



The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism

Liisa H. Malkki

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In *The Need to Help* Liisa H. Malkki shifts the focus of the study of humanitarian intervention from aid recipients to aid workers themselves. The anthropological commitment to understand the motivations and desires of these professionals and how they imagine themselves in the world "out there," led Malkki to spend more than a decade interviewing members of the international Finnish Red Cross, as well as observing Finns who volunteered from their homes through gifts of handwork. The need to help, she shows, can come from a profound neediness—the need for aid workers and volunteers to be part of the lively world and something greater than themselves, and, in the case of the elderly who knit "trauma teddies" and "aid bunnies" for "needy children," the need to fight loneliness and loss of personhood. In seriously examining aspects of humanitarian aid often dismissed as sentimental, or trivial, Malkki complicates notions of what constitutes real political work. She traces how the international is always entangled in the domestic, whether in the shape of the need to leave home or handmade gifts that are an aid to sociality and to the imagination of the world.

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