

Earthquakes, famines and armed conflict: international responses to humanitarian emergencies

Miriam Bradley, Barcelona Institute for International Studies (IBEI)

Kyung Hee University Global Collaborative Summer Program in Humanity, Civilization and Global Governance

Course description and class format

This course offers a challenging introduction to the main debates within the study and practice of humanitarianism, and provides students with a range of conceptual tools for understanding the politics and everyday practice of humanitarianism. We examine the work of UN agencies and international NGOs in response to armed conflict, famine, and natural disasters. We discuss how politics and principles interact to shape the priorities, practice and outcomes of humanitarian response in countries like Haiti, Afghanistan and Syria.

Does the massive expansion of the humanitarian sector suggest the world is becoming more compassionate and civilized? How do the political interests of donor governments drive humanitarian priorities? Does aid do more harm than good? How does humanitarian aid differ from human rights or development work? Should humanitarian action be political? How does law protect in war? The course will grapple with these, and other, important questions regarding the ethics, law, politics and practice of humanitarianism.

Most days, the class is divided into two parts. In the first half of the class, we discuss a case study focused on the international response to a particular humanitarian emergency. In the second half of the class, we turn to a more general theme or topic. Wherever possible, the case study humanitarian emergencies have been chosen as particularly pertinent or interesting examples of the issues and debates in the general topic covered in the second half of the class.

The classes take the form of interactive lectures, with small group discussions. As part of the class, we often watch documentaries focused on the case study. On the thematic topics, we sometimes also watch clips from lectures and panel discussions by policymakers.

Learning objectives

At the end of this course the students should:

- demonstrate substantive knowledge of the major developments in international humanitarianism
- be able to engage in reasoned critical reflection on humanitarian principles and associated approaches to humanitarian action
- understand the strengths and criticisms of some of the main actors in international humanitarian action, including donor states, UN agencies, the Red Cross and international NGOs

Assessment

Attendance – 20%

In-class presentations – 2 x 40%

Week 1: What does it mean to be “humanitarian”?

Humanitarianism is a contested concept, and the first week of this course will introduce students to the central debates and main areas of contestation in international humanitarian action. We will discuss, among other things, what distinguishes humanitarian work from development work, how expansive and ambitious the goals of humanitarian action should be, and to what extent humanitarianism should be political.

Monday

Introduction

Tuesday

Brief history of modern humanitarian action

- Michael Barnett & Thomas G Weiss (2008) “Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present” in Barnett & Weiss (ed.) *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power and Ethics*, pp.1-48.
- Eleanor Davey, with John Borton and Matthew Foley (2013) *A history of the humanitarian system: Western origins and foundations*, HPG Working Paper, pp.1-15.

Wednesday

Case study: Famine in the Horn of Africa 1983-85

- Müller, Tanja R. 2013. “The Ethiopian famine’ revisited: Band Aid and the antipolitics of celebrity humanitarian action.” *Disasters* 37 (1):61-79.

Thematic topic: The construction of humanitarian emergencies

- Calhoun, Craig. 2009. “The idea of emergency: humanitarian action and global (dis)order.” IILJ International Legal Theory Colloquium Spring 2009: Virtues, Vices, Human Behavior and Democracy in International Law, NYU Law School.

Thursday

1. Film: Shake Hands with the Devil

2. Case study: Rwanda 1994-96

- DANIDA 1996. *The international response to conflict and genocide: lessons from the Rwanda experience. Synthesis Report. Various Authors.* Copenhagen: DANIDA. Chapter 3.

3. The principles of humanitarian action

- Fox, F. 2001. New humanitarianism: does it provide a moral banner for the 21st century? *Disasters* 25(4), pp. 275-289.

