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Liisa H. Malkki, *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015.207 pp. £ 18.99 (pbk)

What – or who – comes to mind when we think about international humanitarian aid?

In her book *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism,* Liisa Malkki starts by asking some basic questions: "*Who are these people?* Who wants to work in humanitarian aid and emergency relief, and why?" (p. 2). Based on in-depth ethnographic interviews with Finnish Red Cross aid workers and volunteers in Finland between the years 1996 to 2012, Malkki invites us to revisit preconceived ideas of international humanitarian aid. By shifting the gaze from aid receivers to aid workers and volunteers, she problematizes the often binary depiction of power relations between aid givers and receivers, demonstrates the importance of the domestic in international humanitarian aid, and puts front and centre the affective nature of aid work, which is often dismissed as "the mere" or the lesser element in international humanitarian aid.

In her introduction, Malkki effectively maps out three concepts that consistently emerged during her research and are woven together throughout her book. First, she visits the notion of *need,* as not being felt exclusively by aid recipients, but also strongly experienced by aid benefactors. Second, she reflects on *the relations of self to self,* through the positioning of aid workers and volunteers' subjective selves within the 'domestic' spaces where humanitarianism starts and the 'international' spaces where humanitarianism is directed. By doing so, she brings us to her third concept, *the imagination*. Applying a Foucauldian approach to imagination, Malkki illustrates how international humanitarianism engages in many imaginative practices: aid workers and volunteers imagine the recipients they wish to help, the places and societies where they come from, and those they wish to go to or connect with.

Based on interviews with Finnish Red Cross professionals, Chapter 1 highlights aid workers' desires of self-escape and self-improvement. Often motivated by a *need* to always improve and be better at their professions, the aid worker as a professional challenges the often-romanticized ideals of the aid worker as a saint. In Chapter 2, Malkki illustrates how aid workers' deep commitment to maintain a cold professional distance from the people they are tasked to help, is often challenged by the emotional realities of living in the middle of conflict and human suffering. Stories of selftransformation become intertwined with stories of self-loss. Chapter 3 places the figure of the child at the centre of humanitarian logic and affective imagination, especially, but not exclusively, in the Global North. This theme continues in Chapter 4, where the perspective shifts to Finnish Red Cross volunteers. Malkki highlights volunteers' imagination of and connection with 'children in need' through the production and/or donation of toys and toy-like objects, such as knitted aid bunnies. In Chapters 4 and 5, Malkki writes about a need to be needed, a dignity in giving, and a need to

overcome loneliness felt by many Red Cross volunteers in Finland. Finally, in Chapter 6, Malkki looks critically at the two fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: humanity and neutrality. She describes the zealousness with which aid workers defend these principles and the moral dilemmas they often face in doing so.

Warning against the belittling of the 'mere' acts of humanitarian aid, Malkki advocates the importance of what she calls "imaginative politics", which has the power to move people, capital, knowledges, and goods beyond borders. She criticizes what she sees as misogynistic tendencies to dismiss universal humanitarianism as politically insignificant. Malkki demonstrates how internationalist humanitarian imagination is very *domestic*. As her book illustrates, it involves practices of care often done by women and/or within a home. Also, in a broader sense, it forces us to acknowledge that practices deemed as 'international' are often emplaced somewhere in particular – in this case in constructions of Finnishness. Malkki effectively blurs the often-rigid lines between the international and the domestic, the aid worker and aid receiver, the imagined and the real.

While Malkki does not attempt to make any generalized notions of Finnish national identity, this topic repeatedly emerged in her interviews, allowing her to use aid workers and volunteers' affective imaginations of "the world" and "the international" to reflect deeply about what it means to be Finnish. *The Need to Help* does not only offer insights for those interested in international humanitarian aid, it also offers examples for thinking ethnographically and reflectively about the ways in which groups of people imagine and position themselves in relation to a 'world out there', which can manifest in societies abroad or embodied by foreigners nearby. Malkki's expertise in making explicit the relationality between international humanitarianism with different modes of thought makes this book relevant to various fields of study, including, but not limited to, refugees and other migration, development, and children and youth studies.

MAHARDHIKA SJAMSOE'OED SADJAD
Sjamsoe'oed@iss.nl
International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam