



Perspektiven auf globale Politik

AFK-EUPRA – 5: HUMANITARIANISM, 'EMERGENCY IMAGINARY' AND ALTERNATIVE IMAGINATIONS OF INTER-AND TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

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AFK-EuPRA – Panel 5:

Humanitarianism, 'Emergency Imaginary' and Alternative Imaginations of Inter-and Transnational Solidarity

Chair: Anne Menzel (University of Marburg, Germany)

Presenters:

Cordula Dittmer & Daniel Lorenz (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany):
„Emergency Imaginary“, Humanitarian Interventions and Disaster Management in Germany

Calhoun used his concept of “emergency imaginary” to capture and analyze the construction of so-called complex humanitarian emergencies and associated humanitarian interventions as an ongoing imperialistic project in the global south. In order to gain a better understanding of the concept and its implicit ideas and assumptions, we would like to ask if the “emergency imaginary” could be an adequate and plausible concept to analyze the reaction of German aid organization in particular to the field of disaster and crisis management, as well as in the field of refugee sheltering and care in Germany. Can the concept also be applied to



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analyze events and processes in “Western societies”? Where are the limitations and problems? What do we learn by transferring a concept that is usually applied for processes in “other” countries, to our own society and processes within? Are similar power structures and discourses of legitimization to be found as are to be found in the context of interventions in, e.g., Sierra Leone or Aceh?

In elaborating out argument we will refer to our own research, workshops, and interviews that were with experts from different aid organizations dealing with refugee sheltering and care from September 2015 up till now. Our main research assumption is that the so-called refugee crisis as well as the tremendous engagement of aid organizations – and particularly disaster relief organizations that were not involved in provisions for refugee before the summer of 2015 – could only be legitimized by using a specific emergency imaginary.

Dennis Dijkzeul (Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany): When is a Crisis a Crisis?

There is no official definition of a humanitarian crisis in international law. Moreover, many crises are forgotten in the media; others gain far greater attention. Different disciplines have developed ways to collect, analyze and represent data on and indicators for (potential) crises. New factors, such as social media, are also influencing how such data is represented, so that the conclusion that a crisis exists or is developing can be drawn by various (political) decision-makers and stakeholders. This paper studies three different disciplinary and practical ways in which crisis definition, crisis representation or negation takes place in today’s multifaceted humanitarian landscape.

Sophia Hoffmann (University of Bremen, Germany) & Kai Koddenbrock (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Germany): ‘There is no Alternative’: The Rise of Humanitarian Aid in International Politics

The war in Syria and the plight of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa have placed a focus on humanitarian aid unseen since the 2003 Tsunami. But even beyond the rise and fall of global attention to various wars and crises, humanitarian aid has developed into a key transnational practice of ever growing importance. This advance requires explanation. Drawing on our many years of research in eastern DRC, Syria and Jordan, in this paper we present three main explanations for the rapid rise of humanitarian aid, which can be observed in massively expanded budgets and expanding UN agencies and NGOs. Firstly, we argue that aid organisations have an inherently expansionist drive and ability, which is based on the weakly defined concept of

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humanitarian „needs“, which are always expanding. Secondly, we argue that working in humanitarian aid remains highly attractive in Western societies, where other options for political transformation have ceased to exist. Thirdly, we identify the improved ability of aid-receiving governments to integrate humanitarian aid into their domestic politics, without this developing into a threat to legitimacy and the status quo. These three factors offer an explanation, why and how humanitarian aid is developing into the key relation between the rich „north“ and the poor „south“.

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