Friday

Principled vs. political humanitarianism

Week 2: Agents and actors

In the second week of the course, we turn to the architecture of humanitarian aid, introducing the different kinds of actors operating in the arena of humanitarian action. We look at how different UN agencies and INGOs interpret and implement humanitarian principles, how they are funded, what their strengths and emphases are in terms of response and activities, and how accountable they are—to their funders, the people they are supposed to help, and other stakeholders. We will also discuss the main criticisms made of different organizations. We explore the roles of domestic actors, including the governments of affected states, local and national NGOs, and armed non-state actors.

Monday

1. Case study: 2004 Asian Tsunami

- Cosgrave, J. (2007). Joint evaluation of the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami (synthesis report: expanded summary). London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition.

2. Thematic topic: Politics of humanitarian financing

- Poole, Lydia. 2014. Bridging the needs-based funding gap: NGO field perspectives. Geneva: Norwegian Refugee Council.

Tuesday

1. Case study: Sri Lanka 2009

- Niland, Holmes, Bradley. 2014. Policy Debate - Humanitarian Protection in the Midst of Civil War: Lessons from Sri Lanka. *International Development Policy* 5(2). <http://poldev.revues.org/1629>

2. Student presentations on UN agencies

3. Thematic topic: UN agencies

- Barnett, M. 2001. Humanitarianism with a sovereign face: UNHCR in the global undertow. *International Migration Review* 35(1) 244-77

Wednesday

1. Film on Biafra

2. Case study: Biafran war 1967-70

- Pérouse de Montclos, M.-A. (2009). Humanitarian aid and the Biafra War: lessons not learned. *Africa Development*, 34(1), 69-82

Thursday

1. Student presentations on international nongovernmental organizations

2. Thematic topic: The Red Cross Movement and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs)

International responses to humanitarian emergencies

- Stoddard, Abby. 2003. Humanitarian NGOs: challenges and trends, HPG Briefing Paper 12. London: Humanitarian Policy Group/Overseas Development Institute.

Friday

Case study: Afghanistan

- Benelli, Prisca, Antonio Donini, and Norah Niland. 2012. Afghanistan: humanitarianism in uncertain times. Somerville, MA: Feinstein International Center.

Thematic topic: Armed actors

- Collinson, Sarah, Samir Elhawary, and Robert Muggah. 2010. States of fragility: stabilisation and its implications for humanitarian action. HPG Working Paper. London: Humanitarian Policy Group.
- ADH. (2011). Rules of engagement: protecting civilians through dialogue with armed non-state actors. Geneva: Geneva Academy of IHL and Human Rights.

Week 3: Operations and activities

In the third and final week of the course, we turn our attention to the nuts and bolts of humanitarian response, working through the project cycle from needs assessment, to different kinds of response, to evaluation.

Monday

1. Case study: 2011 famine in Somalia

- 2012 Special issue of Global Food Security – see <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/22119124/1/1>

2. Thematic topic: Food aid, other forms of material assistance, and cash transfers

- Maxwell, Daniel G, John W Parker, and Heather C Stobaugh. 2013. "What drives program choice in food security crises? Examining the “response analysis” question." *World Development* 49 (0):68-79.
- Harvey, P. (2007). Cash-based responses in emergencies. *HPG Report 24*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

Tuesday

1. Documentary on Darfur

2. Protection and advocacy in Darfur

- Pantuliano, S. and O'Callaghan, S. 2006. *The 'protection crisis': a review of field-based strategies for humanitarian protection in Darfur*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Humanitarian Policy Group. 2007. *Humanitarian advocacy in Darfur: the challenge of neutrality*, HPG Policy Brief 28. London: Overseas Development Institute.

3. Thematic topic: Protection, dialogue and advocacy

- Slim, H., & Bonwick, A. (2005). *Protection: an ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

Wednesday

1. Documentary on 2014 Ebola epidemic

2. Case study: 2014 west African Ebola epidemic

- Humanitarian Exchange Magazine (2015) Special Feature on the Ebola crisis in West Africa, see http://odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/he_64.pdf

Thursday

Student presentations

Friday

Student presentations