in our families, in our communities, and among strangers. Focused on late medieval and early modern Southern Europe, this collection of essays asks how acts of help reflect and shape individual and collective identities.

In the bustling cities explored in these essays, men and women—free and enslaved, foreign and local, members of different classes and followers of different faiths—were entangled in a shifting and ever-extending web, yet many of them had no networks to rely on in frequent times of crisis and need.[2] As these cities grew, circles of familiars became tighter, bonds of trust more fragile, and patterns of assistance less intuitive and even less reliable. Widespread poverty elicited a variety of responses: private donations, confraternal almsgiving, communal dowry or ransom funds, and, in some settings, state-operated welfare systems.[3]

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* The conception of this special issue traces back to the stimulating discussions that took place during the graduate training school "Moving Goods for Charity Across the Mediterranean (15th–19th centuries)", promoted by the PIMo COST Action (CA18140) and held from 13 to 16 June 2022 at the Centro Studi sui Monti di Pietà in Bologna and the Biblioteca Roncioniana in Prato. I would like to thank Giovanni Tarantino, Emanuele Giusti, and the editorial team of *CROMOHS* for their support in bringing this issue to fruition, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful engagement.

1 MIRI RUBIN, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–2.

2 On poverty and attempts to relieve it in late medieval and early modern Europe, see, among countless others, DAVID NICHOLAS, *The Later Medieval City: 1300-1500* (London: Longman, 1997); MICHEL MOLLAT, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); BRONISLAW GEREMEK, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, transl. JEAN BIRRELL (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); CATHARINA LIS and HUGO SOLY, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial Europe. Pre-Industrial Europe, 1350-1850* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979).

3 The historiography on late medieval and early modern European aid initiatives is extensive, and what follows is only a brief indication of its breadth. NICHOLAS TERPSTRA, *Cultures of Charity: Women, Politics, and the Reform of Poor Relief in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); MAURO CARBONI, 'The Economics of Marriage: Dotal Strategies in Bologna in the Age of Catholic Reform', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 39, no. 2 (2008): 371–87; LAURINDA ABREU, *The Political and Social Dynamics of Poverty, Poor Relief and Health-Care in Early-Modern Portugal* (London: Routledge, 2014); STEFANIA PASTORE, ADRIANO PROSPERI, and NICHOLAS TERPSTRA, eds, *Brotherhood and Boundaries/Fraternità e barriere* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2011); LINDA MARTZ, *Poverty and Welfare in Habsburg Spain: The Example of*

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Building on extensive scholarship on charity, community, and identity, this collection explores how such channels of aid delineated, reinforced, and occasionally subverted the boundaries of belonging in late medieval and early modern Southern Europe. Social psychologists have long recognised that people define themselves both by the groups to which they belong and by those from which they are set apart.[4] Many historians have drawn on this notion to explain collective behaviour and the development of communities in the past.[5] The essays gathered here extend this inquiry by asking what role instruments of assistance—whether private donations, charitable institutions, or mechanisms of state welfare—played in shaping both communities and people within them.

Bianca Lopez opens this issue with a story of Slavic and Albanian migrants who, having moved to the March of Ancona in the fifteenth century, used charity both to integrate into their newfound communities and to preserve ties to the ones they had left behind. By following the local patterns of giving and donating to projects that benefited the entire city rather than their own neighbourhoods, Lopez argues, these men and women

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Toledo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); GABRIELLA PICCINNI, *Alle origini del welfare: radici medievali e moderne della cultura europea dell'assistenza* (Rome: Viella, 2020); ALESSIA MENEGHIN, *Serbatoi di umanità: la Misericordia e i suoi volontari nella storia* (Ospedaletto: Pacini Editore, 2017); JAMES W. BROADMAN, *Charity and Religion in Medieval Europe* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009); ADAM J. DAVIS, 'The Social and Religious Meanings of Charity in Medieval Europe', *History Compass* 12, no. 12 (2014): 935–50; MARIA GIUSEPPINA MUZZARELLI, *Il denaro e la salvezza: l'invenzione del Monte di Pietà* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001); PIETRO DELCORNO, ed., *Politiche di misericordia tra teoria e prassi: confraternite, ospedali e Monti di Pietà (XIII-XVI secolo)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018); TIMOTHY G. FEHLER and JARED B. THOMLEY, eds, *Do Good unto All: Charity and Poor Relief across Christian Europe, 1400–1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023); PAOLA AVALLONE, GIUSEPPINA T. COLESANTI, and SALVATORE MARINO, *Alle origini dell'assistenza in Italia meridionale: istituzioni, archivi e fonti (secc. XIII–XVII)*, special issue, *RIME – Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea*, n.s., 4 (2019): 5–199; GIULIANA ALBINI, *Carità e governo delle povertà (secoli XII-XV)* (Milan: Unicopli, 2002); THOMAS MAX SAFLEY, *The Reformation of Charity: The Secular and the Religious in Early Modern Poor Relief* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); BRIAN S. PULLAN, *Poverty and Charity: Europe, Italy, Venice, 1400–1700* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994).

