

of displaced people's self-protection mobility strategies, thereby perpetuating the criminalization of poor people and deviant male youths. Criminalization as *progress narrative* concerns the criminalization of wartime rape; the safeguarding (harassment, sexual exploitation, violence) against unlawful behavior by humanitarian staff; and initiatives to tackle corruption (e.g. in food aid or refugee resettlement).

Kristin Bergtora Sandvik

References

- Cook, M.L. (2011) "Humanitarian Aid is Never a Crime": Humanitarianism and Illegality in Migrant Advocacy. *Law and Society Review*, 45(3): 561–591.
- Sandvik, K.B. (2011) Blurring Boundaries: Refugee Resettlement in Kampala: Between the Formal, the Informal, and the Illegal. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 34(1): 11–32.
- Sandvik, K.B. (2018) Humanitarians in Court: How Duty of Care Travelled from Human Resources to Legal Liability. *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 50(3): 358–374.
- Schneider, J., Schneider, P. (2008) The Anthropology of Crime and Criminalization. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 37: 351–373.

Crisis

A humanitarian crisis is framed as “an event or series of events that represents a critical threat to the health, safety, security or wellbeing of a community or other large group of people, usually over a wide area” (Humanitarian Coalition). Humanitarian crises can be the result of different causes such as natural catastrophes (an earthquake, a cyclone, a flood, a drought, etc.); human-driven actions (armed conflict, fire, etc.) or a combination of the two (famine, displacement). Such classifications, however, are contestable, as natural events are not merely the result of natural processes. The effects of and responses to natural disasters are related to social inequalities and wider political and economic processes.

Historian of concepts Reinhart Koselleck (2006) has followed the conceptual journey of the term “crisis” from classical Greece to contemporary times to

show how it has acquired an important place in everyday vocabulary and has become a catchword since the 19th century. The crisis frame significantly informs our conceptual and epistemological imaginations. At the same time, crisis is a “narrative construction” and a blind spot in the social sciences (Roitman 2013: 11). Crisis justifies specific interventions at the micro- and macrolevel, as Janet Roitman’s work on the financial crisis has illustrated (Roitman 2013). Thus, the crisis vocabulary opens the ground for the detection, diagnosis, and specific therapeutic treatment of social phenomena.

A humanitarian crisis is considered a rupture to a presumed normalcy. It is defined as a disturbance to the ordinary state of affairs and as an exceptional and extraordinary situation. As such, it follows the logic of the “emergency imaginary” (Calhoun 2008). Life in crisis is suspended and replaced by a rule of rapid and unstable change and chaos. Like “humanitarian disaster” or “humanitarian emergency,” terms often used interchangeably with “humanitarian crisis,” the latter appears to be traceable to a specific historical moment in the course of events. For example, the European Commission has highlighted that the Syrian conflict has generated one of “the worst humanitarian crises since World War II” (European Commission 2017). But it was only when more than 1 million displaced people reached Europe’s shores in 2015 that this labeling took place, motivating humanitarian aid by the European Union and the formation of a vast humanitarian apparatus. The year 2015 has thus come to be known as an exceptional moment in history and the time when the humanitarian crisis erupted.

It is not certain when the term “humanitarian crisis” gained currency in the humanitarian sphere, although researchers locate its rise to the Vietnamese boat people in the 1970s (Redfield 2013: 34). The humanitarian crisis frame depoliticizes suffering and gives a moral anchor to it. Such a discourse shifts attention away from the political and economic causes of crisis towards sentiments of pity and compassion. Moreover, saving lives or, more broadly, responding to a humanitarian crisis has a morally legitimizing effect. Therefore, the crisis-thinking logic prepares the ground for what generally follows: the responses of humanitarian actors.

Defining a situation as a humanitarian crisis justifies humanitarian and military interventions (Fassin and Pandolfi 2010), allocates material and symbolic resources, and mobilizes political responses. It is, in fact, the international humanitarian apparatus that defines a situation as a humanitarian crisis and calls for its treatment (Stockton 2004). At the same time, humanitarian images and the world media have a crucial role in locating, highlighting, and, ultimately, defining specific contexts as affected by humanitarian crises. One such example was Biafra in 1968, which became a symbol of humanitarian

crisis and gained global attention through the images that circulated in international media (Heerten 2017).

It goes without saying that there remain crises that are undefined as such (Stockton 2004: 16) or chronic crises (Vigh 2008) that are not on the radar of humanitarian aid. What qualifies as a humanitarian crisis and what does not is thus debatable.

Katerina Rozakou

References

- Calhoun, C. (2008) The Imperative to Reduce Suffering: Charity, Progress, and Emergencies in the Field of Humanitarian Action. In: Barnett, M. and Weiss, T.G. eds. *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*. Cornell University Press.
- European Commission (2017) *Fact Sheet: The EU and the Crisis in Syria*. <http://europa.eu>.
- Fassin, D., Pandolfi, M. eds. (2010) *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*. Zone Books.
- Heerten, L. (2017) *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism: Spectacles of Suffering*. Cambridge University Press.
- Humanitarian Coalition. *What Is a Humanitarian Crisis?* <https://www.humanitarian-coalition.ca>.
- Koselleck, R. (2006) Crisis. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67: 357–400.
- Redfield, P. (2013) *Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors Without Borders*. University of California Press.
- Roitman, J.L. (2013) *Anti-Crisis*. Duke University Press.
- Stockton, N. (2004) The Changing Nature of Humanitarian Crises. In: *The Humanitarian Decade: Challenges for Humanitarian Assistance in the Last Decade and into the Future*. United Nations Press.
- Vigh, H. (2008) Crisis and Chronicity: Anthropological Perspectives on Continuous Conflict and Decline. *Ethnos*, 73(1): 5–24.

Decolonization

Decolonization—the process through which colonies gained independence—has been formally successful largely thanks to the role of the United Nations