



Not breaking the rules

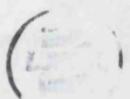


Not playing the game



A study of assistance to countries at war
(1997-2001)

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PhD



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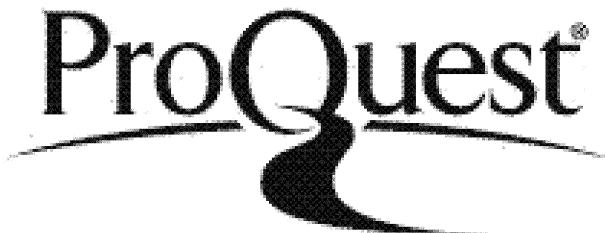
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Abstract

Why do the humanitarian principles, human rights and other aims espoused by NGOs apparently fail to influence the reality of assistance delivery, whilst reality does not dint these objectives? Drawing on literature concerning assistance, the political economy in which it is given, and psychological dimensions of regulation, I investigate the nature and function of objectives stated by aid providers. I argue that whereas discourse is manoeuvred to approve whatever NGOs undertake, the assistance delivered is so far from its objectives as to question what guidance they offer and their strategic merit. Additionally, the NGOs' approach disregards failure by allowing operational weaknesses to blame or discredit others, rather than being acknowledged to reflect on interventions. This screens assistance from evaluation or reform, whilst overlooking on-going suffering. My methodology combines an analysis of donor and NGO policy-making with an empirical investigation of how people are given, or excluded from, assistance.

I find that aid agencies maximise returns on a politically constructed morality. Where these are high, as in the cases of Sierra Leone and Rwanda, a consensus of sorts is reached between aid providers and governments, and some people benefit from assistance. The consensus, though, marginalises opposition groups and people in their territory. In the Democratic Republic of Congo and southern Sudan, no consensus emerged and the contexts offered nothing to aid providers; most people received no genuine help. In all countries, NGOs deemed political and military activity illegitimate, thereby forestalling dialogue and limiting their perception of the situation; these factors cast doubt on the sincerity of the interventions. I conclude that people in countries at war are not 'breaking the rules' of assistance – as assistance is not meaningfully 'ruled' by rights or principles – they are more fundamentally 'not playing the game'.

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Table of contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of contents.....	4
Table of figures	6
Glossary.....	7
1. Some surprises and no referee	9
Thesis	9
Research problem	10
Providing assistance.....	11
Players.....	11
The rules	14
How does it work?.....	16
Research questions and argument	21
Methodology	22
Analytical approach.....	24
Challenges posed.....	25
Inverting the inquiry	25
Theoretical framework.....	26
Coping with cognitive dissonance	27
Stage one: morality	28
Stage two: influence.....	35
Stage three: impunity	41
Structure of the thesis.....	46
2. DFID: a new humanitarianism.....	48
What DFID says	48
What DFID does.....	50
Sierra Leone	51
Rwanda.....	58
Congo	64
Southern Sudan	69
What DFID achieves.....	73
Defines good	73
Reaches targets.....	75
Different questions, same responses	77
3. Sierra Leone and Rwanda.....	78
Sierra Leone.....	79
Freetown	81
Displacement.....	82
Port Loko	85
Camps.....	86
Bo	88
Service provision.....	89

Rwanda.....	93
Kigali.....	95
Peace	95
Ruhengeri	99
Resettlement.....	100
Umutara.....	104
Neutral progress	104
Achievements, but not according to objectives.....	109
4. Congo and southern Sudan	110
Congo	111
Kinshasa	114
Health and disarray	114
Goma.....	118
Lobbying	119
Bukavu	123
Targeting	123
Southern Sudan	127
Kotobi.....	130
Sustainability.....	130
Agangrial	133
More sustainability	133
Lankien.....	137
Impartiality	137
Guidance lacking.....	140
5. Breaking the rules.....	142
Persuasion and provocation	143
Southern Sudan	143
Solutions rejected	143
“Memorandum of mis-Understanding”	145
Congo	149
Unregulated violence	150
Intransigence	153
Rwanda.....	156
Troubling elements	156
Bullying.....	159
Sierra Leone	162
“Brutal war”	162
Harassment/ development.....	163
Legitimacy	165
Another strategy	167
6. The Game	169
The assistance game.....	169
Who gets assistance, and why?	170
The politically backward	171
Victims of moral outrage.....	175
How and why is assistance sustained?	177
Fabricated clarity	179
Tactical confusion.....	187

The Score.....	194
7. Conclusions.....	196
Not breaking the rules, not playing the game	197
Implications for theory	200
Methodological – discourse critique.....	201
Empirical – political morality	202
Analytical – integrating psychological theory	203
Implications for practice.....	206
Plan B, NGO assistance and withdrawal.....	208
Plausibility	208
Commitment	210
Congo rules	211
Plan A.....	212
REFERENCES.....	216

Table of figures

<i>Slaves rescued from vessel operating illegally, c1869.....</i>	17
<i>Feeding centre, Sudan 1998.....</i>	17
<i>Africa: showing countries studied.....</i>	47
<i>Humanitarian Assistance: Top Ten Recipient Countries.....</i>	50
<i>Bilateral aid from DFID. Source: DFID</i>	51
<i>Tony Blah-Blah</i>	76
<i>Map of Sierra Leone</i>	79
<i>British post-box, Freetown.....</i>	81
<i>A bowser supplies water to a camp.....</i>	92
<i>Map of Rwanda</i>	93
<i>NGOs' hoardings</i>	95
<i>Map of Congo.....</i>	112
<i>Comedian rails the "Ministry of Useless Affairs"</i>	114
<i>Road to Kisenso</i>	117
<i>Map of southern Sudan</i>	127
<i>Cattle camp near Agangrial.....</i>	137
<i>Bonthe clinic, funded by the people of UK.....</i>	199
<i>Kids on stilts, Sierra Leone</i>	215

Glossary

I introduce aid organisations in the text by their full names, and use acronyms thereafter as they are often primarily known in the latter form. Full versions of their names are listed here, alongside other acronyms I have used.

AAA	Agro Action Allemande
ACF	Action Contre la Faim
AFDL	Alliance des forces démocratiques de libération du Congo
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (Sierra Leone)
AliR	L'Armée de libération du Rwanda
APC	All People's Congress (Sierra Leone)
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CARE	CARE International
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CDC	Community Development Committee (Rwanda)
CDF	Civil Defence Force (Sierra Leone)
CHAD	Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department (of DFID)
CMA	Christian Mission Aid
DAC	Disaster Assistance Committee
Diakonie	Diakonie Emergency Aid
DDR	Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Office
ECOMOG	Economic Community Cease-fire Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
ERT	Emergency Response Team
EU	European Union
ex-FAR	ex-Forces armées rwandaises
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
FDD	Forces for the Defence of Democracy (Burundi/Congo)
GoS	Government of Sudan
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Product
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HDI	Human Development Index
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMC	International Medical Corps
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IRIN	United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
Merlin	Medical Emergency Relief International
MLC	Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MODEP	Ministry of Development and Economic Planning (Sierra Leone)

MoH	Ministry of Health
Monuc	Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Medical Research Council
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NCDDR	National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (Sierra Leone)
NCRRR	National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (Sierra Leone)
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFDA	Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
Oxfam	Oxford Committee for Famine relief
PATS	Project d'Appui Transitoire à la Santé (Congo)
Radda Barnen	Swedish Save the Children
Rcd	Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie
RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Army
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RUF	Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)
SC-UK	Save the Children UK
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement. The Army and Movement are referred to together as SPLA/M.
SPDF	Sudan People's Democratic Front
SRRA	Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
TSA	Transitional Safety-net Allowance (Sierra Leone)
UN	United Nations
Unamsil	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
Unicef	United Nations Childrens Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VSF	Vétérinaires Sans Frontières
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

1. Some surprises and no referee

On Sunday 11th November 2001, I was staying in Kotobi, southern Sudan. I had plans to go fishing, but plans do not always work out, and then I was a bit unexpectedly playing football. I had four positions: defence, right-wing, mid-field and marking that guy with the bandana. The pitch was grass (knee-deep) with heavy camber in our favour.

Rule #1: No off-side rule. Stand where you want, especially near the goal. Playing behind your opponents is not playing, and is pointed at. #2: No dribbling. Hoofing is good, and headers are tolerated if the ball is likely to do some damage. #3: No tackling. This corroborates #2: if someone is dribbling, they have already fouled, so approaching them implicates you in that. #4: No dallying. When the ball passes between players, anyone has to knock it into a spectating child, the church, or the sorghum field. #5: Whenever you are hit by the ball, be hit by it in any direction, so as not to favour either team. #6: If you are white, female, wearing shoes and speaking English (albeit quietly and to yourself), having the ball land on you is *as good as* scoring a goal, and will be recorded as such in local lore.

Adherence to the rules ensures what English footballers would term chaos, but who are they to say? Later, the ball wandered into the goal sparking total pitch invasion, singing and acrobatics. In all relevant respects, we played football (and won). In no relevant sense was it like the World Cup. The game is obliquely illuminating: as the lone foreigner, I was incapable of fulfilling all my roles, danced around in heat I was not used to, misunderstood much of what was happening and was publicly credited with scoring the goal. It is not profoundly analogous, but raises questions about rules, goals and what happens on the way, which I investigate in this study, and is also representative of my methodology, which I outline below.

Thesis

This thesis is about assistance and violence. It investigates how assistance is formulated and delivered through international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in violent contexts, to whom it is given, and how it is justified and sustained. I consider relief and longer-term projects such as health, education or agricultural support, and use the word ‘assistance’ to avoid confusion with more general comment on aid. The salient factor for the thesis is that the countries were at war and parts of their population were in dangerous poverty, rather than what name is attributed to the intervention.

There is some similarity between violence and assistance, as evidenced by NGO campaigns to fight poverty or hunger. Both have psychological and political dimensions. With each, it can be

asked why it occurs, not simply in terms of motivation or provocation, but why people think that it is a reasonable way to achieve something, if not everything.

Violence and assistance can be triggered by like stimuli, including desperation and inequality, and sometimes by each other. People fighting and people assisting often perceive each other as interfering, corrupt and illegitimate. Both processes are peculiarly optimistic: they have immediate goals, but their political credentials and history are varied. Both (often) take place in fraught circumstances where the chance of success is low, and the cost of failure high. People who hand out assistance or violence often justify themselves by reference to their aspirations or objectives, although what assistance or violence actually *does* is generally more interesting for those on the receiving end.

This opens the question of practicability. Violence and assistance attempt to change social structures or resource allocations, and have corrective roles, extending from punishment to treatment or welfare. In southern Sudan, a doctor encouraged people at an NGO workshop to have their children vaccinated for the good of development and war, saying:

Let us not think that we will liberate ourselves and then come again for development. Let us, when we are carrying a gun in one hand, carry building materials in our other hands. Within war there are some who are suffering and wounded, and others will be born. Now if we leave our children to die of measles and polio, who will come and help us? We cannot continue war if other diseases are killing our children or our mothers. Let me tell you that when you are preventing disease, good health is important for development.¹

According to his analysis, both assistance and violence are necessary to fight the oppression, and both are hampered by it. Similarities apart, assistance and violence have opposite angles on suffering. A central proposition of assistance is that suffering is unnecessary and unhelpful and should be stopped. The force of violence is that suffering is both necessary and helpful; in practice both target the vulnerable, who are often poor.

Research problem

How do assistance and violence interact? Violence gives assistance its *raison d'être*: it creates victims and provides a moral foil. At the same time, it makes assistance unlikely. There is something obvious about the merit of assistance, when considered in isolation: people who are desperately poor need help. There is also something *unobvious* about how this will work when the violence that contributed to the desperate poverty is factored in as a constraint to relieving it.

The puzzle this poses, which is central to the thesis, is why it is that objectives espoused by aid agencies apparently fail to impact on the reality of assistance delivery, and why it is that this

¹ 02/12/02, Cuiebet.

reality does not impact on what objectives are professed. I endeavour to explain the relationship between the stated objectives of assistance and the reality of delivery, to determine not only how and why some people receive assistance whilst others do not, but also why assistance is like it is, how it endures and what it achieves. First I describe the actors involved in providing assistance and the objectives they espouse; then I present my questions, methodology and analytical approach.

Providing assistance

I am considering assistance in the form of relief, development and peace projects, pursued through material or service provision, income generation, infrastructural support or advice. Whilst the Toyotas and food sacks are the most obvious manifestations of assistance, I am also examining the interests, power bases and agendas that direct and fund the vehicles and sacks. I am investigating contexts in which people have been subjected to famine, displacement or pillage, or had their property, infrastructure, village or development destroyed by fighting.

Players

Donors and international NGOs have devised assistance as a means of responding to disasters elsewhere; they determine the aims and methods. For assistance to be delivered, some cooperation or acquiescence is needed from people in countries where it is given. I refer to them as hosts, so as not to assume who is a recipient or beneficiary.

Names of aid agencies inspire optimism and power: ‘Save the Children’, ‘Feed the Hungry’, ‘World Vision’, ‘Plan’, ‘Department for International Development’. Ignatieff moves that NGOs and pressure groups have emerged as:

[a] new kind of politics...that takes the world rather than the nation as its political space and that takes the human species itself rather than specific citizenship, racial, religious, or ethnic groups as its object... Its popularity owes much to the fact that it is an antipolitics, rejecting all the arguments that political ideologists devise to justify harm done to human beings. (Ignatieff 1998, 21-22)

The moral case is intuitive: if people have the money and inclination to help others who are suffering, it seems right for them to do so. It can also be argued that people who have the means have a duty to help, even if they have no inclination.

In addition to the moral grounds, there is something practical and convenient about the way that assistance flows from countries of material surplus to countries of material shortage. A government official in Sierra Leone summarised, “We need everything. That’s the fortunate aspect. NGOs are just doing what they want to do. I’m not saying they’re wasting resources –

there's a need for everything. They come with an already pre-determined agenda.”² Giving assistance is dependent on, and takes advantage of, rich-world to poor-world prices and logistics.

My main focus is on governmental donors and international operational NGOs although, as I am writing about the institution of assistance, human rights organisations and implementing UN agencies are also relevant. I refer on occasions to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and interviewed delegates in the course of my research, but I do not make a specific enquiry into the ICRC's operations. In considering whether the analysis that emerges about NGOs could be applied to the ICRC, some points of difference and similarity can be mentioned.

The ICRC differs from NGOs in that it has a unique mandate in the Geneva Conventions, international recognition, and an unparalleled international network, institutional memory and skills base (McAllister 2003, 4). The ICRC has direct access to states and explicit diplomatic status. It can convene states on matters relating to International Humanitarian Law and its terminology is of ‘humanitarian diplomacy’. It retains respect for sovereignty and a practice of discrete diplomacy, rather than witness, and its authority is given by the governments signatory to the Geneva Conventions. Appeals are made under some circumstances and annual reports are produced, but the emphasis is on what the ICRC does, not what it sees (Delorenzi 1999, 28). From these factors, and from the fact that the organisational culture dates from 1864, it may be construed that the ICRC is likely to be more autonomous and more conservative than NGOs.

Whilst there are elements that differentiate the ICRC from NGOs, there are also similarities. Primary amongst these is that the ICRC, like NGOs, has limited resources, and is therefore under pressure to make decisions about where to operate. Secondly, many of the features that define its official status are not of practical significance in situations when the state has disintegrated (Delorenzi 1999, 36). Additionally, in that I am investigating how assistance is received, as well as how it is given, it is reasonable to suppose that people who see aid vehicles and operations may not be aware of, or care about, the differences between NGOs and the ICRC. The upshot of this is that the ICRC's security is not necessarily more assured than that of NGOs, and increasing attacks were documented after 1989 (ICRC 1991). So, whilst the ICRC's identity differs from that of NGOs, the challenges faced at implementation, and the means to deal with them, are likely to be comparable.

Donors

There is an array of donors including governments, the UN, the EU, and individuals. In this thesis, I examine the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID). Focusing at the governmental level allows consideration of political agendas and how they

² Interview 25/01/01, Freetown.

relate to assistance. I take DFID as an example because it has been at the forefront of humanitarian policy-making since its inception in 1997. Moreover, the UK is a major donor with a dominant role in shaping international aid and assistance.

Why do governments give assistance? Possible reasons include the general tenet that the rich should help the poor, lobbying by domestic constituencies including NGOs and expatriates, foreign policy interests of strategy or economics, international agreements, and combinations of these factors. Some donor countries, notably Britain, France and Belgium have vestigial colonial ties, which can either spur them to action or exclude them from the action. A more recently articulated donor concern is for common security (Duffield 2001).

In wars, donor engagement is typically short-term ‘emergency’ funding. Duffield writes, “The formal position of most northern governments is that humanitarian assistance is unconditional” and, “Few politicians or aid agencies, for example, would publicly advocate cutting humanitarian assistance to civilians as a result of abuse by local political or military actors” (Duffield 1997, 57). Tendering to NGOs can have financial or technical advantages for donors. In terms of the political relationship, Smillie reports, “most governments claim to value NGO independence, but insist that NGOs conform to government norms and priorities, and are resentful of NGO criticism” (Smillie 1996, 164-5), identifying the imbalance of power.

NGOs

Disasters attract dozens of NGOs, but many have small budgets, and around fifteen command 75% of all NGO humanitarian funding (Randel and German 2000, 49). Many NGOs originate from ideological or religious movements in rich nations when people have mobilised around a particular disaster, or a particular sector, such as health, food or sanitation. Regarding the relationship with their funders, Randel and German write,

NGOs have often been criticized for their dependence on governmental donor agencies. Where emergency programming is concerned, the dependency shoe is on the other foot: without NGOs, many bilateral and multilateral agencies would be unable to deliver the bulk of their emergency assistance as fast, as well, or perhaps at all. (Randel and German 2000, 47)

This suggests potential for dynamic collaboration between donors and NGOs. Donors fund international NGOs to bring goods and skills and circumvent existing political, economic and legal realities by setting up their own, according to their principles. That may not be possible; Terry identifies the ‘paradox of humanitarianism’ as the tendency for NGOs to contribute to the suffering they aim to alleviate. She reports from eastern Congo, following the genocide in Rwanda, when aid was supporting a population that included many murderers:

The French section [of Médecins sans Frontières] decided to follow its convictions and leave, whereas other sections decided to stay. This rupture undermined the coherence of our claims that the situation was untenable for humanitarian organizations, and our withdrawal made few waves in the aid community, among donor governments or in the

press...For those of us who left, however, the decision was far more than tactical; it was a question of ethics and responsibility. (Terry 2002, 4)

Terry's account floats the possibility that NGOs' ethics and responsibility can be esteemed independently of what they achieve. There were no easy answers: the decision to withdraw was controversial within MSF, and the ethical stance was eroded by the irresolution. What should or could NGOs do? Confusion turned to neglect, and Duffield records,

Whereas over 150 NGOs had flocked to the sprawling and unsanitary refugee camp at Goma in 1994, a year later their number had dropped to five following a barrage of international criticism and the collapse of donor confidence. When an alliance of regional forces exacted its own violent retribution on the Hutu refugees in 1997, despite the evidence of serious human rights abuse and appeals by aid agencies, the international community was in no mood to intervene. (Duffield 2001, 81-2)

Duffield does not credit the international community with 'ethics and responsibility', but the retreat was comparable to MSF's in keeping hands or noses clean. In terms of what it achieved in Congo, neither giving nor withdrawing assistance halted the unknown thousands of deaths, and violence continued after the NGOs left. Congo is an extreme example, but assistance is given in extreme situations, and it is worth interrogating the 'ethics and responsibility' involved.

The rules

Universalist concepts are fundamental to assistance, and can be understood in descriptive and normative terms (Brems 2001, 3-16). The conviction that human beings are equal and have like requirements for survival, and rights, establishes a basis for general and specific objectives, some of which have been codified in political, legal or less formal conventions. I am examining a perspective founded on (but not limited to) two categories of universalist 'rules'. The first encompasses humanitarian principles and associated values, describing how and to whom assistance should be given. The second category is allied to human rights, and relates to how people should behave towards each other, including the ways in which they give or demand vital assets.

The two sets of rules are internationally approved, and the perspective accepts both that an undisputable morality exists, and that this is applicable to all situations. Consequently it entails strictures – also drawing their legitimacy from universalist foundations – about how assistance should be received. As will be seen, the terminology of principles and rights provides a foundation for a burgeoning discourse.

Humanitarian principles

There is no definitive corpus of humanitarian principles, and the surge of 'humanitarian' activity post-Cold War has stirred interests in what the principles are, and are for (Slim 1997; Leader 1998; Leader 2000; Mackintosh 2000). In practical terms, what force they have derives

from their moral authority (Leader 1999). The perspective owes much to Henri Dunant, founder of the ICRC, who instituted principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Humanitarian principles also have a legalistic element, originating predominantly from International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the laws limiting armed conflict. Leader writes, “these rules are determined by soldiers and politicians and as such reflect their purposes, and more broadly the function and nature of conflict” (Leader 1999). The core texts of IHL are the 1948 Genocide Convention, the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the Additional Protocols of 1977, the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and the Hague Laws.

De Waal differentiates between ‘Ground Rules’ types of humanitarian principles, arranged between aid agencies and belligerents in a specific context, and humanitarian principles as an alternative to IHL, which are vague and praiseworthy, and champion aid delivery over other elements of humanitarian action (de Waal 2000, 212). Examples of the first type are the Joint Policy of Operation in Liberia and the Ground Rules and Humanitarian Principles in southern Sudan. The second is exemplified by the ICRC’s *Code of Conduct* in 1994 (ICRC 1994), which de Waal notes is hardly an instruction manual (de Waal 1997, 135), and also the *Sphere Project*, an NGO initiative which, it claimed, “contribut[ed] to an operational framework for accountability in humanitarian assistance efforts” (Sphere 2000, 6). It established the Minimum Standards and the Humanitarian Charter, founded on IHL, human rights law, refugee law and the *Code of Conduct*.

Human rights

The legalism of humanitarian principles interfaces with rights, which lay the foundations for the second category of rules. There is an intersection between principles and rights – humanitarian law has been interpreted as a right to assistance (IRRC 1992, 600). There are also some areas which are officially uncharted: where IHL does not apply, where the state is not party to the agreement, where derogation is invoked, or where an offending party is not a government (Meron 1997, 97). People living under such circumstances are typically within NGOs’ claimed remit, along with the victims of government abuse.

The right to assistance was established in the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which included the protection of civilians. In international armed conflict this entails free passage for vital goods to civilians, and duties for Occupying Powers. Additionally,

Protocol II (*Art.18*) specifies, among other things, that if the civilian population is suffering excessive deprivation owing to a lack of supplies essential to its survival, relief actions which are of an exclusively humanitarian and impartial nature and conducted without any adverse distinction must be undertaken subject to the consent of the warring parties. (ICRC 2001, 24)

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights granted a range of civil, political and economic rights, and generated others. Rights can be grouped as entitlements to life, liberty, personal security and adequate living standards (Power and Allison 2000, xiii). NGOs tend towards ‘basic rights’, the rights to food, water, shelter, a livelihood, education, health care, safe environment, protection from violence, equality of opportunity and a say in one’s future (Dalton 1995). These are closely associated with concepts of needs. NGOs use rights language to authorise interventions: water, because there is a right to water. The approach implies two connected functions: one is to describe why assistance is needed – because people are having their rights abused. The second is prescriptive: people should have those rights fulfilled.

Humanitarian principles and human rights are not all adopted by all NGOs, but they frame a widely-held perspective. Occasionally NGOs disavow neutrality, claiming solidarity instead. This has a cost; de Waal notes, “It is not possible for an NGO to reject the principle of neutrality but still claim humanitarian privileges, except in the case of the fight against genocide” (de Waal 2000, 173). In addition, donors may refuse to fund NGOs with a stated political agenda although, conversely, the independence of NGOs can be compromised by donor pressure to be ‘neutral’ (Duffield, Macrae et al. 1994).

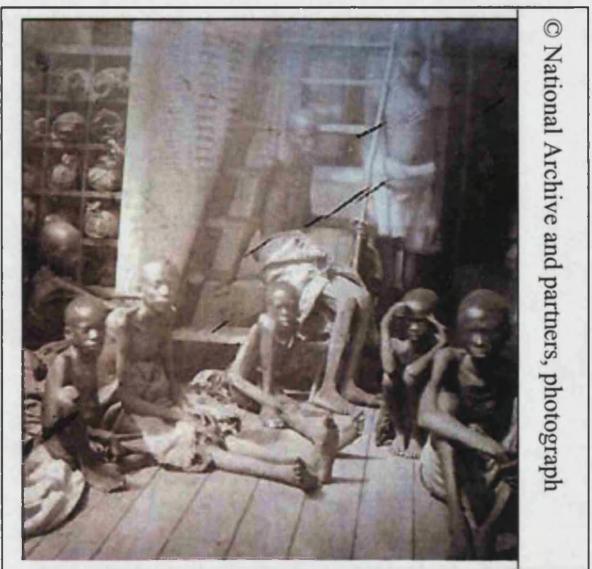
A strength, and possibly a weakness, of the perspective is that humanitarian principles and human rights, are about non-negotiability. Violence also admits of little compromise, which can make operationalising assistance difficult. The non-negotiability of humanitarian principles and human rights assumes that debate is over: there is a paradigm and nothing more to discuss, except implementation.

How does it work?

A former Sudan People’s Liberation Army soldier, referring to the early 1990s commented, “The SPLA thought that if people were not contributing to liberation, why should they benefit from relief?” If assistance is described as pursuing relief, peace and development, whose relief, peace or development provides room for interpretation, and in practice, human rights standards are too high, and humanitarian principles too ambitious. It is unnerving to describe rights to means of survival as ‘too high’; the rules set low standards and expectations, and are disappointed nonetheless. What are they for? Tomasevski writes, “to say that government and opposition groups which wage wars of starvation are violating human rights does not make anyone any wiser; nor does it constitute an effective deterrent, evidenced by the fact that wars of starvation continue” (Tomasevski 1994, 70).

Contracts and regulation (and their contravention) have long characterised global powers’ policies towards Africa. The pillage of Congo under King Leopold, according to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in his introduction to Morel’s *Great Britain and the Congo*, violated the Treaty of

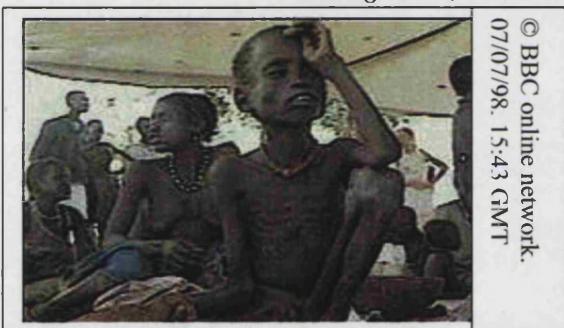
Berlin. He asks, “why should any state keep any treaty if this is to pass unchallenged?” and describes Congo after the abolition of slavery:



Slaves rescued from vessel operating illegally, c1869

Nearly a century later, the International Federation of the Red Cross asserts: “aid spending by DAC [Development Assistance Committee] donors now bears little relation to need or even to what most countries can afford to give” (IFRC 1999, 113). How much is needed, and what does aid relate to?

When we read of the ill-treatment of these poor people, the horrible beatings, the mutilation of limbs, the butt-endings, the starving of hostage-houses – facts which are vouched for by witnesses of several nations and professions, backed by the incorruptible evidence of the Kodak – we again ask by what right are these things done? Is there anywhere any shadow of justification for the hard yoke which these helpless folk endure? Again we turn to the Treaty [of Berlin] which regulates the situation. “All powers...pledge themselves to watch over the preservation of the native populations and the improvement of their moral and material conditions of existence. (Morel 1909, xv)



The UN General Assembly in 1970 endorsed a target for donors to give 0.7% GNP for Official Development Assistance, but assistance does not relate to this, and by 2001, four had achieved it. DFID inched from 0.26% in 1997 through 0.27% (1998) and 0.24% (1999) to 0.32% in 2000, committing to 0.33% in 2003/4 (DFID, Grant et al. 2000, 42), and ODA from DAC countries decreased by 12% between 1992 and 2000 (Randel and German 2002). This is not described as aid diversion, and there is no mechanism for enforcing compliance with the target. Assistance does not have the political or material resources to achieve what it would be consistent with humanitarian principles and human rights to deliver. Concerning the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Genocide Convention, and Geneva Conventions, Rieff writes, “every state paid lip service to the new norms, but when those who had the power to kill thought it was time to start killing, these laws and conventions saved not a single life” (Rieff 2002, 71-2).

The optimism conveyed by the objectives of assistance is combined with an expectation of failure in difficult circumstances. Bradbury perceives a ‘normalisation’ of crisis (Bradbury

1998), and the convenience observed in proffering assistance is up-ended when it is convenient to give sub-standard assistance, and when it is inconvenient to help. The first scenario counters the above-mentioned suggestion that Sierra Leoneans need everything. At the end of 2000, the World Food Programme (WFP) stocks in Bo, central Sierra Leone, had exhausted bulgar supplies, and cornmeal was provided instead for NGOs to distribute in camps. The displaced population was unimpressed. A camp resident told me,

WFP said that whatever comes from overseas they give us. For these last few months from September to December they have given us maize-meal. Grinded corn. It was given us for a staple food, but it's not used for that. You cannot even eat. We asked them to change it; we do not like it, but we cannot change it. It caused a lot of problems: some people got dysentery, stomach problems. Really it was not good for us.³

I asked a WFP employee where the decision about the change had been taken. He replied,

Well, that really I cannot tell you. And it will also depend on what food donors will provide. Donors outside the country... We have our food basket: corn, maize or bulgar, depending on the availability of any of these commodities. For these last four months we hadn't bulgar countrywide, so we had to give [cornmeal]. It's not a matter of decision, it's a matter of what's available.⁴

An example of the second scenario, that when assistance is inconvenient it is not given, comes from southern Sudan: after thirteen years of coordinated assistance, Unicef reckoned "26% of households had access to safe drinking water during the dry season" (Unicef 2001c, 109). I travelled with a Catholic Relief Services (CRS) programme officer to a hygiene promotion workshop, an incongruous activity, as he accepted:

So the thing is, with the little we have, where there's no clean water, no soap, how can we protect ourselves from the preventable diseases: diarrhoea, eye infection etc? So when we talk about hygiene, please don't think we're talking about a new thing. We're talking about the same hygiene that we have used, only to ask if there are ways we can improve. For example, you know that through dirty water you can get infections. So if we have a problem with dirty water and we know it causes diseases and there's no access to clean water, what can we do with that water? I believe some of you have some answers, if there's no hand-pump and no boreholes.⁵

Hygiene promotion did not involve providing water, soap or information. Whilst there are enough resources and laws for everyone, water proved inconvenient, contesting the applicability of the universalist claim. De Waal registers the "over-inflation of some of the concepts of humanitarianism" (de Waal 2000, 206), meaning that they make grandiose claims, become unworkable, and so are brought into disrepute. Regarding human rights, Duffield writes, "Essentially, a distinction is made between human rights interpreted in legal terms and associated with monitoring and enforcement, and human rights understood as a moral force

³ Interview 02/01/01, Bo.

⁴ Interview 11/01/01, Bo.

⁵ 29/11/01, Abirieu.

derived from the universality of their application" (Duffield 2001, 221). The dual nature of rights and principles allows a loop-hole for responsibility.

Universality vs responsibility – the political landscape

Ignatieff asserts that in the twentieth century, "the idea of human universality rests less on hope than on fear" (Ignatieff 1998, 18). For the protagonist in his narrative, universality exists in contradiction with the particular: a Serbian soldier maintains that the Croats are different, down to the cigarettes they smoke. Minutes later he adds, "Those Croats they think they're better than us. They want to be the gentlemen. Think they're fancy Europeans. I'll tell you something. We're all just Balkan shit" (Ignatieff 1998, 36). Reflecting on this, Ignatieff writes,

Behind those "self-evident" liberal truths – that all human beings are equal, that their persons should be inviolable, and that they have enforceable rights by the simple fact of being human beings – lies a fiction that the [Serbian] men in the farmhouse would have found fatuous in the extreme: that human difference *is* minor, that we *are* brothers and sisters under the skin. (Ignatieff 1998, 64)

Ignatieff describes the "Perhaps necessary blindness" of excluding people, "The liberal fiction might never have been conceived had it been required to include everyone: women, blacks, the propertyless, non-Christians, and adolescents". Liberal truths and universality, originating with Hobbes and Locke, emerged when people were circumscribing their universes.

Is it realistic to propose reorienting an ideology, which depends on oversight, to embrace the very people it has marginalised in the past? During the Cold War, strategic concerns carved up Africa between communist and American puppets, and at the time, Chomsky critiqued the human rights discourse within US imperialism (Chomsky, Herman et al. 1979). Following Chomsky, Shivji observes that, rather than uniting, "Human rights ideology, in its different forms, has historically played a legitimising or mobilizing role in the struggle of classes to either rally for certain specific changes or to legitimise the status quo" (Shivji 1989, 50).

With the end of the Cold War, superpower tensions eased, but the conquest changed. It was not the end of history as Fukuyama had described it (Fukuyama 1992), but it was important to prove that it was – that liberal democratic peace was viable and universalist. Many people suffering in wars at the beginning of the 21st century are women, blacks, the propertyless, non-Christians, and adolescents, and critiques have surfaced of dimensions of neo-liberalism, liberal peace or liberal democratic peace as post-Cold War ideological determinants of intervention (de Waal 1997; Dillon and Reid 2000; Macrae and Leader 2000; Macrae and Leader 2000; Duffield 2001). Dealing with the illiberal remains problematic for liberals, and inclines towards irony, if not self-defeat.

That there is some discrepancy between the stated objectives and the reality is not in question, and the lack of safety nets or redeemable rights has been documented (Minear and Weiss 1995;

Cairns 1997; Stockton 1998). I am investigating why the discrepancy exists. While a case can be made that NGOs and donors do not have responsibility for fulfilling all needs in all countries, it is harder to argue that they have no responsibility for what they profess. Given the universalist rules, it is unsurprising that questions of responsibility are routinely fudged. Darcy writes, “It is a feature of the humanitarian system at all levels that there is no collective responsibility among agencies and donors for overall outcomes; nor is there accountability for the relative success or failure of the total humanitarian response to a given situation” (Darcy 2003, 7).

To describe this as a weakness without acknowledging the opportunity it offers would be naïve: assistance is not systematic, and can be used to political ends. Gourevitch records that during the genocide in Rwanda,

Many people who participated in the killing...also protected some Tutsis, whether out of personal sympathy or for financial or sexual profit...Later, such people sometimes pleaded that they took some lives in order not to attract attention to their efforts to save others. To their minds, it seemed, their acts of decency exonerated the guilt of their crimes. But to survivors, the fact that a killer sometimes spared lives only proved that he could not possibly be judged innocent, since it demonstrated plainly that he knew murder was wrong. (Gourevitch 1999, 130-1)

He is recounting choices taken by Rwandan people, many in positions of relative power.

Responsibility for action and inaction is also discussed by Uvin,

On those few occasions [in the early 1990s] when the international community set out to pressure the government [of Rwanda] to improve its human rights record, results were achieved. This makes the overall neglect of these issues all the more regrettable. (Uvin 1998, 96)

Following the genocide, the *Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda* (Borton, Brusset et al. 1996) was unprecedented in evaluative scope and agency involvement, including 250 NGOs (Borton 2001). It identified the ‘hollow core’ to the response, meaning the lack of political strategy, and recorded that, in the absence of any coherent approach, NGOs tried to construct their own and failed. The report’s conclusion, that “humanitarian action cannot substitute for political action” became a maxim, but in delimiting the reach of criticism, it also commented on the potential usefulness of NGOs – they bungled the responsibilities they undertook. In the event, ‘No aid official was sacked, no agencies went out of business and no apologies were even offered – leave alone compensation – after what was, by universal consent, one of the most disastrous humanitarian adventures ever in Africa’ (de Waal 2000, 228).

The dimensions in which NGOs are unaccountable have been detailed (Edwards 1994; Edwards and Hulme 1996). Fowler notes that political support for governments and financial returns for businesses have no corresponding ‘bottom line’ by which to assess NGOs (Fowler 1996). There is no systematic monitoring: what money is spent where by NGOs is almost entirely mysterious (Randel and German 2003). Regarding comprehensive or comparable measurement of needs, the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) was introduced in 1992, apparently to enhance

transparency. Smillie and Minear write, “As if to underscore the absence of allocations according to need, improvements in the CAP process that have brought more uniformity to country analyses have not been matched by an increase in donor subscriptions” (Smillie and Minear 2003, 22). It did not address the issue: “Put crudely, donors are sceptical of the validity of agency needs assessments; and agencies doubt that a concern with objective needs assessment is central to donor thinking” (Darcy 2003, 6).

The prospects of political opportunism are multiplied by the fact that relief can be understood not as commitment, but as a means of disengagement from “countries deemed too complex, too distant or too impenetrable for conventional aid” (Bennett and Duffield 1995, xiv), or which demand more support than politicians can contemplate mobilising (Belgrad and Nachmias 1997). Governments and multilateral bodies de-link their responsibilities (Keen 1992), and Duffield sees the ‘flexibility’ of the donors as interacting with the emergence of ‘competitive’ NGOs to concentrate programmes in line with donor preferences (Duffield 1994a). African Rights propose that “the increase in donor-funded relief operations and western disengagement from poor countries are two sides of the same coin” (African Rights 1994). Smillie and Minear find, “humanitarian principles – to the extent that they are articulated – are a subset of, and subordinate to, the foreign and domestic policies (and politics) of donor countries” (Smillie and Minear 2003, 6).

In wars in Africa, NGOs are often the sole remnants of international presence, and the chances of co-optation by donors have been identified (Duffield 1995; Commins 1997; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Hulme, Edwards et al. 1997; Weiss 1998). By contracting out to humanitarianism’s delineated sweep, donors can claim success in relief operations, without threatening good relations or NGO access by drawing attention to the government’s role in promoting famine or other abuses (Keen and Wilson 1994; Keen 1994a; African Rights 1996). There is dislocated glory: Rieff notes that humanitarian groups enjoyed an improved reputation through the 1990s, “whilst humanitarianism is also generally agreed to be in crisis” (Rieff 2002, 24).

The fact that principles, rights and associated values are espoused under such circumstances does not prove that they are simplistic or superficial, rather the reverse – they are multi-faceted and enduring. NGOs talk about saving lives, but the means at their disposal are such that their activities are defined: which lives are saved under what circumstances.

Research questions and argument

Why are humanitarian principles and human rights professed? My first hypothesis is that they are stated because they *are* the objectives of assistance. Within this I hypothesise that they are

stated (1a) because they guide aid organisations themselves; and (1b) because they exert strategic leverage over others. Hypothesis (2) is that they are stated because they allow some other end to be pursued. I investigate this by inquiring into the shape and supporting mechanisms of assistance, asking, *who gets assistance, and why?* and, *how and why is assistance sustained in spite of its failure to provide in accordance with human rights and humanitarian principles?* This enquiry explores not only the political interests and power involved, but also how they are communicated. In doing so it reveals how the discourse relates to the reality of assistance delivery, and (drawing on this discussion) throws light on why the objectives are stated.

I present the case that assistance is delivered alongside rules based on human rights and humanitarian principles. I argue that these rules are not constantly adhered to by any party; they are inconsistently referred to, and rarely fulfilled or enforced. On occasions when the rules are invoked, their function is to claim legitimacy for interventions, and to discredit people who obstruct them. On other occasions, violations are overlooked. When assistance does not provide for people, its discourse ignores, excuses or disguises weaknesses in implementation. This has two potential consequences, firstly: no change for people suffering from destitution caused by violence, and secondly: no impact on the description of suffering or the formulation of assistance.

Methodology

Central to the methodology is the journey I made through the countries researched, as is conveyed by the way I record my findings. I present places I have visited and describe events. I also relay discussions in the text, and spoken excerpts are from interviews, unless otherwise indicated. I interviewed more than 150 aid agency office and implementation staff, and conducted around three hundred interviews with people in the countries I visited including (amongst others) politicians, people living in camps and others who were displaced, militias, and demobilised fighters. Generally I record only the place and date, if the interviewee's name is not relevant to the argument, or to respect confidences that people have shared. When reporting dialogues, the interviewee's initial is used, and I present myself as 'Z'.

I test hypothesis (1a), that the stated objectives guide aid organisations, by examining attitudes and operations. I am looking for evidence that principles and rights are conceptually useful to the analysis that takes place within aid organisations, and that they inform activity. I consider two contexts: the first is given by countries whose economies and territories are small – Sierra Leone and Rwanda – where NGO assistance was reasonably well funded by donors, and was complemented by broader international involvement. In the second context, assistance was expensive and under-resourced, was not part of concerted donor engagement, and was delivered

in territory that was largely unnavigable in technical or political terms; this concerns the Democratic Republic of Congo (henceforth Congo)⁶ and southern Sudan. I draw analysis from within and across the two environments.

The enquiry starts with DFID as an example of a donor. It begins in 1997, when DFID was established as a governmental department, and ends in 2001, reflecting when the research was carried out. I compare DFID's official policy with its allocations of resources (also tracing under what conditions it withdraws) and its achievements. The data comes from DFID policy documents and reports, discussions in the House of Commons, and interviews with DFID (and, on occasions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office) personnel in London and in the countries I visited.

I pursue hypothesis (1a) further with reference to NGOs. My investigations took me first to Sierra Leone, between November 2000 and February 2001. I travelled extensively in western and southern parts of the country, which were government-allied, and in some areas in the north and east, including a garrison town. Between April and July 2001, I went to Rwanda and Congo; travel in Rwanda was easy, and I visited much of the country. In Congo I went to two occupied towns in the east, and then to the capital, Kinshasa. Further travel was not possible because of the cost of air transport. My third trip was from October 2001 to February 2002, when I researched southern Sudan. I stayed in each of the three regions: Equatoria and Bahr el-Ghazal (which were held by the SPLA/M), and Upper Nile, which was under various leadership. Additionally, I spent time in Kenya, in Nairobi and Lokichoggio (also known as Loki), where NGOs have programming and logistics bases for operations in southern Sudan. Maps of the countries feature in Chapters 3 and 4, and indicate where I went with an asterisk.

In addressing whether the stated objectives guide NGOs, I draw on NGO reports and other papers, and interviews with staff. The interviews were broad-ranging, concerning where NGOs operated in each country, what work they did and why, and what constraints they experienced. During much of my research I was living with NGO personnel so, besides the formal interviews, I had numerous informal discussions, had access to documentation, attended staff meetings and assessments, and visited projects. In doing so, I was able to interview people who were more tangentially associated with assistance, or who were not involved at all, and include their personal or local histories.

I do not compile a comprehensive or evaluative account of interventions but analyse qualitatively how assistance is given or withheld in various contexts. I examine the mechanisms and processes by which some people are assisted, and others excluded, including what events

⁶ Congo was Zaire between 1971 and 1997.

lead to withdrawal. The countries were selected because they present contrasting environments in terms of the conflicts, histories and level of international involvement, and I use the dissimilarities between the situations also to identify what commonalities exist. Within each country I have selected three sites around which to focus the narrative; again, these were chosen as they present various aspects of assistance within each country.

A large part of the enquiry relates to why NGOs adopt rights and principles, and how this terminology is adapted in different situations. Analysis of how NGO staff conceptualise situations is based on questions about what needs and victims they perceive, and how this information is interpreted and utilised. I identify what approach has been employed, and how responsibility is claimed or shifted through the discourse used.

I investigate hypothesis (1b) – that the stated objectives provide strategic leverage over others – by tracing the dimensions of persuasion and negotiation. This concerns the leverage NGOs have over people in host countries: what part does moral pressure or shame play in influencing people and shaping behaviour? How willing, able or likely are people or situations to change? There are obverse investigations: what scope is created for superficiality, deceit, collusion or provocation? I examine correspondence amongst NGO staff, and between field and head offices, particularly regarding access, security, and violations of principles or rights, to explore how discussions proceed, and how assistance is justified.

In the scope of hypothesis 2, that the objectives are stated because they allow other ends to be pursued, the question, “*who receives assistance and why?*” is addressed by identifying what patterns emerge in terms of where NGOs work, what they do, and whose agenda this represents. In asking how and why assistance is sustained in the face of its failure to provide in accordance with human rights and humanitarian principles, I investigate how the discourse is shaped through reporting, glossing, and promoting particular stories: what are the processes of covering-up or denying that sustain assistance together with its avowed objectives, despite their difference?

Analytical approach

A weight of criticism has been made of assistance by observers and many people who work, or have worked, in aid organisations. Amongst the more exacting critics is de Waal, who presents cases in which political contracts between leaders and constituencies have averted famine, arguing that when famine is not problematic for leaders, it is allowed to happen. He examines how NGOs undercut the political responsibility of African leaders, and how this is compounded by neo-liberalism. De Waal’s book *Famine Crimes* “does not shirk its logical conclusion: that most current humanitarian activity in Africa is useless or damaging and should be abandoned.

Humanitarian action is too noble an enterprise to become debased and discredited in this manner" (de Waal 1997, xvi).

Challenges posed

De Waal's conclusion issues a theoretical and a practical challenge. At the level of theory: *why is assistance monochrome?* Rwanda is nothing like Congo. Could it be said so generally of schools and restaurants that they are damaging and should be abandoned? Furthermore, the ways in which aid agencies present themselves vary widely (Campbell 1990; Black 1992; Bentham 1993; Haug, Gasser et al. 1993; Moorehead 1998; Rieff 2002). What factors influence the way that assistance is provided, to the extent that distinct cultures converge? De Waal's implication about the prevalent deficiencies of assistance is elaborated on by Uvin. In *Aiding Violence*, Uvin reveals how aid to Rwanda in the 1980s and early 1990s shaped inequalities and animosities that found violent expression in war and genocide (Uvin 1998). He is explicit that the scenario is not unique to Rwanda, and the book has elements that would be surprising to people who have not been involved in assistance. For people who have worked with aid agencies, there is immediate recognition of the processes and hierarchies Uvin describes. What is shocking about his account is not what he says, but the fact that it is *not* shocking. This is how aid operates and here are the conditions that aid perpetuates, these conditions can lead to genocide; these are all very familiar.

While Uvin does not argue that aid *necessarily* leads to genocide, his theoretical analysis entails the same practical challenge as de Waal's, which addresses itself as much to detractors as to NGOs: *what happens when assistance is abandoned?* While de Waal's critique is convincing, his solution of withdrawal and preventive political action is awkward, and he grants, "At least for the coming decade, the prospects of dramatic economic growth and inclusive political contracts are remote" (de Waal 1997, 213). His reading of how the political economy allows people to be plundered and murdered also explains why they do not, or cannot, mobilise politically. As such it defines the scope of reform beyond simply the improvement of assistance.

Inverting the inquiry

In addressing these challenges, I am starting from the suspicion that something links the monotony of assistance and the practical hazard of withdrawing it. This leads me to investigate the supporting ideology, and instead of asking how assistance sizes up to principles and human rights, I ask to what extent these rules are useful, and how they are used, in describing, analysing and impacting on events.

This combines a philosophical political economy approach as developed by Duffield (Duffield 1994b; Duffield 2001), Keen (Keen 1994a) and others, with a socio-psychological investigation of how actors perceive, interact and influence each other. The political economy angle relates to

how power is distributed and used in delivering assistance, both at the level of implementation – in the ways that aid organisations operate – and in terms of the international institutions that back assistance. The socio-psychological angle is concerned with the processes of coping with contradictory information, morality, exerting influence, and denial.

How do the rules relate to the – apparently monochrome – nature of assistance, and how they relate to its withdrawal? I conceptualise the rules as a product of donor and NGO interests and conferences, rather than as objective benchmarks. It is a precarious line in that human rights and humanitarian principles assume differing meanings: the same words can be used to describe something that does happen, something that should happen, and something that does not. The assertion that everyone has a right to food, for example, is made most often about children who do not have any. I am not questioning whether children need food, I am asking what is gained for whom by saying they have the right to it, or saying that it is provided impartially, when they have none.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework structures an intellectual evolution that takes place through the investigation into the ‘game’ of assistance. Initially, I am using the word ‘game’ to signify that assistance has an arena, players and rules, but the language allows for elaboration of the analogy at a later stage.⁷ I start by considering the disparity between the ideal and the reality of assistance, and then develop the theory in stages, which are analytically sequential in the thesis. The purpose of this development is to examine the perspective of rights and principles, then to consider the context in which this perspective is situated, and what impact it has, and finally to investigate elements not perceived by the perspective. Important questions are the extent to which, and the reasons why, aid organisations adopt a common perspective, and whether this is connected to the apparent uniformity of their activity and weaknesses.

Perspective, Bourdieu suggests, means “the use of a frame that cuts out, encloses and abstracts the spectacle with a rigorous, immobile boundary.” He notes, “the immediate harmony between the logic of a field and the dispositions it induces and presupposes means that all its arbitrary content tends to be disguised as timeless, universal self-evidence” (Bourdieu 2000, 29). Applying this to the perspective of assistance, apparent self-evidence is embedded in the universality of claims made. Rights and principles impose a certain logic in describing what is wrong, and this is harmonised with prescriptions that the perspective gives rise to.

⁷ Whilst the terminology overlaps with that of Game Theory and new institutional economics, I am not drawing on this literature or using the associated analytical tools. New institutional economics presents the ‘rules of the game’ as formal and informal constraints. Much of my argument is that the ‘rules’ of principles and rights, whilst associated with assistance, are not constraints, and do not guide behaviour or define the institution of assistance. This will become more evident later in the theoretical framework.

In a critique that is related to Bourdieu's analysis, Schaffer highlights the error in making policy in a privileged arena and without considering the feasibility of implementing that policy. He writes,

The first main problem is the treatment of policy as verbal, voluntaristic and decisional, in contrast to actual practice which concerns decisions, agendas and establishments. The second problem is the treatment of policy as mere utterances, separate from implementation so that whole zones of policy practice are ignored. (Schaffer 1984, 142)

Bourdieu's observations about the constrictions of a particular perspective and Schaffer's warning about decisional policy-making prompt two lines along which to develop the theoretical framework in order to examine the perspective itself and to access those areas that are ignored or excluded by it. The first is philosophical and political, and concerns how assistance is formulated and what it achieves. How does the espousal of principles and rights affect perception and analysis of conflict, need and assistance? How do these influence the response? What does the perspective include, what is cut out? The second line of enquiry is psychological. How do the rules affect people who champion them and people who transgress them? How are NGOs encouraging others to support or comply with the rules, and what happens when they do not? How and why are some areas or pieces of information excluded? How effective are the processes of assistance in alleviating suffering?

The theory for addressing these questions comes from political and psychological literature. Some ways in which assistance can be used for political advantage have been discussed already, and in the thesis I will examine how people are given, or excluded from, assistance, and whose interests this furthers. In that assistance results from the decisions of individuals and organisations and collective motivations, I also focus on the psychological dimensions of why particular choices are taken, how they contribute to organisational culture, and what implications they have. This reveals why people intervene and how motivation is maintained.

This approach illuminates the connections between the political and psychological aspects of assistance. Implicit to my enquiry is an intuition that decisions are not made exclusively for political reasons, and that they are not reducible to purely utilitarian calculations. This is an intuition that I explore through the thesis, and the originality of my approach is that it addresses political and psychological questions together.

Coping with cognitive dissonance

The ideal of humanitarianism differs from the practice of how it is implemented, and in that two (or more) versions of events exist, there is dissonance between them, as the ideal does not change in the face of the challenge from reality. On the one hand, NGO workers and aid organisations avow rights and principles, and this perspective is underscored by political claims,

policies, predisposed interpretations and fund-raising propaganda. On the other hand, there is evidence that conflicts with the ideal interpretation – I am looking at observations of projects, testimonies from people involved in giving, receiving (or not receiving) assistance, empirical literature, and rigorous analysis, much of which is incompatible in literal terms with the official version.

Why do these different versions exist, and how do NGOs cope with the cognitive dissonance that arises from them? Theorists discuss dissonance principally in psychological terms, arguing that discomfort arises when somebody has two cognitions (which can be pieces of information or attitudes) that are inconsistent (Zimbardo 1969). In that this dissonance is fed by circumstances and interactions and has outcomes that impact on other people, it also requires political analysis. Festinger, whose work is seminal in cognitive dissonance theory, hypothesises, “The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance;” and “When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance” (Festinger 1962, 3). He proposes that dissonance can be reduced by changing a behavioural element, by changing an environmental cognitive element, or by adding new cognitive elements (Festinger 1962, 19-21). Dissonance persists if there are constraints to changing knowledge or behaviour.

Starting from Festinger’s analysis, a theoretical framework can be built around three phenomena, all of which have political and psychological dimensions. The first is morality, which I consider in Stage one of the framework’s development. Festinger argues that changing a behavioural element can reduce dissonance, and the theory relevant to Chapters 2-4 of the thesis sets up the enquiry into how morality is constructed and represented, including how this changes the behaviour of NGOs. The second means of reducing dissonance proposed by Festinger is to change the environmental cognitive element, and for the data presented Chapter 5, I extend the theoretical framework, in Stage two, to examine how influence is exerted, drawing on literature concerning persuasion and provocation. This allows investigation of what results from the rights and principles perspective, both for aid organisations, and for those with whom they interact. For the theory behind Chapter 6 (presented in Stage three) I consider Festinger’s third means of reducing dissonance, that of adding new cognitive elements. I investigate this with reference to denial and power, as these two concepts help explain how the discomfort of cognitive dissonance can be alleviated by ignoring it. The discussion also casts light on how fantasy creates new elements that can reduce dissonance.

Stage one: morality

Assistance is commonly promoted and analysed as a moral venture (Minear 1991; Lewer and Ramsbotham 1993; McCollan 1995; Minear and Weiss 1995; Prendergast 1995). This is

communicated by the concept of a ‘humanitarian imperative’, the existence of exhortations such as “Do No Harm” (Anderson 1999), and association with principles and rights, as well as by more informal discourse relating to what is right, just or good. On occasions, NGOs have to choose between two unsavoury options, and the dilemmas these pose are also often understood as moral choices (Minear 1995; Slim 1997; Anderson 1998; Moore 1998; Pirotte, Husson et al. 1999), despite the implication that decisions made will have negative impacts. In the thesis, I will explore how this morality is constructed and how acts are presented as moral, particularly with reference to the ways in which discourse is employed by aid organisations.

Festinger proposes that changing a behavioural element makes it consonant with environmental cognitive elements and can reduce dissonance. Behavioural elements of aid organisations include what they do as well as the claims that they make. Given that speech acts are statements of morality, rather than simply of preference, there is resistance to changing, particularly if they represent group convictions or are held as absolute truths. In addition, the activity of NGOs is often limited by a given context, so making morality statements potentially intensifies, rather than reduces, the dissonance. How intensification is counteracted can be investigated by examining the functions of morality and its statements, including how, and if, they guide aid organisations.

Constructing morality

Investigating the construction of the morality associated with assistance involves identifying who defines what is ‘good’, how positive terminology is attributed, and what political and psychological manoeuvres are used to evade or reduce dissonance. Since I am looking into what guidance principles and rights give, it is also relevant to consider how responsibility is allocated, how constantly the morality is applied, and what risks are involved for the agent in making morality statements.

Some theoretical understanding of these issues can be drawn from Milgram’s work on obedience to authority. In experimental conditions, subjects were instructed to deliver electric shocks to a victim (played by an actor), who was apparently attempting to learn lists of words. The subjects saw evidence of the victim’s distress, but many continued to obey the instructions. The methodology was designed to test a cross-section of the population, and Milgram’s interpretation is that it revealed how people in general behave.⁸ For the present purpose, though, the significance of the experiment is to pinpoint the psychological mechanisms involved in constructing morality. Milgram writes,

⁸ Milgram’s methodological justification can be compared to Hilberg’s description of killers in the Holocaust who, “were not different in their moral makeup from the rest of the population...[and represented]...a remarkable cross-section of the German population” (Hilberg 1961).

Some subjects were totally convinced of the wrongness of what they were doing but could not bring themselves to make an open break with authority. Some derived satisfaction from their thoughts and felt that – within themselves, at least – they had been on the side of the angels. (Milgram 1974, 10)

What Milgram demonstrates is that, other things notwithstanding, dissonance can be eased by maintaining a conviction that one is moral, even whilst acting in a way that is contrary to what one believes to be right. This involves gaining satisfaction from the feeling that no wrong-doing was intended;⁹ the subjects felt no moral uncertainty, but judged that they were acting under instructions.¹⁰

Whilst Milgram's example is striking, the essence of the subjects' experience is common, and many aid workers find themselves in positions in which they perceive that they cannot act in accordance with what they believe to be moral. This is attributed to the existence of constraints, and much assistance is delivered in challenging environments. According to Schaffer's analysis above, though, asserting that there are constraints raises questions of why a policy (or morality) is pursued that is inoperable, and how profound the constraints are. In psychological terms, Milgram's experiment showed that the ability of subjects to perceive constraints facilitated their impression of their own morality.

Milgram records that in his experiment subjects were constrained by 'binding factors', such as politeness, a desire to uphold an initial promise, and the awkwardness of withdrawal, and that these prevented people from acting on their convictions. His finds that the authority of a scientist carrying out research secured a degree of obedience, although no coercion was used. When this 'binding factor' was weakening, the compliance of subjects was increased by the prompt "the experiment *requires* that you continue" (Milgram 1974, 9).

These examples of binding factors provide insight into the relationship between constraints and responsibility. The implication of Milgram's finding is that the degree to which factors 'bind' is less significant than the extent to which they release the subject from responsibility for action. He asserts that there is 'counteranthropomorphism', in that the experiment itself was given human qualities, namely moral responsibility, which reduced the discomfort that subjects felt by placing the decision to act in the hands of someone (or something) else. Milgram deduces that a complex system in which responsibility can be moved around is likely to have dangerous results, and this is relevant when investigating events that constitute a 'humanitarian system'.

⁹ A comparison can be drawn with the US government's justification of its use of torture.

¹⁰ Similarly, Browning recognises how, during the Holocaust, perpetrators distanced themselves from the orders that they followed and that they gave to others (Browning 1998, 211-212).

A connected psychological process concerns the attribution of blame. Honouring an arbitrary authority requires that other cognitions are reordered accordingly. In Milgram's experiment, adjustments in the subjects' thinking that undermined the resolve to break with authority also allowed them to maintain the relationship with the experimenter and reduce the strain brought about by the experiment. Milgram reports, "many subjects harshly devalue the victim *as a consequence* of acting against him. Such comments as, 'He was so stupid and stubborn he deserved to get shocked' were common" (Milgram 1974, 10). The release of psychological discomfort was accompanied by a political alignment that was not helpful to enhancing the 'learning' process, but was beneficial to the subjects. Similarly, Gow observes that, in the context of aid work, factual evidence rarely challenges development models, as the blame is shifted to the victim (Gow 1991). This can be seen in the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's response to the failure of Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa.

Milgram's experiment posed no risk to the subjects, and their interests were not affected if the morality was inconsequential. Research of decisions taken in high-risk environments exposes different configurations of convictions and behaviour. Wood, investigating the insurgency in El Salvador, finds that participation was high, despite the fact that the movement gave little political or material advantage. Examining reasons for joining the insurgents, Wood finds three emotional factors affecting decisions. The first two are participation and defiance, which are intrinsic to the individual, and as such do not depend on outcomes. The third reason is pleasure of agency, which, according to Wood, complements a model of rational agency as it depends on some expectation about the results of actions (Wood 2003, 231). The implication is that when the outcome of a decision impacts directly on the agent, the conviction is more likely to be followed through with action.¹¹

Darley and Latané, too, find that people's decision to help others depends largely on the cost or the risk they face in doing so (Darley and Latané 1970). The inaction of Milgram's subjects and the pleasure in agency observed by Wood suggest that there is a spectrum of responses linking beliefs with actions. The proposition arising from Milgram's experiment, that the perception of constraints is connected to the opportunity to reallocate responsibility, is corroborated by Wood's research in that when responsibility could not be palmed off, people disregarded constraints and even put themselves at risk. These examples have two implications. Firstly, that when there is little risk, exorbitant claims can be made about morality or conviction and, secondly, that it can be expected that what action is taken – the extent to which stated convictions give guidance – is likely to depend on the impact of the decision on the agent.

¹¹ Sen examines the relationship between morality and action. Investigating ethics and economics, Sen challenges the assumptions that people maximise their self-interests, and that this leads to optimal economic conditions. Moving beyond this traditional model, he includes interdependence and instrumental accounting in his analysis of how people make choices (Sen 1987).

Representing morality

In addition to the possibility that the espoused morality guides aid organisations, I will look at what other functions morality has, and how and why the objectives of assistance or their definitions are moved around. For this it is useful to consider morality with reference to mimesis, which can be understood to mediate the relationship between reality and appearance, and demonstrates how people can believe in things in different ways. The first form is mimicry (by which the agent imitates certain behaviour), and the second is the creation and use of symbols (in which an object or event achieves importance by representing something else). These are connected as the effect of symbolism depends on a shared mimetic culture.

Dawkins, who invents the word ‘meme’ for the unit of imitation, claims, “The new soup is the soup of human culture.” He cites tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, fashions, ways of making pots and of building arches as examples of memes (Dawkins 1989, 192); principles and rights are also memes according to his definition. Meme theory is based on the model for genes: as genes are replicators of DNA, memes are replicators of human behaviour, and the ones that are the most copied are the most successful. Dennett writes, “The first rules for memes, as for genes, is that replication is not necessarily for the good of anything; replicators flourish that are good at...replicating” (Dennett 1996, 362). The ‘survival value’ of a meme is gauged by asking, “What is it about the idea of a god [for example] that gives it its stability and penetrance (sic) in the cultural environment?” (Dawkins 1989, 193).

Imitation amongst aid organisations is demonstrated by the existence of jointly-held concepts and fads, and the need to access the same resources is one reason to copy each other. Slim identifies the predictable nature of relief agencies as a weakness in pursuing their stated goals. Citing the Chinese military strategy of Sun Tzu, he advocates that NGOs should be unconventional and flexible, prioritising the need to win the next engagement (Slim 2004). According to Slim’s analysis, replication makes aid agencies easy to predict and contain, so investigating how copying takes place could reveal why assistance appears monochrome.

Blackmore makes a specific contribution to meme theory with an investigation into altruism, which she defines as “doing something that costs time, effort, or resources, for the sake of someone else” (Blackmore 1999, 27). She observes that socio-biological explanations of such behaviour rely on an unobvious genetic advantage, whilst other explanations depend on humans having a ‘true morality’ that other species do not. Unconvinced by these, Blackmore explains altruism as mimesis:

If people are altruistic they become popular, because they are popular they are copied, and because they are copied their memes spread more widely than the memes of not-so-altruistic people, *including the altruism memes themselves*. (Blackmore 1999, 155. Italics in original)

Altruism, Blackmore argues, spreads altruism. Thus meme theory would hold that the memes of rights and principles, and other discourse or activity, are replicated inside and across aid organisations because they are stated or undertaken by people whom others want to emulate.

Meme theory has some drawbacks. Firstly, it is not clear that altruistic people are popular, or that they are copied. The counter-assertion is that people who are greedy are copied, as selfish behaviour brings material returns. Secondly, because the theory is deterministic, it does not answer political or psychological questions. Further, whilst altruism does appear to be at odds with a theory of genetic propagation, it is a concept that is used, and can be considered rational, if rationality is extended to include psychic gratification, reciprocity and approval from peers (Cohen 1995, 52). Aid workers' activity, including the use of certain forms of language, also often falls within a more conventional rational choice model, and is comprehensible as the product of professional or self-interested decisions, requiring no further theoretical elaboration.

One part of Blackmore's theory that may be useful for the present context, however, is the explanation of how some acts appear to be altruistic but do not have positive impacts on the 'beneficiary'; Blackmore attributes this to the 'altruism trick'. She writes, "The altruism trick depends on the simple idea that a meme that gets into an altruistic or likeable person... is more likely to be copied than one that gets into a meany" (Blackmore 1999, 165). Blackmore identifies two ways in which the trick can work. Firstly, actions can be imitated that *look* like altruism – she gives examples such as saying 'Happy New Year', and 'Have a nice time at the party'. These are memes that are not connected to mechanisms that make the New Year or the party more pleasant. Secondly memplexes – complex sets of memes – bring some memes that are 'tagging along for free'; these are memes that are associated with altruistic or likeable people, but are not in themselves altruistic.

Parallels to this form of mimesis exist in psychological studies on conformity. Janis analyses 'groupthink', which leads a group of people to conform with each other and reject information that might threaten the confidence in their morality and decision-making (Janis 1982; Janis 1983). Other psychology experiments find that individuals converge their opinions when faced with a difficult task (Sherif 1936), or under pressure from peers (Asch 1956). The phenomenon of inverse resonance is also similar, whereby agreement within the in-group leads to discrimination against out-group members (Carr, Rugimbana et al. 1997). Common to these types of behaviour is the fact that people are motivated by a desire for certainty. What is significant from these studies is that, although the opinions of subjects tended towards each other, subjects achieved consensus to be in agreement, rather than being led by what was (or what they believed to be) correct.

Blackmore's theory of the altruism trick and the psychological work on group behaviour highlight the deceit that is inherent to imitation, whether subjects are deceiving themselves or others. Applying this to assistance, aid agencies could 'go through the motions' in a mimetic fashion. In *We did nothing*, Polman describes her experience of giving water to people besieged by the Rwandan army in Kibeho:

I have no idea how this humanitarian operation is supposed to succeed, but what I see these blue helmets clumsily trying, I can try too.

"We are the world..." I hear myself humming, as I pick up my first empty tin from the ground and hold it under the thin stream from the tap. "...we are the children" I carry the full tin to the barbed wire and hold it up until an owner claims it with a loud "Merci!"

"So let's start giving," a Zambian [UN soldier] joins in. *The illusion that we are saving the refugees makes us euphoric*. We discuss how it can be done faster and better. (Polman 2003, 207. Emphasis added)

For as long as mimicry can be sustained, it can reduce cognitive dissonance, as actions appear to increase the consonance between the world as it stands and the ideal described by the discourse. As Polman's example indicates, mimicry also proposes a second implication of the 'game': giving the impression of assisting (or of trying to assist), and thereby playing a game, may be more comfortable psychologically than accepting that activity is not helpful.

In replicating actions, mimicry establishes symbols and rituals, and a culture of assistance is sustained through shared understanding. There is symbolism in phraseology, and the names 'rights' and 'principles' add weight to certain sorts of statements. The provision of water can be symbolic of life, and assistance to children symbolises hope. Carr et al., investigating 'donor bias', argue that disaster images of individuals promote a dispositional interpretation of poverty: the poverty is the person's fault, rather than resulting from their situation. The case is made that the image generates a particular understanding of where the problem lies, and is relayed by a camera that is operated by, and broadcasting to, a western 'observer' (Carr, McAuliffe et al. 1998, 26).¹² Disasters that attain a high media profile provide NGOs with opportunities to convey symbolic messages, which have political force, as the newspaper or television screen becomes the stage for theatrical representations of assistance (Shaw 1996; SC-UK 1998; Curran and Seaton 2003).

Girard traces mimesis to the ancient Greeks (Aristotle, 1447a; Plato, 598b; Girard 1988) noting that, since Plato, it has been regarded almost exclusively as a positive phenomenon. Conversely, for Girard, mimesis necessarily leads to conflict over resources, which he perceives to have constructive and destructive aspects. He argues that the creation of scapegoats is a product of

¹² This may involve deceit, as is implied by Bentall, who finds a tension between NGOs' need to campaign and the need to maintain "an institutional ethos appropriate to the organization's 'deprived' clientele" (Bentall 1993, 56), and Lidchi, who observes that publicity material for potential donors can conflict with attempts to educate (Lidchi 1999).

mimesis, and redirects violence onto a victim, animal or object, to protect society.¹³ He claims, “There is no question of ‘expiation.’ Rather, society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a ‘sacrificeable’ victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members” (Girard 1977, 4).

Licence to invert the model of sacrificial violence is granted by what Girard refers to as ‘double transference’: “those involved in collective violence transfer the disorder and the offenses producing it onto the victim, but they transfer also their newly found peace to the victim, ascribing to him or her the power that brings it about” (Girard and Williams 1996, 293). By inverting scapegoating, it could be argued that a mimetic morality demands a beloved victim in place of a loathed outcast. Ritual, Girard claims, depends on society not understanding it, and the victim (to be saved) is situated within the mythology of assistance morality, which defines the victim’s needs and locates a solution. The death of the victim or the rejection of assistance, though, reveals the myth and destroys the inverted-sacrificial ritual.¹⁴ The assistance does not expiate the society that gives it, but redirects the need for salvation (the morality) that might otherwise be directed at the society itself. Thus inverse-sacrifice demonstrates how the perspective is reinforced by the ability of aid agencies to bestow morality onto victims.

The processes of mimesis achieve dissonance reduction in a way identified by Festinger and others, which involves valuing one cognition so highly that others become comparatively insignificant. Symbols or symbolic acts give certain people, objects or events disproportionate value. Additionally, creating representations is – in literal or allegorical terms – art, and provides a distraction, which alleviates tension arising from dissonance.

Stage two: influence

As it stands, the theory I have presented facilitates understanding of ways in which avowing the morality through principles and rights could – contrary to first appearances – play a part in reducing cognitive dissonance between the ideal and the reality of assistance. These include the possibility that the rules guide NGOs, as well as the possibility that aid organisations operate through mimetic mechanisms of imitation and symbolism. The framework now needs to be expanded to support a broader discussion on what impact espousing the rules of rights and principles has on others. In Milgram’s experiment, the ‘victim’ was played by an actor; in examining assistance, the enquiry needs to assess impact on real characters, and what interactions are established between them and aid organisations.

¹³ This is supported by psychology theory, in which the use of scapegoats is analysed as a form of displacement, dependent on repression and denial (Milburn and Conrad 1996, 5).

¹⁴ The inversion of sacrifice is reinforced by Girard’s comments on ambiguity: God (in the Gospels) demands nonviolence, rather than sacrifice. The result is that Christ’s death – which is not sacrifice in Girard’s sense – reveals the nature and origin of sacrifice by making it unworkable (Girard and Williams 1996, 18).

The thesis turns, in Chapter 5, to look at influence. Festinger cites influence over the environment, which includes influencing the behaviour of others, as a second means of reducing dissonance. In the context of assistance, this involves the behavioural cognitive element remaining constant, and the environment being changed in order to achieve consonance.

Festinger's theory is developed by Brehm and Cohen, to include the "special case of commitment" (Brehm and Cohen 1962, 7) to explain how certain kinds of decisions are taken. Applying the theory to assistance, the inference can be drawn that NGOs make a 'commitment' of sorts to the perspective of rights and principles. When such a commitment is made, the resistance to modifying that cognitive element increases. Brehm and Cohen write, "A central kernel of dissonance theory...is the notion that *a person will try to justify a commitment to the extent that there is information discrepant with that commitment*" (Brehm and Cohen 1962, 300. Italics in original). In a similar argument, Carr et al. propose that when we buy something we cannot afford, or it does not turn out as anticipated, it creates dissonance between what we know we should have done and what we did. We then attempt to maintain the belief of ourselves and others that we acted correctly (Dore 1994; Carr, McAuliffe et al. 1998, 14).

In the thesis, I will examine empirically what leverage aid organisations exert over others by claiming a rights and principles perspective, and how they justify their perspective. The links between psychological and political elements are close, in that influence takes place in a political economy and involves power being exerted by one party over another, affecting its decisions and actions.

Persuasion

Risse and Sikkink present a model according to which human rights are adopted as a result of pressure being applied. The process described is a positive form of mimesis – as Singer puts it, "If you are not happy, act the happy man. Happiness will come later. So also with faith. If you are in despair, act as though you believed. Faith will come afterwards" (Singer 1961, 144). Risse and Sikkink, examining governments adopting human rights norms, present the case that, even if the decision to adopt human rights terminology is instrumental, the norms are later 'socialized' and become part of a country's social and political fabric.

This presents further dimensions of belief: NGO workers may promote the perspective, believing they can achieve an approximation of their objectives, even if the ideal is unattainable. On the other hand, people in host countries may have ulterior motives for adopting the language. Risse and Sikkink observe three causal mechanisms for the internalisation of norms: processes of instrumental adaptation and strategic bargaining, processes of moral consciousness-raising,

argumentation, dialogue, and persuasion, and processes of institutionalisation and habitualisation (Risse and Sikkink 1999, 5).

It is possible that NGOs operating in countries at war intend to reproduce a version of this model by drawing attention to humanitarian principles and human rights. Risse and Sikkink recognise the part played by NGOs, amongst other international actors, and some activities of NGOs resemble strategic bargaining and consciousness-raising. There are, though, differences between the situations in the model and those considered in this thesis. Risse and Sikkink write, for example,

Our dynamic model is based on the prior existence of international institutions which regulate human rights norms (a social structure) and of transnational advocacy networks composed of NGOs and foundations which are loosely connected to officials working for human rights IOs [International Organisations] as well as for national governments (the norm-producing agents). (Risse and Sikkink 1999, 19-21)

The concept of ‘socialization of norms’, the authors acknowledge, presupposes a society, and the model is not easily transferred to situations in which there is little pressure from donor governments and little organisation of civilians, and in which NGOs are the only international involvement. Additionally, Risse and Sikkink’s work concerns applying pressure on governments that have instrumental reasons for using the discourse, whether to attract aid, or to be seen to be reputable in international relations. In countries at war, instrumental decisions become more uncertain, governments are not always in control, and the incentives for parties to adopt human rights language can be low or contradictory.

Other political assessments review official ways in which NGOs gain influence through human rights terminology, tending not to investigate how persuasion takes place in difficult circumstances. Smith, for example, describes the role of NGOs in monitoring, implementing and enforcing human rights in terms of reporting to UN Committees, and writing reports on abuses. She observes, “Naturally dissemination by an NGO may be wider and more user friendly than that of the State. This can have a positive impact on human rights awareness in a State albeit achieved solely through the dedication of the NGO” (Smith 2002, 152). This is not specific about the mechanisms of persuasion involved in lobbying the various committees, and does not explain how such activity leads to greater compliance with human rights norms. Donnelly, too, claims that NGOs’ campaigns have “contributed greatly to the creation of both the Convention and the Special Rapporteur and have been extremely important in continuing to publicize the issue [of torture]” (Donnelly 2003, 148), but again without reference to *how*, or what it achieves.

The frailties in these models can be seen in sharper focus when viewed from a psychological angle, and an analysis of persuasion can start with Laswell’s question, “Who says what in which

channel to whom with what effect?" (Lasswell 1948; Argyle and Colman 1995). He identifies communicator credibility and communicator likeability as factors governing persuasiveness. According to similar logic, Petty and Cacioppo find that persuasion is dependent on the quality of the argument as well as on peripheral clues, such as the expertise of the source (Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Argyle and Colman 1995). Cialdini's work, identifying consistency, reciprocity, social validation, authority, scarcity and friendship as means of persuasion is in the same vein (Cialdini 1984). These studies imply that unless NGOs are able to establish the legitimacy of their morality and themselves, they are unlikely to have persuasive influence over others.

Other psychological accounts track sequences of events. Hovland et al., for example, argue that persuasion is dependent on "attention to the message, comprehension of its content, and acceptance of its conclusions" (Hovland, Janis et al. 1953). McGuire extends the sequence to, "presentation, attention, comprehension, yielding (or acceptance), retention and behaviour" (McGuire 1972; Argyle and Colman 1995). Such sequences reveal the points at which the process of persuasion may falter. These theories propose that, when analysing the persuasiveness of aid organisations, factors to consider are how the message is presented, and to whom, how it is received, and what scope there is for changing behaviour.

Whether aid organisations do consider these factors is an empirical question, but caution is sounded by Cohen, who, assessing how human rights reports are written, argues that processes are little understood. In terms of what reaction is 'wanted' from the reader of a report, he writes:

Human rights organisations are seldom clear about which forms or stages of acknowledgement they want to achieve through disseminating their information... When we compile a report about political killings in Colombia or capital punishment in Saudi Arabia, do we know what effect we would like the text to have on our audiences? (Cohen 1995, 49)

For operational NGOs, the context is complicated further as their rights and principles discourse assumes various functions, ranging from explaining why they are intervening in the health sector, to making recommendations to warring parties. Cohen writes,

What happens to all these reports when they are 'released'? No one I interviewed in any organisation – however much their own work is devoted only to producing reports and however much they believed in reporting as a value in itself – said "we don't care." But the great majority did say "we don't know." Or else they said, with varying degrees of cynicism and self depreciation, that their reports remained on the shelves or only reached people who already knew the information. (Cohen 1995, 68)

Whilst this lack of knowledge has probable disadvantages in terms of furthering respect for human rights, it is also as a means of reducing dissonance for those working in the organisation. By not enquiring into what happens to the reports, report writers evade pieces of information that may otherwise increase the dissonance they experience about the impact of their work. Instead, importance can be attached to adhering to the technical aspects of witnessing, including registering discontent in negotiations and report-writing itself. As far as those who write (or

file) the reports are concerned – and these are people who are in literal terms in command of the discourse – the statement “I don’t know” equates to “it doesn’t matter.” If discomfort arising from dissonant cognitions cannot be reduced by changing them, they can sometimes be ignored.

Provocation

In addition to the possibility that aid agencies have, or fail to have, persuasive leverage over people in host countries, it is worth considering how an opposite outcome may occur, if the assistance or its perspective is rejected. If the rules, instead of increasing compliance, lead to provocation, whatever action ensues is likely to increase dissonance between the ideal version of assistance and what actually happens.

An introduction to provocation is given by literature on the impact of imposing regulation. In a study into police and public disorder, Bessel and Emsley find that patterns of provocation followed mishandled arrests, the rapid spread of rumours about police brutality and an escalation of hostility. This suggests that provocation (as the opposite to persuasion) results from a failure of credibility or legitimacy. The authors found that police violence tended to follow heightened tension amongst officers and expectations of serious disorder. So the failure of attempts to regulate led to changes in the behaviour of both parties, as violence arose from the perception of threats or unfairness on the part of the protesters, and feelings of insecurity on the part of the police.

The research recommends that investigations of influence and provocation should examine the relationships between those imposing rules and those receiving or rejecting them. This should include an enquiry into what behaviour accompanies the attempts to persuade, rather than restricting itself to an enquiry into the morality of the rules. The question of “why are they protesting?” in Bessel and Emsley’s research, led to police accounts of violence that apportioned blame to individuals, and chiefly to the protesters. Bessel and Emsley write,

Riots have invariably been attributed to ‘agitators’; less commonly, they are acknowledged to have been provoked by the clumsy behaviour of a policeman, but a policeman who is a ‘rotten apple’ or a ‘black sheep’. (Bessel and Emsley 2000, 3)

Blaming individuals produces scapegoats (which are expected to have psychological and political functions) but does not necessarily quell the situation and may lead to further provocation. A further question to ask is, “why are they policing?” The police blamed protesters, excluding structural factors that may have contributed to the provocation, and perceiving themselves to be extraneous to the process. Whilst this may have been the view of individual officers, such a bias has political implications at a group or societal level, and the manner in which opinion of the police was received reflected (and reinforced) an imbalance of power in the political economy of the protest and of the society in which it took place. Bessel and Emsley

continue, “Even the proudest liberal democracies, even in peacetime, have not been averse to giving preference to police evidence and justifications” (Bessel and Emsley 2000, 7).

In applying this theory there are two factors to bear in mind. The first is that the relationship between police and protesters is relevant for assessing the outcome of events. Secondly, this relationship takes place in a larger context, and Wisler and Tackenberg broaden the analysis of protesting to include assessments of political infrastructure and media representations (Wisler and Tackenberg 2000, 121). In terms of aid organisations, the influence that they exert needs to be examined with reference to the war in which they are working, and the political economy in which their work plays a role.

The work on policing and protesting investigates the sources of provocation, and the means by which regulation can increase an existing imbalance of power. It explains why policies may be pursued even if they entail costs. In a comparable analysis, Gilligan presents psychological research from American gaols to examine relationships between the rules and punishment and the people on whom they are imposed. Gilligan’s focus is on how violence is provoked, and he finds that many practices that are designed to control people are unsafe in terms of reforming violent behaviour. In a counterintuitive thesis, he identifies shame not as a form of positive moral pressure, but as a motivating factor behind violence: the reaction of violent men to shame is to destroy its source, including murdering people who remind them of their inadequacy (Gilligan 1999; Gilligan 2001).

Gilligan’s theory of the provocative impact of shame identifies elements that are common to assistance. Harrell-Bond in her study of Ugandan refugees in Sudan, argues that aid is ‘iatrogenic’ – a medical term she borrows, signifying that disease is caused by examination or treatment (Harrell-Bond 1986, 364). Harrell-Bond’s contention is that aid is imposed – that unhelpful processes are inflicted with counterproductive results. Part of the unsuitability of aid, she argues, derives from its failure to involve its ‘beneficiaries’, as has been proposed also by Chambers and others (Chambers 1983; Chambers 1997). The result of this on a practical level is that projects are designed without incorporating the views of people to whom they are given, and differences of opinion arise about what the ‘problem’ is and how it could be addressed. On a psychological level, though, Gilligan’s theory suggests that if people perceive that they are being side-lined or over-ridden, they may react in negative ways, through stealing, being uncooperative, lying or by using violence.

A second form of provocation may occur when aid is *not* imposed – by which I mean that it is not given but that, in that it is postulated, expectations are heightened. Frustration or the perception of being betrayed, belittled or shamed through neglect could provoke a backlash, or

increase the vulnerability of the people whom the assistance purportedly set out to help. For example, the prospect of receiving assistance may distort decisions that people take regarding their movement or food procurement, and if resources are ultimately not forthcoming, their security can be compromised. A related process, but pertaining to the work of human rights organisations, is described by de Waal: Rwandan activists were encouraged by international human rights advocates to speak out against the Habyarimana regime, but were not protected, and were murdered in the genocide (de Waal 2003, 487). These analyses suggest that encouraging people to demand, or believe in, human rights or the likelihood of assistance potentially generates political costs, and may lead to retribution, if the expectations that have been raised are then disappointed.

Gilligan's central thesis, that shame is the cause of violence, entails a normative message and offers advice. If you shame people, they are violent; therefore – respect them. His line is intellectually similar to de Waal's argument that has been discussed above: Gilligan describes an economy of dignity, a commodity that is withheld from the person who is being shamed, and de Waal an economy of responsibility, which is corroded by weakening political accountability within a society. Both writers identify disequilibrium in their respective economies, arguing that this has detrimental impacts and needs to be redressed in order for progress to be made.

Whilst these positions have much to recommend them, their existence alongside continuing disrespect and irresponsibility and the suffering they cause, flags an additional demand on analysis. The framework needs to be expanded again to embrace a further question, which results directly from these advances in political and psychological analysis: why does suffering continue, if we know – to a great extent – what causes it and how to stop it? What is needed is a theory to explain how and why, even when there are cognitions about how dignity and responsibility operate, there are also processes that blank out certain pieces or types of information.

Stage three: impunity

Festinger identifies a third means of reducing dissonance as that of adding new cognitive elements, and in the thesis I will explore this in relation to fantasy. The notion of fantasy raises a third implication of the word 'game,' namely that assistance does not seriously engage with the suffering that it perceives, and is recreational for the people who play it. I do not want to impute beliefs that people hold, and I quote from interviews, in order to maintain a direct account. The word 'game', though, is intended to open various ways of interpreting the disparity between what people say and what they do, showing how people can believe things in different ways and at different times.

Denial

Gilligan's work has suggested that asserting rules does not always have the stated desired effect, and may have reverse effects, if it is perceived to be provocative. If this is the case, the cognitive dissonance increases, as the reality shifts further from the official version of assistance. Festinger writes, "When dissonance exists, persons will be able to evade the impact of dissonance-increasing information, even when forcibly exposed to it, by various means such as mis-perception, denying its validity, and the like" (Festinger 1962, 176). Denial, then, is a means of cutting off unwanted cognitions, and is connected to fantasy, since fantasy involves (amongst other things) denying reality.

Cohen defines denial as, "states – in the psychic and political senses – in which something is known and not-known at the same time" (Cohen 2001, 79). He identifies three forms of denial. The first is *literal* denial; this involves denying the occurrence or existence of an event, and is summarised by the claim, "nothing happened." The second is *interpretive* denial, which is the denial of the interpretation given; it is not disputed that something happened, but the claim is made that what happened is not as it appears, and is really something else. The third form of denial is *implicatory* denial: this again accepts that something happened, but denies the implication that the accuser is making. It is characterised by the assertion, "what happened is justified." Cohen argues that these forms of denial can be sequential – as incriminating evidence emerges – or simultaneous, as an (illogical) ideological connection is established between denial that something occurred, and justification of it. He gives the example, "there was no massacre and the bastards got what they deserved" (Cohen 2001, 103).

Denial as a means of dissonance reduction takes place when the psychological and political gains it grants are greater than the losses caused by increased violence. Investigating denial as a psychological defence mechanism, Milburn and Conrad observe that states in the USA were reinstating the death penalty, despite evidence that it did not deter crime. They draw attention to the desire for psychological certainty as a motivational factor, and the way that it is attained recalls the previous discussion on scapegoating and its functions:

What purpose does [capital punishment] serve? Supporting and implementing it allow people to act out their anger, rage, and helplessness that many of us carry around and to direct these emotions at a target that is clearly and undeniably 'evil'. (Milburn and Conrad 1996, 2)

Denial is not restricted to individual people or acts, and relies on a cultural setting. Cohen perceives a dependency between the technique of denial and the audience, which can be based on vocabularies of motivation or neutralisation that are used to explain or exculpate. Referring to Sykes and Matza's work on juvenile delinquents, he identifies various techniques of neutralisation that people employ when accused of a crime. These include denial of injury, denial of the victim or of responsibility, condemnation of the condemners and an appeal to

higher loyalties (Sykes and Matza 1957; Cohen 1995, 32). According to the research, delinquents do not usually deny what happened or offer an alternative value system, but construct a motivational account, which is calculated on the basis of what explanation is likely to be received. This increases consonance as, within the story created, some cognitions can be neutralised or ignored.

Cohen's work can be adapted to examine fantasy as stories are made up to cover the gaps left when elements are denied. This is helpful to an analysis aid organisations because assistance takes place in environments of low information and high potential for denial. There are some situations that aid organisations have no influence over; if these cause injury, there is incentive to avoid implicating themselves. There are also some processes for which aid organisations are causally responsible, and again, the incentive is to deny responsibility for any harmful outcomes.

Denial and fantasy present opportunities for aid organisations, in that they relieve cognitive dissonance without necessitating any change in behavioural or environmental cognitive elements, and as such they allow a degree of impunity. Two implications follow: firstly that if a person (or set of people) is able to impose rules and deny the impact that the rules have, this is – in itself – an expression of power. Secondly, the power that the person has is entrenched by the process.

Power

The success of denial and fantasy rests, in part, on power as they imply some dereliction of accountability. Power can take various forms and change over time: NGOs appear vulnerable in some situations, for example when compared to the political forces of the UN, or when faced by people with guns. At the same time, their existence is sponsored by the global economy. Investigating how power works in the context of assistance, involves identifying how it is expressed and underpinned and what the political and psychological processes are.

Edelman analyses representations of power in the use of rhetorical evocations and official language. Such discourse can ease dissonance in that it is used to reduce ambiguities and reinforce myths that serve dominant interests. Edelman writes, “A woman whose poverty makes her angry or despondent becomes a different political symbol after a psychiatrist defines her as ‘hysteric’; she now symbolizes individual sickness, not a malfunctioning economy” (Edelman 1977, 21). ‘Help’ is a political symbol according to his analysis, which creates a relationship between the giver and the recipient that can make both parties immune to evidence that challenges the labels that the relationship ascribes. Evans, also criticising the way in which a perspective is communicated, argues that “the dominant image of human rights remains that of civil and political rights and...these rights offer legitimisation for particular forms of social activity that support the interests of the neoliberal consensus” (Evans 2001, 118).

The use of power to legitimise a dominant position can be explained to some extent by psychological literature on ‘balance theory’. Heider’s definition of balance is “a harmonious state, one in which the entities comprising the situations and the feelings about them fit together without stress” (Heider 1958, 180). It is comparable to the theory of cognitive dissonance in that consistency is sought, but instead of being a quest for rational consistency, “it implies that people are *biased* towards perceiving their social environment in such a manner that they can make simple evaluative judgements in terms that enable them to maintain a positive view of themselves” (Eiser 1986, 17). Later work into cognitive balance has suggested that the incentives to reducing balance, which is necessary for making decisions, can coexist with incentives to seek out incongruity, as a survival mechanism (McGuire 1968; Eiser 1986, 20). The implication is that if one party’s survival is assured (or at least ballasted by superior power), that party is likely to seek consistency, by finding (or making up) cognitions that fit with its bias.

Duffield’s investigation of global governance is instructive on this subject as it is concerned with the mechanisms of control and the neoliberal consensus. Concerning the way that aid is given, Duffield proposes that Northern governments have merged their development and security agendas, portraying underdevelopment as dangerous. This, he argues, is not primarily explanatory, and he writes that the “main effect has been to encourage interconnections and patterns of coordination within the emerging strategic complexes of global liberal governance” (Duffield 2001, 116). His argument is that serving powerful interests demands a particular interpretation of events in the countries in which assistance is given. He continues:

The view that the poor are prone to revolt against underdevelopment yet, at the same time, tend to attract criminally violent and vengeful leaders is extremely important for liberal peace. If the revolt is legitimate and invites strategic alliance, the need to separate the deserving poor from their undeserving leaders underscores the urgency of intervention. (Duffield 2001, 128)

Duffield’s suggestion is that a new piece of information, which is consistent with the bias of Northern governments, ‘underscores the urgency of the intervention’, and this concurs with Festinger’s cognitive dissonance analysis. According to Duffield, aid is part of the liberal peace agenda that involves problematising leaders in marginalised countries, and as this creates scapegoats and relies on emotive morality, it is connected to the psychological processes already discussed. Duffield’s analysis, though, captures the scope of the global political economy, demonstrating how individual, organisational or societal mechanisms operate in structures of power.

Duffield examines how actions are swept into a larger agenda, or how the larger agenda is pursued through myriad channels. This line of reasoning can be pursued with reference to Foucault’s analysis of power. Foucault perceives power to be expressed through discourse, detecting a ‘regime’ of truth: “ ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power

which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it” (Foucault 1980, 131). According to this, there is not one ‘truth’, but one version of events – which may be fantastical – that is used to subdue others. Foucault investigates what he terms “the ‘problematization’ of madness, crime or sexuality” (Foucault and Pearson 2001, 171) by the dominant, in exploring how discourse generates and reinforces its rationale. The doctor makes madness medical by naming it insanity (Foucault and Sheridan 1973; Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). There is political utility in the spectacle of public execution; the prison also has a function – to contain criminals (Foucault 1979, 53).

Extending Foucault’s theory, cognitive dissonance could be annulled by the powerful, who control or manipulate people and events and their descriptions until consonance is achieved. Foucault’s analysis enhances understanding of how some things are not perceived, and the element of power explains how morality statements, and activity to proselytise them, can be sustained even if there are neutral or negative consequences. Foucault’s examples come from a society that retains power, alongside a degree of – mainly physical – control over elements that do not adhere to its rules.

The analysis can be applied to the discourse of assistance, defined and employed by a powerful minority. From Foucault’s suggestion that the discourse does not comprehend the processes it condemns, it can be predicted to have a degree of success in furthering its own interests and also some spectacular consequences when condemned elements cannot be physically restrained. Even in the concentrated institutions of prisons and hospitals that Foucault describes, he observes that there are unintended or counterproductive outcomes. His argument is that the discourse of problematisation lacks the conceptual sophistication for self-critique, exposing itself to confusion and retribution. The dilution of power, as the model is transferred from the Panopticon – the construction of surveillance – to intermittent assistance in eastern Congo, brings the implication that victories of political truth are likely to have costs for the victor.

To sum up, I have outlined a framework that places morality, influence and impunity within a discussion of how aid organisations deal with cognitive dissonance. Gilligan provides analysis to explore how adverse effects result from regulation. He does not, though, give a full account of what violence may achieve, or of why provocation is not diffused, if it can be identified. Cohen’s theory is used to approach these questions from a different angle, as it explains how some elements are ignored. Cohen presents the political and psychological elements behind denial, focusing chiefly on the intended functions, including the psychological defence that denial affords. Because denial can overlook provocation and provocation can be intensified by denial, an understanding can be reached of how, in theory, provocation and denial could sustain each other in a dissonant environment.

The rationale behind bringing these analyses together with that of Foucault is to uncover the unwelcome and half-seen consequences of denial, beyond the calculated returns. Foucault demonstrates that there are political incentives for the dominant in intensifying regulation and impunity, and also that, under some circumstances, this increases provocation and unwanted products of denial by blocking off information that is psychologically uncomfortable, but may be relevant. It should be noted that the parts of the theoretical framework are inter-connected. Foucault's analysis suggests that power is an element common to all three phenomena considered in this framework, manifested in the way that it defines morality, assumes authority for influence and creates space for denial and impunity.

Structure of the thesis

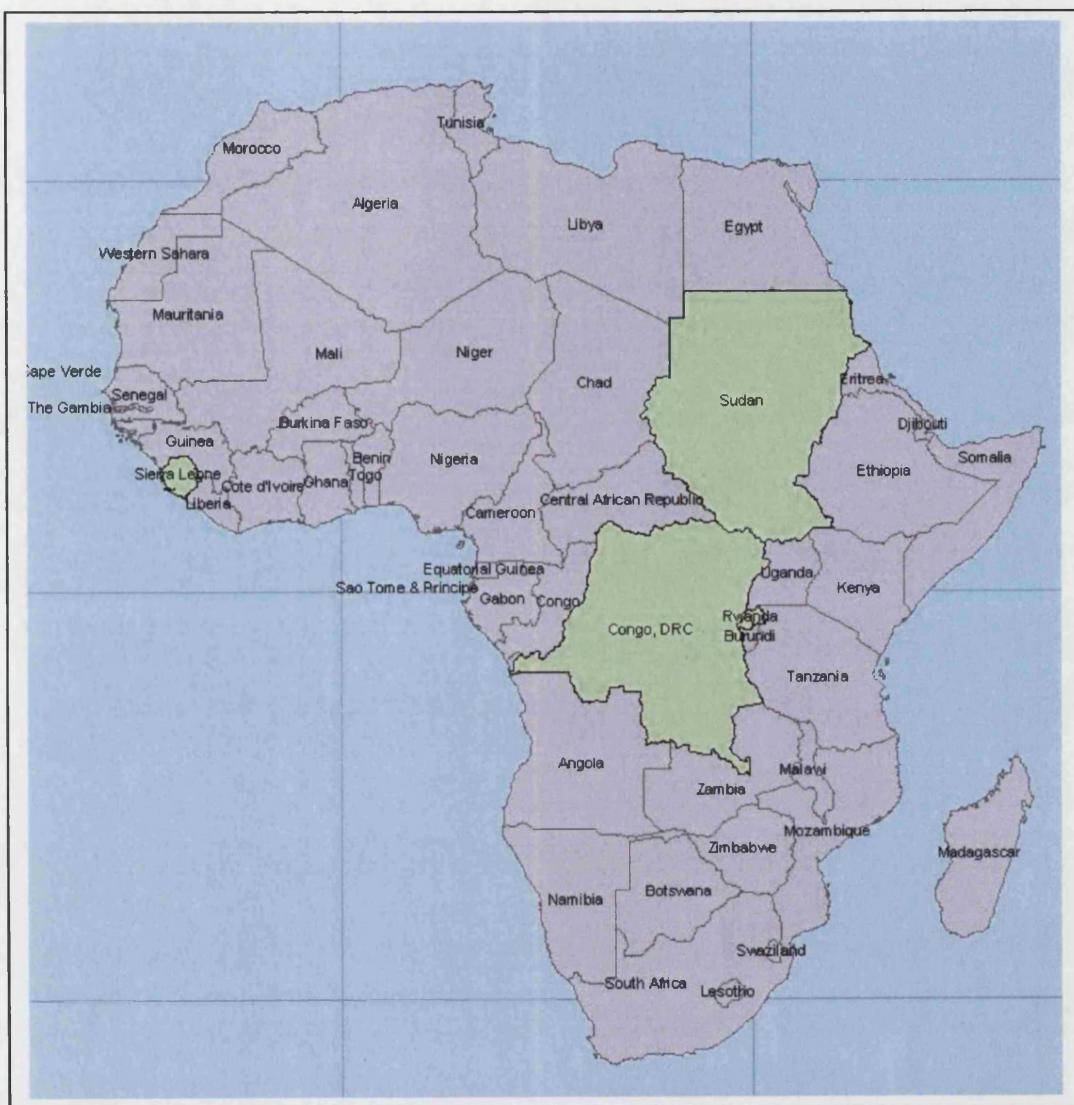
I have structured the thesis to trace assistance from donor and NGO policy to implementation and how it is received and justified. Chapter 1 has set out the research problem and questions, along with the hypotheses, and methodologies for addressing them.

Chapters 2 to 4 examine hypothesis (1a), relating to the guidance provided by the stated objectives of assistance. Chapter 2 introduces DFID and assesses its interests and involvement by comparing its policy with implementation and achievements. Chapters 3 and 4 track NGOs, identifying ways in which their discourse is amended or added to in various contexts. Chapter 3 examines operations in Sierra Leone and Rwanda, and Chapter 4 moves to Congo and southern Sudan.

Chapter 5 examines hypothesis (1b) – that stating objectives has a strategic function – identifying what leverage aid organisations have, particularly when people in host countries attempt to control assistance. This is characterised in the title as ‘breaking the rules’. Chapter 6 describes ‘the game,’ turning to hypothesis (2), and addressing the subsidiary questions to determine the shape of assistance, the ways in which it is sustained, and what gains are made from it.

In Chapter 7, I reflect on the theoretical implications of the material presented. For practical purposes, I identify the need to submit objectives to tests of plausibility and commitment, concluding that without these elements, the possibility of assisting is undermined.

Africa: showing countries studied



2. DFID: a new humanitarianism

In May 1997, New Labour was elected into government in the UK and established the Department for International Development (DFID), distinct from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). DFID published its White Paper, *Eliminating World Poverty: a challenge for the 21st century*, in November the same year. The White Paper defined policy on the International Development Targets agreed by members of the United Nations in 1990, “to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.” “It is first, and most importantly, about the single greatest challenge which the world faces – eliminating poverty. It is about ensuring that the poorest people in the world benefit as we move towards a new global society” (DFID 1997b, 5).

In this chapter, I begin examining hypothesis (1a) – that the stated objectives, founded on humanitarian principles and human rights, guide assistance – by an investigation of DFID. I compare DFID’s policy with implementation and achievement. Regarding each country studied, I consider DFID’s engagement and how it relates to rights and principles. The chapter provides both an exposition of the funding environment and how it affects NGOs, and a political analysis of DFID.

What DFID says

DFID’s White Paper introduced a ‘consistent approach’ to “make sure that all Government policies affecting developing countries promote sustainable development” (DFID 1997a, 12). DFID formed the Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department (CHAD), and wrote: “In responding to disasters, we aim to provide swift, appropriate and cost-effective financial, material and technical assistance, based on analysis of actual need” (DFID 1997b, 44). George Foulkes, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for DFID, proposed in 1998,

The basic principles of humanitarian intervention are well known. Chief among these is the principle of “impartiality”. i.e. help must be provided to those who need it, only on the basis of their requirements, and regardless of their political affiliations or other considerations. There is no dispute over this. (Foulkes 1998)

In April 1998, DFID’s Principles of a New Humanitarianism were established, including:

- We will seek to promote a more universal approach in addressing humanitarian needs wherever they arise. People in need – wherever they are – should have equal status and rights to assistance;
- Our humanitarian policy will seek to work with other efforts aimed at tackling the underlying causes of a crisis and building peace and stability...
- We will seek the best possible assessment of needs, and a clear framework of standards and accountability from those who work to deliver our assistance. (DFID 1999b)

The rights focus, attention to the underlying causes of crises, and mention of accountability showed recognition of the debates through the 1990s regarding the palliative or aggravating nature of aid. Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development, speaking on

Principled Aid in an Unprincipled World, a self-consciously moral title, couched the ‘new rights-based humanitarianism’ within a description of rights abuse as violent, deliberate and individual acts. The response, she asserted, “goes well beyond private charity or governmental largess. It is not about discretionary assistance when the mood for benevolence takes us.” Short held,

Thoughtful humanitarians have already realised that, in the eyes of many people, humanitarian aid has lost most of its moral currency. Once an undisputed symbol of solidarity with those struck down by misfortune and adversity, humanitarian assistance is now vilified by many as part of the problem: feeding fighters, strengthening perpetrators of genocide, creating new war economies, fuelling conflicts and perpetuating crises. (Short 1998)

In February 1999, DFID released a policy statement on conflict reduction and humanitarian assistance: “The purpose of DFID conflict reduction policy is to build the political and social means to enable the equitable representation of different interest groups, promotion of all human rights, and resolution of disputes and grievances without recourse to violence” (DFID 1999a, 2). The policy was wide-ranging, including capacity building, conflict prevention, small arms, mines, and human rights. In March 1999, *Poverty and the security sector* positioned security sector reform within development. This involved political and military engagement. DFID clarified, “Involvement by DFID in the security sector is permitted by the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act so long as the primary purpose is to promote development” (DFID 1999c, 3).

The formulation of policy was swift, and the policy far-reaching. In her speech to the Labour Party conference in September 1999, Short announced,

All of Britain’s development resources are now focused on the eradication of poverty. This is the biggest moral challenge facing the world. One in four of our fellow citizens are living in abject poverty. Justice demands that they be given the chance to improve their lives. But so does our hardheaded self-interest. If we do not make faster progress in reducing poverty, the consequences in growing population, environmental degradation, war and disease will damage the prospects of the next generation wherever they live.

Short stated, “Our development strategy and our conflict prevention strategy are one and the same. Promoting sustainable development is also promoting the conditions for sustainable peace.”¹⁵ The threads of poverty and conflict were drawn together. The ‘hardheaded self-interest’ claim was followed in July 2000 with the formation of two Conflict Prevention Pools, managed jointly with the FCO and Ministry of Defence (MoD).

The White Paper *Making Globalisation work for the Poor*, launched in December 2000, announced that from April 2001, all aid would be untied. The UK’s unilateral decision made it “absolutely clear that poverty elimination is the sole objective of aid”, but also “Managing

¹⁵ News from DFID, 02/11/99.

globalisation with equity is morally right. It is also in our interests.”¹⁶ This tied in with an appreciation that “Over-prescriptive aid conditionality has a poor track record in persuading governments to reform their policies” (DFID 2000c, 92). The poverty focus meant that “Resources are being switched from better off countries with relatively few people in extreme poverty to poor countries with large numbers of poor people, particularly those with good policies” (DFID 2001a, 9). The opportunity to work with governments with “good policies” prevailed over DFID’s initial interest in wars, and the subject of conflict (which had previously commanded a subsection in the Departmental Report) was, in 2001, subsumed into “International response” in paragraphs 353-59.

What DFID does

The 1997 White Paper promised,

We shall continue generous provision for humanitarian assistance through UN and Red Cross agencies, NGOs and partner governments. Recognising the problems of diversion and manipulation of external assistance in conflict situations, such help will be based on carefully assessed needs. We shall seek agreement on a code of ethical conduct for organisations working in conflict areas. The protection and promotion of human rights and the observance of international humanitarian law will be integral to all of our programmes of humanitarian assistance. (DFID 1997b, 71)

Espousing impartiality, IHL and human rights indicated priorities. DFID’s humanitarian allocations are shown below:

Humanitarian Assistance: Top Ten Recipient Countries

	1997/98	£m	1998/99	£m	1999/00	£m	2000/01	£m
1	States ex-Yug	20	Sudan	23	States ex-Yug	81	States ex-Yug	32
2	Montserrat	12	Bangladesh	16	Balkan Region	16	Ethiopia	13
3	Afghanistan	7	Cen'l America	10	Albania	15	India	12
4	Sudan	4	Montserrat	8	Mozambique	12	Iraq	10
5	Iraq	3	Iraq	6	East Timor	7	Mozambique	9
6	Ethiopia	3	Kenya	5	Iraq	7	Afghanistan	6
7	Rwanda	3	States exYug	4	Afghanistan	5	Russian Fed.	5
8	Malawi	2	Tanzania	4	Montserrat	4	Sudan	4
9	Burundi	2	Ethiopia	3	India	4	Kenya	4
10	Angola	2	Malawi	3	Russian Fed.	3	Congo (DR)	3

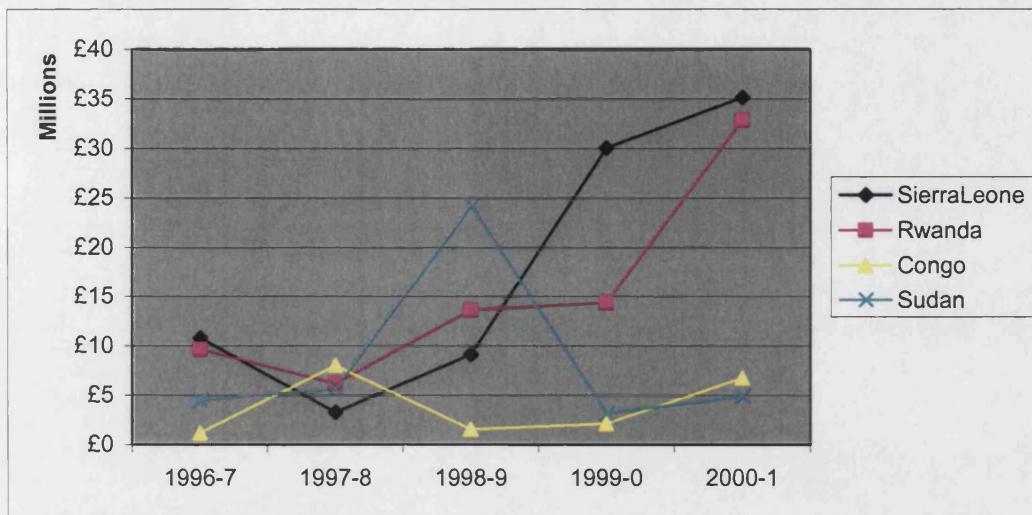
DFID (Statistics on International Development)

In 1998, the States of ex-Yugoslavia also received £1m from the existing allocation for the region, £37m from DFID Unallocated Reserve and £68m from HM Treasury Central Reserve (DFID 2000b). A National Audit Office study of the period reported,

DFID’s own analysis reveals that, since 1997, the per capita level of humanitarian assistance it has provided in European emergencies has been five times higher than for emergencies in Africa. The analysis concluded that this large variation could not be explained by differences in cost of delivery and associated security factors alone. (NAO 2003, 19)

¹⁶ DFID Press release, 11/12/00.

Regarding the countries studied in this thesis, DFID allocations as Gross Public Expenditure (GPEX) are given by the following graph. GPEX includes humanitarian assistance, incorporating all official UK sources of developmental aid (DFID 2000g, 160).



Bilateral aid from DFID. Source: DFID

I turn now to how DFID operated in each of these countries.

Sierra Leone

Following Sierra Leone's coup in May 1997, Short announced, "We have suspended all current aid activities in Sierra Leone following the coup and made clear that existing plans will not be continued under a military regime."¹⁷ ActionAid and Cause Canada were withdrawn from water and sanitation, Medical Research Centre from primary health care, and Christian Children's Fund and Concern Universal from 'children affected by war.'¹⁸ Short asserted, "The time scale for resumption of normal aid to Sierra Leone, provided through non-governmental agencies, will depend on progress in establishing peace and the return of the democratically elected government of President Kabbah."¹⁹

DFID assisted Kabbah in exile, and the British High Commissioner relocated with him to Conakry. Kabbah returned to Freetown on 10th March 1998, and Short assessed:

The proper, democratically elected Government have been restored. The coup in Sierra Leone was vicious and brutal; a set of people went around chopping off the arms and legs of children. It is good for humanity that that is over.²⁰

DFID immediately committed £1m to the ICRC, and £1m to Kabbah's government; the FCO was funding peace-keeping. According to Short,

¹⁷ Hansard 30/06/97:39.

¹⁸ Hansard 08/06/98:445.

¹⁹ Hansard 25/11/97:493.

²⁰ Hansard 03/06/98:354.

Britain has historical responsibilities in Sierra Leone, and it was only right that we did everything we could to restore democracy. The fighting has not finished everywhere, and we must be ready to move in quickly with food and medicines to help the Government restore their competence throughout the country.²¹

NGOs were wary of DFID's withdrawal, and ActionAid had made public criticism that DFID was setting political considerations above the needs of Sierra Leoneans (ActionAid 1998). Short denied this:

We did not reduce humanitarian aid to Sierra Leone to put pressure on the coup leaders...That allegation has been made by one NGO, and it just is not so; some of my officials have written to it on the matter. There was real trouble getting resources in without feeding the fighters...We did not cut resources to hurt people.²²

By July 1998, DFID was funding seeds, tools, shelter and medicines through five NGOs, and in 1999, it established an Anti-Corruption Commission. DFID was "preparing a development programme which will contribute towards the establishment of effective government, at local and national levels."²³ The policy was "directed at building a lasting peace and security and promoting poverty reduction and sustainable development." Short advocated that the international community should "take risks to provide security, which was a prerequisite for development,"²⁴ and DFID funded demobilisation and security sector reform.

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

In July 1998, DFID funding was approved for Emergency Demobilisation in Sierra Leone, and the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR) was established in the capital, Freetown. Three thousand of the junta troops who had surrendered or been captured had opted to demobilise, and DFID contracted the Crown Agents Emergency Response Team (ERT) to manage the camp for six months. Phase I was terminated by the Revolutionary United Front's (RUF) attack on Freetown in January 1999.

Phase II followed the Lomé Agreement of July 1999; a UN trust fund was established, and the Government of Sierra Leone costed the programme at US\$50m, and DFID made the largest commitment, with US\$10m. The only comparable contribution was US\$9m from the World Bank (Christian Aid 1999, 2) (the UN reported US\$5.6m and US\$8m respectively (UN 2000b)). DDR was formally re-launched on 20th October 1999, with the deadline for disarmament set for 15th December.

After disarmament by the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (Unamsil), the ex-combatants went to camps for demobilisation, envisaged to take between thirty and ninety days (demobilisation

²¹ Hansard 25/03/98:481.

²² Hansard 03/06/98:355.

²³ Hansard 03/11/99:232.

²⁴ Hansard 24/05/00:505W.

from the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) took a week, as they lived with their families). Demobilisation included reception, screening, reintegration interviews, pre-discharge orientation (PDO) and payment of the first instalment of the US\$300 Transitional Safety net Allowance (TSA). One aid worker commented, “DDR is using the model of cash for weapons... There has to be some other incentive, and some realistic alternative way of life. If you give up your weapons, most likely there’s no other prospect of a job.”²⁵ An NCDDR official did not refute this,

We’re emphasising the long-term benefit for the ex-combatants. If you institute cash-for-weapons you create a demand for weapons. If you consider the number of weapons in this sub-region, we’ll end up collecting all of them from Liberia and Guinea, and we don’t have money to pay for them.²⁶

The NCDDR Commissioner proposed, “The overall aim is to consolidate peace. We’re creating an opportunity for ex-combatants to rejoin society in a dignified way, which is reassuring to the population.”²⁷ The policy was in place, as were the camps, but an assessment found,

little evidence that PDO activities, which are scheduled to include psycho-social counselling, basic adult literacy and employment training, have occurred in an organised and meaningful way. Camp inmates have no daily schedule or reorientation activities and are bored and listless, doing little else but smoke marijuana. (Christian Aid 1999, 10)

The ERT was supporting logistics and administration, and DFID encouraged NGOs to work in the camps. (NGOs were reluctant, as demobilisation was intensely political while fighting was on-going and there was scant protection for vulnerable populations). The process was slow; the dribbles of lower-rank RUF did not diminish military capacity, and renewed offensives in May 2000 ended the demobilisation. The camps shut, were destroyed by the RUF, or had never opened. A DFID meeting in Oxford the same month recognised as a ‘key point’ “the need for relative peace before establishing a DDR process, along with the need for a strong commitment by both the opposing factions and donor agencies to support the process” (DFID 2000a, 41). Between 18,344 (Christian Aid 2000) and 26,699 (DDR figures) of the estimated 45,000 combatants had, in some sense, disarmed. The disruption by the RUF distracted attention from weaknesses in the DDR’s conception and implementation. The ERT, having been kidnapped, returned home, and Sierra Leone passed from CHAD to the West and North Africa Department.

Having pinned itself to the government, DFID had no reason to stay while the situation deteriorated. An employee at the demobilised children’s Interim Care Centre in Bo explained DFID’s response:

²⁵ 08/12/00, Freetown.

²⁶ 17/01/01, Freetown.

²⁷ 17/01/01, Freetown.

D: Because of the insecurity. They packed up in a hurry. It was just one night and everyone was gone. Actually in the space of about two hours they had packed up and everyone had gone to Freetown...

Z: What was the security situation in Bo?

D: Because the RUF was abducting foreign personnel [in Makeni], I'm sure expatriate staff were feeling insecure. They didn't want to put themselves in a position where they would become a security liability...After they left, the operation was halted, there was no work done. After two months they closed down the entire operation here. They closed down the office.

Z: Was that for security reasons?

D: It was more for the fact that the peace process had been disrupted in the North. Nobody could tell the CDF to disarm while the RUF were marching.²⁸

Remobilisation ensued. Six months later Issa Kamara, heading DDR in Bo, described the demobilisation procedure:

I: If I get RUF here in the south and they want to disarm, I take them to the Unamsil milobs [military observers], and they will decide. If they have arms, they will disarm them. They ask the [Peace Keeping Force] to take them to Kenema, and Kenema Unamsil will transport them to Daru [demobilisation camp].

Z: How often does this happen?

I: I haven't had anyone who has come here yet. I've had one or two young boys who have come, but not with arms.²⁹

At the end of 2000 some demobilisation was picking up again. The camps were staffed by Sierra Leoneans, with security provided by Unamsil. The US\$300 TSA had been replaced by a Le30,000 (around US\$14) travel allowance. The government explained, "Since the May 8, 2000 peaceful demonstration against the RUF leader and unfortunate incidents, the payment of Transitional Safety Net Allowances to discharged Ex-combatants has been suspended" (GoSL 2000, 4). DFID edged in again, but with a lower profile. An NCDDR official assessed,

C: DFID is trying to show some more involvement in downstream reintegration programmes. Initially they were concerned with D[disarmament] and D[demobilisation] and less with R[reintegration]. It cannot happen without the Ds. Now they are interested in funding more R.

Z: Why?

C: Disarmament and demobilisation are crucial, which people recognised. It has political and military sensitivity, which most donors will want to avoid. The R has not enticed anyone to come out. The R happens in the community, and you have to make it safe and secure...If you are not putting members of the community back home [i.e. they stay in camps] and you are reintegrating ex-combatants, there will be problems. But if you're not disarming ex-combatants, people will not go back home.³⁰

And later in the interview,

At Lomé...everyone said, "we have to access power through the legitimate process," but nobody supported that. They were more interested in trying to disarm the fighting forces. It's asymmetrical. There's a lack of proactive engagement in driving the RUF towards a political process. The political leadership of the RUF became suspicious of the process and reneged.

²⁸ 02/01/01, Bo.

²⁹ 04/01/01, Bo.

³⁰ 17/01/01, Freetown.

By the beginning of 2001, DDR camps were operational again in Port Loko and Daru.

Mohammed Thomas, who had disarmed at the end of 1999, recalled,

M: I went home, my mother and father drove me out saying I'm a big man. I don't get TSA, I just fly up and down like a crazy boy. They don't give me no money.

Z: Are you getting training?

M: No. One year one month, just waiting.

Z: Why did you come to the DDR?

M: Because I want peace, I need peace now. I spent two years seven months in the bush.

Z: How did you hear about the DDR?

M: From the radio. They said there's a big camp for ex-combatants to disarm, they give you \$300. I stay one year three months, they don't give money.

Z: Why don't you leave?

M: I don't have money. Everything is money. I don't have house rent.³¹

He was among over two hundred demobilising RUF fighters marooned in the garrison town of Daru. A few days later the NCDDR commissioner claimed, “There are very few in camps now. Those coming are probably those who have been coming in the last two weeks. We are processing them very quickly.”³² His denial was functional, and DFID’s persistence had kept DDR on the agenda. The eventual process was swift: according to DFID, “Over 50 000” excombatants disarmed in the year from May 2001 (DFID 2002, 27), handing DFID sudden success on its policy.

Security sector reform

DFID’s work alongside the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Sierra Leone formed a showpiece of ‘joined up government’. Peter Hain, UK Minister for Foreign Affairs, proposed at a DFID meeting,

Security sector reform matters. If you want an example of why, look at Sierra Leone. A country with so much potential dragged to the bottom of the UN development index. By a military which overthrew the elected government. By the state’s inability to protect its own people or even itself. By the security vacuum which was filled with such venomous effect by militias, warlords and mercenaries. (DFID 2000f, 28)

Security sector reform started in June 1999. It had two planks: “helping the Sierra Leone Ministry of Defence create the capacity to control the armed forces and hold them accountable to the elected Government,” and “building up the new National Security Council and its secretariat so that it can provide effective policy management and coordinate security policy” (DFID 2000b, 84). It also included the restoration of the Paramount Chiefs, a project initiated in 2000 and aimed at re-establishing the pre-war civil administration. Forty-six out of 149 Paramount Chief posts were vacant, and only forty-five of the incumbents remained in their chiefdom (DFID 2000e, 12).

Sarah Beechings, Head of the Conflict and Security Policy Section of CHAD, explained,

³¹ 12/01/01, Daru.

³² 17/01/01, Freetown.

natural disasters" (DFID 1999a). DFID backed existing structures – government, Paramount Chiefs, and young men (through demobilisation) – apparently to drive development back on track. In that such rebuilding disregarded the inequity and patrimonialism of pre-war society and the functions of ten years of violent development, the approach had potentially dangerous consequences. In the short term, though, appreciable security returned by the end of 2001, and this afforded DFID moral credit on a political gamble, giving retrospective respectability to some of the heavy-handedness.

Rwanda

The UK government had little involvement with Rwanda before the 1994 genocide. In 1995 the FCO established a small British embassy in the capital, Kigali, and DFID started working with the Rwandan government in 1997. Clare Short made her first official visit to Rwanda in October 1997, announcing £5m for "education, justice and revenue collection and [to] promote gender issues" which increased Britain's contribution to £222m since the genocide (IRIN, 09/10/97). DFID's engagement included humanitarian assistance and bilateral development aid, and also a new policy of conflict reduction. Citing Rwanda as an example, Short claimed in 1998,

We aim to prevent conflict through long-term development programmes that bring benefits to all. We are also pursuing targeted strategies of conflict reduction such as improving the international machinery for dispute resolution and conflict prevention, combating small arms proliferation and other measures to limit the means of waging war.³⁷

Beechings described the triggers for conflict reduction:

I'm not sure we've got any hard and fast rules, in fact we don't have. Engagement is related to our knowledge of an area, I suppose one would say the leverage we have to get involved, within a government, what is our comparative advantage, why as a government, would we engage in country X versus country Y? And if country Y happens to be, for example, a francophone country in Africa where we've got no historical engagement, we don't really understand the players, of course a lot of us speak French, that language barrier wouldn't necessarily be an issue, but at the same time, we don't necessarily understand the political structures, we don't necessarily understand the intervention of the French, and we've got no aid programme, why would we engage in that country, even though it happens to be in conflict versus another country somewhere else where it's let's say a former colony, we've got a historical relationship, we know the people, had an aid programme, you know, much more likely to get involved. That's on one level, our level of understanding that we have. Another level would be whether a country is of strategic interest to us, be it either for security reasons, so you could have, for example, countries in Eastern Europe, on our doorstep, or for commercial reasons would be the other major one. A big trading partner or potentially a big trading market, so again that could be another interest. I suppose another one would be whether or not a country were a big political player in a region.³⁸

The account roamed some way from the language of principles and rights, but even according to this version, Rwanda was not obvious. The primary reason for DFID's involvement, as

³⁷ Hansard 11/11/98:352.

