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Gary Bass, *Freedom's Battle – The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2008, 509 pp.

Freedom's Battle – The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention aims at nothing less than analyzing and explaining the historical background of policies of humanitarian intervention. This task is huge and the author wisely limits his historical investigation to three cases of interventions that he regards to be examples for humanitarian interventions: First the British, Russian and U.S. response to atrocities against Greeks in 1821-27, second the French and British responses to atrocities against Syrians in 1860 and finally the British and Russian responses to atrocities against Bulgarians in 1876.

By analyzing these three cases Gary Bass gives an insight in 19th century's political history and his close, detailed and accurate research is definitely one of the major strength of his book. With respect to those conflicts the state of mind of the key political actors Bass' work is a goldmine for every interested scholar.

But Bass' book is not only a piece of historical scholarship; it also contains a well pronounced political message. Bass' key thesis, at which he arrives against the background of his historical analysis, is that the story of the analyzed cases presents a strong argument for humanitarian interventions. He furthermore states that "[t]he nineteenth century shows how the practice of humanitarian intervention can be *managed*" (p. 360).

Three strands of critic can be brought against Bass' work. First the accuracy of the assessment of the historical cases as proper examples of a practice of humanitarian intervention can be questioned. The second strand concerns the lack of a legal and moral grounding for humanitarian interventions. Finally the pragmatic political conclusions at which Bass arrives have to be called into question.

The first question that arises after reading the book is whether the given examples really show a practice of humanitarian intervention in the 19th century. The answer to this question is twofold. First the existence of a practice or even single cases of humanitarian intervention in the 19th century is counter-intuitive. It therefore is the author's task to prove his thesis right and to rebut those who see the analyzed interventions as examples of imperialism or pan-Christianity rather than humanitarianism. Bass dedicates the first chapter of the book and several parts in the last chapters to this task, however not always fully convincing. Especially the argument Bass puts forward to rebut the claim that Britain and France acted out of Pan-Christianity thinking is rather weak. On page 348ff, he gives three cate-

gories of reasons. These arguments might very well add facets to the motives that drove the respective actors to intervening but they do not prove that Pan-Christianity did not remain a paramount factor amongst those motives. In fact it can be argued that European imperialism was based in large parts on Christianity and the idea of cultural superiority combined with the right or even duty to evangelize the world. This would then mean that even acting out of altruism in order to save fellow Christians' lives has an imperialistic connotation. An interesting question to ask would be if a non-Christian state or community has ever undertaken such things as humanitarian interventions. Maybe one could even go so far as to ask if the whole idea of humanitarian intervention is not a Christian idea. An Idea that initially expressed interest only in the suffering of fellow Christians and over time developed into a broader concept of helping all human beings that suffer from severe atrocities without regard for their religious allegiance. This exposes the problems of making a clear differentiation between imperialism, humanitarianism and Pan-Christianity, at least in those days. Hence unless BASS rebukes the Pan-Christianity argument the imperialism argument prevails, too.

Second, even if the three examples BASS analyses can be understood as examples of a nation acting out of pure altruism, are they not merely the exceptions that prove the rule? To prove a practice of humanitarian intervention in the 19th century or as BASS puts it "a substantial humanitarianism" (p. 380) in British foreign policy more is needed than just three examples.

The second strand of critic aims at the lack of a legal argument for humanitarian interventions. Even if we accept that the given examples show a practice of humanitarian intervention, it is very questionable whether one can deduce a legal argument for humanitarian intervention from that. Neither a right to humanitarian intervention nor a "responsibility to protect" can be derived from the historical analysis. The author himself clearly follows George Canning's position (p. 354) opposing a universal right to wage humanitarian intervention in favor of regional treaties that entitle certain regional powers to act as a controlling power in their own region with the right to intervene militarily if necessary (p. 361). But this is a political suggestion that has no legal backing.

In addition, what seems to be totally omitted in the book is the moral question concerning humanitarian interventions. This is not discussed at all but the author seems to presume humanitarian interventions to be morally correct. That gives the impression that everybody who is against humanitarian interventions is a bad guy. This tends to bias the reader to accept the arguments that BASS derives from the historic analysis to defend humanitarian interventions more easily. Even though it is plausible to consider it immoral not to act in the face of mass atrocities the issue is more complex. Especially with regard to the soldiers that are actually sent to intervene. Is it really a prime minister's moral duty to risk his soldiers' lives to defend foreigners? BASS gives no answer to this question. Of course it has to be borne in mind that BASS book is a historical analysis and not a legal one. However, if conclusions are drawn, ending in advice for today's political actors, neither the sphere of international law nor moral arguments should be fully left aside.

This brings us to the last part of the Book, in which Bass proceeds to draw political conclusions from his historical analysis, ending up promoting humanitarian intervention. This part is weak point of his Bass' work. The line of argument from the historic results of his inquiry and his political proposals is neither clear nor compelling. Even if we accept the fact that humanitarian interventions are not new, the realist who considers them to be "foolish, fake or irrelevant" (p.16) can still be right. To answer the question, whether humanitarian intervention are a good thing and even politically feasible more is required than just a historical reference. It is a political question that needs first and foremost a decent analysis of today's political situation. The way Bass deals with the U.S. intervention in Iraq 2003 is a far cry from being sufficient. The disaster in Iraq does indeed invalidate the idea of promoting human rights and it is difficult to see how the "longer view" the book shows can prevail over that. What follows from the book is a proposal of a new kind of intervention. There are several problems with this proposal. One is the exclusion of cases in which greater powers like China or Russia commit atrocities, because of the danger to provoke a great war. Another is that Bass wants to legally base these interventions on treaties like the Treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji. The parallel with the treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji is hardly very well reasoned. The treaty was made after a military victory of Russia over the Ottoman Empire. It was a treaty dictated by the victor. Who would sign a treaty today in which Australia or South Africa are granted rights to humanitarian interventions? It seems to be an obscure idea.

This brings us to a general skepticism towards the possibility to draw conclusions from historic events to present political challenges. It is difficult to say how much we can take from 19th Century politics that is applicable even to today's political issues. Everything happens in a context and as the political context changes, the meanings of political action changes too. The Post-Napoleonic-Era in Europe in which Bass' examples take place is different from the global political context in which incidents like Rwanda and Srebrenica occurred. In the final part of the book Bass seems to overstep the limits of historical analysis, which eventually results in a poorly grounded promotion of humanitarian interventions.

Concluding the book's weak points lie first in the selective choice of examples and the somehow artificial differentiation of imperialism, humanitarianism and Pan-Christianity that regards too little the interacting and merging of these social movements, second in the omission of any legal or moral discussion that could have backed the political implications and proposals and third in the not well grounded political proposals itself. However, in spite of this critique Bass book is still worth reading especially as a through historical analysis. It is written in a lively tone and gives fascinating insights in the political world of the 19th century. These insights can and should teach us today, although the lesson to be learned is not as clear a support for humanitarian interventions as Bass sometimes makes us believe.