[4] HENRI TAJFEL and JOHN C. TURNER, 'An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict', in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds WILLIAM G. AUSTIN and STEPHEN WORCHEL (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47; HENRI TAJFEL and JOHN C. TURNER, 'The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour', in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds STEPHEN WORCHEL and WILLIAM G. AUSTIN (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 7–24; JOHN C. TURNER and PENELOPE J. OAKES, 'The Significance of the Social Identity Concept for Social Psychology with Reference to Individualism, Interactionism and Social Influence', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 25, no. 3 (1986): 237–52; BETHAN BENWELL and ELIZABETH STOKOE, *Discourse and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); TOM POSTMES and NAOMI ELLEMERS, eds, *Rediscovering Social Identity: Core Sources* (New York: Psychology Press, 2010); RAWI ABDELAL, YOSHIKO M. HERRERA, ALASTAIR IAIN JOHNSTON, and ROSE MCDERMOTT, eds, *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[5] DAVID GRAEBER and DAVID WENGROW, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021); BENEDICT R. O. ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016); ANDRZEJ PLESZCZYŃSKI, JOANNA SOBIESIAK, MICHAŁ TOMASZEK, and PRZEMYSŁAW TYSZKA, eds, *Imagined Communities: Constructing Collective Identities in Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1–2; WOJTEK JEZIERSKI and LARS HERMANSON, eds, *Imagined Communities on the Baltic Rim, from the Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016); ANDRE GINGRICH and CHRISTINA LUTTER, eds, *Visions of Community: Comparative Approaches to Medieval Forms of Identity in Europe and Asia*, special issue, *History and Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (2015): 1–143.

strove to assert their new identities as residents of Ancona and blend into the city's social fabric. By joining their compatriots in confraternities and providing for them in their last wills, on the other hand, the migrants not only preserved aspects of their original identities but also reinforced their positions in their ethnic communities and, together with their countrymen, resisted discrimination by local authorities.

The Jewish residents of fifteenth-century Iberia, introduced by Carmen Caballero Navas and Miguel Rafael García Campos, also found their identities entangled with welfare as they faced discriminatory policies. Forced by the new *apartamiento* decree into unsanitary, crammed, enclosed quarters, where pollution and foul smells of tanneries, wastewater, and dumping grounds—bloodless acts of violence inflicted by their Catholic rulers—caused not only discomfort and humiliation but also rampant diseases, they developed collaborative ways to care for their communities. When calls for the authorities to address the unsanitary conditions of the *juderías* fell on deaf ears, the residents turned to Jewish laws and customs to invent their own healthscaping practices and pooled their resources to form mutual assistance societies such as hospitals, confraternities, and charities dedicated to public health. The authors add nuance to the interplay between identity and welfare by underscoring the role of women, who not only contributed to these communal initiatives (for instance, as *hospitaleras*), but also managed sanitation, disease prevention, and healthcare at home.

Women's identities take centre stage in Jessica Hogbin's work, which features prominent women of sixteenth-century Rome—both native and foreign to the city—and their donations to the Ospedale del Santissimo Salvatore ad Sancta Sanctorum. Ranging from noblewomen and royal mistresses to exiled queens, these patronesses used their donations to the hospital to craft their public images and to highlight—or obscure—certain parts of their biographies. For instance, Vannozza Cattanei —the famous mistress of Pope Alexander VI and the mother of Cesare Borgia—only noted two out of her three late husbands in her *pro anima* donations, denying the excluded spouse posthumous prayers and any association with her memory. Many others ensured that their donations—a bejewelled icon with the benefactress's name and coat of arms inscribed on it, for example—were easily identifiable and featured conspicuously in the hospital for years to come. While, as the author notes, 'the Ospedale del Salvatore provided patrons with a stage to demonstrate their nobility, charity, wealth, and prestige to other notable members of the Roman community', the reverse was also true. As Hogbin indicates, the hospital carefully curated its institutional identity through documents that showcased its influential supporters, including a star-studded list of powerful women who 'acknowledged' the hospital, even if they never actually donated to it.

Women who acted as recipients of aid also had their identities shaped by the process. Lucia Felici's contribution reveals that this was certainly the case for the so-called 'spinsters' enrolled in the Leopoldine Schools of eighteenth-century Tuscany. These public

schools, established by Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo of Tuscany, aimed to provide cultural, moral, religious, and professional education, preparing poor women to assume new roles within the family, the workforce, and society at large. Innovative and transformative, the schools moulded their students into 'useful citizens who actively contributed to the welfare of the state' through education, discipline, and productive labour; offered their female teachers a dignified and financially secure place in society; and allowed their founder to fashion himself as an enlightened reformer.

A different kind of state intervention emerges in Pablo Sanahuja's study of fourteenth-century Valencia, where municipal welfare initiatives blurred the boundary between public assistance and fiscal extraction. In response to food shortages, city officials developed food provisioning policies framed as charitable acts 'for the benefit of the res publica […] for the sake of the poor people, and grace and mercy to the city'. Yet, as Sanahuja shows, these measures—analysed alongside new systems of indirect taxation—ultimately served to expand the city's fiscal capacity and consolidate municipal authority under the guise of the common good.

Finally, Justine Walden illuminates the entanglement of religion, foreignness, poverty, and slavery in her discussion of how Jesuit missionaries instrumentalised charity and identity to convert enslaved Muslims in seventeenth-century Naples. In printed conversion narratives that instructed missionaries on the best evangelisation practices, Walden finds suggestions on how to employ various facets of the slaves' identities to facilitate their conversion. The Jesuits incorporated Islamic tropes into their sermons, offered the uprooted men a sense of kinship away from home and, upon conversion, gifted them with tokens that reinforced their new Christian identities and even produced identity documents that confirmed their new faith. In their pursuit of converts, the missionaries routinely relied on charity: they distributed food and provided medical care and, once someone converted, helped the new Christian find ways to make ends meet to ensure that the convert would not seek support from his or her former coreligionist and become tempted to return to Islam. The enslaved Muslims, in turn, often used conversion as an opportunity for social mobility and a way to gain access to charitable initiatives from which they were previously barred because of their religion.

Taken together, these essays demonstrate that acts of offering and receiving were inextricably bound up with identity in late medieval and early modern Southern Europe. In doing so, they invite readers to see in the history of aid a parallel history of self-fashioning—one that reveals how individuals and communities imagined and articulated who they were.