³⁸ 21/9/00, London.

contrary, that 'peace and security' were contentious and expensive and could be assured only by force.

The effect of DFID cutting violence from its policy discourse was that the stated aims were not shared by the government of Rwanda, whose development was more aggressive than DFID's terminology allowed. DFID maintained, "The Government [of Rwanda] is committed to a strategy aimed at accelerated growth with the benefits of growth shared by the whole population" (DFID 1999d). The government was at war in the northwest, and violence against the infiltrators and civilians was followed by a programme of forced villagisation that led to the impoverishment of part of the population.⁴¹ HRW reported that countrywide "at the least tens of thousands of [people] have been displaced against their will and many of those have been compelled to destroy their own homes" (HRW 2001b, 67). Apart from the fact people incurred costs, the villagisation policy was never publicly debated, so was procedurally in contravention of the hoped-for democratic or decentralised processes. The government and HRW agreed that villagisation combined the development and security needs of the Rwandan government, as the population was more easily monitored when housed in an ordered way (Republic of Rwanda 1998; HRW 2001b). Sharing growth was not high on the government's agenda.

Aside from the optimistic language, there was some oblique reference to the government's categorical control. The Strategy Paper described DFID's programme as "politically and developmentally high risk" (DFID 1999d). Giles Bolton elaborated,

The risks are (A), that the government will go off track, (B), that the challenges for Rwanda...may just prove too big...If you look at other countries around, there's regional instability, land pressure, genocide, a history of division, an AIDS epidemic coming through. There are no obvious economic growth areas, no raw materials to speak of.

It was not a great situation or prognosis. He went on to say that economic growth can be very persuasive politically – look at Uganda – in the next breath he said that it was not going to happen in Rwanda. Bolton also claimed, "The aim of budgetary assistance to government is to ensure that they are directing funds towards developing poverty reducing areas."

As in Sierra Leone, the political logic was weak, and how, or how much, DFID could ensure where funds were going was complicated by the fact that DFID was unrealistic about the nature of violence generally, and also about its specific functions within Rwanda and at the regional level. The perception of Rwanda's development as a national assignment, which was implied by a focus on governance and the faith vested in Kagame, involved overlooking the violent nature of development (and meanwhile justified DFID's close relations with the government). Regionally, too, DFID did not analyse violence. Bolton's position was that Rwanda had

⁴¹ This is pursued in Chapter 3.

“legitimate security concerns” in Congo, and this derived from the unrest caused by insurgent attacks in northwestern provinces. Again, it made formal sense of DFID’s support for the government, but he conceded that marching on Kinshasa weakened the interpretation that Rwanda was simply taking defensive precautions over the border. DFID’s parry, “the Rwandans have publicly acknowledged that the problems of the DRC cannot be solved by military means” (DFID 1999d, 11), whilst apparently a strike for a political resolution, also raised the question of what they were doing in Congo.

Congo provided mining opportunities and employment for the Rwandan army, and a literal analysis could recognise the economics of investing 4.1% of GDP (DFID 1999d) on military spending, given the returns. Instead, DFID found other priorities, tuning policy to the IMF’s Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility, reforming first the economic and financial sectors, then education (DFID 1999d). In 2000, the Rwandan government adopted a strategy of decentralisation and good governance. It aimed to, “Allow the implanting of the national policy of decentralisation by suggesting ways and means assuring the actual and durable participation of the community in its own development centred on the fight against poverty” (Miniloc c2000, 12). This reflected DFID’s concerns, particularly the attention to poverty, decentralisation and durability.

Positive discourse was agreed between DFID and the government for policy, but was not new. Uvin reports that during the Habyarimana regime, “Foreign projects painstakingly attempted to strengthen the commune, in the name of capacity building and decentralization” (Uvin 1998, 25). The commune was a local political unit, and the meticulous administration of power at this level had incorporated the population into the civil defence network in preparation for the genocide (des Forges 1999; des Forges 2004; Melvern 2004). Given the history, reinstituting decentralisation was problematic, the more so as the policy, and the discourse more generally, involved discounting various factors that were politically relevant.

At the time of Short’s third visit to Rwanda in May 2000, for example, there was shelling between Ugandan and Rwandan troops occupying the Congolese town of Kisangani, and DFID was funding both governments. Not referring specifically to the violence, Short reported,

I...saw for myself the progress being made by the Government and the people to overcome the legacy of genocide. I also saw evidence of the severe challenges which Rwanda must overcome if the Government’s objectives for poverty elimination, peace and reconciliation are to be achieved...We will support Government’s own efforts to develop the poverty reduction strategies needed to secure HIPC debt relief. We will provide flexible recurrent budget support to facilitate increased social sector spending, particularly on education and will expand our capacity building support to help Government strengthen its social sector planning and delivery mechanisms.⁴²

⁴² Hansard 22/05/00:317W.

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for the Balkans. Not surprisingly. DFID's role: well, the single biggest refugee, people, migration issue since the Second World War. 800,000 refugees on the two hours flying time from London. That's why it got such a large part of funding. And it was, it was huge. The single biggest bilateral programme last 10m budget.⁵²

contrast, DFID channelled £2m through the ICRC and £1.5m through a few health project and child soldiers, MSF health and nutrition in Kisangani, Oxfam in Kinshasa, and Caritas' humanitarian assistance.⁵³ Oxfam lobbied for Congo to be moved to CHAD in 2001, on account of the conflict. DFID's in Rwanda and Uganda, though, prevented it from acknowledging the wars in significant way. Meanwhile, Congo did not offer conditions for development. DFID was providing 14.7% of the total net development assistance to Rwanda countries (DFID 2001c, table 18), but did not assess critically the impact of its aid.

Laurent Kabilas assassination and Joseph Kabilas succeeded his father. The actor assessed the transfer of power:

different from his dad like chalk from cheese...his father distrusted everyone really westerners and whites. His father was uneducated and extremely unsophisticated. He had no idea of diplomacy, even in its crudest form. Should he want to or talk peace, he would approach it in such a way that would get everyone's back up. He couldn't give a shit. He could think of no way of controlling the territory other than shooting the invaders...Joseph has had a lot more education and is worldly and sophisticated. He has an innate talent for dealing with people, for diplomacy and speaking. I know this is personal, but it is shared by all my colleagues...he has an ability to put across his case, tailored to the government or person he is talking to, in a persuasive manner. Basically he can think when his dad never could.

Kabilas ability to achieve in substantive terms was more problematic. His initial inspired optimism amongst foreign observers, the UK government among them, on international relations, including the Lusaka Accords, deployment of the UN Mission (Monuc), and sovereignty, but playing to the international audience on domestic issues. One observer found,

at the end of February, the new president asked the government still in power to brief him with a cost breakdown for implementing the program announced in his speech, he received figures that allegedly left him literally speechless. He rejected the figures as erroneous and refused to let the press publish them. (Nour 2001, 2)

Internationally, pressure was on Kabilas to find, or fabricate, a palatable panacea for his country's situation. His denial of the data presented to him was mirrored by DFID, who acknowledged the extent of the devastation in the official language of humanitarianism, without accepting it, in that a proportionate response was not made. Short described the situation,

in.

Forecast and Expenditure Spreadsheet: FY2000/01 as at 24/04/01.

A recent Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) study on food security reported the DRC as having the world's most dramatic rise in malnutrition. This affects nearly two-thirds of the population. Infant and maternal mortality figures also continue to rise.

She continued, with talk of rights:

We have been particularly concerned about the use of child soldiers in the conflict and have repeatedly called on all parties to respect the rights of the child and urge them to initiate disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation programmes for children. We will continue to monitor the situation and call for all parties to respect and promote the rights of the child.⁵⁴

Rights discourse related specifically to the issue of child soldiers, the political currency of which was high. It passed over the right to food – a right that de Waal argues was "appropriated" in the 1970s "by the emergent 'humanitarian international'" and put into the basket of 'charity' "(de Waal 2003, 479) – a word of little weight. In real terms, though, Short's 'particular concern' did not elucidate how calling on parties, monitoring the situation, or even disarmament, would improve the rights situation. It also did not translate into money: the budget forecast an expenditure of £150,000 for 'child soldiers', but at the end of April 2001, £113,603 was (according to internal documentation) held in suspense.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, Short reported,

During the period June 2000 – April 2001 we provided a grant of £150,000 to Save the Children for their demobilisation project in the provinces of North and South Kivu. This aimed to provide child soldiers with the social and economic support they required in reintegration into their families and respective communities. We have also provided £400,000 to Rwanda to assist with the DDR programmes for fighters recently [returned] from the DRC.⁵⁶

In August 2001, Short made her first visit to Congo. DFID launched a 'quick start' £5m aimed at demobilising the smaller-fry and promoting the Lusaka Accords, which had been signed two years previously. Short stated,

The disarmament of the fighters who supported Rwanda's genocide in 1994 is vital to the peace process. It will help secure Rwanda and Uganda's security concerns and enable Zimbabwe, Uganda, Rwanda, Namibia and Angola to withdraw from the Congo. We have learned a lot from the former and successes of the disarmament and reintegration process in Sierra Leone. It is vital to offer the chance of a new life to the women so that they are able to persuade the men to resettle and offer their children a better life. The women will be the ones who persuade the men they're sick of being on the run, children need feeding and it's time to come in from the bush. (IRIN, 10/08/01. Source: DFID)

The analysis was superficial, and patronising about the ruin facing people in Congo, whilst laying full blame for the war on the 'fighters who supported Rwanda's genocide.' Short's approach overlooked the economic interests of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi and the militias

⁵⁴ Hansard 07/11/01:266-7W.

⁵⁵ DRC Programme Forecast and Expenditure Spreadsheet: FY2000/01 as at 24/04/01. (The demobilisation centre is visited in Chapter 4).

⁵⁶ Hansard 28/11/01:872W.

they funded. Meanwhile, although the génocidaires could be condemned, nobody knew precisely where, or who, they were. Short held,

It is my view that, with greater international effort, the Lusaka plan could bring peace to the DRC and the six neighbouring countries involved in the conflict. The DRC would then be able to qualify for debt relief and begin to use its rich mineral resources for the benefit of its 60 million people, currently living in desperate poverty.⁵⁷

Sixty million is around twice the combined populations of Uganda and Rwanda, but neither the number of people nor the extent of their impoverishment drew response from DFID, despite the stated impartiality and poverty focus. Universality remained in the background, and rights and principles were used to comment on the situation rather than to inform a response.

Southern Sudan

"The UK bilateral development programme to Sudan was terminated in January 1991 in the light of the policy and actions of the Government of Sudan on human rights, the civil war and key international issues."⁵⁸ DFID claimed,

We continue to respond to emergency needs wherever they occur in Sudan. In 1997 DFID gave over £3 million in food aid through OXFAM and the International Committee of the Red Cross to the population of the Red Sea Hills and to those of North Kordofan and South Darfur through Save the Children Fund and CARE. (IRIN, 19/02/98. Source: DFID)

Managed from *Africa: Great Lakes and Horn Department*, not CHAD, DFID's work in 1997-8 was concentrated in northern Sudan, making no mention of the war or coming famine in the south. Sudan was a paragon of chronic political turmoil, aid diversion, and recurrent starvation, and a drought was followed by fighting, displacement and loss of livestock. In February 1998, DFID asserted that its "£4 million pledge to the 1998 UN appeal will help more than four million Sudanese in the south and those living in refugee camps near Khartoum" (IRIN, 19/02/98. Source: DFID).

In April 1998, Short told the Commons, "300,000 people are in danger of starving. Food and money are available, but we cannot get the food through. It is absolutely imperative for the media that have brought the crisis to international attention to keep the pressure on the right places."⁵⁹ As famine developed, Short pushed for peace;

The cause of the terrible crisis in Sudan is the civil war. Since 1991, the Government have spent £136 million on humanitarian assistance. In February, I approved a further £4 million in response to a United Nations appeal. We can make more funding available. The problem is not lack of food supplies or money, but delay caused by the Government of Sudan in permitting access, and to get the food to the starving.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Hansard 19/12/01:280.

⁵⁸ *British Aid to Sudan*, DFID website Briefing (updated August 2002).

⁵⁹ Hansard 29/04/98:331.

⁶⁰ Hansard 29/04/98:331.

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other for health care in the event
of the new initiative, is spending 80%

the economy. The government has said

themselves to areas controlled by other factions. Consequently, DFID's contribution was dismembered.

The Government of Sudan and SPLA declared a three-month ceasefire in Bahr el-Ghazal on 15th July. Short claimed her victory: "the pressure of international public opinion made the Government of Sudan change their mind on flights and access and led the Sudan People's Liberation Army to agree to the ceasefire."⁶⁶ In the Commons, Gary Streeter, MP for South-West Devon asked,

While I understand entirely what the Secretary of State is saying about the need for peace, and wish her well in her pursuit of a long-term political settlement, will she take the opportunity this afternoon to give a clear and unequivocal message to the British people that she now accepts that in the south of Sudan at least, more money, food and medical supplies are urgently needed to keep people alive? Will she whole-heartedly endorse the public appeals now being made by UK aid agencies?

Short replied,

No. As I said to the honourable Gentleman, no one should play games with the crisis in Sudan. Millions of people are in danger of dying while 90% of the money that is provided goes on air drops. We are spending money on aeroplanes while people starve. Much of the food that is getting in is being diverted by fighters from the people in need. We need international concern about Sudan to keep pressure on both sides, first to get in massively more food – and we need the ceasefire for that – and secondly, to press for a negotiated settlement.⁶⁷

Whilst aeroplanes were expensive, they were used because there were no roads in the south, as much as because of the fighting. Short's approach raised questions of: What if 'we' do not get a ceasefire? What if 'they' were not interested in what 'we' needed or how we needed to give it? The assumed existence of indisputable truths can be seen to have fuelled an ideological assurance – in spite of the feebleness of achievements – leading to objectives such as 'peace' being declared, however indistinctly it related to rights, principles, or politics in southern Sudan.

The international commitment to a ceasefire did not match the Khartoum Government's commitment to war. Short reported,

Our humanitarian response to the crisis in Sudan last year, which amounted to £37 million, included an allocation of £5.5 million for health care to the most vulnerable groups. The Government of Sudan, by its own admission, is spending 80% of the national budget on the civil war. The major priority for improving life for the people of Sudan is an end to the war.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Hansard 29/07/98:363.

⁶⁷ Hansard 29/07/98:363.

⁶⁸ Hansard 03/02/99:635.

was it. £28m in 1998 fell to £3.17m in 1999 for the ICRC and water and sanitation NGOs. £m in 2000, £6.2m in 2001, by which time Darfur and Kordofan (in northern Sudan) were dominant again.⁶⁹ An NGO statement asserted,

Britain has a particular moral responsibility to be at the forefront of international development efforts in southern Sudan – because of its historical links with Sudan, because of its stated commitment to poverty reduction and education for all, and because of its commitment to the fulfilment of human rights. (IRIN 16/10/00. Source: Christian Aid)

first visit from a British cabinet minister for fourteen years to Sudan was made in January and included a short trip from Khartoum to Rumbek, a southern town. "Clare Short made clear that this was a purely political visit less concerned for opportunities for Developmental aid,"⁷⁰ wrote Oxfam's country manager to staff. DFID's Departmental Report 2002 offered,

In some countries, due to conflict or lack of political will, there is little prospect of sustainable poverty reduction. These countries are home to some of the poorest people in the world who cannot be abandoned. However, the nature of our engagement and our objectives will be different from that in countries with governments committed to poverty reduction. This may include political efforts or targeted programmes which seek to promote the demand for change, efforts to tackle conflict, or humanitarian programmes to reduce suffering or save lives. (DFID 2002, 16)

language of universality or imperatives was absent, and notwithstanding DFID's half-committed support for life-saving work, many lives were lost. In 2000, DFID was funding six NGOs, working minimally in the south. In 2001, it helped fund child demobilisation, a project related to children's rights that were pursued in isolation of analysis of the war or of opportunities for peace.⁷¹

held,

Africa is Europe's near abroad. If it is in trouble, that trouble and conflict will spread across the world. For example, bin Laden was in Sudan before he went to Afghanistan...There is no conflict among what is morally right, what is necessary for social justice and what is in our intelligent self-interest. It is in our intelligent self-interest to ensure that Africa has better hope for the future.⁷²

able and conflict did not spread, and whatever common security was achieved was accompanied by war and famine. The question of whether African conflict touches Europe is raised by the question of whether rich 'peace' touches Africa, and where there was no military threat, self-interest advocated no assistance.

British Aid to Sudan, DFID website Briefing (updated August 2002).

email 11/01/02. Subject: Clare Short visit.

This story occurs in Chapter 6.

Entered 06/02/02:300WH.

What DFID achieves

What evidence supports hypothesis (1a) – that the stated objectives guide aid organisations? DFID's overarching 'new humanitarianism' was universalist, reaffirming principles and human rights. The universalist concerns, though, were not transferred into specific policies in the countries studied, and DFID was not constant in responding, for instance, to comparative data on malnutrition. DFID referred inconsistently to rights and principles, and prioritised some rights, for example the rights of the child, over others, such as the right to food. This changeability contradicted the universality claimed. So, as far as DFID is concerned, hypothesis (1a) must be rejected. The rights and principles were not invoked with the constancy necessary to establish guidance. It can be noted, too, that other donors have the same incentives and constraints in subscribing to these objectives, even if their specific concerns vary.

Whilst rights and principles did not provide guidance, they remained in the background, and inspired new discourse or approaches, some of which were only tangentially connected. DFID developed a morality discourse that was seductive domestically, being ostensibly ethical, long-termist and positive-sum. DFID was tenacious in implementation, but ideology is more prominent than practicality: demobilisation, security sector reform, educational support, conflict reduction and peace, all sounded positive, but were not backed by political logic, or accompanied by operational procedures. DFID defined a morality and thereafter controlled its representation in performance targets. This was not neutrality, but a political opportunity for DFID to bleach its policy and reporting, framing examples to approve its approach and – to greater or lesser degree – neglecting the rest.

Defines good

In describing governance and policies, DFID uses the word 'good'. It does not champion an approach – markets, state regulation or education – but describes something about an approach. Reference to governance and policy highlights the role of government institutions, and has echoes of de Waal's recommendation of a political contract between leaders and constituencies, but what does 'good' mean?

Empirically, 'good' reveals little, and governance supported by DFID was compatible with violence and destitution. In Sierra Leone, Kabbah was elected when the country was divided and people were facing death to vote in a system they had little reason to trust; when ousted, he was reinstated by foreign military intervention. Asked whether there had been questions about the government's legitimacy, DFID's First Secretary in Freetown replied, "Not so far. It's the democratically elected government of Sierra Leone. If it postponed the election for an indefinite

period, let's say one year, I think everyone would have to question it.”⁷³ Elections took place over a year later in May 2002, but nobody questioned it.

Evaluating governance is difficult when most state functions are defunct or operated patchily by aid agencies, and for the period under consideration the Sierra Leonean government had low technical competence. In terms of being ‘good’ politically, the International Crisis Group claims Kabbah’s “poor judgement” over the policy leading to the execution of people connected to the junta “undoubtedly contributed to the intensity of the horrific revenge killings and abuses during the January 1999 RUF attacks on Freetown” (ICG 2001, 5). Others have found Kabbah “weak, corrupt and partisan” (Ellis 2001; Hanlon 2004) and documented his blind-eye discipline of the army or allied militias (HRW 1998b). DFID’s decision to support him was not influenced by these factors.

Kagame’s democratic credentials were weaker, as the RPF had taken power by force. Security expenditure had “increased since 1997 both in total and as a proportion of public expenditure” (DFID 1999d), and whilst the war had financial returns, these were not equitably distributed. Short’s calls for peace in Congo were directed more regularly at the victims of violence than the perpetrators, although her judgment that nothing could be gained by fighting was constant (and was repeated in other contexts), if incorrect. DFID’s approach, despite its concern for governance, did not investigate whether priorities were shared by the leadership and the population, and overlooked the Rwandan government’s violence. The partnership was not with those marginalised nationally, or with people abused by those deemed ‘good’ (Riddell 1998). Formal recognition of goodness implies that people to whom it is attributed are not bad, which distracts attention from their victims.

In Congo, eccentric government followed by fragmentation confounded governance valuation. Mobutu was derided, so were Laurent Kabila and his opponents. Joseph Kabila did not stop the fighting, and the good/bad dichotomies established by the government-versus-rebels version of Sierra Leonean and Rwandan politics provided an inadequate taxonomy for the government, insurgency, counter-insurgency, foreign armies and self-defence in Congo. Where there was no government, DFID leant – ironically – towards respect for sovereignty, constricting funds going to NGOs operating in areas not held by the government. There was little ‘good’ about the Congolese militias or the SPLA.

DFID’s control over the discourse instigated some moral clarity. The British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone mused that journalists arrived looking for hidden agendas in the British involvement, and left accepting there was a “moral dimension.” He claimed, “the only

⁷³ 21/01/01, Freetown.

reason for doing this is that it's right against wrong.”⁷⁴ DFID reworked the meanings of moral terminology to achieve consonance between its policy and its activity, so both the morality itself and its clarity were suspect. The weakness was demonstrated by the fact that it was not transferable to implementation. DFID pulled out when the demobilisation faltered in Sierra Leone, having no contingency plan, and the Rwandan government’s mobilisation in the northwest and in Congo could be dealt with only by denial. That said, some advantage for DFID was sustained, as the approach established conditions for withdrawal: Sierra Leone in 1997 and 2000, Rwanda if it deteriorates again.

Short’s position, “it is the view of anyone with any principles who considers aid and development – that poor people should not be punished for living under Governments who do not govern them well,”⁷⁵ was good in principle. In practice, discourse was hazy and powerful, allowing DFID to select governments for patronage or patronisation, whilst appearing to be supporting political systems that warranted cooperation.

Reaches targets

An MSF worker in Sierra Leone assessed, “DFID are promoting British interests – that’s what the British pay them for, isn’t it?...It’s not possible for a country like Great Britain to have a military presence and another humanitarian agenda.”⁷⁶ Ignatieff writes, “When values do not actually constrain interests, an ‘ethical foreign policy’ – the self-proclaimed goal of Britain’s Labour government – becomes a contradiction in terms” (Ignatieff 2001, 23). DFID’s interventions in Sierra Leone and Rwanda were crucial for demonstrating how DFID – and the UK government – engaged in African wars (although the term ‘ethical foreign policy’ was later abandoned).

“We can succeed” the 1997 White Paper had urged, “We have a moral duty to reach out to the poor and needy.” Three years on, DFID reported, “Poor people live primarily in three regions: South Asia (45%), sub-Saharan Africa (24%) and East Asia (22%),” continuing, “Given the number of poor people in Asia...[the target] could be achieved even if poverty were not to improve in other parts of the world such as Africa” (DFID, Grant et al. 2000, 9&12). Suddenly Sudan is not urgent. Chandler writes “Ethical foreign policy is ideally suited to buttressing the moral authority of governments...because policy-makers are less accountable for matching ambitious policy aims with final policy outcomes in the international sphere” (Chandler 2003, 295).

⁷⁴ 23/01/01, Freetown.

⁷⁵ Hansard 16/12/98:956.

⁷⁶ 07/12/00, Freetown.



Kenya's *Saturday Nation* Newspaper, 09/02/02

The 2001 Departmental Report presented graphs concerning selected international development targets. The verdict: “progress against most of the targets is not yet at the rate required to ensure their fulfilment by 2015” (DFID 2001a, 14). The same report records DFID’s performance targets: “Progress to date suggests that most of the 1999-2002 performance targets will be achieved over this period,” (DFID 2001a, 23), which is good for DFID. There is irony, though, as well as political and moral currency, in achieving performance targets when the targets recording progress are all being missed. In a critique of monitoring, Gasper argues that relying on goal fulfilment seals off responsibility for unintended outcomes and forecloses discussion on the definition of goals (Gasper 1999). According to the figures, DFID was doing its bit, and its successes were heightened by the ostensible mayhem of the rest of the world.

By 2002, DFID assessed,

Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals is slowest in Sub-Saharan Africa...On current trends, the region as a whole is unlikely to meet any of the Goals. With a few exceptions, economic growth remains below the level needed to make significant inroads into poverty. Conflict, HIV/AIDS, weak governance, poor economic policies and insufficient investment in health and education all hamper progress. (DFID 2002, 58)

African problems; meanwhile “DFID is strongly committed to supporting reforming African governments that are working to meet the Millennium Development Goals” (DFID 2002, 60), which, in the light of its judgment that nearly none of them would, entailed no responsibility for failure. DFID pursued its interests as an international morality authority, and there is little careful needs assessment in “Poorest countries are defined as having the lowest GNI/capita.”⁷⁷ Wealth divided by population is a calculation that avoids acknowledging how many people are

⁷⁷ Hansard 15/01/02:137W.

affected, or how severe their poverty, and it vaguely assumes that wealth is actually distributed like that. Congo and Sudan were not on DFID's poorest twenty list.

Different questions, same responses

In disputing the hypothesis that DFID is guided by principles and rights, the evidence presented has given insight into how decisions are made. DFID's approach appears to raise the question of whether governments with good policies should receive more aid, given the implication that people living under abusive regimes will be neglected. This seems to be a moral consideration, and maintaining moral debate is politically useful. Closer investigation reveals that the discourse masks a more fundamental reality: DFID defines the morality itself, and weaves it into policy. Outside of DFID's discourse, the question *Should DFID work preferentially with governments with good policies?* is different to *Should DFID work where it does?* By conflating the two, DFID appears to be politically and morally consistent.

DFID's policy-making is renowned among aid organisations, but barring extraordinary emergencies, DFID spends its development and humanitarian resources in the same places. The nine largest new commitments (including project and programme aid) made by DFID in the year from September 1997 allocated £60m to Uganda, £35.5m to Bangladesh, £95.565m to India, and £20m each to Ghana and Tanzania. The UN Appeal to Sudan was in tenth place with £14.1m.⁷⁸ Nothing new; DFID's radical policy found operational conservatism. DFID took calculated risks with financially pliable governments, selecting countries in which its interventions would be visible, and controlling the discourse to justify its action. Meanwhile, in more desperate situations, rights and impartiality were not prioritised, still less fulfilled, by the new humanitarianism.

⁷⁸ Hansard 28/10/98:201.

3. Sierra Leone and Rwanda

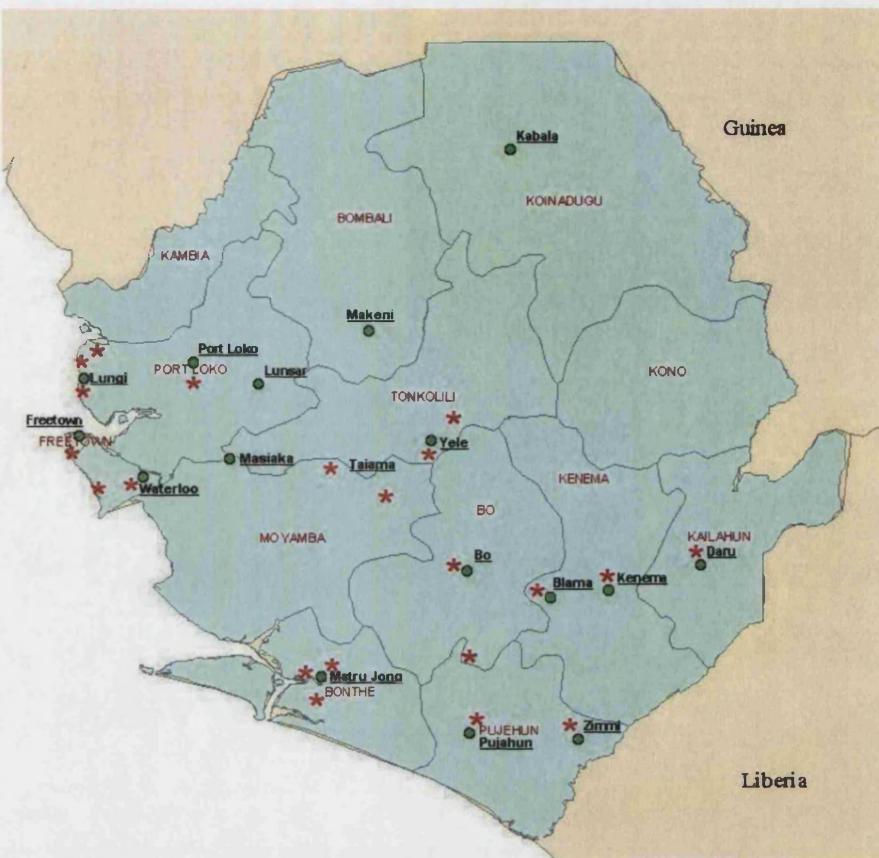
Chapters 3 and 4 look in more detail at events in the countries studied. I continue my examination of the hypothesis that the stated objectives of human rights and humanitarian principles guide aid organisations, now with reference to NGOs.

Universalist rights and principles identify a reparation task that is specific in kind (identifying particular kinds of suffering), and unspecific in degree (there is a lot of it). I am investigating how NGOs respond to this in different circumstances, and whether they are guided by the stated objectives. In terms of presenting the material, I give a brief account of the period 1997-2001, and thereafter the chapters are arranged geographically – I visit three locations (and surrounding areas) in each country. I am not making evaluations but observing what assistance NGOs give, how it relates to rights and principles, and how it is envisaged to operate. In doing so I also consider how NGOs describe or explain activity, and how they take, or evade, responsibility for their espoused objectives.

This chapter presents research from Sierra Leone and Rwanda. I have grouped these countries together as they have some factors in common: in the late nineties they were emerging from intense violence to considerable stability, and NGO assistance operated alongside government-to-government aid. Sierra Leone and Rwanda are small, and all areas are physically accessible within days from the capitals. There was sufficient infrastructure for NGOs to function, and little enough for them to contribute to services, transport and communications. Both countries were poor: in 1997, Sierra Leone reached the bottom of the Human Development Index (UNDP 1997), and the World Bank reported that more than 70% of Rwandans lived below the poverty line (World Bank 1998). Morally, too, assisting people who had been attacked by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone or who had survived genocide in Rwanda seemed straightforward.

The recent histories also share some elements, including unstable domestic politics tipped over by incursion (Abdullah and Muana 1998; Prunier 1998). In October 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), an armed group around a hundred strong, crossed from Uganda to Rwanda; most had lived in Uganda, having been exiled in 1959-1963 from Rwanda. Their home-coming was a military offensive against President Juvénal Habyarimana, who headed a regime championing Hutu Power. In West Africa, in March 1991 a few hundred RUF fighters crossed from Liberia to Sierra Leone, demanding an end to the patrimonialism that shaped politics and opportunities. War broke out in both countries, and Rwanda suffered genocide. By 2001 the RPF had formed the government in Rwanda and the RUF had been disarmed in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone



Map of Sierra Leone
(Research sites marked with red asterisk)

1996 ended with the Abidjan Accords, signed in November between Sierra Leonean President Tejan Kabbah and Corporal Foday Sankoh of the RUF. The RUF demanded the withdrawal of Executive Outcomes, a South African security firm, operational since 1995, before disarming; “it is not a disagreement of principle but rather of an acceptable timetable” hoped International Alert (Garcia 1997, 22). Executive Outcomes left in January 1997, when external interest in Sierra Leone was low. Instead of demobilisation, clashes increased between the civil militia Kamajors, RUF and Sierra Leone Army (SLA). The invasion of Freetown on 25th May 1997 by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) headed by Major Johnny Paul Koroma brought the war to the capital. The trigger, Kabbah’s perceived favouritism of the Kamajors over the army, indicated institutional malaise, and the government, in office since March 1996, was exiled to Conakry, Guinea.

The AFRC held power in Freetown for nine months, inviting their former adversaries, the RUF, to join the junta, with Sankoh (detained in Nigeria) appointed Vice Chairman. The regime, according to HRW, was “characterized by serious human rights violations and a complete breakdown of the rule of law” as the constitution was suspended, and military rule instituted (HRW 1998b). It obtained no external political recognition. The Conakry Accord, signed on

23rd October 1997, sealed an unlikely commitment to return Kabbah to power by April. Disarmament and demobilisation were agreed in the second clause, a ‘simple and uncomplicated procedure’, planned for December, and supervised by the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). No disarmament; the junta was removed in February 1998, and Kabbah reinstated on March 10th by ECOMOG.

Deposed, the AFRC/RUF beat a destructive retreat from the capital. Violence against civilians was described as ‘unprecedented’ (Amnesty International 1998) as the defeated forces embarked on ‘Operation No Living Thing’, and the Civil Defence Force (CDF) also mounted attacks. The RUF took locations in Northern and Eastern Provinces, including Kono, a major diamond-mining area, taken in 1995 by Executive Outcomes.

Sankoh returned unexpectedly to Freetown from Nigeria in June 1998, stood trial, and was convicted of seven treason counts; his case was immediately appealed, and he was jailed. The RUF gained across Northern Province in December, and on 6th January 1999 made another assault on Freetown, holding the city for three weeks, inflicting thousands of casualties, and abducting civilians. In heavy fighting and summary executions, ECOMOG defeated the RUF forcing their – again violent – withdrawal from the city.

A Ceasefire Agreement in May 1999 agreed to, “Guarantee safe and unhindered access by humanitarian organizations to all people in need.” This was followed by the Lomé Peace Agreement of 7th July, brokered by the UN, Organisation of African Unity and ECOWAS, and signed by Kabbah and Sankoh. Kabbah’s national and international standing had been battered by his near-defeat in January; this combined with international agitation over ECOMOG to effect a fit-up peace. The RUF achieved four cabinet seats and an amnesty, and Sankoh was made Vice President.

Human rights observers deplored the amnesty, which was agreed “apparently...with little discussion” (Hirsch 2001, 84). Amnesty International wrote:

The amnesty in place violates the fundamental human rights principles by providing impunity to the perpetrators of gross human rights abuses and provides no deterrent against further abuses...There can be no amnesty for serious breaches of international humanitarian law and for human rights abuses which may amount to crimes against humanity. (Amnesty International 2000, 7-8)

There was; the UN was excused – by handwritten exemption – from waiving genocide and crimes against humanity, but “believed that without the amnesty the RUF would have withdrawn from the talks” (Hirsch 2001, 16).

In November, Kabbah formed the government of national unity, and the country remained divided between the RUF and ECOMOG. By March 2000 there were 7000 Unamsil (UN Mission in Sierra Leone) troops deployed in Makeni, Port Loko, Lungi, Kenema and Daru (OCHA 2000, 3). The last ECOMOG troops left Sierra Leone on 2nd May, while fighting continued and spread in Northern Province. The RUF captured 500 UN peace-keepers and killed four, and held some NGO staff; on 19th May, Unamsil's mandate was expanded to 20,500 but nowhere supplied troops. Sankoh was arrested, ending the Lomé Agreement.

By June, less than half of the US\$71m requested in the UN's Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) had been pledged (Randel and German 2002). On 10th November a Cease Fire Agreement for thirty days was signed in Abuja. Amongst RUF promises was clause 5, "to ensure...unimpeded movement of humanitarian agencies and of refugees and displaced persons." HRW criticised the document because the RUF agreed to return weapons and ammunition, not to release abducted children or forced recruits, and wrote to Kofi Annan on 30th November that the agreement "miss[ed] a critical component of the conflict" by not defining attacks on civilians as ceasefire violations. The articles, particularly the disarmament of the RUF and access for aid agencies were not fulfilled, but the roads were opening, and ceasefire held (with some violations) beyond the thirty days.

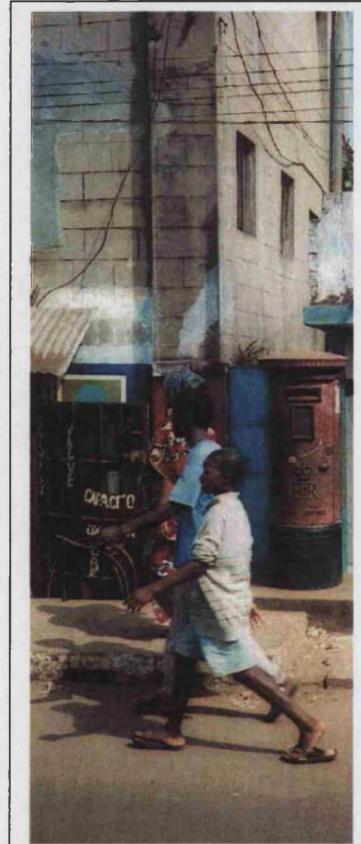
Freetown

By the end of 2000, there was visible Unamsil and British Army presence in Freetown. The helicopters over the city, and the Unamsil checkpoints testified to international support for the Sierra Leone government. At the same time, the lack of progress – despite the display – highlighted the real strength of the RUF. The military technology and flamboyant political will was making little progress. ICG proposed:

Those who refuse to demobilise should be defeated militarily. The military option could be spearheaded by UK trained and led Sierra Leone armed forces, with UNAMSIL securing the areas regained. The UK should provide military and intelligence backup to guarantee the safety of UN forces. The Civil Defence Force (CDF) could provide additional security for local villages and settlements. (ICG 2001, iii)

Several donors, including ECHO, DFID, USAID and the UN had formed some consensus on the preferred outcome of the war. The UK government's joined-up approach manifested a partiality abhorred by many NGOs. Despite difference of

British post-box, Freetown



stated opinion, though, there was little variation in what they did; some NGOs approached the RUF, but without concerted negotiation or success. As NGOs evacuated from RUF-held territory in the north, they clustered around Freetown and Western Area, and all except one had headquarters in the city.

Were NGOs guided by rights and principles? I look first at assistance in Freetown, finding some overlap between the stated objectives and the activity of NGOs. I then consider the response to displaced populations elsewhere, and the way that basic services were provided in the provinces.

Displacement

One account opens, “The post-colonial experience of Sierra Leone has been a catalogue of unmitigated dysfunctionality, trauma, and national paralysis” (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999, 1). Economic deterioration and a weakness of policy to manage it pre-dated the war, as did a decline in the nation’s defining attribute, education (Cramer and Weeks 2002). By 1996, 70% of primary-age children were not in school (SC-UK 2000, 15), and the political and economic fabric continued to be unpicked.

The RUF’s arrival in Freetown in May 1997, after six years of fighting in the provinces, attracted sudden international attention to Sierra Leone; foreign aid workers evacuated to Guinea. The ICRC and some NGOs returned, daubed ‘junta NGOs’ by the government, but infrastructure was depleted by looting, neglect and displacement of personnel. WFP food, managed from Conakry, was disrupted, although limited distributions took place in Freetown and (less) in Kambia, Makeni, Bo and Kenema. ActionAid judged that no food arrived in Sierra Leone between May 1997 and February 1998, and that no reserves remained by the end of 1997. ECOMOG troops blocked all assistance from Guinea except medical supplies; commercial trade, conversely, continued (Porter 2003, 19).

Following the junta, around twenty international NGOs returned to, or arrived in, Sierra Leone. Freetown was wrecked, and thousands of people were living in public buildings and camps in and around the capital. NGOs evacuated again following the attack on Freetown in January 1999. In May 2000, the RUF reached Masiaka, 47 miles from the capital, and rumours (later disconfirmed) that they had entered Freetown, precipitated another evacuation of foreign aid workers. Staff returned within weeks, but the tentative relations with the RUF terminated: the spokesman, Steve Williams, was not speaking and was no longer credible. The withdrawal of NGOs from Makeni was the end of assistance to RUF territory, most of which had been not been reached since October 1999. Fighting in the north resulted in more displacement to Freetown and the Lungi peninsula. There were one million people internally displaced countrywide (Christian Aid 2000, 1), including 95,000 ‘newly displaced’ (ReliefWeb 2000).

