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**Eric Munoz on The Geopolitics of Hunger 2000-2001: Hunger and Power edited by Action Against Hunger. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000. 354pp.**

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**The Geopolitics of Hunger 2000-2001: Hunger and Power edited by Action Against Hunger. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000. 354pp.**

In 2001, Action Against Hunger celebrated its 22nd birthday with a growing awareness that the eradication of hunger requires much more than simply ensuring that global production of foodstuffs maintains pace with growing populations. In that year, AAH published The Geopolitics of Hunger, 2000-2001: Hunger and Power, an edited volume that presents an overview of contemporary food security issues.

Indeed, the argument made by AAH is more complicated than supply and demand: control of food supplies is a tool wielded by authorities in power and those seeking to contest that power. Famine is more often a result of human action than environmental drought or disaster. The Geopolitics of Hunger describes the places and ways in which chronic malnutrition and the threat of starvation result from political manipulation of food supplies, despite international legal prohibitions against the use of food as a weapon of war. With a forward that invokes the Biafran Civil War as a classic example of how access to food can be used as a political instrument of control, the first 24 short essays are collected under the heading “Food Crisis: Hunger as a Weapon.” The purpose here is to provide a broad overview of the ways in which food shortages and hunger have played into conflict and post-conflict situations ranging from Africa to Central and Eastern Europe, Central and South America. The second section features debates about the efficacy of humanitarian intervention, and the final section discusses particular policy prescriptions for worldwide hunger eradication.

The section “Food Crisis: Hunger as a Weapon” examines food security problems arising either during periods of conflict or in the years since conflict has ended. The presentation of the problem here is through specific case studies. While some of the essays deal explicitly with the ways in which combatants on one, both or all sides of a conflict have used food to control populations (Sierra Leone, Somalia, the Congo, Rwanda and Kosovo), the other essays (dealing with Abkhazia, Tajikistan, Kosovo, Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua) focus on post-conflict development activities and local food shortages. The chapter on Honduras discusses water shortages in the wake of Hurricane Mitch, and one of the Kosovo chapters (“A Survey of Kosovar Refugees in Macedonia, May–June 1999”) describes food security issues faced by Albanian Refugees fleeing Kosovo, “focusing particularly on issues pertaining to their ability to procure, grow, and harvest food” (137). Maps and short chronologies included in many of the chapters provide an accessible format for understanding the scenarios being described. Given the scope of case studies presented, however, no focus on any one set of problems (e.g. conflict-driven famine or misuse of humanitarian aid supplies) exists. Instead the case studies provide an introduction to many different practical problems associated with food supply and demand.

The wide-ranging nature of the first section is repeated in the remaining two sections of the book. The section entitled “Confronting Unjust Food Distribution: Which Strategies for Humanitarian Intervention” deals with the nature and content of humanitarian aid distribution programs, including discussions of the Code of Conduct for disaster relief programs (“A Code of “Good” Conduct?”), reconceptualizing humanitarian aid programs to include strong security components (“Security: A key Component of Humanitarian Action”), and defining/redefining international legal norms legitimizing intervention and aid (“Humanitarianism and the International Criminal Justice System: Abandoning Neutrality and Impartiality” and “Combating Man-Made Famine: Legal Instruments”). The chapter “Security: A Key Component of Humanitarian Action” is particularly useful in

demonstrating how goods provided through humanitarian assistance have become an increasingly viable commodity, and how aid agencies and their employees have themselves become a target in conflict.

The final section, entitled “Food Policies to Eradicate Hunger” consists of ten short essays which take a global perspective on malnutrition and starvation, and attempt to describe the conditions that must be overcome in order to ensure that the basic right to food is respected. The first several chapters present a broad overview of hunger in the world including current population statistics and projections to the year 2050. The section also contains two chapters on food aid to Russia in 1998 and 1999. Though somewhat repetitive, they demonstrate the effect aid can have on local, national, and international commodity markets. The section also includes a chapter on hunger in the United States (focusing on programs to feed the elderly) and a brief examination of the Lomé Convention—a series of agreements which governed trade relations between European states and African, Caribbean and Pacific states between 1975 and 2000—that was subsequently replaced by the Cotonou Agreement.

The Geopolitics of Hunger presents a sweeping examination of hunger and starvation within the context of a growing global civil society. For those with an interest in food security, the essays provide an excellent starting point to gain an understanding of these topics. The case studies presented in the first section of the book are particularly useful in this respect, while the latter two sections offer brief examinations of a host of theoretical, technical and legal issues. Except for the somewhat inconsistent organization of topics and essays, this book offers some excellent food for thought.

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