

Book Reviews

Warren, A., & Grenfell, D. (Eds.). (2016).

***Rethinking humanitarian intervention in the 21st century.* Edinburgh University Press.**

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Rethinking humanitarian intervention in the 21st century is an edited volume that examines the evolution, ethics, and politics of humanitarian intervention in the modern era. The book moves beyond a state-centric view of interventions to explore the complexities of globalization, technological advancements, and evolving notions of sovereignty. Published in 2016, the volume was released against the backdrop of the Syrian refugee crisis and increasing global skepticism toward Western-led interventions. The rise of non-state actors and complex humanitarian emergencies called for a reevaluation of traditional intervention models. With that in mind, the book's central thesis challenges the traditional government focused approach to humanitarian intervention, advocating instead for a model that incorporates local ownership, non-military strategies, and a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical dynamics in conflict zones.

The book is divided into three sections, each exploring a key theme: the evolution of humanitarian intervention in a global era, the limits of sovereignty and the ethics of intervention, and the politics of post-intervention reconstruction and humanitarian engagement. Chapters 1–4 explore the changing landscape of intervention, highlighting the influence of globalization and the shift from traditional state-based conflicts to more complex forms of violence. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, traditional notions of sovereignty are challenged, leading to a rise in complex humanitarian crises that require innovative and multifaceted responses.

Traditional humanitarian interventions, often characterized by military force and a state-centric approach, are insufficient to address the complexities of modern conflicts, the authors argue. For example, in Chapter 3, the author analyzes how the US-led intervention in Afghanistan was successful in removing the Taliban regime but failed to address the socioeconomic issues; thus showing how military interventions frequently ignore underlying causes like poverty and inequality. As Warren and Grenfell state, "Addressing symptoms of conflict without tackling its root causes only prolongs instability, as seen in the failures of Western-led military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq" (134). The authors use data from UN intervention reports to illustrate the ineffectiveness of purely military-led interventions, noting that in over 70% of cases, these approaches did not lead to sustainable peace. This data supports

their argument for non-military strategies, such as community-based peacebuilding initiatives.

Chapters 5–8 delve into the ethical dilemmas surrounding humanitarian intervention, questioning the effectiveness of traditional approaches and emphasizing the need for more nuanced and context-specific strategies. For example, in chapter 6, the author discusses the 1994 Rwandan genocide, where the international community’s failure to intervene due to concerns over state sovereignty resulted in the deaths of an estimated 800,000 people. This underscores that the traditional concept of state sovereignty often hinders effective humanitarian intervention because it can be used to shield perpetrators of atrocities from international scrutiny. This necessitates a careful balance between respecting state sovereignty and protecting human lives. While traditional humanitarian interventions often rely on military force and state-centric approaches, the book advocates for a more nuanced and comprehensive framework.

Chapters 9–12 focus on the challenges of rebuilding societies in the aftermath of conflict, emphasizing the importance of local ownership and sustainable peacebuilding efforts, as Trudy Fraser argues in chapter 10, the international community’s response to the Biafran War, where the financial and military support to the Nigerian government failed to address the underlying issues of poverty and inequality. This example demonstrates the importance of addressing the root causes from the context of governance failures and social fragmentation in post-intervention reconstruction efforts, must prioritize local ownership and capacity building to ensure long-term sustainability and prevent future cycles of violence. A top-down approach often leads to unintended consequences and undermines the legitimacy of interventions.

Overall, the volume highlights the importance of non-military strategies, such as diplomacy and humanitarian aid, in addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting reconciliation. Military intervention can often exacerbate conflict and undermine long-term peacebuilding efforts. Emphasizing the importance of considering the diverse range of actors involved, including non-state actors, regional organizations, and global power dynamics, the authors make the case for a more holistic understanding of the political, social, and cultural context in which conflicts occur. Furthermore, the book emphasizes the importance of local ownership in humanitarian interventions, arguing that involving communities in designing and implementing strategies enhances sustainability and legitimacy. The authors state, “Empowering local actors not only enhances the legitimacy of interventions but also increases the chances of achieving sustainable peace by addressing the specific needs and dynamics of the affected communities” (210). This requires a shift away from top-down approaches and toward more participatory and inclusive models of intervention.

Therefore, *Rethinking humanitarian intervention in the 21st century* is a valuable contribution to the literature on humanitarian intervention, drawing on diverse disciplinary perspectives to provide a comprehensive analysis of the subject. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the book offers a nuanced

understanding of the complex factors that shape humanitarian interventions. The authors' emphasis on contextualization is particularly commendable because it highlights the importance of tailoring interventions to specific circumstances rather than relying on one-size-fits-all solutions. The book provides practical recommendations for improving the effectiveness and ethicality of future interventions, drawing on lessons learned from past experiences.

However, the book could delve deeper into the gendered dimensions of conflict and peacebuilding, recognizing the unique experiences and needs of women and girls in crisis contexts. Furthermore, a more focused analysis of community-led climate resilience interventions would provide valuable insights into empowering local communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The authors mention, "as Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly integrated into humanitarian efforts, the risks of algorithmic bias and data misuse pose significant ethical dilemmas that must be addressed to prevent unintended harm to vulnerable populations" (245). The book briefly discusses AI's potential in optimizing humanitarian efforts but lacks depth on ethical concerns like data privacy and algorithmic bias, which could lead to unintended harm. Addressing these areas would allow the book to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the humanitarian sector in the 21st century.

Nonetheless, this book offers a timely reflection on the systemic challenges that the humanitarian sector has been grappling with and continues to face. It highlights the persistent issues that continue to plague the sector and demand urgent attention. Its interdisciplinary analysis provides valuable insights and offers a fresh perspective that is critical for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners working in the fields of international relations, peace and conflict studies, humanitarian assistance, and development.