The first NGO worker I interviewed in Freetown said, “Sierra Leoneans typically think in the short term, and think about what they can get out of the system as it stands, rather than what they may be able to get out of long-term development.”⁷⁹ Funding was for six months or a year, and camps were central to assistance. One NGO would manage the camp, while others provided water, food, medical care and, on occasions, schooling. An old man in Parade Ground, a camp in the centre of town, described his journey:

The rebels came to Tonkalili district in 1997. They pull me and spoil my eye. When I came from Tonkalili, the first place I stayed was Bramalene. When the intervention [junta] time reach me, they pulled me here. The intervention pulled me back to that place, John F Kennedy School [camp]. From there they pulled me for coming to the camp here. In this camp I’ve taken two years and some months.⁸⁰

Asked about the conditions he replied, “Well, if a person gives you something, you say Al humdul’allah, you say thanks to God.” Towards the end of 2000, fighting along the Guinea border caused further displacement. In January 2001, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 17,000 people arriving in Freetown in government boats. One man who was repatriating explained the unease of his group,

They don’t want to go to Kailahun and Kono because the place is being surrounded by rebels... We’re tired of going to camps camps camps. How long will we be staying in camps – until our grandchildren are born? This is my fifth camp in three years. I don’t want to go to another camp.⁸¹

Nonetheless, he described supplies favourably,

One packet biscuit when you arrive. Next day, one month dry supply. Bulgar 10kg per person, oil 1.5kg per person per month. Beans 4kg. Medical facilities thanks to Concern, they are doing well. Lodging: no problem, Lutheran World Federation are doing well. Even those who came yesterday and those who arrived on 24th received non-food items. Mats, blankets, soap, kitchen set and one bidon [water container].

Assistance to people in camps accorded with the rubric of rights to food, water and health care, and NGOs were able to maintain supplies. Large camps grew up on the city’s periphery, including one in Jui where people displaced from Freetown and Western area occupied two disused hangars, owned previously by an Israeli fishing company; they were living all over them, including in the fridge. Initiative for African Solidarity (IAS) was managing the camp, and a Sierra Leonean employee reported:

They get mats, blankets, and biscuits if they happen to come at the time when the food has been shared... IAS is responsible for food. It provides some drugs, though not enough. There’s a lack of communication. They are slow to ease this. I have reported that matter four times, but no action, so I’ve decided to forget about it. If someone is at the point of death and no action, it means it is poor reaction.⁸²

⁷⁹ 30/11/00, Freetown.

⁸⁰ 10/02/01, Freetown.

⁸¹ 06/02/01, Lumpa.

⁸² 30/01/01, Jui.

The NGOs categorised the residents depending on whether they were directly internally displaced or were returning from Guinea. The definition of groups was within the discretion of aid organisations, and it officially disqualified some people from assistance. As we were speaking the food arrived: cooked bulgar porridge, served from the boot of a white Mercedes-Benz to the card-carriers. The interviewee continued,

Those people who come from Lokomasama are getting no food, no medicare. The children are not going to school, they've been here for over one year. They are not getting anything from this. They only get the wood [collect firewood to sell] so that their families can eat. Each time the food comes their children rush, but they do not get anything because they are not getting [registration] cards.

Other people were less officially excluded. A resident claimed,

They said we would be in the transit camp for five days, and now it's one month. They are giving breakfast pulp, bulgar. Yesterday no breakfast, water is reducing. No medicare...There's war in Guinea – the rebels are operating from Kissidougou to Conakry. As they bring people, we stay in the hangar and get registered.⁸³

The assistance given to people in camps in Freetown overlapped with areas of concern established by rights and principles, although it does not necessarily follow that NGOs were *guided* by these. Camps outside town were less well provided, and assistance was given only to people within the NGOs' categories. Fifteen miles outside the capital, people in Koya district were displaced and plundered, but received no assistance.⁸⁴

Why did it tail off so quickly? Freetown was the only evacuation point for foreign workers, and the unpredictability of the RUF informed hesitation. For thousands of Sierra Leoneans camped in the city, there was little motivation to invest in the provinces where they had been repeatedly pillaged, and this constituted another reason for the NGOs' Freetown bias. On one level the NGOs' position was reasonable – Freetown gave good working conditions, there was camaraderie amongst NGO staff, and their perspective was backed by international military operations that provided some safety. On another level, the interventions diverged from claims of neutrality or impartiality, as the camps in the capital afforded preferential assistance to the government's Freetown constituency.

Hence a challenge to hypothesis (1a) arises: even within the limited setting described, NGOs did not give an inclusive response. An unofficial Freetown focus prevailed, and as assisting became more difficult outside the city NGOs overlooked some people and categorised, at will, whom they would assist.

⁸³ 30/01/01, Jui.

⁸⁴ Inter-agency assessment 07/02/01, Koya.

Port Loko

Although it was not comprehensive, the NGOs' response to displacement – temporary shelter and provisions – reflected their stated areas of concern, particularly for basic rights. It was unclear, though, what the assistance could achieve, and the perspective of abused rights did not enhance understanding of why people were fighting, why they were so successful, or why people living in territory controlled by them were not protected or provided for. Port Loko is in Northern Province, and travelling there in late 2000, we came across the deploying Kenyan Unamsil Battalion. The convoy had ground to a halt because the first vehicle – an ambulance – had a puncture and no spare tyre, about 20 miles from the RUF.

Unamsil's chequered performance was one reason to doubt the interpretation that the RUF was the sole cause, rather than one effect, of Sierra Leone's troubles. *The Democrat* newspaper offered another:

There is no question that Ahmed Tejan Kabba's administration is a qualified failure. It is no longer a sovereign government in all the territories of Sierra Leone, and has not been for several years now. It has surrendered vast territories to a brutal and barbaric rebel group, without regard to the suffering of the people. It continues to ignore its sovereign responsibilities for all the people of Sierra Leone, by its inaction and dishonest attempts to cover its repeated failures. It maintains a tenuous hold on a fraction of the country, and even that it cannot manage without support from friendly governments in everything from policy to security. (The Democrat 2000, 1)

The government had little control, and its weakness was not incidental either to the war's character or its causes. In *Fighting for the Rainforest*, Richards places Sierra Leone's violence in the context of the jungle (drawing on the RUF's own imagery: RUF 1995) which nurtures and represents the fighters, and their clash with the urban elites. Many Sierra Leoneans acknowledged the RUF's grievances against a patrimonial and corrupted state, albeit obscured by the means: by 1995 the political agenda was lost to looting and collusion (Keen 1995; Shearer 1997).

Sahr Roberts, soldier-turned-newspaper correspondent, claimed, “[The RUF] are welcoming humanitarian agencies now. They want them to help their people.” He continued,

These are all small small boys. They're helped along. We don't need any round of fighting, and we will get peace. They even want peace more than us. I see most of the papers saying “let them strike.” Politically they have changed leadership. Most of their people are in jail. Everyone around this man [Issa Sesay, the interim leader] is opting for peace, his advisers, even the fighters.⁸⁵

The government did not strike, and Port Loko buffered the fragile amity of Freetown and the volatility of the RUF. The displaced and demobilised lived there in large camps built from tarpaulins. NGOs provided assistance, but as more people poured into Port Loko, it became

⁸⁵ 11/12/00, Freetown.

materially and politically inadequate. I follow how, by overlooking and categorising people, NGOs redefined 'displacement.' This resulted in assistance that was not optimally appropriate for those it included, and which excluded many. The redefinition did, though, frame the impression that NGOs were – to some creditable extent – pursuing their stated objectives.

Camps

Patricia Sankoi lived in Port Loko and recollected,

In December 1997, Port Loko was attacked by rebels, so we pulled out and were displaced in Lungi. We returned to Port Loko to resettle in April 1998. On 7th May, Port Loko was attacked again – that was when I lost fifteen members of my family. I left Port Loko and was in Freetown. In June and July the whole of Maforki [chiefdom] was attacked. We have exodus of people coming into Port Loko. I came to look at my house and the centre here to see the damage. I found everything packed with displaced people... The rebels attacked this side up to the bridge. When they were repelled, the ECOMOG soldiers occupied everything. The rebels stormed the villages. People came to Port Loko because it was the district town.⁸⁶

An Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp was established in October 1998, and a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) camp in November. DFID was managing the DDR camp and funded an International Medical Corps (IMC) clinic in the IDP camp. Sonkoi, recalled, "The problems started between ex-combatants and IDPs. A lot of people were raped. They beat up the people, they stole their property. They always threaten to attack Port Loko, so every time there was firing in the night, they had to run." The friction reflected elements of the war. A security guard for the IDP camp assessed,

We're longing for dialogue. We go with the principles of some laid-down rules. There's a proverb: when gentility fails, we apply brutality. That's Africa. But in the other sense it's not correct because the fall of an elephant causes the suffering of the grass, and we're the grass. When there's a struggle between the government and the rebels we are the sufferers through starvation, or stray bullets. That's this camp.

He continued,

The rebel is a troublesome element that is difficult to defeat. And if you read between the lines keenly you will see that you cannot defeat them. You look at the kind of international soldiers that have come into this country to defeat the rebels, and they are still existing.⁸⁷

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) managed the IDP camp, Oxfam provided pumps and WFP food; the population exceeded 20,000. In addition to receiving assistance, people were selling vegetables and firewood, tailoring and weaving mats. Many said that their areas were safe, but that their homes had been destroyed. Santiga Kanu, for example, was from a village five miles away, and had lived with his family in the camp for two years. He reported,

S: I go to the village and bring cassava. I get palm fruit to make oil, then I take it to Port Loko to sell to get money for food.

Z: Do you think you will go back soon?

⁸⁶ 13/12/00, Port Loko.

⁸⁷ 13/12/00, Port Loko.

S: How can I return without a house in my village? Even though the place is safe, there is not a single house. If there's security and help I will return.⁸⁸

The RUF (or splinter factions) had displaced people, and the government was not securing areas or providing support. NGOs did not house or protect the uprooted population, but offered some services, anonymity and sheeting. There was some assurance in numbers, which was not willingly relinquished, but was not necessarily enough. One man, when asked if he felt safe in the camp, replied, "Since I've been here there hasn't been any attack. I'm not safe – I used to work, and since I have been here I have nothing to live on or for my family." Another described his decision to move,

P: I heard that there was a camp for displaced people, so that decided me to come here. I heard that they have security in the camp that will protect their life and property. I came with nothing and am praying and hoping that Allah will provide for us.

Z: Can you describe the conditions in the village before you left?

P: To start with they vandalised all the houses in the village, so there was no place to sleep. They have been getting creatures, cows and bicycles, all those things have now been collected by the RUF, so now we are having nothing. We have our palm oil and clothing, but all of those things have been collected by the RUF.

Z: What made you leave the area?

P: What made me leave was that one of the RUF fired my wife and killed her in an instant. I have never seen the RUF, but I heard the gunshot. I ran out to the bush, but when I returned I found my wife lying fighting to live. But she passed away, so I decided to leave with the balance family. At first when we left the area others wanted to go back and make a check. They [the RUF] caught them and flogged them and amputated some. So we were lucky to leave the area. After some days the rebels came to the village again and caught the stubborn people and flogged them and said, "Go to the Port Loko camp and go and eat bulgar."⁸⁹

People continued arriving, but the camp was full. Nearby, Caritas ran a transit centre, as part of a child demobilisation programme implemented by NGOs: agencies' estimations of the number of child soldiers ranged from 5000 (Amnesty International 2000, 1) to more than 15,000 (SC-UK 2000, 15). The centre housed one demobilising boy when I arrived, while a few hundred displaced people camped in the building and courtyard. Bob Martin, who was among them, had petitioned NRC for supplies. I asked if they would have received assistance had they not organised themselves, and he replied,

B: Not at all. I could remember when they met us the last time. They said we were not in the camp we were in the town, so they could not render any assistance to us.

Z: What changed their mind?

B: It was only pleading on them, pleading on behalf of our people, because we cannot get food elsewhere.

Z: How do you hope to get non-food items?

B: We've made several appeals to the NRC and even to Oxfam. One time [the Oxfam employee] came on a visit. He promised to put our position across to his bossman, but we have not seen them until now. Really we are pressed, we are totally in distress.

Z: How do you think the NGOs are responding in the IDP camp?

⁸⁸ 13/12/00, Port Loko.

⁸⁹ 14/12/00, Port Loko.

B: They are responding. The day of distribution in the camp, there are people who come for the day, then go back to their village.

Other people camped in the Co-operative building and the Sierra Leone Roads Authority building. Kasho Kamara had been there for seven months, and reported,

K: Just recently we get from CRS [Catholic Relief Services]. We get one supply. We are eight in number. They gave us one bag of bulgar, now it is on the way finishing. We are six, they give us one tin oil. Five in number, one bag beans and that was the end.

Z: When will they come again?

K: We don't know yet. We don't know until we see them again.

Z: What are your major medical concerns?

K: No treatment, no medical. We have scabies. Pain, cold, then headache. There are different types of sickness. We went at this hospital [IMC clinic], but they demand money from us. But there's no money – we're all displaced. They told us Le500 to register, then you give for treatment Le200.

Z: Does the clinic demand payment from everyone?

K: That camp there, they don't request money. They charge we [us] because we're not in the camp.

Assistance in Port Loko was broadly aligned with basic needs, and helped people within the camp's registration boxes, but did not provide impartially to people who were displaced. As the camp residents demonstrated, they were neither wholly excluded from their villages, nor wholly dependent on camp facilities. At the same time, other people who had been displaced did not receive assistance, and NGOs did not respond to the processes of displacement or vulnerability. The 'displaced' label explained why assistance was given, and NGOs provided food, water and health care in a way that symbolised universality, depending on their logistical strength, how they categorised people, and when they evacuated.

Bo

Bo was run by civil militia Kamajors and, except during the junta, repulsed the RUF. It was calm from 1998 onwards and, as in many places in Southern Province, the army's challenge was to win power back from the Kamajors, with whom it was allied. That alliance was strained: many Kamajors did not differentiate between the army and the soldiers who joined the junta. Many civilians could not distinguish the various militias from the soldiers.

Two contrary lines have appeared in NGO reasoning: one is universalist, and the other qualifies universality by ignoring people informally or by introducing categories that exclude them. As I will now explore, the significance of this increases in the provinces. NGOs supplied camps in Bo, along the road in Blama and Kenema, and in surrounding areas, providing an observable and ordered response to the apparent secrecy of society (see: Ferme 2001) and outward anarchy of the fighting. The camps were similar to those in Freetown and Port Loko, providing a small, reasonably reliable livelihood for thousands of people. Outside towns, NGO priorities were clinics and wells. A government water official said, "we are there to ensure that this implementation is effectively done. Most of the implementers are NGOs...We ourselves are

supposed to be implementers, but there are no funds.”⁹⁰ NGOs also had limited logistical strength.

Service provision

Bo is five hours drive from Freetown along a road that has known other days. A man displaced there gave his view:

It’s the responsibility of the RUF and government to come and negotiate for lasting peace in this country. Since they started this fighting in 1991, no peace. So they will have to negotiate. We cannot predict the future of this war because everything has failed us. Negotiations from Lomé, Conakry, Abuja. They’ve been doing this since 1991. Up to now: no champion. No winners. We’re all losers. Let each one have his position – all we want is peace.⁹¹

In the first half of the war, there had been displacement from Southern Province to Bo. Kamajor gains in 1996 allowed hundreds of thousands of people to return home, many receiving supplies from NGOs. Bo became an assistance hub for Southern Province as it was easy travelling from Freetown, and offered access to parts of Eastern and Northern Provinces. By 2000 it hosted eight international NGOs, Unicef and WFP offices, and a Unamsil base.

Assistance was provided to around 10,000 registered residents in four camps in town; they were based in public buildings, although most people lived in mud or tarpaulin booths. There was a mass influx following attacks on areas in Northern Province in December 1998. A woman in Lebanese Camp remembered:

This camp was established in 1994. In 1996 they said we were to go home, they said the war was over so we were to go home. Some went and some of us stayed because we knew the war was not over. Those who went came back later when they were attacked. They almost came empty-handed, some came naked. When they came back we went to NCRRR to let us renew the camp, to help us rebuild the camp. Those who came, we were all sleeping in this main hall. The place was congested. We went to NCRRR to help us build the camp. The contract went to CCSL [Council of Churches of Sierra Leone]. So we renewed the camp, and still people were coming.

I asked what they received from NGOs. The woman replied:

They supply us monthly. They also supply us with some non-food items like cooking utensils, buckets, pots, spoons. All along they have been supplying us bulgar which we are used to, but within these four months they change the diet to maize-meal which is not good for us at all...The other NGOs come and help and go back. Like CARE; CARE gave us the toilets. ACF tried to give us water, but it has not materialised. ACF used to give water but they stopped. They dug a water-well down there and fixed taps. But the landowner says he has sold the land to someone else, and this man says he is ready to build his house there and has ordered ACF to remove the taps. So this has caused ACF to stop.⁹²

⁹⁰ 05/02/01, Bo.

⁹¹ 03/01/01, Bo.

⁹² 02/01/01, Bo.

As in camps elsewhere, NGO provision was broadly commended. Some residents negotiated small pieces of land for vegetable gardening, but could not farm as their own plots remained under RUF control. For many, firewood was the only source of income. Along the road in Blama, a camp was established in 1998, and accommodated 15,000 people in mud houses. Not everyone had waited for the RUF; one man told me that he left his area before the RUF had arrived. When I asked about those who stayed behind, he said, "Some stay there. Some are saying it's better because the government is taking no action to stop this war,"⁹³ implying that there was an element of decision, and also that assistance might be less dependable than war. Around Kenema, too, a number of camps expanded through 1998 and 1999 following RUF attacks in the north and east. As in Bo and Blama, the camps were serviced by NGOs, which provided food rations, water, and static or mobile clinics.

In material terms, conditions in the camps outstripped those of the surrounding area. I joined an NGO assessment to Kenema district; most villages visited had no wells or medical facilities. One man explained,

Before the war, individuals were getting 20-30-100 bags of coffee. As of now it's difficult to secure ten bags as all the plantations are bushy. The people left here in 1992, and returned in 1997. From the time they have returned, they have not been fortunate to brush [clear] the plantation... They're financially handicapped to enable them to have large farms. What they're doing is subsistence for their own home upkeep. Everything was taken away by the rebels, so for now: financial constraints.⁹⁴

It was an account of destruction and economic isolation, and the man recalled that Africare had distributed some food and some Unicef drugs. The assistance was not commensurate with the devastation, and did not approximate fulfilment of rights to food or health care. Ad hoc provision was also tiring for donors: Merlin was working in the area, and an employee reported,

ECHO, up to May [2000], used to fund twenty-four [Primary Health Outposts]. The communities were not prepared for the exit. ECHO's reasoning was that they had given sponsorship for two to three years, and said they had to get out, or people would be getting idle, but they did that without assessing the agencies. They kept talking about proliferation and duplication.⁹⁵

The National Commission for Rehabilitation Resettlement and Reconstruction (NCRRR) assigned operational areas to NGOs, officially to avoid duplication, but assigning areas exaggerated NGOs' competence. MSF-B supported thirteen clinics south of Bo, World Vision thirteen clinics in Bonthe district, MRC worked in Bo North and Tonkolili district. Clinics were rehabilitated with a well and latrine and offered primary care including children's vaccinations, but they were few and basic. An old man living near the Liberian border, said,

We do not want to rely too much on NGOs supplying us all the time which is not forthcoming. Our worry now is seed rice. We are just brushing brushing brushing, but

⁹³ 29/12/00, Blama.

⁹⁴ Assessment 02/02/01, Boama Koya.

⁹⁵ 29/12/00, Kenema.

we have no hope of getting seed rice. We've made some cries to GTZ, which is currently operating in Zimmi, LWF and ICRC...The other area of concern is medical facilities. Before the war there was a medical centre here. Fortunately the health worker is here, but no medicines. We've tried all to try to get assistance from outside, but up to now we have not had any response.⁹⁶

Partitioning operational areas meant that NGOs did not intervene on each other's patches, but it did not guarantee coverage. Also, NGOs left with little warning, and the description of work as 'emergency'-oriented assumed that they were tiding-over the worst of the crisis. They found, though, that people's unwillingness or inability to pay for treatment, made 'handing back' difficult. MSF planned some cost recovery, then postponed it. World Vision noted a 50% drop in consultation when cost recovery was introduced in March 2000. The explanation was drawn from the war – the emergency – not the underdevelopment or poverty:

Funds carried the programme through November 30, 2000 at which point the project was to be handed over to MoH. However, a countrywide insecurity in April stopped the movement of commodities, rapidly increasing food prices and other goods making it difficult for the [cost recovery system] to succeed. (World Vision 2000, 6)

The implication was that, had there not been further fighting, the cost recovery – which sounded like a durable approach to medical provision – would have succeeded.

The assumptions implicit in the allocation of operational areas and the cost recovery policies indicate that NGOs' actions and discourse were not constrained: they chose where they operated, when they withdrew, what they did, and how they described it. They spent donor money on projects that were within the rights terminology and, in that assistance was given only in government-held areas, alleviated some of the government's responsibility. By 2001 there was stalemate. There was no assistance to RUF-held territory, despite acceptance that needs were greatest there, and there were minimal partnerships with national NGOs despite the thousands of educated, unemployed Sierra Leoneans. Meanwhile tens of thousands of people lived for years in camps, whilst others who were equally impoverished received no assistance.

The arrangement was quietly convenient: the government line that assistance should go everywhere (for example: Reuters 2001) was not difficult to maintain, given the violence of the RUF. The government's capacity was so weak (even within its own territory) that it did not criticise NGOs openly, however much or little they achieved. NGOs (and their donors), meanwhile, did not need to scrutinise the theoretical dimensions of neutrality or impartiality when faced with plundered supplies and broken security guarantees. There were few costs for the RUF, who pursued their interests away from international attention, and the only drawbacks were for civilians, who had no means of recourse.

⁹⁶ 01/02/01, Gofo.



A bowser supplies water to a camp

The evidence poses a challenge to the hypothesis that NGOs were guided by their stated objectives. NGOs were able to maintain their stated objectives because they could ignore some people and specify categories, in spite of the fact that this entailed some contradiction to the professed universality. The discourse was moved around, and as terms could be redefined to fit the context, NGOs activity appeared to correspond to stated policy. Having removed the discomfort caused by cognitive dissonance, NGOs could perform tasks that imitated a more profound engagement and were symbolic of their avowed mandate.

NGOs could not assist everyone who was displaced, so assisted only those who were in camps. The size of the camps was determined by NGOs, as were the rations and definition of who should receive them. 'Displaced' – particularly in budgets, but more broadly in NGO workers' discourse – denoted people in camps. NGOs could not reach people in RUF territory, so kept the term neutrality and added 'inaccessibility'. Whilst it was true that NGOs could not operate safely in these areas, the effect was to affirm what NGOs were doing and excuse what they were not, although people living there gained nothing by being labelled 'inaccessible.' In the south and west, services were provided 'impartially' according, mostly, to how close villages were to the road from Freetown to Bo or Kenema.

On the surface, the NGOs' approach of making universalist statements and then limiting them is practical and explanatory, but it has a destabilizing effect on how events are understood. If NGOs had used the terminology of rights and principles in a constant way, they could have provided a decontextualised, but clear framework. Instead, whatever guidance might have been offered, was disoriented by the freedom to create modifications of the universalist claims.

Rwanda



Map of Rwanda

A display in Rwanda's national museum in Butare stated, "The Hutus, the Tutsis and the Twa inhabit the same country, where they live mixed with each other; they speak the same language, and have a culture and history in common." For many Rwandans there was no complete account or explanation of what happened between April and July 1994. For outsiders, there was horror, guilt and pity at the intriguing weirdness of the violence and the intimacy of the killing. Rwanda emerged as victim-victor as the RPF pulled the country back from desolation. Melvern recounts,

The world had never appeared more hopeless or helpless, [Kagame] said later. "All those claiming to be civilized had turned their backs," he said. "I knew that we were alone. We would have to sort out the problem. I developed contempt for those people in the world who claimed to stand for values of moral authority." (Melvern 2000, 189)

Twentieth century Rwanda was marked by violence in 1929, 1959, 1963, 1990 and 1994 (Byanafashe 1998). Three formative features of recent history were the massacre of around a tenth of the population, the vast population movements within Rwanda and across its borders, and the necessity for antipathetic groups to live together. A quandary beset the new regime as the world had ignored genocide and now offered money. The government of Pasteur Bizimungu relied on foreign aid whilst despising it for what it had not done and for what it had done. International efforts became characterised – at least on the surface – by novelty, and new support for new political leaders avoided engaging with why (or whether) all that preceded was erased.

Aid in the 1980s and early 1990s had nurtured political and social structures claiming development, democracy and participation. Apparently a “well-developing country” (Uvin 1998, 2), a darling for donors (particularly Belgium, France, Switzerland, Germany and the World Bank), Rwanda had imploded. Analysis of the role of ethnicity, colonialism, and leadership in conflict pre-dated the genocide (Kamukama 1993, 5-7), but did not prompt measures to prevent violence. In 1993 there were thirty-eight international NGOs in Rwanda and, according to Melvern, most “were fully aware of the overt system of apartheid operated against the Tutsi” (Melvern 2000, 55).

Oxfam wrote, “The tragedy of Rwanda has demonstrated more clearly than ever before that the international community lacks the capacity to respond effectively to such crises” (Vassall-Adams 1994, 2). Hutu extremists, who had fled to Zaire following the RPF’s victory in 1994, regrouped in refugee camps in the Kivus, received international assistance, and launched cross-border attacks on Rwanda. The Rwandan army mounted its decisive assault on the camps in October 1996, leading to the forced repatriation of around a million Rwandans in a few weeks, and the deaths or disappearance westwards into Zaire of 200-700,000 more (for this debate, see: HRW 1997; Eltringham 2004, 125-9). The RPF then backed Laurent Kabila’s forces on their march to Kinshasa. Zairian authorities also forcibly repatriated refugees, 200,000 were sent home by the Burundian army, and 500,000 by Tanzania.

April 1998 saw the public execution of twenty-two people convicted of genocide. The same month, the International Criminal Tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania, recorded its first conviction, and in May, former Prime Minister Jean Kambanda pleaded guilty of genocide. After a year as Congo’s president, Kabila had not expelled the extremists whom Rwanda held a threat, and in August Rwanda withdrew from its alliance from Kabila and supported the Rassemblement congolais pour la democratie (Rcd) with 20,000 troops against him. At the end of 1998, the government launched a six month Donor Alert for US\$38m. Visiting Rwanda at the time, Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, noted the government’s lack of policy on reconciliation, and judged the human rights situation ‘bleak’.

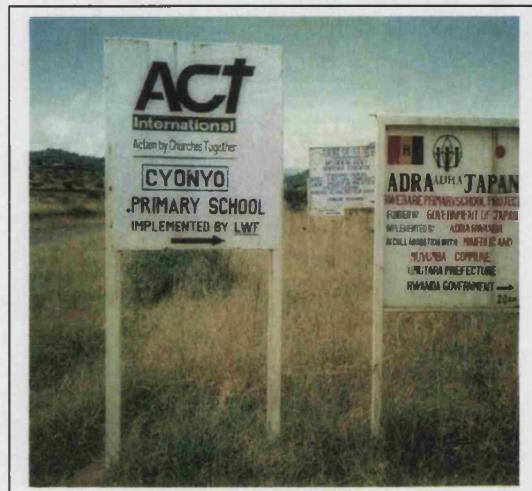
Local government structures were created in 1999 as the government extended its own term of office until 2003. In March and April, elections took place for Local Councils, the first elections since the genocide, with 95% of the population voting. Paul Kagame became President in April 2000, elected by ministers and members of parliament, gaining 81 out of 86 votes cast. This came days after the UN Security Council “explicitly accepted responsibility for failing to prevent the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.”⁹⁷ In November a donor meeting in Kigali urged Kagame to withdraw from Congo, but at the beginning of 2001, he spoke of up to 10,000

⁹⁷ BBC 15/04/00, 03.44 GMT.

combatants hostile to Rwanda amassing in Congo, and the Minister of Defence was quoted as estimating 100,000 (HRW 2001a, 4). In March, municipal elections were held (although 45% of the contests were single-candidate) and a *Gacaca* law was adopted; this instituted local trials for those accused of crimes relating to genocide that were not category one offences. The following month, UN Special Representative Michel Moussalli reported improvement in the human rights situation.

By 2001, aid agency advertisements stood as reminders of assistance as NGOs shrank to the capital. The Government held, “It should be noted that certain donors or institutions exacerbate these problems of not appropriating the community by placing signboards putting them on the first place instead of the beneficiaries, and thus preventing a real appropriation of development activities” (Miniloc c2000, 10), indicating dissatisfaction.

NGOs' hoardings



Kigali

The weakness of government in Sierra Leone apparently recommended order. In Rwanda the organisation of annihilation had reflections in the efficiency of reconstruction; political strength was destructive and constructive, which had implications for NGOs. I will examine two processes, both stemming from the preoccupation of NGOs to make sense of their activity. The first involves adding ‘peace’ to the discourse of assistance, and the second is the use of existing terminology, particularly ‘resettlement’, to connote neutrality and evade political responsibility.

Peace

Four international aid workers were killed in Ruhengeri in January 1997 and five UNHCR staff in Cyangugu the following month. This was the start of the ‘transition period’, and Rwanda had no Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) appeal that year. The UNHCR representative assessed, “the government made a mistake. They didn’t want to be seen as an emergency, and said they wanted to get into development, not realising how long it took for development funding to return.”⁹⁸ In 1997, funds for emergency work fell below US\$150m as the development budget rose above it (UN c2001, 5), and at the end of that year, donors withheld contributions from UNHCR, ending the era of extraordinary money.

⁹⁸ 03/05/01, Kigali.

Work shifted to UNDP but many NGOs, previously funded by UNHCR, scaled down or closed activities. Some discourse still described disaster: the 1998 CAP appeal listed, “1.4 million returnees (including organised and spontaneous returns), 36,000 displaced persons, 34,000 returnees, 57,500 soldiers to be demobilised and 130,000 prisoners” (UN 1998). ICRC counted 100,000 unaccompanied children following the genocide, and child-tracing and psycho-social work were NGO concerns until 1998, when the government declared the unaccompanied children crisis over. NGOs’ target groups also included orphans, child-headed households, and widows (including women raising children conceived by rape). NGO spending in 1998 was estimated at US\$300m – about half the 1996 figure. Emergency funds for NGOs were still generally available in 1998, and from ECHO until the end of 1999.

In 2000, there were 125,000 refugees outside Rwanda, and 30,000 refugees (from Burundi and Congo) inside; the eighty-four international NGOs fell to fifty-eight (UNHCR 2000, 108). Oxfam’s Programme review that year identified three on-going ‘humanitarian issues’: resettlement, IDPs and food shortages, claiming, “More than 1.5 million people...are living in inadequate shelter.” Oxfam were not working in any of these areas at the time. Like other NGOs, they were reducing staff, particularly those based outside Kigali. The review concluded,

There does not seem to be a clear humanitarian response or disaster preparedness strategy currently in place for the programme...Most efforts at developing new programming have been focused on development oriented activities, but these have not been very successful. (Oxfam 2000b)

Whilst the violence and assistance had moved past the emergency phase, aspects of society had not. A World Vision employee commented, “I’m worried: we’re moving into development work, but where are we? There are lots of vulnerabilities. Lots of agencies have lost their responsiveness.” She continued,

The aid business has changed. Agencies have their own way of operation, and are not in the short-term phase anymore. There’s a rapid turnover of expats – lots left, they were denied permits, received death threats. The development strategy has been longer coming because of the disturbances in the circumstances of society.⁹⁹

Rwanda was reasonably stable, but NGOs’ difficulties in defining a role pressed the issue of their function into secondary importance, and funding was tight. DFID’s First Secretary assessed:

NGOs haven’t moved on very quickly from the humanitarian phase...NGOs have to concentrate on leveraging funds, and genocide and humanitarian disaster are better for getting money. There’s also an issue with donors, and NGOs are led by someone else’s agenda. They’re interested in their own survival, and some become implementers of whatever funds they can get.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ 06/04/01, Kigali.

¹⁰⁰ 06/04/01, Kigali.

The UNDP had a US\$100m Trust Fund for reintegration from 1996-2000, and an unusually operational role that required implementing partners. An employee explained,

What we wanted from those NGOs was a quick – how can I call it? – delivery, because this was not UNDP core resources, and bilaterals are very exigent – they want this amount of money spent in one year, or two years. Also that NGOs should work closely with the government, even if it didn't have much capacity. It's they who will be handling, so we tried to put the emphasis on community participation and government involvement for when NGOs phase out. This is where we are now. Most of these projects are now ending. International NGOs are phasing out, the money is out, so we're trying to build the capacity of the government to manage these things.¹⁰¹

A CARE worker corroborated this, reporting funds falling from US\$30m in 1995 to US\$5m in 2001. He recounted:

We had a plan and fitted the pieces into the plan. There were people implementing the plan who ensured continuity. It was not the donors, but the implementers who gave continuity. Now there's mid- to longer-term funding – donors are out of transitional-development mode. A lot still have some reservations, given the Great Lakes context.

Reservations apart, he said that by 1997, the strategic plan had been 'development oriented':

It included economic security as one of the main areas we wanted to be involved in, especially in those areas which were traditionally marginalised or of low potential... We wanted to work in environmental issues, those damaged and those which, from the set-up, were environmentally fragile. Also, other aspects of assistance – resettling the population, responding depending on the geographical area. We started to design programmes more for geographical areas.¹⁰²

The focus had shifted from 'emergency' needs, even if these were not met. Other NGOs were doing likewise: in 1999, Concern's three-year community development project included schools, water, and associations – bee-keeping, agriculture, bicycles, and bank accounts. In January 2001, CRS's Development Activities Programme launched a five-year budget of US\$30m from USAID, which included wetland development, terracing, agro-forestry and road rehabilitation. IRC had a four-to-five year strategic plan in the governance sector.

The medley of interventions and concerns voiced by NGO staff arose partly because the situation strained existing understanding of development and emergencies. There was also a more fundamental uncertainty: there had been development before and it had ended in violence, and this did not bode well for the future. Altercation at an institutional and individual level was alleviated by talk of peace. "After the war it was important to continue developing the country," reported the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) director, "There was a lot of distrust, so we tried to intervene in the area of traumatism – to put people together."¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ 03/05/01, Kigali.

¹⁰² 12/04/01, Kigali.

¹⁰³ 05/04/01, Kigali.

‘Peace’ was a term that captured the duration of development whilst being the antithesis of violent emergency; it was added to the NGOs’ discourse from 1995, and became explicit in policies as NGOs converged on the term. CRS’s peace work examined the Catholic church’s role in the genocide, and targeted 26,000 young people in the Rwandan Youth Peace-building project. World Vision had a reconciliation and peace building programme from 1997, which was later termed ‘healing and reconciliation’. IRC did conflict mediation, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) conflict resolution. In 2001 Oxfam’s focus was peace-building to address the ‘negative peace’; it gauged, “Although the formal cessation of hostilities in Rwanda has taken place, divisive pressures within Rwandan society seem likely to continue and may increase” (Oxfam 2000b, 2).

The possibility that peace was holistic and pervasive was attractive, but to create such a peace, NGOs would have needed huge resources, as well as the ability to stimulate social transformation. Instead, ‘peace’ became prominent when funds were dwindling and NGOs’ capacity to effect social change was decreasing as staff moved from rural areas to Kigali. So ‘peace’ was tagged onto other projects to approve interventions on poverty, food, human rights, the church, youths, or anything else. It also lent itself to low-budget discussion and workshops, rather than costly inputs. Without political analysis, ‘peace’ could be claimed either as a prerequisite for progress or as an ultimate goal; but without such analysis, no assessment could be made of whether what NGOs were doing was promoting peace or making it less likely.

For many Rwandans, the ‘peace’ was not very convincing, “you have to resolve conflicts at the village level, but also you have to eat,” said one man, suggesting competition between ‘peace’ and food. A woman from a national NGO proposed in a meeting: “you can’t do peace-building work in Rwanda without something which generates income or combats poverty.”¹⁰⁴ Frustration was heightened because people perceived that money had been wasted. A Rwandan aid worker said, “This is an area which has received a lot of humanitarian assistance, but nobody knows where it has gone.” Pondering conflict resolution, whilst being mildly offended by it, he continued, “if the funds had been managed correctly [during the emergency] you would not be seeing this conflict resolution now.” The government assessed, “Due to mismanagement, very low percentage (15%) of the project funds reaches the beneficiary population whereas a good number of the projects are loans to be repaid by the same population” (Miniloc c2000, 8).

Adopting the term ‘peace’ in a conspicuously conflictual society etched out a role for NGOs but it was not clear how they would fulfil it, and evaluation was difficult. World Vision reported from their Promoting Reconciliation Among the Youth (PRAY) workshop:

¹⁰⁴ NGO meeting 18/04/00, Cyeru.

One youth gave an example of an old person with whom she stay together; this old person know people who have exterminated his family and always said that he will never forgive them, "*I don't feel at any time I will forgive any one who killed my people*" said the old man, but once this girl joined our group and was told about unity and reconciliation messages, she went back to that old man and explained to him about unity and reconciliation through forgiveness and the man changed and have forgave those who had killed his people. (World Vision 2001, 33)

Peace was evangelical in religious or secular terms. "Here the social fabric has been destroyed almost completely. Not completely, there's still hope,"¹⁰⁵ a World Vision employee told me. The optimism was impressive, but much peace work ignored – rather than addressed – the divisions in society, by exorbitant claims, skating analysis and halting implementation. NGOs identified a problem (in very general terms), but no solution. In an Oxfam meeting on peace-building, after discussing a live land dispute, the participants enumerated the available options.

Option 1: no option

Option 2: no option. There is no more land and the problem is going to increase.

Option 3: the government should take responsibility to give people the means of survival.

Option 4: if the issue of justice were resolved, then the whole thing would be resolved.

Does the government have the capacity/will to address those things?

More debate, followed by the conclusion that one option is getting rid of the opponent, and "the other option is very difficult: having a leadership that does not have refugees coming and refugees going."¹⁰⁶

Whilst 'peace' displaced much of the language of rights and principles, or proposed a higher goal, it was officially concurrent with a policy of neutrality. In ideological terms it was a call for a cessation (or transcendence) of politics, rather than an alternative configuration. As it focused on local level conflicts, though, the call did not challenge the government's national or foreign policy, or the Interahamwe. Instead of being informed by rights and principles, the term 'peace' is more plausibly interpreted as a product of the failure of development (which had proved violent in the past), the persistent emergency (to which NGOs could not respond), and variable foreign funding. NGO workers proselytised 'peace,' but they had little experience of genocide, poverty and reconciliation, lived with razor wire round their houses, and made their exclusive social and security arrangements.

Ruhengeri

Ruhengeri is in northwestern Rwanda, 1½ hours bus ride along a metalled road from Kigali; to the north is Uganda, and to the west is Gisenyi, Lake Kivu and Congo. The area is intensely cultivated, with patchwork agriculture covering the hills. Some people wanted to protect the environment, but others wanted to eat, explained one woman.

¹⁰⁵ 10/04/01, Kigali.

¹⁰⁶ 11/04/01, Kigali.

Ruhengeri's story is about resettlement, much of which can be understood within the discourse of rights. I am not attempting to produce a definitive account of the resettlement programme, but am investigating how and why NGOs described their activities in neutral terms. My findings reflect what Ferguson describes as an “‘anti-politics machine,’ depoliticizing everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of expanding bureaucratic state power” (Ferguson 1990, xv). In Rwanda, NGOs (and the UNHCR) implemented the government's settlement agenda. In allocating resources, it was not simply that there was not enough bulgar to go round; implementing resettlement undermined some people to the advantage of others.

Resettlement

Developments in Rwanda depended on interests elsewhere in the region. From 1996, Rwandan militias exiled in North Kivu attacked Tutsi survivors, returnees or refugees living in the prefectures of Ruhengeri and Gisenyi, and there was full-scale insurgency from May 1997. This met with counter-insurgency from the Rwandan army. Amnesty International and HRW detailed massacres of 6000 people, the majority unarmed, by government troops, between January and August of 1997 (Amnesty International 1997; HRW 1998a). African Rights questioned the veracity of the reporting, and critiqued the effectiveness of using the term ‘unarmed civilians’ without analysis of how they interacted with fighters (African Rights 1998, 5&418).

