



## The European Graduate School EST. 1994

Seminar with Professor Thomas Keenan (4.5 ECTS credits)  
Division of Philosophy, Art and Critical Thought  
October Session/October 29–31 2019

### **Migration and the politics of humanitarianism**

Humanitarian relief organizations, from the International Committee of the Red Cross on, have insisted that their work is, and ought to be, independent of political considerations. Access to care should not depend on who you are and what side you're on. This claim of humanitarian neutrality has been tested and criticized again and again, including from within the movement, but remains an essential operational principle. And yet the interventionist dimension of humanitarian action, its implicit and sometimes explicit challenge to or cooperation with political authorities, cannot be denied. In the words of a former president of Doctors without Borders, "the humanitarian act is the most apolitical of all acts, but if its actions and its morality are taken seriously, it has the most profound of political implications." These implications are now at a critical stage. The crisis of the E.U. and U.S. border regimes marks a turning point in the debate about the politics of humanitarianism, as rescue operations in the Mediterranean and the southern deserts have been increasingly treated as criminal acts by governments. This seminar will explore the literature of humanitarian action and its dilemmas, in the context of the criminalization of rescue at sea and on land, with particular attention to the situation in Malta. Readings may include texts and films from Aditus, Doctors without Borders, David Rieff, Miriam Ticktin, Didier Fassin, Abu Bakr Khaal, Forensic Architecture, Forensic Oceanography (Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani), Paolo Cuttitta, Joe Sacco, and others, as well as meetings with activists in Valletta.