

Abstract

In this auto-ethnography, I use my experience of volunteering during the 'European refugee crisis' to pose a critique of how humanitarian aid is negotiated in its everyday practice. I identify four main groups of actors involved in the negotiation, namely the aid-workers, the volunteers, the locals and the refugees themselves. The goal of this work is to explore the mechanisms and causes of the marginalisation of the locals, and most importantly, of the refugees in this negotiation. Following De Genova's theory of migrant "illegalisation" I argue that the marginalisation of refugees is a result of the way the European border regime operates and I explore both the complicity of humanitarians in this regime and also how they challenged it. Following Agier's theory of the "humanitarian government", I argue that there is very little space for agency of people designated as refugees in humanitarian aid, and I analyse the power of aid-workers over the refugees. Last but not least, I use Pandolfi's concept of the humanitarian apparatus as a form of "migrant sovereignty" to show how humanitarians partly took over the local political practices in a setting of a humanitarian crisis on one of the Greek islands, and I describe the effects of this take-over on the local population.