The accounts of Amnesty International and African Rights had differing implications. The ‘unarmed civilians’ version suggested that such victims be assisted or protected. Acknowledging that civilians were hiding and supplying the insurgents (whether or not by force) proposed more forthright politics. The Economist Intelligence Unit added, “The RPA will continue to conduct security operations against [the infiltrators], but in doing so will further alienate the Hutu community from the Rwandan government, while not really affording genocide survivors the protection they are demanding” (EIU 1997, 23).

Security improved towards the end of 1998, and with it access for aid agencies; by July 1999, the fighting had stopped. 650,000 people had been displaced into camps, and HRW estimated that US\$22m of aid went into the construction of this accommodation, which was then abandoned as new villages were constructed (HRW 2001b, 77). Throughout Rwanda people were re-housed. The Arusha Accords of 1992-3, signed by the government and the RPF, agreed the formation of “the village grouped type of settlement to encourage the establishment of development centres in rural areas and break with the traditional scattered housing,” but the process was interrupted by war and genocide. The National Habitat Policy, a Ministerial decree

of January 1997, initiated the building of villages, known as *imidugudu* (singular: *umudugudu*), officially to provide services and facilitate land use and reconciliation.

In the first five months of 1999, 14,000 Rwandan refugees returned from Congo. A survey by NGOs, Unicef and the Ministry of Health in early 1999 found 7% acute malnutrition in Ruhengeri, and NGOs started emergency work. CARE's representative recalled,

When we had the chance to go back, it had changed. There was no settlement infrastructure, houses had been destroyed. The government forced people into resettlement structure, villages which people did not accept at all. Also in Umutara and Kibungo but there it made more sense...In Ruhengeri people wanted to go back. 95% had a place that they had left six months before.

He continued, "For the northwest, there was coordination between agencies...it was pretty good. It lost steam in coordinating when things moved towards rehabilitation and development. They were not able to sustain that for a long time."¹⁰⁷ Oxfam convened a workshop on land use, at which the first two 'key points' were, "Continuing with the status quo is not really an option" and, " 'There is no alternative' to villagisation" (Palmer 1999). The document quoted a survey of *imidugudu* that found "only one village could boast running water, schools and health centres". HRW evaluated:

By late 1999, many land claims from the relocation remained unresolved. Farmers in the northwestern prefecture of Ruhengeri were cultivating less than 60 percent of available arable land. About 60 percent of the population of the northwestern prefectures was malnourished (compared with 40 percent elsewhere in the country) and more than half a million still depended on foreign food aid near the end of the year. (HRW 2000b)

Elsewhere in the country, villagisation was reasonably well received, but its advantages masked another process: the destruction of existing homes, and forced relocation, particularly in the northwest (HRW 2001b). This was part of the price of peace ordained by the government. One man in Kinigi, where nearly everyone had been moved into *imidugudu* in the first eight months of 1999, counted his costs:

In the first place we abandoned the solid houses we were living in, and we live here in feeble little houses. The houses we live in are small and there's not enough land for us to cultivate. We made some big losses as well. Before, I lived in a house that was worth 500,000F [US\$1400], and now we live in a house worth 200,000F. One loss was the first house that we left, and the other was the 200,000F for the construction of the second house. There was also another problem: there was a decrease in the agricultural produce. We're now not close to the land, so there's a loss in terms of the time it takes to go from here to the plot. On top of this there's a loss of compost, which influences the productivity. If I'm close by, I can do it, but at the moment it's impossible. Also watching the plot isn't easy, and there are animals that destroy the crops.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ 12/04/01, Kigali.

¹⁰⁸ 19/04/01, Kinigi.

I travelled further up the road to Kabwende, on the slopes of a volcano where people had been for two years, but their houses were falling down before they were completed. I asked one man why they had moved from their previous homes,

J: Because of the insecurity, the infiltrations. We were obliged to move and come here, where we're protected.

Z: Who are you protected by?

J: For the moment it's secure in the region.

Z: Did you leave your land or keep it?

J: We kept the land. We go back to farm it, but there's a problem with the destruction by wild animals, mainly the deer and antelopes... Previously, when we lived there, we chased them away, but now there's no one there.¹⁰⁹

Nearby I talked to some women shelling maize outside a tarpaulin shelter; they had come from Congo, and had received food from WFP. One of the women said, "There was a local association for survivors of the war. It's called *Ibuka*, which is 'Remember' in Kinyarwanda. They built some houses, and all the survivors helped build them. They were well built." 'Survivors' refers to Tutsis who were in Rwanda during the genocide; I looked at the sheeting the women and several children were living in and asked if they had received that assistance. She replied, "No, we're not survivors."

The politics of resettlement were complicated by the fact that *not* providing housing was also potentially divisive, as was the categorisation of refugees, returnees and survivors (which was engrained in discourse, see: Eltringham and Van Hoyweghen 2000; Mamdani 2001, 266).

UNHCR spent at least US\$30.7m on housing between 1996 and 1998 (HRW 2001b, 15; NRC 2003, 92), and funded NGOs. It avoided all political complexity with: "situations of forced villagisation should be viewed in the context of the fact that the post-war Government of Rwanda was young and largely inexperienced," and quoted a draft report by a shelter evaluation team:

Rather than discussing the policy, the international community should ensure provision of the technical backstopping and training to allow the policy not to become a failure. More efforts should be placed constructively into how it is implemented rather than on discussions on what is being done. (UNHCR 2000, 42. Italics in original)

Describing a technical shortfall rationalised a technical response, whilst discharging political responsibility. UNHCR led the international involvement in the imidugudu; NGOs were ambivalent, but many found that their need to contribute dove-tailed with government policy. The speed of building was remarkable: "About twenty organisations physically rehabilitated Rwanda," said the director of SNV which, he reported, had given technical assistance for 5000 houses. "They constructed thousands of houses, and that was done with a long-term vision... We felt that the population did not want individual houses, but they agreed to build them, and they

¹⁰⁹ 19/04/01, Kabwende.

have been occupied well.”¹¹⁰ HRW reckoned, “most of [the NGOs] knew that the housing programs were intertwined with a rural resettlement programme that had occasioned multiple human rights abuses” (HRW 2001b, 2).

UNHCR acclaimed the lines of houses; the representative said, “the government was smart in terms of returnees. It didn’t want IDPs in camps, as they could never have moved on. At the time it annoyed a lot of people, NGOs and us too.” A Concern employee commented,

The umudugudu was a big issue last year. It was seen as the government putting Hutus in villages and controlling them. They said it was easier to provide services for them, but did they provide services?...NGOs used to have meetings on villagisation. It’s a land issue, and that’s still there.¹¹¹

The meetings had stopped, though. I asked a local government official in Ruhengeri the reason for the villagisation, and he replied, “It was a security matter. There was a system of living in villages for security, in the face of infiltrations. If you live together, people know each other...It was a national system – we were obliged to.”¹¹² The control-protection was doubly potent as many of those who, like the government, were returning from Uganda and Tanzania, benefited from the housing, and many who were forcibly relocated had little common cause with the government.

The government’s enforcement of the National Habitat Policy was violent, but it was less violent (and more constructive) than conventional counter-insurgency. The choice for aid agencies might have been between supporting and not supporting the Policy, but instead they avoided commenting on the politics. NGO workers were perturbed about their involvement, and the right to shelter provided authorisation. This, though, was not guidance, but a means of alighting on technical aspects, and connoting the worth of their involvement. In doing so, NGOs distanced themselves from the results of their own actions, and diminished their chances of making a positive impact.

Another process is emerging. By sweeping resettlement (and, for that matter, peace) into the remit of assistance, NGOs dominated the conceptualisation of ‘recovery’, and subtly discounted the efforts at survival made by Rwandans. This took place in the discourse (NGO activity was not literally more influential than that of the Rwandans), and drew disproportionate attention to assistance, giving it symbolic importance. In reality, the question that faced most people was not whether peace and housing were preferable to war and homelessness, but how to achieve these in a meaningful way, and without increasing their vulnerability.

¹¹⁰ 05/04/01, Kigali.

¹¹¹ 20/04/01, Kigali.

¹¹² 18/04/01, Cyeru.

Umutara

The way NGOs exaggerate their reach and discount Rwandans' actions becomes more evident, and more incongruous, when money runs out. NGOs had provided emergency assistance, but vagueness over what to do next, in what capacity, and how to involve a disinclined population, left projects aimless and unpredictable. I trace here how withdrawal, like intervention, was decided with little reference to rights or principles.

NGOs have been seen to be unrealistic about power – overstating their ability to operationalise peace and understating the government's influence in the development agenda. In Umutara, a further dimension is visible: they did not assess the strength or weakness (or inclination) of the population to host assistance.

Neutral progress

Umutara is in eastern Rwanda and was home to people returning from Uganda and Tanzania, where they (or their parents) had fled from Rwanda following massacres of Tutsis in 1959. They were known as 'old caseload' refugees, and for those without housing, the imidugudu speeded repatriation. John-Baptist Gihana, a primary teacher, explained:

We were in exile forty years ago; we came in 1994. Most of the people here were in Uganda, and then there was a group who were in exile in Tanzania. They came in 1997. When we came here we tried to build houses, sometimes with the help of NGOs. These [houses] we found them here, but the owners were not here...But when they came back in '97 they reoccupied – they took over their houses. We had to go to the umudugudu. The government provided some iron sheets, then we had to use our manual labour to create a kind of bricks.¹¹³

Most of Umutara had previously been Akagera National Park. It had become a Prefecture in 1996, and received considerable international assistance. The Surprefet of Nyagatare, a Commune in Umutara, recalled:

There was the establishment of mobile clinics, we had MSF – so many NGOs. Those that were involved in health, non-food items and food items, establishment of water points, infrastructure. Everything had been destroyed, even though there had been even none...During the emergency phase there was minimal evaluation and follow-up, because people were rushing around trying to stop a catastrophe...Then we had a phase between emergency and development when we insisted on some development activity. If you want to build, you have to go to the people and they identify and define their own needs and that's what NGOs will follow. That's 1997-99. When that started, unfortunately so many NGOs pulled out. I don't know why, but the number is dramatically reduced. When we asked they said their funders are not willing to fund development activities.

The emergency had offered options for NGO involvement, but whether the response was genuinely guided was questionable. The Surprefet continued,

They would tell me they are rehabilitating a health centre. They will put in furnishing and say they have rehabilitated it, they will put in two pipes and say they have

¹¹³ 23/04/01, Bugaragara.

rehabilitated 160km of pipes. A lot of poor work being done. We were just coming out of genocide. There were those NGOs which didn't understand the causes of the genocide...Organisations would come with their own projects and say, "we're going to give you blankets," and it would be hard to continue then to work towards what the people themselves think is needed. You would be compelled to go into their system. That's what happens in areas of conflict, they don't have time to plan.¹¹⁴

According to this account, the assistance had not been structured in its approach or what it achieved. Some people gave a more positive appraisal. The assistance had included construction of some basic infrastructure, and a doctor recalled Agro Action Allemande's involvement:

I think they have built 1000 [houses] and they have built latrines. They are very many. Definitely they have assisted the people. People when they came in were not able to build for themselves. In each they would build a social centre where they would put a radio and TV. And the TV is still maintained.

The buildings were in place, but environmental conditions were such that there was little surface water, and the water from the river had to be pumped uphill and cleaned. The doctor recounted from early on, and identified technical and political dimensions to assisting:

In 1995 Oxfam came around, I think they had just come, and were the first. They came to find out whether they would really supply water. They took water from the Muvumba and Akagera rivers...Last year but one, in 1999, Oxfam finished the project. There were about thirteen Oxfam workers. Generally it's been effective, they have really helped. Only the management has been poor and people have been difficult. When people come they pay money and that goes to pay for fuel. Only the managers, I think, in a way they embezzle it, but if they can be faithful and the management goes in to see the accountability of the system, it can be effective. Oxfam is continuing with public health. Some of the people here were dodging to get this water and they go to the ponds. They were saying that the water from these ponds is better for banana beer, they say it's quicker fermenting and is sweeter. So Oxfam have been educating about hygiene.¹¹⁵

The system potentially served 15,000 people. Each operator charged 10F per 25 litre jerry can, of which 2F constituted his salary; "but they have a tendency to keep the money and mismanage it," said the Community Development Committees (CDC) representative, whom Oxfam regarded as fraudulent. (In Ruhengeri, by contrast, people paid 600F per year for water). "The water system is sustainable subject to the condition that they are not corrupt," commented an Oxfam worker in a meeting that recognised that there had been little community involvement in the project's design.

A tap had been installed in the school, and a teacher held, "The water is from Oxfam, but we pay for it, so it's not a donation." The question of ownership was complicated by the running costs. One user was sceptical:

We're fetching water. It's not yet successful – because this water is not free, because they're using a pump. It's not gravity – we need to buy diesel, so the population is having a problem of buying water, and when there's a shortage of diesel we have no

¹¹⁴ 26/04/01, Nyagatare.

¹¹⁵ 23/04/01, Matimba.

water. On the whole it's quite OK, but you find that one jerry-can is 10F so you find the population have not even 10F. It's too early to say that it's successful, and Oxfam are still here and it is overseeing.¹¹⁶

In technical terms the system was installed (and had been for two years), so Oxfam had decided to withdraw its remaining staff, who had been doing 'sensitisation'. However, providing assistance had not attracted sufficient confidence for maintenance, or motivated people to demand up-keep services from the state, so impact was pegged to what the project itself achieved. A Rwandan employee, charged with organising meetings for people to rally the government to take responsibility for water provision explained,

I can lobby for that and arrange meetings. But it's not going to happen in the next eight years. At the commune level they're not going to lobby their government...I can organise meetings with the bourgmestre,¹¹⁷ but they will go back and hold meetings to see how they can get donor money. Then they'll look for how it can be spent on administration, transport, that that. At the end of the day it will all end up in the *per diem* of the bourgmestre.¹¹⁸

At the end of 2000, SC-UK conducted a Household Economy Analysis. The 'destitute' (1-5% of the population) were not economically active and did not fit the methodology, so were excluded from the recommendations as well. Apart from that, the findings were that the 'very poor,' who were 15-20% of the population, would need a half-ration to cover a ten day gap before the December/January harvest and should receive seeds, and that market prices should be monitored (SC-UK 2000, 13). People were surviving, but their opportunities were uninspiring. By 2001 many NGO workers cited shortage of funding as a major constraint on activities.

Decision-making within tighter budgets involved some more informal redefinition of terms and categorisation of who would be assisted. A CARE representative related an 'assessment of needs':

We plan to go there to see how the latrines are, how is the hygiene. We've been going there just for trees. Now we'll go for hygiene. We've had meetings with parents, because education should go to parents of those children. It's mainly within schools. Where there are no latrines we construct them, depending on what the needs are.¹¹⁹

The hypothesis that NGOs were guided by rights and principles is challenged by the ease with which interventions were abandoned. CARE ran a mobile clinic for mothers and children. It was equipped, but was (mute) testimony to the lack of government commitment to basic services after two years of 'emergency' NGO health care in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. Viewed from another angle, the government permitted CARE to operate, but CARE did not secure donor funding, had management problems, and shut the clinic temporarily: donor, NGO

¹¹⁶ 23/04/01, Bugaragara.

¹¹⁷ The Bourgmestre held executive power in the commune.

¹¹⁸ Management meeting 09/04/01, Kigali.

¹¹⁹ 26/04/01, Nyagatare.

and government indifference all visited the same people. When the clinic returned, there were a few babies to immunise and women to be screened, but no riots. The nurse deliberated, “Maybe the reason they don’t come today is because we have not been here for three months. Also it’s a market day and it’s the rainy season. Some of them are working in the fields, others are going to the market.”¹²⁰

As with resettlement, water and health assistance overlapped with concern for rights, and were pitched at a technical level. This was more opportunistic than pragmatic, as is clarified by the fact that NGOs used positive discourse to credit whatever assistance was offered. Lutheran World Federation’s (LWF) programme officer explained ‘conflict resolution’:

F: There are minor conflicts between cattle people and cultivators. Also between the government and the National Park people. People want to graze in the National Park and the government says that they have to reserve a part for animals...

Z: Is there a link between these conflicts and the genocide?

F: No, it’s a different issue. If it wasn’t for the genocide we wouldn’t have this peace and reconciliation commission. But the returnees coming from outside had those same issues. They are hardening on those people who graze on other people’s crops, but that one doesn’t have any link with the genocide. It’s not there.¹²¹

The phrase ‘conflict resolution’ exploited social tensions and found a niche for NGOs. She continued, “We used to work in five provinces, now in three. It all depends on funds. It’s a precautional measure – if there are no funds, at least we have talked to people to do things for themselves.” Meanwhile the challenges remained. A man who had returned from exile in Uganda summarised the disappointment: “We thought we could work with NGOs, but we lack land. People here are compact because of land. We came in 1999, we expected more. But since we came here we lack all: we have small small land and cows are not enough.”¹²²

As NGOs withdrew they invoked the government’s responsibility, moving from gap-filling to a position of working nominally within state structures. NGO workers were guarded about the government, and their caution sat awkwardly with their readiness – when the funding ended – to abandon people to the government’s priorities and the poverty and violence to which sections of the population were subjected. NGOs worked predominantly the CDCs, complementing the government’s decentralisation programme. An employee of Africare, working on capacity building in Umutara, assessed, “The government empowerment at the grassroots political structures is tying to the idea that the genocide happened because there was no sense of individual responsibility.”¹²³

¹²⁰ 25/04/01, Muvumba.

¹²¹ 24/04/01, Nyagatare.

¹²² 23/04/01, Bugaragara.

¹²³ 11/04/01, Kigali.

The prospect of decentralisation allayed some NGO workers' fears, although decentralisation, too, was directed by the government. The government held: "The Community Development Policy in Rwanda is designed in order to bring together stakeholders in development who operate at various government levels and within grassroots structures (cells and sectors) to combine a better standard of living." The Policy included the assertion that, "Weak participation of the population in the development activities...[has had the] consequences that, instead of the population taking ownership of those development activities, they sometimes destroy them" (Miniloc 2001, 7).

The Mayor of Rukindo District explained the official reassignment of roles: "Formerly it was NGOs who would go to the ministry, then to the prefecture, then to the population. The district is now the local government, and they deal directly with NGOs, in that order we will know what the priorities will be."¹²⁴ The NGO coordinator for the Ministry of Local Affairs offered,

J: It's not clear to me that the government has taken the parts that were served by NGOs. There are some NGOs – Oxfam Quebec, Oxfam GB – which are dealing with water. The government didn't take it from the role of NGOs. The government may take an upper hand in the control of it, because it is important to have clean water, so it's in the control of government and NGOs. They all work hand in hand.

Z: Are there some areas of the country which are better served by NGOs?

J: This may depend on if I see mapping of NGOs countrywide, I can cross-check and see, I can at least know the kind of NGO activities carried out.

Z: Do you have mapping?

J: We had thought of having a bigger map so we could have green indicating X NGO. We haven't yet finished it, it's a very big work. So actually it's quite difficult to tell which prefecture has more NGOs than others and which needs more NGOs.¹²⁵

The process relied on guesswork, both about the government's motivation and about what NGOs were doing. So, in spite of the official collaboration, and contrary to the framework suggested by talk of rights and principles, assistance was unmonitored and uncoordinated.

Recalling the genocide, one man summarised, "The only link between everyday struggles and the genocide is through the leaders. The leaders said 'kill this man and you can have his land'. People are facing two conflicts, one with the leaders and one with poverty."¹²⁶ Whilst there had been massive funding after the genocide, the recovery task proved more diverse than the house-building and peace-building presumed. When NGOs were funded they could provide some assistance, but the assistance did not transform people's economic situation beyond the provision of various material items, and NGOs' peace projects were not a credible form of social transformation. When funding was shorter, the frailty of what had been (or could be) accomplished surfaced.

¹²⁴ 27/04/01, Rukindo.

¹²⁵ 20/04/01, Kigali.

¹²⁶ 25/04/01, Kagitumba.

Despite government rancour and falling funds, though, NGOs used neutral terminology to assume unambiguous and apparently technical tasks in equivocal political territory. This restored consonance between the neutrality professed in policy and the tasks (described in neutralised terms) that were undertaken.

Achievements, but not according to objectives

Did the stated objectives guide NGOs? Thousands of people in Sierra Leone and Rwanda received assistance that was believably helpful, but for rights and principles to have guided NGOs, there needs to be a process in evidence, rather than merely an overlap of activity with stated concerns.

Instead, the terminology of rights and principles provided some disjointed technical opportunities, and as the objectives were unattainable, there was no accountability for outcomes. This unaccountability was reinforced by excluding mention of the aptitude of NGOs (and exaggerating their influence), and of the political strength or weakness of government or people in Sierra Leone and Rwanda. By not analysing power, the NGOs' discourse evaded comment on what was politically possible. The relationship between universality of the objectives adopted and responsibility for pursuing them was ignored. This minimised the dissonance between the objectives and the delivery of assistance, as the discourse of impartiality and neutrality was used to credit action and evade responsibility, and not to critique the work of NGOs.

NGOs used terminology that was endorsed by their donors, and mechanisms have been identified by which they rescued the official line. These included informal processes by which some people were overlooked, or labelled 'inaccessible'. More formal processes included introducing categories that denoted (by redefinition) particular groups, using existing terminology to connote the worth of interventions, and the introduction of new objectives (such as peace). NGOs also 'claimed' domains as the concerns of assistance, attributing symbolic importance to their own contribution. This manipulation of the discourse challenges hypothesis (1a) as the stated objectives were moved around or added to, to explain NGO behaviour, rather than guiding it. For the most part, though, in excusing what was not done, NGOs defended the assistance that was given. In the next chapter I will examine how assistance is defended when it is scarce or withdrawn.

4. Congo and southern Sudan

I asked an Action Contre la Faim employee in Freetown why ACF worked predominantly in camps. She replied, “Because that’s where the emergency needs are. We take care of emergency.” NGO interventions in Sierra Leone followed the model of a camp: people came from areas where life was dangerous to safer areas, and some received assistance. In Rwanda, society was reorganised to make one peace more likely than others and, maybe, more likely than war; in both countries NGOs were on the winning side. Congo and Sudan are much larger, and NGOs worked on all sides of the frontline, taking assistance to people, rather than attracting people to assistance. Little consensus existed between aid agencies and governments or militias. Assisting was expensive; there was insufficient infrastructure to support NGOs, and the incidentals – installing satellite dishes, repairing stretches of road, taxi or beer money – had minimal impact, and were rare.

In this chapter I continue my investigation of whether NGOs are guided by their stated objectives. In doing so, I find more (and more extreme) examples of the categorisation, or specification of sector or location, and also find further examples of terminology being added to the discourse. These manipulations differ from most of what has been seen so far in that they defend assistance that is in itself unsatisfactory or non-existent (rather than simply being exclusive), and I explore a related process, by which defending universalist ideology under such circumstances involves shifting responsibility away from NGOs.

Mbaya writes, “Zaire has been spectacularly successful in one field – music. Africa dances to Zairian music, and even though the tone-deaf might sneer at that accomplishment, on balance it is no mean achievement” (Mbaya 1993, 357). The observation does justice to the music, and to defiance. Donors suspended development aid in the early 1990s. The EU cut off aid in 1992, and the OECD measured overall contributions falling from US\$992m in 1990 to US\$192m in 1993. Thereafter everything was described as humanitarian, although there was no war, famine or natural disaster. A Congolese aid worker reflected,

JC: The state of Congo doesn’t exist. So the humanitarian world worked out that the state would not help the people – it wouldn’t help the refugees or pay the salaries. The humanitarian community and the UN agencies preferred to stay here, to continue to help the Congolese population. The humanitarian impact on the population is very important in all areas: education, health, road repairs...food security, assistance to displaced persons, water and sanitation. Until now huge needs remain. There’s only the humanitarian community, and they cannot fulfil all the needs of the population. It is, at all costs, necessary to bring in the participation of the Congolese state for development. Road repairs, construction of schools, payment of salaries of civil servants. The government has to intervene.

Z: Is it possible for the government to intervene at the moment?

JC: It has to, because our country is very rich. We need a responsible government to do that. Because the humanitarian community cannot do it – the country’s very big. The

state should intervene or facilitate the intervention of humanitarian organisations to attend to the needs of the population. The state has to improve the security conditions. If it doesn't, we the humanitarian community cannot get to the population who are hidden in the forests and corners of the country. It has to improve the roads. That's the most important.

Z: But how can it do so?

JC: That's why I said there's no state.

Z: So how can it do it, if there's no state?

JC: It's a wish. The country should be united, and the government should be responsible.¹²⁷

De Waal similarly argues that, "Famine in Africa can be defeated by Africans and only by Africans" (de Waal 1997, 214). The dual implications – that the government should be responsible, and that assistance cannot defeat famine – is a concise demolition of NGOs' professed rationale. At the same time there is no guarantee that governments, or any one else, will be responsible.

Congo and Sudan are two cases in point; President Mobutu's national and international standing depreciated through the 1990s (de Villers 1995; Mukendi and Kasonga 1997; Malu-Malu 2002). The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), suffered a setback with the fall of Colonel Mengistu in Ethiopia in 1991, split, and fell to factional fighting. Vulnerability and famine followed in 1992, and the SPLA led no major anti-government offensives again until 1995. Violence intensified in both countries in the second half of the decade.

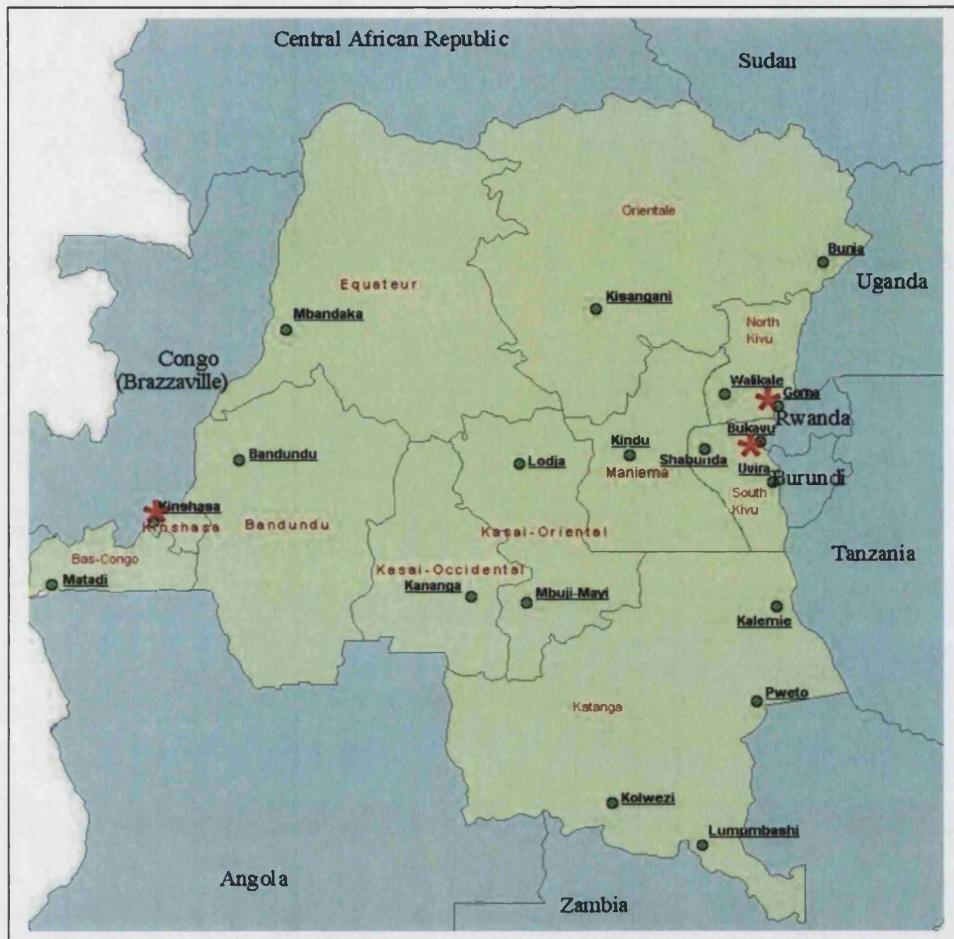
Congo

Eastern Congo saw violence through the 1990s, increasing from 1994 with the arrival of two million Rwandans, including the Interahamwe (Adisa 1996, 63-74; Malengana 2001). Through 1996, Tutsis in North Kivu whose citizenship had been revoked by Mobutu in 1981, and other Tutsi groups in South Kivu were increasingly harassed by the government or the exiled Rwandan militias. The Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) recruited and trained fighters in Congo, allying – uncomfortably – the Tutsi 'Banyamulenge' (whose identities and interests varied) with some Maïmaï militias under the standard of Laurent Kabila's Alliance des forces démocratiques de libération du Congo (AFDL) (Pottier 2002). War broke out in October 1996, the first attacks emanating from regions that historically had turbulent relations with Kinshasa (Reed 1998). Camps sheltering the Rwandans were violently dismantled by the RPA, and in December the AFDL took Goma, with Kabila declaring 1000 square miles liberated.

War chased westwards: Kisangani was taken in March 1997, then Mbuji-Mayi, and Lubumbashi in April. The march across the country ended on 17th May when RPA troops entered Kinshasa (Mobutu had left twenty-four hours earlier). The AFDL took control of the

¹²⁷ 07/05/01, Goma.

city, and Kabila arrived from Lubumbashi; eight months of fighting had killed 50-150,000 people, although the capital fell after a quick battle around the airport.



Map of Congo

After Kabila had ruled for a year, his spending restrictions to the army in the east fomented rebellion. Kagame and Museveni, disillusioned by Kabila's failure to prevent the Interahamwe and ex-Rwandan Armed Forces – renamed L'Armée de libération du Rwanda (ALiR) – from making cross-border attacks, supported the Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie (Rcd) against him. In August 1998, war broke out again and the RPA besieged Kinshasa for three weeks, failing to take the city. Kabila was saved by the intervention of the Angolan army, which had longstanding interest in Congo, and Namibia, Zimbabwe and Chad also lent some troops. Nzongola-Ntalaja calculated: "For the Congolese democracy movement, the resulting political situation called for fighting on two fronts, with a double strategy of resistance against external aggression and new forms of dictatorship by the Kabila regime" (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 241).

The Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo (MLC) was formed in Uganda in November 1998, demonstrating lack of support for the Rwandan-backed Rcd, and headed by Jean-Pierre Bemba. By the end of 1998, a third of Congo was no longer under government control. In April 1999, Muammar Gaddafi brokered a peace between Kabila and Museveni, which was also signed by

the presidents of Chad and Eritrea (Rwanda and Rcd did not sign). Chad withdrew its forces; Zimbabwe sent 3000 troops and Angola and Namibia remained. On 10th July a Ceasefire was signed in Lusaka by the heads of states of Congo, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe, and the defence minister of Angola. MLC signed on 1st August, and on 31st August, fifty members of Rcd signed, betraying disunity within the movement.

The Lusaka Peace Accords were not implemented – they made allowance for free movement of people, humanitarian goods and essential papers – and achieved only a stalemate. They did not include the Maïmaï, ALiR or the Burundian Forces for the Defence of Democracy (FDD). The UN was assigned two roles: to monitor hostilities and facilitate aid deliveries, and to disarm the ‘negative forces’, meaning those not part of the agreement. The UN sent ninety military observers in September, and in November authorised 500 to form the Mission de l’Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo (Monuc). Disarmament was to take 120 days, and troop withdrawal 180 days.

In practical terms, Kabila ruled Kinshasa, and six other cities (ICG 2000, 47), and fighting continued in the east. The Kampala disengagement plan was signed in April 2000, which was more generally observed than Lusaka, although the Maïmaï, ALiR, and the FDD were again excluded. July and August saw the brokering of a Peace Agreement in Arusha, signed by nineteen parties and facilitated by Nelson Mandela. It did not include a ceasefire, and ushered more war. In August the government suspended the Lusaka Agreement, and authorised Monuc deployment.

Meanwhile, the occupying armies of Rwanda and Uganda clashed in Kisangani in August 1999, and again in May 2000; in Tanzania, Museveni and Kagame agreed to demilitarise Kisangani. The third round of fighting took place 5-11th June, when the government reported 1000 soldiers and 5000 civilians injured (Ministère de la Santé 2001b, 8). A ceasefire was signed on 8th June, and not observed. The same month, UN Security Council Resolution 1304 named Rwanda and Uganda as aggressors, condemned the fighting in Kisangani, and called for troop withdrawal.

On 26th January 2001, Joseph Kabila became president of Congo and supreme commander of the armed forces following his father’s assassination. The dormant National Committee for Disaster Management was reawakened in February. It comprised sectoral ministers, UN bodies, the ICRC and NGOs, a cooperation attesting to an ameliorated rapport between the government and aid organisations. Assessments took place across the country, four out of twelve in opposition-held territory, marking some reassertion of sovereignty. Additionally, Joseph Kabila accepted Sir Ketumile Masire as mediator for the Inter-Congolese Dialogue.

Kinshasa

Over the 1990s, as the population drifted towards Kinshasa, the capital drifted into the surrounding areas. The city was neglected and siphoned for decades, then pillaged in 1991 and 1993. 1996 saw a third pillage, by Mobutu's army, and there were lesser pillages in 1997 and 1998. Mobutu advised, "debrouillez-vous," (fend for yourself); charges against him were of supreme predation, incompetence and terror.



Comedian rails the "Ministry of Useless Affairs"



Kinshasa was the base for NGOs in government-held Congo, and I identify two contrary-motion processes of specification. The first specifies the sector – health – and professes a national scope; the second specifies a city – Kinshasa – and attends to different sectors within it. Whilst these are essentially extensions of the categorisation already discussed, NGOs did not fulfil even the delimited remit, although the rights and principles terminology served to decontextualise events.

Health and disarray

A Ministry of Health official reported that, of the 307 health zones, sixty-seven could be described as somewhat 'functional', the majority in government territory and many managed by NGOs.¹²⁸ Congo had outbreaks of Ebola and Marburg fever; trypanosomiasis, of which there had been a few thousand cases forty years previously, was estimated to have risen to 100,000 (WHO 2001, 5). Malaria was responsible for 52.4% of recorded deaths, and 18.5 million people had no access to health care (Oxfam, SC-UK et al. 2001, 20).

Health sector interventions had a history in Congo. The Coopération Internationale, a Belgian-led donor initiative, supported the health system from independence; it suspended funding in 1990 and infrastructure went into decline. MSF published photographs (MSF 2000c) and testimonies, "to try, once again, to stir the international community from its lethargy" (MSF 2002, 3. Translated from French). Alain Kassa, heading MSF-Belgium in Kinshasa, held,

¹²⁸ 16/06/01, Kinshasa.

It was working very well for thirty years. Congo had the best health system in Africa. They asked Mobutu to promote democracy here, but he didn't want to...The students of Lubumbashi were killed; the Belgians withdrew funding, then the others. The funders have stayed in specific domains. If an NGO wants to work with sleeping sickness, that's supported by the Belgian government, AIDS by the US government. It's been compartmentalised and the government here does not really have much say in what happens, it's pretty much what the donors want.¹²⁹

In 1995, MSF created an 'Emergency Pool' for targeting epidemics, with antennae in Kinshasa, Mbandaka, Lubumbashi, and Kisangani. By 2000 they were working in nineteen districts in government-held areas, and eighteen in the east. MSF-Belgium supported fifteen reference hospitals and ninety-nine health centres in Katanga, Bas-Congo, Equateur and Kinshasa (MSF 2000a). Kassa continued,

Things went bad in the health service after the end of the Coopération. It was an error not to have questioned the decision to withdraw. The goal of the project was to develop a sustainable health service, so that they could just leave it and it would carry on by itself. It was a big error to think that they could find any kind of autonomy...When they leave, it's like MSF was never there.

Even after the end of the Coopération Internationale, donors funded some assistance in the health sector, on a smaller scale. Based in Kinshasa, the first phase of the EU's Project d'Appui Transitoire à la Santé (PATS I) ran from 1994 to 1997 and led to PATS II from 1997-2004.

PATS partnered twenty-one European NGOs, many of which arrived specifically to work on the programme. It recognised the chronic emergency, reporting, "The funders work more and more with NGOs, sometimes for political reasons, often also for reasons of efficiency and to impact on the population more directly" (PATS 1997, 14. Translated from French). Coverage was Kinshasa and its environs, parts of the Kasais, and some of Kivu, and so was far from comprehensive. PATS shut down in Kivu in 1998, and worked in Mbandudu.

Health could be taken out of political context and provided specificity for NGOs. A CRS worker commented,

For the US government and EU, there's less willingness to block health programmes due to political concerns, and they coincide with multilateral concerns like the eradication of disease. Food security is limited to Congo, but epidemics have implications for others. Funding follows the perception of some kind of threat, and there's much more concern about things if the problems can be exported, and health has that character in Congo.¹³⁰

Additionally, there were financial advantages for NGOs. The over-valued fixed exchange rate made it more attractive to import medicines than to buy non-specialist supplies, such as food or building materials. There was further specification made as, for the same reason, a focus on epidemics was more attractive than a general response.

¹²⁹ 22/05/01, Kinshasa.

¹³⁰ 23/05/01, Kinshasa.

Despite the optimism of official discourse, Congo's disaster could not be tackled by a small number of NGOs tending to epidemics. Kassa gauged, "we've been working here for fifteen years; it's no better and it's getting worse,"¹³¹ but this did not lead to alterations in the approach. He acknowledged,

The constraints are: logistical, the war, the economic crisis – the population has no money, the civil servants are not paid, and the state has no money. During the war people prefer to buy guns to medicines. It's more important for them – until they get an epidemic in the army.

From April to June 1998 the Ministry of Public Health undertook a survey, finding that maternal death rates were 1837/100,000 live births (three times higher than the average for Africa (WHO 2001, 3)), and child mortality at 127/100,000. Nearly 10% of children were born under 2.5kg, and national severe malnutrition rate for under-fives was 10.6%. The report also recorded a dearth of medical staff and equipment (Ministère de la Santé 1999, 451). Jean Bosco Mofiling of OCHA explained:

Health centres have been pillaged over the years, all the materials are unoperational, there's no stock, and the personnel is not paid. Other personnel have been hit by diseases themselves. Even in Kinshasa, where there has been no war...the needs remain enormous. I don't know if it's a question of logistics. We need aid, bilateral aid and personnel employed in good working conditions – need to pay the school fees for the children of the personnel, that way you protect the medical stock...some NGOs do work with contributions, there was a good experience with one NGO in the east which was giving medicines for free. Here there are no medicines, even if you pay.¹³²

His analysis included political processes, not just epidemics and broken hospitals. Like others, Mofiling saw significance in the change of leadership from Laurent Kabilà to his son, saying,

We need structural cooperation – medical, food. There are families who don't eat every two weeks. There are lots of children with malnutrition. It's not a question of donors – sometimes you have to motivate donors. In 2000 it didn't work here, but you have to say *why* there's no access. They can't give you money, so you can't go there. You have to prioritise how to break that constraint. In the last five months things have happened very quickly. There are lots of people who think it's now or never for action.¹³³

The Ministry of Health estimated the health costs of the war at US\$732,283,298,497 (Ministère de la Santé 2001a, 11). PATS spent €1.32m in 1999; in December 2000 it announced €2.5m of new contracts. WHO saluted the aim with, "Despite good intentions, up to 70% of the population is now excluded from accessing basic health services" (WHO 2001, 1).

The impression of vertical health system (or epidemic response) was maintained by the official claims made by aid organisations, not by events in Congo, and NGO staff unofficially accepted the ineffectuality of assistance. In Kinshasa, horizontal operations were also in difficulty. SC-

¹³¹ 22/05/01, Kinshasa.

¹³² 08/06/01, Kinshasa.

¹³³ 08/06/01, Kinshasa.

UK interviewed a hundred mothers of children admitted to therapeutic feeding centres in the city in February and March 2001, finding 25% were from 'chronically food-insecure' homes. The proviso: "feeding centre coverage seems to be very low and therefore does not provide a representative sample of malnourished children" (SC-UK 2001). An OCHA survey found that the majority of the population in Kinshasa was living on 20 US cents per day (WHO 2001, 5). Again, selecting particular facets for response produced inert interventions.

