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The Role of Time in International Law and Humanitarian Crisis

International law has primarily viewed time as functional. Statutes of limitations and the Rule of Inter-Temporal Law illustrate the practicality of time in the international legal system. Time, however, plays a much more dynamic role. It is inherent to the construction and operation of international law, yet rarely examined or identified as a tool. This paper seeks to introduce temporality as an analytical framework in international law.

International law tends to prioritize crises, particularly humanitarian catastrophes. Feminist critics, however, have identified numerous problems with this “crisis model,” including its manifold contributions to the abuse and exploitation of women. In an effort to address these problems, this paper critiques the role of time within the crisis model and, specifically, the ways in which international law’s current temporal approach underpins the model’s deleterious effects on women. (Accordingly, the notion of “crisis” is demystified and exposed as a mere “sign of the times.”)

Alternative, feminist temporal schemes are then proposed to alleviate feminist concerns with the model. These schemes purport to broaden and contextualize international law’s temporal approach to crises, thereby promoting the safety and well-being of women. Hopefully, the temporal schemes presented herein will be applied to myriad international law contexts.