As in other countries, assistance discourse established areas in which NGOs might operate, and in 2001, around 40% of people in Kinshasa did not have access to potable water (World Bank 2002, 14). NGOs dug some wells, and one evaluation found:

After 1 year the Executive Water Committee find the mentality of the population very difficult. No participation of the beneficiaries at the reunions [meetings]. Absenteeism of several members of the different committees...Difficulties have also arisen, as the population does not fully want to pay for water. This is due to the fact that in the original contract written in Lingala and set between Oxfam and the Executive Water Committee it was stated that Oxfam would give 'free water.' (Patrick, Kateba et al. 2001, 23)

A Congolese staff member reported, "It's not evident that they pay – there are problems with paying: in November it was 30F, now it's 100F. If it was stable, they would pay." We visited some pumps: one was not finished. The other two were closed for lunch, and people were carrying water from the river. I asked the water committee treasurer why; "Because the pump needs to rest," Why does it need to rest? "So it stays in good condition." Water provision was authorised by rights terminology, but digging a well had not addressed the politics of people's lack of access to water, and the outcome was that they did not find the intervention useful.

Road to Kisenso

A similar process dictated school rehabilitation which, in some sense, concerned the right to education. The assistance could still be legitimised in official discourse, but the reality of the intervention was (at most) tangential to the stated



objective. According to a 1997 study of spending on educational materials, the returns on instructional materials is up to fourteen times higher than returns on physical facilities (Filmer and Pritchett 1997) "but donors continue to favour more observable buildings over less observable textbooks" (Easterley 2003, 8).

In Kisenso, a suburb of Kinshasa, I visited two schools rehabilitated by Oxfam, five minutes walk apart. Each had several hundred children enrolled but, according to a teacher, half had dropped out; few of the remaining half were in evidence. Reporting on the progress of the rehabilitation, the teacher said that most of the painting had been finished within five months. “We are going to have two doors and that’s the only problem. We have the latrines, but we haven’t got round to using them yet. The pump is OK, but it’s not been painted yet.” None of this related to the drop-out rate, which was due chiefly to parents’ inability to pay fees. We explored the book cupboard, finding two Swiss dentists, a reclining seat, flood light, fan and drill. I was told,

T: There’s a difficulty with books.

Z: Do you have any books?

T: No books, no.

Z: Not any?

T: One for the teacher maybe, and one for the assistant, but not for the children.¹³⁴

The disarray of assistance in Kinshasa was related to food, water and basic education, but the projects did not satisfy needs in the way that was apparently intended, and dotted assistance did not respond to the processes of destitution. Meanwhile, frail monitoring and capacity of the health interventions that were managed from Kinshasa meant that, whilst NGOs performed actions that suggested a coordinated response, nothing systematic was alighted upon or achieved. The specificity of diagnosis presented what appeared to be a total solution – a universalist approach to trypanosomiasis, for instance. On closer inspection it can be seen to be symbolic, and responses to epidemics were belittled by deaths from displacement, malaria and malnutrition, not for what they achieved (if they did), but for what they passed on the way.

Goma

Goma borders Lake Kivu had sheltered millions of people running from Rwanda after the genocide. In 2002 it was covered by the volcanic eruption of Mount Nyiragongo. A Merlin nurse had been in Sierra Leone in 1997, and compared the environments:

Everything’s so much worse here. In Sierra Leone there were trained staff, so things didn’t take so long, donors let NGOs pay incentives, here you can’t get funding for it. We do cost sharing – we give the drugs that they sell, in a sense to be sustainable, which is the belief which I don’t believe. If people didn’t have to pay for treatment we would be inundated. At the moment in Sierra Leone there are two consultations per person per year, which is normal for vulnerable population; here it’s 0.4...I’ve got no hair left and just feel totally out of control.¹³⁵

Eastern Congo was not under government control. NGOs lobbied donors for more funds and targeted meagre assistance, both of which involved shifting responsibility for the universalist claims. In the case of lobbying, NGOs invoked the responsibility of donors. Targeting involved

¹³⁴ 24/05/01, Kisenso.

¹³⁵ 08/05/01, Goma.

transferring ‘responsibility’ onto the small assistance itself, assuming that it could impact disproportionately.

Lobbying

Goma is the headquarter town of North Kivu. Oxfam and MSF worked there in the early 1990s, and with the Rwandan influx in 1994 the town was flooded with NGOs. Development projects were surrendered to the emergency agenda, but from 1995 many NGOs left for ethical, political or financial reasons (as noted in Chapter 1). Following the RPA’s destruction of the camps in eastern Congo at the end of 1996, MSF recorded a crude mortality rate of 60.7/10,000 among the Rwandan fugitives in Congo. Oxfam estimated that this rose to 300/10,000 for a few days, and detected the “demonisation of the ‘undeserving’ disaster victim” (Stockton 1998, 354), as a means of justifying withdrawal. UN and NGO staff evacuated from Goma.

Most NGOs did not operate at strength until after Kabila’s victory in Kinshasa in May 1997. On their return, some – for example SC-UK, who traced 20,000 Rwandan children in 1997-8, and CRS – attended to the old disaster. The new disaster was emerging, which included donor disinterest. Smaller, emergency NGOs, including Merlin and ACF, arrived in 1997, and larger agencies, such as World Vision and GTZ, attempted to resuscitate some long-term work. In October, Kabila expelled UNHCR from North Kivu along with refugee-oriented NGOs. UNHCR, held in suspicion by the government for having supported the Interahamwe, did not reopen the office until May 1999.

Following the expulsion of UNHCR, other donors were unwilling to get involved. Agro Action Allemande (AAA) had a seeds programme but no external funding. Concern had arrived in 1994, and from 1998-2000 all money came from its own funds. The project supervisor explained, “these are the caprices of the funders – or they’re scared of spending their money in a country where there’s always a war.” MSF’s funding decisions are made by the organisation, rather than by appeals, and Congo was MSF-Belgium’s biggest budget in 1998 and 1999 (MSF 2000d).

NGOs allocated from core funds, but a report found that from August 1998 to March 2001 “very little humanitarian aid reached populations affected by the war in Katanga, Equateur, and the two Kasai provinces, despite a growing body of information about the level of need” (Oxfam, SC-UK et al. 2001, 13). It recommended that donors “should substantially increase their funding of humanitarian assistance and protection.” Around fifteen NGOs were stationed in Goma, with no signs on the gates to their compounds because of security anxieties. Assistance was predominantly health and food, as non-food items were prone to looting.

There was, in a sense, insufficient funding, but that raised a question: insufficient for what? A Congolese aid worker assessed,

There are two constraints. There's a financial problem and a problem of insecurity. If the problem of insecurity is resolved, we can also solve the financial problem...The mismanagement of Mobutu's regime caused the misery of the population today. The two liberation wars have exacerbated the problem of deprivation in the population. It continues to go down the chute. The international community is *trying*, but it can only *try* to do something. It's a huge task – because of a lack of resources, the needs are enormous.¹³⁶

He credited the intention, but the implication of 'it can only *try*' is that it fails. The weakness of lobbying was that it did not propose a way around the security constraint, and there was deadlock between NGOs, who considered donors to be rigid, and donors, who would not fund NGOs who were not getting anywhere. An AAA employee deliberated,

P: It's all emergency funding, and we have a big problem with that. What Congo needs is post-emergency funding. We're trying to use emergency funding for development. We have contracts of three to six months, and it's difficult to plan rehabilitation of roads with that. This year we have a UN contract of one year, but when we arrived the contracts were all for three to six months, which made planning very difficult.

Z: Why is there only humanitarian funding?

P: Because of the instability of the country.

Z: Does that mean that the funders are right?

P: No, because the proof of the means of working is that we have been here for three years, and never evacuated. I can say that we should have longer contracts with more flexibility. On the development level they are very rigid. With emergency funding you get more flexibility. So that means that emergency work can be more flexible, but planning is more difficult.¹³⁷

In an extroverted display, a set of UN humanitarian principles of engagement was agreed in January 1999. It aimed at "increasing the efficiency and the pertinence of the delivered aid and maximising the humanitarian space for the relief community." It took its 'guiding principle' from the ICRC's *Code of Conduct*: "As members of the international community, we recognise our obligation to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed" (ICRC 1994), and championed impartiality, neutrality, independence, human rights, participation, coordination, transparency and accountability.

An OCHA internal document written in March 2000, on the other hand, disclosed, "Until the beginning of this year resources were so scarce that we were unable to prove to ourselves, our beneficiaries or our donors that efficient work was possible in rebel held Congo...An optimistic estimate of the humanitarian needs being met in rebel-held Congo hovers somewhere under 30%" (Winder 2000, 2). Lobbying turned shortfalls into opportunities. The same year, an IRC report, based on five mortality surveys of 1.2 million people made a "conservative estimate" that,

¹³⁶ 07/05/01, Goma.

¹³⁷ 10/05/01, Goma.

1.7 million excess deaths or more have occurred over the past 22 months as a result of the fighting in eastern DRC. This equates to 77,000 deaths per month and of that, 26,000 (34%) are children younger than five years of age. (IRC 2000, 11)

200,000 deaths were caused by “a man with a weapon”, and many more by disease. National Immunisation Days across the frontlines were disrupted in 1998, 1999 and 2000 (Ministère de la Santé 2001a, 6). IRC reported,

Eastern DRC is an unchecked incubation zone for disease. In the five surveys conducted, both endemic and epidemic illnesses are rampant, with major (suspected to be more than 500 deaths) outbreaks of cholera, shigella and meningitis reported by households. Suspected polio was reported in two of the five areas...The overall mortality rate during the year 2000 is higher than it was in 1999. Thus, none of the collected information indicates that the rates will decline in the foreseeable future. (IRC 2000, 1)

Lobbying donors freed NGOs of the responsibility for what may have been under-performance on their part. It would be an exaggeration to say that the situation in eastern Congo was a result of NGO ineptitude, but it can still be noted that NGOs used the same pieces of information to explain why they were there and why they were not doing what they claimed. By appealing for more funds, they half-excused what had not been achieved, by implicitly blaming it on the funding shortage. In doing so they also evaded judgement about their competence, and consideration of whether another approach altogether might be more appropriate.

Many aid staff viewed the IRC report as a wake-up call to donors. It was widely cited by other NGOs, the UN and the media, and its methodology was more robust than most information-gathering in eastern Congo; but what was it for? The thrust of the NGOs’ message was that donors should take responsibility for funding adequate assistance in Congo. In some ways, it was an obvious tack for NGOs to take, but NGOs were not gaining access, and that was not going to change with more money. Also the disaster was such that even hugely increased assistance would not resolve it, and the lobbying did not change donors’ incentives, which were – broadly – not to get embroiled.

The mortality rate was not reduced either by what NGOs offered, or by lobbying donors to offer more, and many Congolese people adapted to conditions. The director of a national NGO described events around Goma:

F: The situation has changed. There are not many cases of huge population movements, so that has diminished. The people in the village have found that when they are displaced, it’s worse. So they stay in the bush, and then go back to the village. That’s the system: if there’s a little problem they go back to the bush. And there’s no humanitarian aid.

Z: Is that new?

F: You have to look at the amount given. Everyone intervenes. You see that the food that WFP gives is a bit late. After three months WFP will give for one month, CRS for two weeks. People are displaced for one year. For 365 days of displacement they get food for twenty days.

Z: Was there ever sufficient assistance?

F: No, never. What is interesting is the agricultural assistance. They help people to work – the tools are effective, and the seeds are good, but the food is totally insignificant. In December [2000] I came to a camp; I asked if they were getting food. They said yes. I asked them what, and they said beans. There were 10,000 displaced households, multiply that by five to get the number of people. There were 150 tonnes of beans; each family gets 15kg. You're going to eat for two days, maybe three or four. I said they should get hoes; they said, "we need beans." But it's completely insignificant.¹³⁸

A World Vision employee reported that the health zone administration in the Grand Nord found global acute malnutrition at 40.9% during the first three months of 2000 amongst 6-59 month old children, and that in August 2000 SC-UK found 29.5% adema (automatically acute malnutrition) in Lumé using the middle upper arm circumference measure. The following month World Vision found 31.8% in the neighbouring health zone, using the same measurement.¹³⁹

Oxfam was militating: "The international donor community must greatly increase the level of humanitarian aid available to the DRC. This aid should be diversified from merely a focus on food aid, to include human rights, education, and support for primary health" (Oxfam 2000a). The west of Province Orientale became accessible (by boat from Kisangani) as the frontline moved following the peace agreement of July 2000. The initial assessment was " 'zero' availability of medication and no routine immunisation for three years" (WHO 2001, 6). The government reported that in November the number of people displaced reached a new height at two million, second only to Sudan (Ministère de la Santé 2001b, 13). At the end of 2000, ICG catalogued: 125,000 displaced by fighting in Bunia, 60,000 displaced from the Kisangani wars, 120,000 displaced by fighting in Equateur from August to September 2000, over one million displaced in the Kivus, and 150-200,000 displaced by fighting between Congolese and Rwandan-Rcd troops since October (ICG 2000, 67). IRC estimated excess deaths relating to the conflict in eastern Congo at over 2.5 million from the start of the war to April 2001 (IRC 2001).

"No end in sight" assessed an NGO report:

To date, the humanitarian assistance provided by the international community has been totally inadequate when considered alongside the scale of human suffering, and when compared with the efforts made to address humanitarian crises in other regions of the world. (Oxfam, SC-UK et al. 2001, 4)

For swathes of the country few details escaped, but all available data fuelled the NGOs' petitions to the donors (see also: Herp, Parqué et al. 2003). The call was not "we can cope", but "we can't cope", but the implication was the same: "more assistance is needed." Nonetheless, although lobbying may have been psychologically appealing to aid workers, it was

¹³⁸ 09/05/01, Goma.

¹³⁹ 11/05/01, Goma.

contradictory to presume that future assistance could be more successful than that which had been given or stolen in the past. Whilst instability restricted NGOs, the solution of assistance (or more assistance) was actually no solution, and entailed the continued exclusion of the most vulnerable people.

Bukavu

In August 1999, SC-UK opened a child demobilisation centre in Bukavu. Children are soldiers on all sides of the war in Congo, and demobilising them appeals to the fact that they should not be in the army. It does not, though, embrace the fact that eastern Congo is not safe for those inside or outside the military, and fighting and societal devastation had narrowed the distinction between suffering and inflicting violence. As NGOs had few resources, they instituted targeting, a concept that situates small assistance within a larger discourse, by assuming that it can be given to those most in need, and that this will have significant impact. I will look at how targeting favours categories of people and excludes others and how, when the general situation is catastrophic, this undermines even what the resources given to targeted groups achieve.

Targeting

NGOs estimated there were 10,000 child soldiers in Congo (Oxfam, SC-UK et al. 2001, 4). Déo Namira, who worked for SC-UK, assessed,

The whole system was destroyed with the management of Mobutu. There was war, ethnic conflict. For the most part, people were not paid. At least there was an organisation taking decisions...[Now] there's a chief of department in the Province. He can't make a decision without the Rwandan commander at his side. There are many sources of authority, and that plunges the population into confusion...There's a danger that they can't explain, because they'd be seen as a collabo or a resister. They're scared. So if you go to a village and ask what the problems are they'll just look at you, because they know that when you leave, someone else will come.¹⁴⁰

He described recruitment and assistance:

The soldiers say, "give us the kids for the army." [People] have moved five or six times, so they think that maybe they can take up arms and maybe get some money. They have the example of their big brothers – in the forests the great activity is arms. Some of the children are taken by force, others go by themselves. Kids are good tools for adults. Their parents are worn through, the children aren't in school – they can't pay the school fees or the rent and they need assistance from somebody else, so you find the kids on the street. It's a good opportunity for the Maïmaï to grab them. The parents don't want to say no, because they'll be branded collabos with one or other party for not letting the children fight the enemy. There's a danger that children will be recruited, so we're doing advocacy and sensitisation with the Rcd and the Maïmaï. There's a big problem of access, though – the Maïmaï don't rate humanitarians, they say they're not neutral because they work in Rcd camps. The humanitarians try to stay neutral, but the circumstances do everything to make them non-neutral. If you don't have authority to go somewhere here, you can't go over there...Humanitarians put everyone on the same level – we come for the population, not just for the Rcd. We're trying to do sensitisation

¹⁴⁰ Interviews in the centre: 14/05/01, Bukavu.

for the non-recruitment of children with *all* parties, whether in the territory of Rcd or Maïmaï, but the big problem is access and authority for access.

He portrayed a system of violence to which the SC-UK centre did not respond, as targeting assistance to demobilised children made no difference to recruitment. Mukamba was a fifteen-year-old resident at the centre, and I asked him if it was his decision to demobilise. He answered,

M: No, it was the authorities who demobilised me. They said that kids mustn't be soldiers and have to return home.

Z: What did you think about that?

M: I thought that it was true that kids should go home and help their parents and cultivate the land. But there's the Maïmaï who risk catching me, and that's a constraint.

Mobilisation had not been his decision either; he said he did not like any part of military life, "But then the military wasn't my choice – we went at the order of the commander." The children received clothes and some kit from the centre, and theoretically stayed in conditions similar to those back home; the drawback was the condition in which people were living.

Namira explained:

In all the wars that spring up here like mushrooms, the children are the victims. They are always the first victims, then the women, then old people. For over three years, more than 70% of children are not going to school, because families are displaced from village to village, or from their village to the forest, to flee one or other of the fighting groups – the FDD, the Interahamwe or the Maïmaï. There's indescribable movement. These people don't know how or why to flee. They don't know what they've done to deserve it.

His colleague commented, "Children who are in the army or on the street may be stronger or more intelligent than those who have stayed in their families. And they're not weaker or poorer than the handicapped. They've found their own way of surviving."¹⁴¹ Survival was not easy or guaranteed, though, and decisions to fight were taken under duress or determined by abduction. "Kids can't demand much" said Namira, "If you give them a dollar and tell them to go to the front, they're there." I asked one sixteen-year-old if there was anything he liked in the army. "No," he said, "there was nothing I liked. Every day at the front, every day fighting, falling into ambushes, losing people – and the ambushers always left with the loot."

The notion of targeting was applied also to diseases and locations. MSF, for example, were closing down in South Kivu in order to target epidemics; not HIV, though, which was considered "too developmental." A member of staff reported,

From Kisangani to Basoko and Yahuma there's a total absence of everything, no medical facilities. In Yahuma there's not even a clinic building. People are fleeing from fighting and forced recruitment; they're just coming out of the bush. There's a total health care emergency. If there's an epidemic there, a lot of people will die. They can't remember the last vaccination. This is where MSF want to apply their reorientation – want to open up the place, then other NGOs can work with a longer mandate.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ 10/05/01, Goma.

¹⁴² 07/05/01, Goma.

The intention of opening places up included no explanation of how. USAID/OFDA and ECHO were the only significant donors, and Oxfam pulled out of Bukavu for lack of funds and security in 2000. The programme manager explained,

In the east we've resigned ourselves to ECHO funding...But it's not an emergency project and we can't get ECHO funding. ECHO says leave here, go there. In Katanga they say it's no longer an emergency, but that's just funny. We're supposed to be preventing emergencies. Kivu is a very sensitive area. There are acute emergencies and chronic emergencies. There are no camps and no television cameras; it's a chronic emergency.¹⁴³

More than a third of the population had 'critical food needs' and, of the two million displaced, over half had no form of external assistance (Oxfam, SC-UK et al. 2001). HRW reported attacks on villages, murders, rapes and people being buried alive (HRW 2000a). Access was insufficient for assistance to be provided neutrally or to those most in need, but the word 'targeting' avoided implications of selectivity and inadequacy – it sounded astute. The OCHA representative assessed,

It's very difficult to make a difference. There are problems at the level of micro-economy, macro-economy, roads, people have to go to market etc, and it's difficult to do things about that. It's so systematic that it's difficult to be seen to be making a difference. Up to one million people are displaced in the Kivus, and of them 600,000 are accessible, and we're probably not reaching any of those adequately. It's not necessarily a lack of resources. We've not gone there and pushed and pushed and opened places up, and then asked for more money. It's not just a lack of resources, it's lack of will to push...We don't talk to the Rcd opposition groups, and a lot of people are in those areas. We've been *thinking* about it for a year, and more for the last eight months.¹⁴⁴

Targeting reduced the need to 'push,' as its implications of astuteness encouraged illogical interpretations of token interventions. More broadly, applying the word 'targeting' avoided self-critique, by providing a spoken rationale for whatever was delivered.

Projects (and official faith in them) were maintained to some extent, but unofficial versions were commonplace. Another OCHA official recounted,

In 1994 a lot of money came for the refugees – \$300m per year to operate the machine. Afterwards they left, there was a security issue in 1998 with Kabila and the AFDL, that was the second war. The UN withdrew from the east. The funders are a bit tired. There are the Lusaka Accords – maybe with Kabila *fils* things will get better; I don't know. Everyone was there last week for Lusaka, but Kabila was in Tanzania. It was signed, but not by the boss. They have hope with the arrival of Joseph Kabila, and there are some signs, but there's still a lot to do to get to a dynamic of reconciliation. And if that happens, maybe the international community will put in more money.

The opportunity to do something (and call it 'targeting') avoided the question of whether, in terms of impact, doing something was any different from doing nothing. The official continued:

¹⁴³ 09/05/01, Goma

¹⁴⁴ 08/05/01, Goma.

There's a question of impact; there's a problem on the level of impact. If we work on that level, to get enough means to target the population to get them out of vulnerability and also give them the tools to put them in charge, with tools and seeds. To give them the minimum service so that they no longer need humanitarian assistance. If we don't do that then what will happen? A UN agency or NGO, if you give them non-food items, you go back one month later and you don't see any. They will have sold them in the market because that's not their priority. The priority is to eat today, or medicines – they need basic services.¹⁴⁵

On one understanding, everyone was a target, so the target could not be missed, but to help people in a genuine way would have involved more extensive assistance and, in reality, basic services were not available. The demobilisation centre epitomised the temptation, and also the weakness, of targeting one group (or disease, or location) when the normal situation for nearly everyone was disaster. An SC-UK worker said,

We carried out research in Goma and Bukavu to try to find categories of children who are very badly affected and to work with local NGOs for more specific projects. All categories have been badly affected, but they had to choose who to work with... Save the Children is the only international NGO working in child protection, and cannot help them all.¹⁴⁶

There were thirty children (all boys) at the demobilisation centre. His colleague recounted some contradictions in targeting some people, or some aspects of life:

If there's a demobilised soldier who goes back to the village, there's the same reality there that he left. Or if it's a girl who has been raped, does that protect her against another rape? No. When they're in the centre we give them some training that they can use in the village. But if you give some skill, does that protect other children? No. Does it protect against another recruitment? There was a Unicef project in Bukavu of giving a carpentry kit worth \$200 to reintegrated soldiers, but it was adopted during the conflict. There were others who were poor and who see him as something special, so they join the army, so they can get demobilised too.¹⁴⁷

The centre fed children for the month they stayed there, but like other interventions, it could not provide assistance in quantities that impacted on mechanisms for survival. The notion of targeting extended the opportunity for NGOs to decontextualise people or events, and this made assistance less, rather than more, likely to impact positively on the people to whom it was given. Targeting appeared to be connected to universality when lagged by rationalising discourse, but contrariness persisted in that, in more literal terms, targeting was a renunciation of a universalist approach, and in practice assistance was not aimed at the most vulnerable and did not fulfil rights.

NGOs working in eastern Congo shifted – in official parlance – responsibility for universalist objectives either onto the assistance itself, or onto the donors or the 'international community'. This was achieved through the words 'targeting' and 'lobbying', and actions which followed

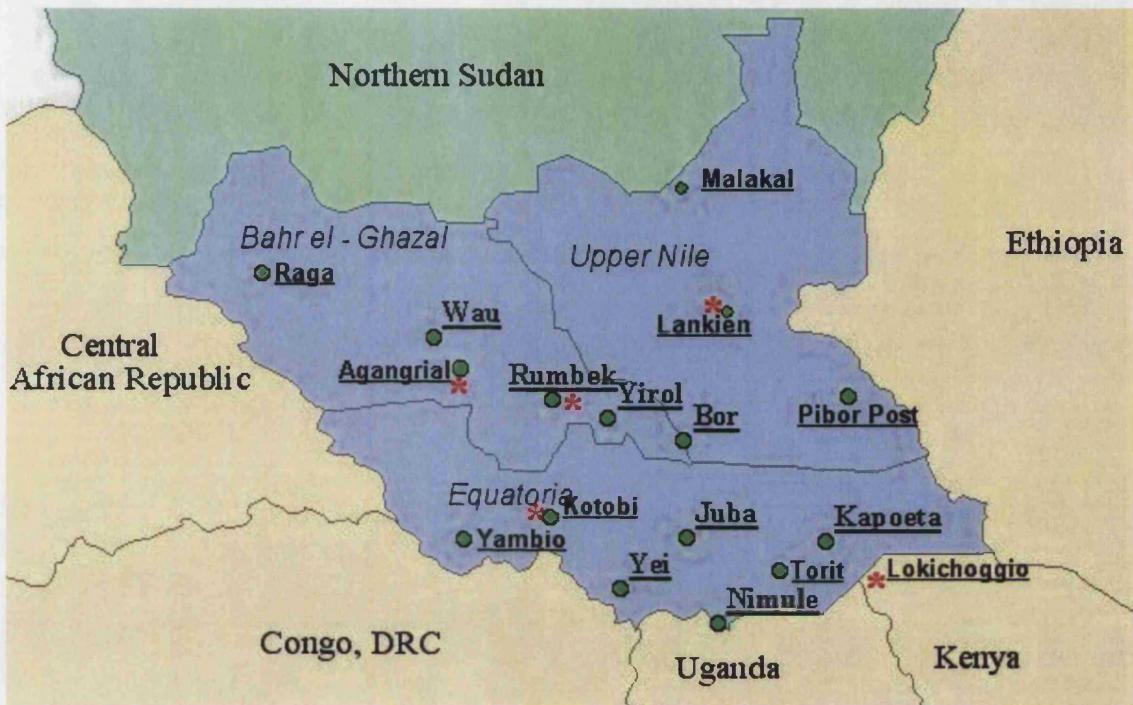
¹⁴⁵ 08/05/01, Goma.

¹⁴⁶ 10/05/01, Goma.

¹⁴⁷ 10/05/01, Goma.

involved mimicry in performing symbolic actions. NGOs could reduce their discomfort caused by cognitive dissonance by reallocating responsibility for outcomes. A suspension of disbelief was required, though, as it was the lack procedure and supporting ‘international community’ that generated the terminology of targeting or lobbying in the first place.

Southern Sudan



Map of southern Sudan

An NGO worker in eastern Congo contended, “For some reason donors don’t want to fund it. Look at South Sudan – it gets money chucked at the place. There are thirty planes flying round there. Here there are two planes.” Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), a UN and NGO consortium, was created after the 1986-9 famine, granting negotiated access agreed between the Government of Sudan (GoS), the SPLA and the UN. OLS delivered assistance “on the basis of four key humanitarian principles – neutrality, transparency, impartiality and accountability” (UN and OLS 1998, 8). On accepting the agreement, the Sudanese Minister of Social Welfare commented, “We have, in effect, conceded sovereignty over a large part of our territory to the United Nations” (Minear 1991, 101); no word about responsibility for famine.

The 1996 review of OLS recorded that, whilst the number of NGOs had increased from six or seven in 1992 to nearly forty, OLS activity had decreased after 1994, and was meeting “about 20% of estimated need” in the south, comparing it to 1992, when “It is claimed that less than 10% of the potentially reachable population was being accessed” (Karim, Duffield et al. 1996, 15-17). 1996 and 1997 handed the SPLA significant victories, and in April 1997 the government signed a Peace Agreement with six southern factions, including the Southern Sudanese Independence Movement headed by Riek Machar. The SPLA considered it a “war

agreement against the SPLA,” claiming that SPLA victories had forced the government, fearing imminent demise, into a ‘southernisation’ of the war (SPLM/A 1997). SPLA gains continued, but the analysis was optimistic, and the recent discovery of enormous oil resources had raised the stakes. The government accepted the Declaration of Principles of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in July, indicating that the Peace Agreement was negligible. In September, Lam Akol of SPLM-United also sided with the government, hoping for oil returns.

At the end of 1997, the government requested ‘rehabilitation’ aid, implying that the war was over. The Annual Needs Assessment warned:

Continuing conflict has so weakened traditional livelihoods that the drought experienced this year and the continued effects of the conflict are likely to result in the same desperate conditions that sparked the formation of OLS in 1989...At this stage, the only way to prevent the onset of the scale of humanitarian disaster that spawned the creation of OLS in 1989 is to increase urgently the levels of relief assistance so that OLS is able to respond rapidly to life-threatening emergencies in southern Sudan. (UN and OLS 1997, 6)

Mario Muor Muor, sometime SPLA/M and NGO worker, mused, “If we are to learn from ten years, it is that nothing was put in place after ten years.”¹⁴⁸ In January 1998, Kerubino Kwanyin Bol, supposedly with the Sudanese Army, defected back to the SPLA and attacked the garrison towns of Wau, Gogrial and Aweil in Bahr el-Ghazal. OLS estimated that 100,000 people were displaced. The government banned all relief flights to Bahr el-Ghazal from 4th February to 31st March, “the small exception to the ban – on February 26, permission to deliver food to four locations in rebel-held areas and two government garrison towns – exacerbated the situation by creating ‘aid magnets’, causing migration” (Rone 1999, 3-4). Four years of poor rain left people with little food, who then had to share it.

The Task Force investigating the events found that “chronic under funding that OLS has suffered since 1995” was a cause of famine, continuing:

All OLS agencies were late in their capacity to respond to the rapidly deteriorating situation. The reasons include: the lack of contingency planning by OLS for the region of [Bahr el-Ghazal]; and that OLS underestimated the total number of people in need because it relied on its own limited assessment and distribution coverage to make projections. (SPLM, SRRA et al. 1998, 3)

In April 1998, fifty airstrips were open in Bahr el-Ghazal. WFP estimated that 350,000 people were in danger of starvation, and 2.5 million were going hungry; NGOs established feeding centres. One assessment recorded, “There was a lot of confusion for all aid workers on ground during this period (May-June) as they watched the nutritional status of the population deteriorate rapidly as none of the agencies was prepared for an emergency of this magnitude”

¹⁴⁸ 18/10/01, Nairobi.

(Arara and Waithanji 1999), although it had been predicted at least six months earlier. SC-UK reported that more than half of the children in Bahr el-Ghazal were malnourished. Unicef recorded, “In early July, the death rate in Ajiep was 18 people for every 10,000; ten days later, the rate quadrupled to nearly 70 per 10,000. The rate among children under five years went from 32 per 10,000 to 133 per 10,000” (Unicef 1999a, 14).

A three-month ceasefire, covering Bahr el-Ghazal and Upper Nile, and including three corridors of security, was agreed by the government and the SPLA in July. By August, WFP was delivering 15,000 tonnes/month, and continued until the end of October at costs estimated between US\$1m and US\$1.6m/day. The SPLA/M taxed relief, and looting was widespread. Oxfam, SC-UK and CARE petitioned UN Security Council representatives for the UN to appoint a Special Representative for the Sudanese conflict. The UN’s reply was that it supported the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) talks, which were stationary.

The International Crisis Group estimates that 60,000 people starved in the 1998 famine (ICG 2002). HRW’s “No one knows how many people have died in Sudan’s most recent famine or how many remain at risk” (Rone 1999) is as informative, although they previously estimated 60,000 in Bahr el-Ghazal alone (HRW 1999a). The Task Force investigating the famine made four criticisms of OLS, but “by the time OLS and SRRA [Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association, the SPLA/M’s humanitarian wing] made an announcement on 9 September on the measures to be taken following the Task Force report, all the critique of OLS had been swept under the carpet” (Harragin and Chol 1998, 68). Donors were initially censured for their “slow and inadequate” response (OLS 1998, 10), but by 1999, Unicef/OLS said, “Thank you. On behalf of the women and children of southern Sudan,” to a list of donors including themselves (Unicef 1999a). The first meeting of the Technical Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (TCHA) took place in August 1998, leading to the Rome Communiqué in November, in which the warring parties “reaffirmed the basic humanitarian principles.” It also granted a Security Protocol for OLS staff, and an agreement on Minimal Operational Standards.

OLS gauged that 500,000 to 700,000 people would be in need of emergency assistance in 2000 (Unicef and OLS 1999, 8). They were eclipsed by the Memorandum of Understanding, presented by the SPLM to NGOs working in areas under its control.¹⁴⁹ The OLS monthly report of January 2000 announced, “no agreement had been reached regarding a version acceptable to both parties and to donors” (OLS 2000, 1). The report also detailed seventeen locations flight-denied by the government including “all rebel held areas in eastern Equatoria...[and] all locations south of the Kapoeta, Juba and Yei” (OLS 2000, 2). Despite the flight restrictions, the

¹⁴⁹ This is discussed in Chapter 5.

same page applauded, “A landmark beneficiary protocol” signed by the Government and the SPLM at the TCHA meeting in Geneva. The Beneficiary Protocol included the right to humanitarian assistance, unimpeded access for UN accredited humanitarian agencies, and the right to physical and legal protection according to International Humanitarian Law. The parties guaranteed that humanitarian assistance should be distributed only to civilians and not taxed or diverted.

Operation Lifeline Sudan is a name that captures optimism and desperation – the last hope. That hope is faint; accounts of assistance from expatriate aid workers and Sudanese people bear little resemblance to each other, but near-constant elements are frustration or anger. In what follows, I examine how NGOs’ discourse contorts to produce imperatives of sustainability that are contradictory to the stated objectives of principles and rights.

Kotobi

A Sudanese man in Nairobi told me, “the costs are mismanagement, wrong planning and relief relief. You will not see a trace.” In August 1996, a government helicopter gunship strafed the centre of Kotobi. The government was a distant, anti-development force, but occasional bombing did not explain destitution. Fighting had also claimed thousands of lives and caused displacement, especially before the 1999 Wunlit Peace Agreement between Nuers and Dinkas, the two largest southern groups.

Sustainability

Kotobi is in Mundri County, Western Equatoria; it was not in the heat of the war, and the town was well-supplied by NGOs, compared to elsewhere in southern Sudan. NGO projects included four grinding mills (one still functional), a clinic, school support, food security and guinea worm eradication. In 1998, some NGOs produced a record of ‘Baseline Data’, apparently to direct assistance. It opened:

Mundri county like any other part of South Sudan harnesses a collapsed economy. No currency for trade and exchange (where found the currency is inadequate). The mode of trade exchange is barter and some vestiges of cash. Although there exists some vestiges of cooperative movement efforts. The cooperatives although existing on paper and a bit of activities goin’ on, the capacity to operationalise is lacking. (Oxfam, MRDA et al. 1998)

Kotobi’s clinic was built in 1994 by MSF, which moved north in 1998 to famine-affected areas. Under a Sudanese NGO, the clinic lurched through funding and management turbulence, and the buildings, made of mud, were not maintained. The nurse showed me round: a couple of babies with malaria, a grandmother bitten by a dog, a boy with epilepsy and an old man coughing. The nurse explained that ‘helpless elderlies’ were treated for free. The doctor, whom I interviewed but who was not at the clinic, added: “Soldiers don’t have salaries, and because of them we’re now living in peace. So this is our contribution to the war. We fight indirectly.” For

the rest, treatment cost Sudanese £100, equivalent to around 1p, were the Sudanese pound legal tender (which it was not). The doctor explained,

We're trying to introduce the policy of self-dependency and sustainability. There are pilot projects in this county and Tonj county. The price will be set by the health secretariat of the SPLM. It's cost-sharing, and with this money you are getting every time better drugs.¹⁵⁰

The economics were unviable. Calculations, pitting rights against costs, were also made about education; OLS started its education programme in 1993. A Unicef study priced primary education at US\$26.25 per child (not including transport costs), revealing, "Only 31 percent...of the estimated 1.06 million school age children are enrolled in schools" with an implied shortfall of over US\$19m for the children not enrolled. The report acknowledged, "There is little to no public revenue allocated directly to schools by National, Regional and/or County administrations" and, listing twenty-four UN, international and Sudanese NGO contributors, recommended against paying teachers' salaries (Schwartz, Schlüter et al. 2000, 28). Kotobi's school was run by nine teachers, and officially International Aid Sweden provided stationery, exercise books and chalk. The acting head teacher reported, "IAS said that it would support for six months in a year. But this was verbally, but it just died. This was last year, but it does not materialise."¹⁵¹

Similar support was given by seventeen NGOs to the Carter Center's guinea worm programme. Guinea worms are not dangerous, but are outlandish and appear susceptible to eradication. According to OLS, 70% of cases were in Bahr el-Ghazal (Nwachukwu 2000, 11); the Field Officer reported that there were none in Kotobi, where the compound was maintained. He explained,

In 1995 we were doing the 'accelerated guinea worm eradication' but it doesn't work. There was a ceasefire declared, then people were relaxed and now it's going slowly-slowly. Now we've changed tactics and the focus areas are Lakes and Western Equatoria. They put a lot of resources and there was little impact. NGOs have a high turnover. You work with an NGO, tomorrow it's not there, so now they are targeting one area, they do the work properly and then move on to another.

He showed me his books filled with empty boxes. Most partner NGOs had not submitted findings, suggesting that, actually, they were not doing their work properly, or leastways there was no indication that they were.

Veterinary drugs had also run their course; the health of the economy of southern Sudan depended on the health of the cattle (see: Hutchinson 1996). Partial cost recovery had been trialled from 1995 and, from September 1999, OLS introduced 100% 'cost recovery'. The annual meeting in Lokichoggio in November 2000 increased the prices to 165% of the cost of

¹⁵⁰ 07/11/01, Kotobi.

¹⁵¹ 07/11/01, Kotobi.

the drugs as of April 2001, passing transport costs together with drug prices to the southern Sudanese. Oxfam, running Kotobi's veterinary programme, established 'Kogo' as an organisation to hand over to. A woman on Kogo's executive recalled,

Before Oxfam there were no vets. In the 1980s the government of Khartoum was providing drugs, but when the SPLA took these places it's under the administration of SPLA. So the government of Khartoum is not able to provide drugs. So it's now emergency. Oxfam came in to help as emergency.¹⁵²

Oxfam was moving out, so Kogo was to import drugs from Uganda and sell them in the market, as explained in a workshop held round a flip-chart easel, graffitied with, "you can't punish a fish by throwing it back into the river," which might have been a comment on NGO withdrawal. One participant observed,

We are now falling under the OLS policy and they are still guiding us in pricing. Then in the future we can get drug companies and maybe they will be able to sell the drugs cheaper. Then there will be higher demand from the community. So the animals will improve because we get more drugs for treatment. We're not sure.¹⁵³

It was not certain. Another added,

What we're doing now, Oxfam is making decisions. The ones when Oxfam brought us – because the prices were fixed by OLS – the drugs were waiting to be expired. Nobody was making decisions. Now we [will] purchase from Kampala, we will put prices, and when we see there's no market we have to make decisions to reduce the prices or give credit to cattle owners, or any way not to lose the whole price. At the moment there's one meeting per year in Loki when prices are fixed, and they cannot be changed whatever, if there's disease or drought.

Oxfam was to support transport for veterinary workers during 'transition', leading to discussion on past performance: often transport was not available, or was late, and people coming to meetings got bored and went home. There was still a chance of funding, but debate over how much resulted in Oxfam and Kogo staff thinking each other corrupt. The quest for sustainability was disconnected from investigation into economics, or its disentanglement from politics. It related to insufficient donor support, so Kogo (like the rest of southern Sudan) had no means of appeal and nobody to appeal to. The Oxfam veterinary officer knew the contradictions of 'sustainability' but glossed them with aspirations,

There's a problem for selling because there's no money, and marketing information is not fully known. We as Oxfam have started specially where food surplus is, where deficits are, and where to find buyers. We're in the process of linking producers with buyers and consumers. There's a problem of transport – we're looking at storage facilities and keeping things in one place. The infrastructure, roads, is still a hindrance. With rural marketing and trade we want to see economic activities increased, we want to see money reaching the hand of all, especially the marginalised. We want to identify and support traders in initiatives, and will be able to reach the needy. The plan is going to materialise in this financial year.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² 13/11/01, Kotobi.

¹⁵³ 12/11/01, Kotobi.

¹⁵⁴ 14/11/01, Kotobi.

The process was called privatisation, disguising the fact that services were not originating in the state sector, not going to the private sector and could not make a profit. Reference to the ‘financial year’ demonstrated that sustainability was not designed by, or for, people in Kotobi. It did not merely trump the NGOs’ avowed rights and principles (which ceased to feature as concerns), it established an opposite imperative and, in doing so, an official version of why the objectives were not fulfilled.

Agangrial

Agangrial is in Lakes, southern Bahr el-Ghazal. A Diakonie coordinator told me, “We feel that we have to have an exit strategy. It’s time that people realise that they have to be part and parcel of the system. If you dish out money freely, people don’t appreciate it.” She continued, “Getting people out of dependency is an issue. Someone will get up in the morning and the sun is up, and basically bask in the sun.”¹⁵⁵ Oxfam’s programme officer summarised, “We’re looking at sustainability, which has been missing from our programmes in the past. We’re focusing on sustainability and exit strategies. Where do we end and how do we end, in case we don’t have funding?”¹⁵⁶

More sustainability

During the famine in 1998, flight restrictions cracked NGOs’ faith in the mooted neutrality and impartiality of OLS. Some left the consortium in order to get access. The Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA) representative commented,

We’re a humanitarian organisation. It’s not possible to be neutral in this context. It’s like South Africa. If there’s need in south Sudan, we cannot wait for Khartoum to say we can go to places...It’s a political statement, saying we have taken a political stand and are expressing solidarity with the SPLA and the people of South Sudan.¹⁵⁷

By 1999, there were thirty-eight agencies working inside OLS, and seventeen outside the consortium. At the donor meeting the *NGO Program and Project Plan 1999* was presented, alongside the observation that, “For the first time it is possible to know what NGOs plan to invest in south Sudan.” 80% of the budgeted US\$85.6m was funded (UN and OLS 1999, 6). In August 1999, WFP introduced Targeted Aircraft Funding; membership of OLS became less attractive, and spiralling costs led to NGO belt-tightening on projects. NGOs collated their project plans for 2000: US\$93.1m, of which 40% was funded by end-February 2000. It showed 27.6% (US\$25.9m) of money was spent on health, 20.4% on household food security, 17.1% on relief food, 13.1% on water. 23.1% was spent in Lokichoggio and Nairobi.

¹⁵⁵ 06/12/01, Rumbek.

¹⁵⁶ Workshop 31/11/01, Mayath.

¹⁵⁷ 23/10/01, Nairobi.

The cattle economy was shattered by famine and fighting. A WFP and SC-UK Food Economy Analysis estimated that the number of cattle in northern Bahr el-Ghazal had been reduced by 45% in four years, leaving 50-60% of the population with “no direct access to milking cows compared to just 20% having none in 1995” (WFP and SC-UK 2000, 25). An Oxfam report listed the constraints encountered by its veterinary programme: “Attitude of helplessness (aid dependency), Lack of community participation, Manipulation of interventions and dis-dialogue.” These resulted in: lack of sustainability, disempowerment, lack of transparency and rejection of the services. The document evaluates, “The programme has almost no impact...They prefer selling drugs in the markets and make demands for remuneration” (Waithanji 1999, 16).

As OLS increased the prices for veterinary drugs, one evaluation noted a “general out cry from livestock owners and community leaders.” It went on to an ‘Examination of Social and Cultural Considerations’ of cost recovery:

Those without cattle are considered poor people. The more the cattle one has the higher the social status. Cattle are used to pay the high bride price. The evaluation mission was informed that the Dinkas pay as many as 100 cattle for one wife! Dinkas are polygamists. (Were and Odero 2001, 21)

There were no immediate implications for cost recovery, and the examination lacked depth. The SRRA vet coordinator for Rumbek recalled:

In April 2000, Oxfam cut the budget by half...The explanation was that the donors have not yet handed over anything, and secondly that they are phasing out, so there's no need to be full-time. So they had to halve it so that we remain and be sustainable on our own. They want to encourage us to be self-sustainable.¹⁵⁸

He had no idea how. He reported that antibiotics had risen from Sd£1000 in 1999 to Sd£4800, decrying, “They are essential drugs; we're now in hot soup because we are accused of having cheated people.” The lack of internationally recognised currency in some places, or presence of seven in others, and no banks made accounting hazardous. “The reasons [for the price hike] are very clear,” continued the coordinator, “Oxfam says, ‘we have spent many years assisting you, so what we want is for you to be self-reliant.’ So in the office we must be sustainability. I have been asking if Oxfam is going away, can it really raise the prices and then leave?” Those selling drugs pretended to run a business, whilst NGOs played at cost recovery. An evaluation found,

The money currently collected...is used to pay the animal health workers' salaries, and on agreed upon community development projects. In future this money should be a revolving fund for the purchase of drugs as well. It is the intention of the project that these services be privatized in the near future. (Were and Odero 2001, 5)

It noted, though, that no money went towards the purchase of the drugs.

¹⁵⁸ 10/12/01, Rumbek.

Health assistance was comparable. A coordination meeting recorded, “From the Health Policy of New Sudan,¹⁵⁹ came the statement: ‘Health care has a cost and someone must pay’... Reports show admission rates are 75% lower than before the institution of user fees” (Nwachukwu 2000). The health policy judged the World Bank’s US\$13/person/year unfeasible, proposing US\$10 instead (SPLM 1998, 16). An IRC official accepted,

NGOs do some work but they lack an integrated approach. All do a sectoral approach, not looking at demands on community to pay for services. They don’t ask what a community can sustain. What is not sustainable can be met with outside aid. Probably the community can pay for a community health worker refresher course, but probably can’t buy a drug kit at \$300.¹⁶⁰

In a meeting, one Payam¹⁶¹ Administrator addressed Oxfam’s primary health programme, asking, “Is it because we have not built enough office that it was decided that our drugs were half? Is it in Nairobi or here that it was decided that it was not our right to have enough drugs?” Oxfam’s medical coordinator replied,

The problem was that the proposal made for the clinics was not honoured, so we didn’t receive any funding. But because you have already done your work, we didn’t want to let you down. So the budget we have for those other payams we had to split because you had done the work.¹⁶²

Oxfam had not secured funds, so the kit was halved, and there was no mention of rights, impartiality, or independence from donors. The SPLM described the health infrastructure as, “A number of primary health care units and less than half a dozen hospitals” (SPLM 2000, 23). One woman explained,

During Old Sudan, the clinic was there and the drugs were free. If drugs are not available you are given prescription and go and buy it in the market. So if the drugs are there, the community will not accept to pay. Secondly, some people are rich and some are poor, and the poor ones will wait until they die before they get drugs.¹⁶³

It was not simply that people could not pay, but also that they were taxed by the SPLA/M. An old man offered,

[Previously] we could contribute grain or a bull. But now how can we contribute it? We cannot afford it. The Anyanyas [SPLA] have taken goats, grain and everything...In Old Sudan the tax are taken, and taken to the government in Khartoum. Then it comes back through health and education. So now I assume that the Anyanya has taken all these things and the Movement should give the services.¹⁶⁴

NGOs worked with the SRRA, the SPLM’s humanitarian wing, so why did they demand payment again? During one evaluation, Oxfam proposed that health workers should demand payment from patients. A birth attendant explained, “The community, whenever we ask, they

¹⁵⁹ New Sudan (as opposed to Old Sudan) refers to places or times after liberation by the SPLA.

¹⁶⁰ 23/10/01, Nairobi.

¹⁶¹ A payam is a sub-county administrative unit.

¹⁶² Evaluation 28/11/01, Malou Pec.

¹⁶³ Evaluation 24/11/01, Billinguet.

¹⁶⁴ Evaluation 24/11/01, Myanthou.

say that the government employs us and if we are employed by the government, we cannot request payment." Oxfam's position was that it was providing 'incentives', not salaries: uniform, kit, training, soap, gumboots, mosquito net and blanket. Payment in rudimentary goods recognised the poverty, but staff did not acknowledge how modest wealth would be perceived in dire economic conditions. In reality the defining economics were those of Oxfam's unsustainable inputs. "It is not withdrawing, the service has finished," insisted the Oxfam team, "It has not finished," replied the birth attendant, "it is being withdrawn."

Sustainability was indistinguishable from withdrawal, and whatever remained was thin. On another occasion, a guinea worm volunteer observed, "When you have no filter cloths, health education will not get through. If you say, 'don't drink that water,' they say, 'bring us filter cloths'." I visited a CRS hygiene promotion workshop for women; the previous day's subject was dish-racks. In the absence of resources, NGOs advised on washing clothes and washing-up, when to bathe children and how to go to the toilet. I asked the promoter about the agenda.

W: Our topic today is water and sanitation. I am giving advice: you have to filter water every day. Now they are complaining about filter water because filters are very limited.

Z: Are there guinea worm volunteers here?

W: No, nothing.

Z: Are there on the other side [of the county]?

W: There are, but they do nothing.

Z: They don't have cloths?

W: They don't have.

He continued teaching,

If you live with a clean house and a clean compound the malaria will be very far. And the malaria will not meet you. A mosquito net is very important. It's very important to sleep your children inside it, to prevent them meeting mosquitoes at night. If you meet malaria you have to go to the clinic for treatment. So you have to go to a proper clinic for treatment.

An SPLA/M vehicle arrived, carrying the Minister of Internal Affairs, and men appeared and went to greet him; the women were not concerned. The chief had visited our meeting earlier to say he allowed the women to be taught; it did no harm – it made no difference. A woman started playing a rattle she had brought in a goat-skin bag. The hygiene promoter explained,

W: They were complaining about clinics. They are saying 'why in our area there is no clinic?'

Z: Where's the nearest clinic?

W: In Abiechok. But the problem is that the health centre is there, but the medicine is not there. The problem there is that it's an outreach clinic and for outreach the drugs come in kits.¹⁶⁵

The clinic was receiving only half-kit, because of the funding shortage. I spoke to the health worker there, whose motivation was dampened because he was not paid, while his colleagues with another NGO – Diakonie – were. At the Diakonie clinic, cost recovery had been adopted.

¹⁶⁵ 21/11/01, Mayath.

“It was tried,” said the health worker, “but people refused, and it’s just given away. It was tried out, but it was negative.” NGOs intervened (people had needs), then withdrew (although the needs remained). Sustainability was a term that agencies copied from each other. It was psychologically assuring as it renounced responsibility for fulfilling rights or providing impartial assistance, and was something for the Sudanese to achieve, regardless of their economic or political situation.

Cattle camp near Agangrial



Lankien

Lankien, in Upper Nile, is nine days walk from Malakal on the border with northern Sudan. It appears sparse, but is the scene resource competition; this is about oil, development and war. There are no roads or vehicles. A man working with WHO on planned polio vaccinations explained, “Because of the insecurity, we do not get transport like donkey and bicycle. Because if you go...with donkey, the Murle they can kill you and take the donkey, and if they see you with a big load. Also if you run on a bicycle, they can kill you and take the bicycle.”¹⁶⁶ Providing assistance in Upper Nile could be interpreted as an assertion of impartiality.

Impartiality

Gagnon and Ryle interpreted the 1997 Peace Agreement as a “window of opportunity in which the government and the oil companies could present Western Upper Nile to investors as a zone of peace, an area that was under government control” (Gagnon and Ryle 2001, 20). MSF-Holland described Western Upper Nile as ‘largely inaccessible’ from 1997 to 2000.¹⁶⁷ During the 1998 disaster in Bahr el-Ghazal, fighting between Nuer groups in Western Upper Nile

¹⁶⁶ 25/01/02, Lankien.

¹⁶⁷ MSF-H internal document 01/11/00.

caused famine and displacement there too. NGOs retreated in June and their compounds were looted. WFP also withdrew and only one food distribution was made between July and December. HRW observed:

Real control at the end of 1998 remained with the government, which granted contracts to many foreign companies to extract the oil and build a pipeline to the north and a refinery there, on an accelerated basis. Revenue from the development of oil will enable the government to finance an expanded war. (Rone 1999, 6)

On 1st June 1999, 1000 miles x 28 inch of pipeline directed oil from Wehida to Port Sudan. That month the US House of Representatives approved a resolution stating that the government of Sudan was “deliberately and systematically committing genocide in southern Sudan.” Also in June, Christian Solidarity International lost UN accreditation, as its practice of buying and releasing slaves was judged to encourage the trade. Slavery was integral to the war (Jok 2001), and Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of Unicef, mentioned “slavery in Sudan” in 1999, although Unicef subsequently called it ‘abduction’. By July, 40-50,000 barrels of oil were being pumped per day, and the EIU reported 140,000 by mid-September (EIU 1999b, 24).

In 2000, OLS security was notified of 114 bombing incidents, nearly double the 1999 figure (Unicef 2000, 19). Upper Nile saw fighting throughout 2000, as Riek Machar broke from the government and formed the SPDF, Peter Gatdet defected from the SPDF to the SPLA, and the government sponsored various militias. In March 2001, *The Scorched Earth* (Christian Aid 2001), claimed that the government’s military budget had doubled since 1998. Other NGOs were more inhibited about mentioning oil than the effect of the fighting; one official professed ‘covert advocacy’. Gagnon and Ryle documented intensifying government, militia, SPLA and SPDF attacks, writing, “A significant new development in the period 2000-2001 is a higher number of direct attacks on civilians by the armed forces of the Government of Sudan” (Gagnon and Ryle 2001, 2). They continue,

OLS access to airstrips in rebel-controlled areas was reduced systematically in 2000 and 2001 by government flight denials, by the danger of aerial bombardment from government aircraft and by persistent insecurity due to clashes between the forces of Commander Peter Paar and Commander Peter Gatdet. (Gagnon and Ryle 2001, 17)

In February 2001 Peter Gatdet, aligned with the SPLA, attacked the SPDF command centre at Nyal, Western Upper Nile, halting assistance. The following month four NGO workers were taken hostage from Eastern Upper Nile, and by mid-2001, most of the region was insecure or flight banned. The UN sanctions against Sudan were lifted on 28th September 2001.

In 1993 the USA had listed Sudan as a state sponsoring terrorism. The USAID 2002 Congressional Budget Justification for Sudan included,

In spite of the civil war, its support for terrorism and continued human rights violations, the GOS has made progress in the past year in rehabilitating its international image. Sudan has recently become commercially important to Canada and a number of Asian and European countries and its economy is growing rapidly.

In Lankien, Christian Mission Aid (CMA) ran a Primary Health Care Centre. The fridge was looted (with the rest of the compound) in 2000, and not replaced. The clinic consisted of mud buildings: one ward for in-patients, and another that had fallen down. The nurse explained that, to encourage ownership, one village would build one wall, other villages other walls, and one would erect a roof. For the moment no village had built any walls, and the patients camped around the remaining hut. The CMA clinic was adequately staffed and supplied, providing basic medical care to people who would not otherwise have any. There was also continual training, although conditions were uncondusive: four trainees trying to remember the vital signs of tuberculosis, child with TB, and no TB drugs. Theoretically, in case of evacuation of expatriate staff, something would carry on until stocks ran out.

In a compound opposite, MSF-Holland ran a curative clinic, which had opened in 1997. They treated Brucellosis until 2000, and had an on-going programme for Kala Azaar, a weak, though lethal, parasite transmitted by sand-flies. The clinic also had a TB programme, which relied on six-months uninterrupted treatment, and ran only in the wet season when fighting lessened. When I arrived, the programme was finishing for the year: of 166 patients, one had defaulted, and five had died.¹⁶⁸ It was a success rate higher than expected even for stable areas. Since the end of the programme, the nurse estimated she had seen nine TB cases, none of whom would get treatment.

These were two of the more proficient programmes I saw in southern Sudan, but why Lankien? As many people might have been assisted for a fraction of the price elsewhere, even in southern Sudan. One man suggested, “If [it is] a campaign for polio, we put our hand there and vaccinate the children. And also if there’s guinea worm, we put our hand there. So we the people of Lankien are very cooperative – a lot of people come here with their projects.”¹⁶⁹ Assistance was what was achieved that day, and the infrastructure was the staff. Everything was flown in, and there was no organised political infrastructure to provide counterparts or constraints. The several-hour flight from Lokichoggio foreclosed sustainability talk, and the concentration of resources in contiguous compounds made coordination irrelevant, either in terms of pretending to ensure coverage or avoiding duplication.

The challenge came only an assessment of what the NGOs actually provided: small medical facilities, occasional T-shirts for men who spoke English, and possible food distribution in famine if budgets and access lasted. It was an opportunity for NGOs to plant a flag, not a system. An elder from Majok, near Lankien, assessed, “The health [assistance] is very limited, there are

¹⁶⁸ 28/01/01, Lankien.

¹⁶⁹ 26/01/01, Lankien.

not enough drugs. CMA alone cannot work, they need help – all the people of Bieh [state] come here.”¹⁷⁰ Some people received treatment, and impartiality and neutrality were partially ‘proved’, easing the awkwardness that confronted NGOs resulting from the dissonance between what they claimed and what they did.

On 25th January 2002, I was sitting in the hut that was the mother and child unit in the CMA clinic. On my left was a man dispensing medicines, and on the other side was a woman lying on plastic sheeting on the floor. Then she gave birth – the first live birth in the clinic that year (two other babies had died in obstructed deliveries that week). The birth took about a minute, four women attended, and in the other half of the hut things carried on. The baby howled, the nurse was shaking it; some blood, no complications. Then the mother was sitting in the dark, dressed only in beads, with a wad of cotton wool between her legs. I asked whether the baby was a boy or a girl; it was a girl. Nobody else asked. Nobody weighed it; the nurse said it was about 2.8kg, and that anything over 2.5kg is fine.

In the neighbouring hut there was an emaciated woman crumpled on the ground. She was like any other old lady in hospital, complaining about the discomfort, and the food that somebody had brought her. She said she needed to eat more, but that there was nothing to lean against. There was no furniture. The doctor said, “why don’t you lean against the wall?” She could get nothing from the clinic, which treated wounds and fevers, not diseases.

On 31st January a boy who had blown his hand off playing with his father’s grenade waited on the airstrip for the ICRC to fly him to Lokichoggio. From 1st February the government banned flights to Lankien. Nothing more could be flown to the OLS NGOs, which adhered to the flight ban, or to MSF which, although outside OLS, was now exposed, and staff were pulled out.

Guidance lacking

The health response based in Kinshasa and the apparent impartiality in Lankien retained a universalist flavour. Elsewhere, terms such as ‘targeting’ or ‘lobbying’ in Congo and ‘sustainability’ in southern Sudan, suggested that NGOs had mastered the machinery of universality and responsibility. The language implied that targeting groups was feasible, lobbying was successful, and sustainability was within the scope of project management.

As in Chapter 3, NGOs rescued the official line by redefinition and by adding new terms, and this can again be read as a means to reduce cognitive dissonance by manoeuvring claims about activity to coincide with stated objectives. However, the effects became more disruptive; ‘inaccessibility’ in Sierra Leone excused what was *not* done to protect the assistance that *was*

¹⁷⁰ 30/01/01, Lankien.

given. In Congo, the liberty of NGOs to transfer responsibility (in the discourse) onto others, meant that they could use the words ‘targeting’ and ‘lobbying’ to commend assistance that was tokenistic or symbolic. In southern Sudan, NGOs called withdrawal ‘sustainability,’ leaving the task with the southern Sudanese. It served to absolve themselves of responsibility for the rights they had avowed, indulge disdain of dependency, sanction abuse of the Sudanese, and flatter OLS and the donors.

Whilst rights and principles were barely mentioned at implementation, they were used in both contexts to rally and unite NGOs and donors behind an official version of assistance. Adopting impossible standards *necessitated* explanations of why the stated objectives were not fulfilled, and it seems natural that NGOs should defend their approach. At the same time, though, the terminology made self-critique redundant and the process as a whole was rendered opaque. NGOs retained their objectives whatever path was taken (so were not guided by them), and none of the emendations or additions implied any fault or frailty on their part, even when NGOs pursued paths that were contrary to rights and principles. So hypothesis (1a) must be rejected: the stated objectives did not guide NGOs. Despite this, they are still professed, and in the next chapter I examine what strategic function stating the objectives has for influencing other people.

5. Breaking the rules

Referring to the reputed monthly spend on international intervention, a government official in Sierra Leone bemoaned, “You don’t see the benefit of \$20 million on the ground. It affects the reputation of Sierra Leone. It seems reckless.” In this chapter, I consider this apparent recklessness and its relationship to assistance by investigating hypothesis (1b), that NGOs state objectives because they exert strategic leverage. I examine the way that aid workers apply moral pressure onto people in countries at war, and to what extent this reaches or shames people. A second line of investigation enquires into the impact on aid workers themselves: how do they react when they do not successfully effect change?

MSF write,

When MSF began, it changed the nature of humanitarian action. It refused to wait for the approval of all parties before acting. It insisted on the right to speak out in the face of human rights violations. Putting populations in danger first, above political considerations, is engrained as core to our mission – and in this MSF has helped shape the humanitarian mission worldwide. (MSF 2000b, 3)

Putting people in danger first, though, conflicts with staff security, which trumps other humanitarian principles (Slim 1997). NGOs’ convictions meet uncompromising violence, and who is ‘right’ becomes undecided or irrelevant. Darcq, OLS’s Counterpart Liaison Officer for southern Sudan, observed,

[The SPLM] are the local authorities. We cannot go there without their approval...It doesn’t mean they’re good or bad. You don’t abandon tens of thousands of people because you have quarrels with the leaders. World Vision had hundreds of land cruisers, and people were coming from Kenya and Uganda to buy them. Two years later they’re coming back...MSF, when their people were killed in the plane, were working with half a million people in Western Equatoria. Suddenly they pull out because a few guys have shot a plane.¹⁷¹

Asserting rules in a war is politically adventurous, the more so when apparent chaos grants military and political returns, as is explored by Keen with reference to Sierra Leone (Keen 1998; Keen *forthcoming*) and Chabal and Daloz regarding Africa more generally (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Uncertainty makes precision attractive, and when things go wrong people appeal to rules, or rules appeal to them. MSF observed,

The 1990s saw a renewed focus on law and humanitarian principles in the official language of the United Nations and national governments, and in the language of NGOs. We should not be surprised by this, nor should we try to pretend that it represents a moral victory for law and principles. Reference to the law is always strongest precisely at those moments when respect for the rules disappears. (MSF 2000b, 6)

The most straightforward explanation of this phenomenon is that, by re-stating their rights and principles, NGOs apply strategic pressure on people to ‘play by the rules.’

¹⁷¹ 24/10/01, Nairobi.

Persuasion and provocation

The persuasiveness of the perspective of rights and principles is related to how strategically aid organisations exert pressure, and De Certeau defines strategy as that which distinguishes a 'place' in relation to the Other (de Certeau 1984, 36). If aid organisations are strategic, besides the formal political mechanisms for diffusing rights (Smith 2002; Donnelly 2003), there may be a potential for instrumental adaptation, bargaining and consciousness-raising, as has been explored by Risso and Sikkink (Risso and Sikkink 1999). Psychology theory suggests that persuasiveness rests with credibility, what sequences of events are involved in communication, and the incentives that people have to conform (Hovland, Janis et al. 1953; McGuire 1972; Cialdini 1984; Petty and Cacioppo 1986), and Slim argues that NGOs' task is to sell humanitarian products, recognising the customer's needs as "central to the art of persuasion" (Slim 2003, 10). How compelling aid organisations are is likely to depend partly on how much assistance is being provided.

The prospect that rules can be persuasive is mirrored by the possibility of negative responses, as moral pressure is closely related to shame. Rather than seeing shame as a means of enhancing compliance, Gilligan, from psychological research among men in American gaols, argues that shame is a universal cause of violence. His theory holds that feelings of inferiority and helplessness trigger violence and, it may be argued by extension, violation of the rules. Gilligan explains, "the most direct, literal, and 'figurative' way to put an end to that feeling of shame is to blind the person in whose eyes one feels shamed" (Gilligan 1999, 70). I am using Gilligan's analysis of how (and if) the mainstream of America imposes its rules on its criminal margins to examine the relationship between the geo-strategic core and periphery.

Southern Sudan

Assistance in southern Sudan is given on all sides of the frontlines, has an enormous remit and is coordinated in Lokichoggio and Nairobi. Its activities are relayed through donor reports, and an Annual Needs Assessment charts a large (not comprehensive) area. Additionally, OLS collaborates with the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA), the humanitarian wing of the only non-state body to sign the Geneva Conventions. Assistance channels millions of pounds to logistics and transport, and around forty NGOs support projects from education to guinea worm training. Officially the system is doing well; the system that predicted famine, failed to coordinate response, failed to negotiate access, and failed to know how many of the people supposedly assisted by it died for want of food. I follow how OLS generated rules, and how the solutions imposed were rejected, and increased misunderstanding.

Solutions rejected

According to Duffield, the 70% cut in food aid between 1994 and 1995 recorded in the Review (Karim, Duffield et al. 1996, 140) was implemented to promote self-sufficiency in the

population – although there was no evidence of increased self-sufficiency, nutrition appeared in some places to be worse, and estimates of needs were hardly substantiated (Duffield 2001, 232). With food, evidence and sustainability lacking, 1995 saw the establishment of the OLS Agreement on Ground Rules, including the Humanitarian Principles, which seemingly consolidated a positive working relationship with the SPLM, after two Unicef staff and four journalists were killed. The Agreement included capacity building. Karim et al. evaluated,

Expectations of capacity building in a war situation, especially where the human resource base is extremely weak, are unrealistically high. This is compounded by the fact that the opposition movements, while having sufficient resources to sustain the conflict, make no provision for the basic running costs of their humanitarian wings. (Karim, Duffield et al. 1996, 4)

In 1997, Levine wrote about *Promoting Principles* (Levine 1997), but interest in principles stemmed from their breach – the rejection of solutions drawn up. The humanitarian wings of military factions were channels for obtaining (rather than dispersing) money, and the SPLA's lack of social programme meant that NGOs had nothing to work with (African Rights 1997). So the rule-making by OLS met rule-breaking by the Sudanese.

This was observable at the village level, where aid workers attempted to impose particular means of distribution. Harragin and Chol found during the famine,

The truth is that, when aid is targeted at certain socio-economic groups in Sudan, local people then redistribute it to the wider population because such targeting runs counter to the way resources are owned within the society. (Harragin and Chol 1998, 54)

The SPLM explained,

In the redistribution methodology carried out by the Chiefs and local communities, the relief food was shared equally among the majority of the population. This resulted in people with higher needs receiving far less than initially intended. (SPLM, SRRA et al. 1998, 3)

The failure to reach the poorest by targeting assistance was documented (see: Rone 1999, Duffield, Jok et al. 2000), and was accepted amongst NGOs (Harragin and Chol were published by SC-UK). Operationally, the redistribution was a maelstrom for NGOs, but retaining the policy formalised the culpability of the chiefs and the SPLA/M. Darcq recounted,

In '98, the WFP were doing distribution. SPLM have always criticised WFP coming with unrealistic, very strange distribution. They had created a village relief committee. It's clear that they were never satisfied – the counterparts, or the local population. There are so many parties. WFP say, "we can never let people do distribution because we don't trust them." We had good reason not to trust people because we had seen what was happening. Our fears were justified, that's clear.

The resentment was mutual. He continued,

They say, "when it rains, it rains for all of us"...but we say, "the food we give you is like medicine. We don't give it to everyone, we give it to the sick people." They say,

“no, we take the medicine and keep it until we’re sick.” They say that we want them to think about tomorrow, but when they think about tomorrow we don’t want.¹⁷²

Darcq observed, “You cannot accuse the government of stealing, but rebels are rebels; stealing is what they do, and accusing is what people do to them,” but the targeting was, by the NGOs’ admission, not simply impossible but senseless. For example,

Organisations including MSF were making it clear that supplementary feeding was a pointless band-aid when there was not a sufficient general ration being given to the population...Such numerical precision seems to have all the strengths of being an objective measure of what is an unacceptable level in terms of malnutrition – but in fact the standards were dropped during 1998 to <70% [height for weight, from <80%], due to the sheer number of cases. (Harragin and Chol 1998, 19)

Insisting on the policy transformed inadequate supplies into reproach for the Sudanese, and the fallout was a further deterioration of relationships. The policy was essential, though, if the small amount of assistance was to be rationalised.

By similar prevarication, HRW found that if there had been no human rights abuses there would not have been a famine. They reported that the “failure of the international community to respond to the 1989 famine” led to the creation of OLS, and continued,

When the 1998 famine began to take shape, critics charged that OLS failed in its original mission to prevent famine. Human Rights Watch’s investigation, concluded during and after an April-May 1998 visit to southern Sudan and Kenya, reveals that the fault lies primarily with Sudanese government and militias and opposition forces that precipitated the famine and deliberately diverted or looted food from the starving or blocked relief deliveries. (Rone 1999, 1)

The declared function of OLS was to prevent famine by providing assistance through access negotiated with the parties listed, and there is no noted irony, or failure, in HRW’s observation that the catastrophe of 1998 was a lot like 1988-9. This was despite the tribute paid by many aid workers to documentation of famine and aid manipulation in the 1980s, particularly by de Waal and Keen (de Waal 1989; de Waal 1991; Keen 1991a; Keen 1991b; Keen 1994a). Pinning responsibility onto the government and SPLA was moral rhetoric, but offered no strategy against violent opportunism. The Task Force investigating the response to the famine detailed the depravity of the Sudanese (amongst other things) (SPLM/SRRA-OLS 1998), apparently confirming where the blame lay.

“Memorandum of mis-Understanding”

Harragin and Chol write,

The Task Force report was generally perceived to be a report about the diversion of aid. In fact it was about much more, but such was the interest in hearing about diversions (including interest from the UN Security Council) that it created a self-fulfilling prophecy. (Harragin and Chol 1998, 52)

¹⁷² 24/10/01, Nairobi.

NGOs and donors heard what they wanted, and the SPLA/M was discredited. Shortly after came the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), a document regarding the provision of assistance in areas controlled by the SPLA, and foreseen by the 1995 Ground Rules. In November 1998, the SRRA presented one version to NGOs at the annual planning meeting, and set a deadline for signing on 31st December. On 23rd December this was put back to March 1999. Negotiations continued; the SRRA pressed for a new draft to be signed on 20th April but, ruling that they had acted in bad faith, donor and NGO pressure coalesced to lift the deadline and pursue negotiations. These continued until August, when a consolidated text was presented. A UN donor meeting minuted: “[The German Ambassador] added that there were indications that the SPLM intends to try to renegotiate all basic agreements for humanitarian operations in Sudan, including the Tripartite agreement and Ground Rules. There is strong opposition to the role of OLS in south Sudan within the SPLM.”¹⁷³ The EU office took the MoU away and returned with the Letter of Understanding in December 1999, riling the SPLM administration, who then insisted that everyone sign the August version before 29th February 2000.

In an email, one head office held,

Our position is fundamentally that whilst the SRRA has the RIGHT to impose various obligations on the [International] NGOs, and exert its authority, this must be MATCHED by explicit acceptance by the SRRA of the concomitant RESPONSIBILITIES that it has to adhere to basic humanitarian principles, and deliver (amongst others) security, protection, support, co-ordination, etc, AND that the whole MoU shd have as its object the issue of enhancing programme quality and efficiency and effectiveness of delivery.¹⁷⁴

Such a contract was attractive to NGOs as it promised a handle on the SPLA, but incentives for the SRRA were weaker. NGOs proposed some changes to the MoU, but felt growing political heat. An Oxfam regional manager noted the ‘threatening/combative stance’ of the SRRA, commenting, “We understand this reflects views at the top: ie Garang [SPLA/M’s leader] is stating he would like to see no NGOs in southern Sudan and that it was a mistake to ever have them around during a war.”¹⁷⁵ The SPLA/M issued a press release,

Another fallacy being peddled by the politically motivated NGOs is that the SRRA through the MOU is forcing NGOs to recognize the SPLM as the authority in the New Sudan. This is, of course, an irrelevant speculation from these NGOs because the SPLM does not require any recognition from NGOs. We, as a liberation movement, will not ask for recognition from any NGO since they do not have the competence or legitimacy to do so anyway...

It also smacks of hypocrisy to exhort the SPLM/SPLA to democratise and at the same time condemn it for consulting the people and democratically ascertaining their views.

¹⁷³ UN/OLS. Donor meeting, 13-14/04/99, ECHO office; p8.

¹⁷⁴ Oxfam 18/02/00, 10:55.

¹⁷⁵ Email 22/02/00, 14:01.

It is those NGOs who do not want to respect our laws and who do not want transparency and accountability that are opting to leave on their own.¹⁷⁶

The dispute exposed the ambiguity of the relationship between NGOs and SRRA, and the desire for certainty. An Oxfam official assessed,

The only formal IHL leverage that we have over the SPLA/SRRA are the 1977 protocols [to the Geneva Conventions], the price of which is de facto recognition that they control the territory in which these programmes will be carried [out]...I have always been worried about the ground rules which, amongst various concerns, commits OLS members to capacity building of the SRRA. Arguably, this is a bad agreement and in breach of the spirit of IHL.¹⁷⁷

NGOs were in the contradictory position of acknowledging the SPLA/M's authority to gain access, and denying it when it did not suit them. Donors were sceptical about SRRA as well.

The notes of a meeting with the EU representative on 13th April recorded a delegate describing Elijah Malok, SRRA's Executive Director, as "one of the most disagreeable people ever met with an overtly political agenda that does not respect IHL nor humanitarianism." An SC-UK Internal Briefing Paper agreed, "Elijah Malok...met the NGO representatives, at his request, in Nairobi on Monday 21 February. He was belligerent and dismissive of NGOs saying that the SRRA would not be upset if all the NGOs left and the people need to suffer before the final victory."¹⁷⁸ On 23rd March, Reuters reported, "The European Union said on Thursday it had allocated...\$11.3 million of humanitarian aid to Sudan for the rest of this year, but that no funds would go to rebel-held areas until conditions were right."

Sixteen international NGOs signed the MoU, and twenty-two non-OLS agencies had previously signed an identical agreement. Eleven¹⁷⁹ international NGOs – accounting for around 75% of the NGO contribution to the consortium – refused to sign. SC-UK was among them, and assessed:

It is clear that the MoU and the process adopted by the SPLM/SRRA to introduce it, is a direct threat to the OLS. It is also felt that some of the donors are using the MoU to further undermine OLS and establish a more direct bilateral relationship between the SPLM/SRRA and the NGOs. Such a strategy would divide the NGOs and undermine the collectiveness that the OLS consortium lead (sic) by the UN had created. (SC-UK 2000)

It was the larger NGOs that challenged the SPLM; despite widespread confidence that the SPLM relied on aid, NGOs found their contribution rated lower than their compliance. The UN declared its 'evacuation' of all 149 staff (UN 2000c). Oxfam and SC-UK announced,

¹⁷⁶ SPLM/SPLA Statement on the MOU between the SRRA and the NGOs, 29/02/00, p2-4.

¹⁷⁷ Email 07/03/00, 10:23.

¹⁷⁸ 25/02/00 South Sudan: MoU between the SPLM/SRRA and NGOs.

¹⁷⁹ CARE International, Carter Center, German Agro-Action, HealthNet, Médecins du Monde, MSF-Holland, Oxfam GB, SCF-UK, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières (Belgium and Germany) and World Vision.

Along with other international aid agencies Oxfam GB and Save the Children UK have been asked to leave SPLM controlled areas of south Sudan because they have been unable to sign a draft Memorandum of Understanding with the local authorities. (Oxfam and SC-UK 2000)

The SPLM maintained, “The SPLM/SPLA is not expelling any NGO. The SRRA is only implementing a decision made by the [National Liberation Council]. It is a democratic right of any NGO to reject our laws and leave peacefully.”¹⁸⁰ As the NGOs withdrew, they stressed that their projects were not life-saving, but it was vital that they returned without delay. CARE international, SCF-UK, Oxfam GB, VSF-Germany and VSF-Belgium were readmitted in late June, having signed on the understanding that they could work without interference from the SPLM. ECHO disowned anything in SPLM-administered areas. Finding fault with the SPLM legitimised cutting funding to OLS, the weakness of which was less publicly acknowledged. An ECHO representative assessed in a telecom,¹⁸¹

- OLS just not worth investing ECHO time in in order to make it better – question of priorities
- main concerns with OLS: wet over MoU in terms of principles, management/coordination weak, no change with Sapra [OLS Southern Sector Consortium Coordinator], size of Coordination capacity not a reflection of the size of the job to be done.
- ECHO happy to fund coordination but so far only asked to fund diesel and spare parts for Loki electricity...
- disbanding OLS not an option – things need to be ongoing so cannot stop and start again.

Similarly, SC-UK could blame the ‘local authorities’. Internally it held,

There is no doubt that the donors’ handling of the MOU since August 1999 has created the problem that the NGOs are now faced with. The handling of the discussions around the draft has created an environment of distrust.¹⁸²

OLS could produce rules, but not compliance. Confirming the misunderstanding, Nhial Deng Nhial, SRRA Chairman for External Relations, wrote to Sapra on 16th March 2000, “The SPLM/SRRA remains fully committed to the SRRA’s independent and purely humanitarian objectives.” Mario Muor Muor, formerly SPLA/SRRA, assessed, “Some NGOs walked out, but they didn’t ask themselves what happens to the people? Who are they punishing? The Movement didn’t gain anything; nobody implemented one article up to now. It created suspicion and at the end of the day they didn’t implement it.”¹⁸³ In fact, NGOs had asked themselves repeatedly, but got stuck. On failing to persuade others, neutrality and impartiality ruled that NGOs should stay, and that they should withdraw; some stayed, and some left.

¹⁸⁰ SPLM/A press release 01/03/00.

¹⁸¹ John Hayward, 17/04/00.

¹⁸² SC-UK 20/04/00 Internal briefing paper.

¹⁸³ 18/10/01, Nairobi.

Congo

One question arising from southern Sudan concerns what would happen without the SRRA. Congo answers that: donor money shying from contracts with people it does not trust is not reassured by the total absence of political infrastructure. I explore next how, in Congo, NGOs condemned violence and intransigence, and were ignored.

The potential persuasiveness of aid workers' rules was low in Congo: assistance was not a credible asset for people suffering from violence, less still for those causing it, whilst lawlessness was profitable. A newspaper reported Onosumba, president of Rcd-Goma, and in principle responsible for people in the territory he occupied, describing returns of more than US\$1m per month from coltan and US\$200,000 from diamonds.

[He] reluctantly conceded, "you understand, we are at war. We have to provide for our soldiers. We need to pay for their services." This was to justify the exportation monopoly of minerals that the rebel movement had decided on...Those statements explain by themselves why it is not easy in these conditions to end the war, or even to want to.¹⁸⁴

Despite this, there are motifs in the discourse similar to those associated with the ability or authority to influence behaviour, although they were expressed mostly in negative terms, as persuasion became overlaid with frustration or abuse. The UNHCR representative in Goma, for example, offered:

The Congolese problem is fights between different ethnic groups, and problems between Congolese and the refugees, and other problems between refugees. And the root of all these problems is the disequilibrium between ecologic and demographic. We have 340 people per kilometre. It's the same thing in this region, the baby-boom continues from 1992. It's permanent growth in Congo. There are more people than the earth can support...There are borders, and there's the development of medicines, so they don't die. People are having sex, excuse me, and they're not dying. All the other problems come from there.

Problematising people *not* dying was interesting in itself, and eastern Congo was a weak example. He also criticised the attitude of the Congolese, although not constructively:

The majority, they think to dance, love and alcohol, full stop. I think Mobutu put this mentality to stay in power. He encouraged everyone to go to dance. Primus [beer] is everywhere, despite the war you have a brasserie. In the Great Lakes and in this region it's evident, and they are nice girls, so! It's the same thing in Rwanda – they drink more than here. They have mentality of state in high Tutsi society. Here you have nothing. Nobody is paid, everybody is a vandal when the opportunity came, and after that they make love.¹⁸⁵

Other manifestations of misapprehensions between international aid workers and the Congolese included tenuous assurances for access or security for NGOs, and despite universalist objectives, there was no coordinated network for supplies.

¹⁸⁴ Le Palmarès 22/03/01, Kinshasa. #2087; p4 (translated from French).

¹⁸⁵ 11/05/01, Goma.

Unregulated violence

The way available resources were distributed created little room for negotiating more access, or inspiring confidence in what was provided. MSF's Activity Report claimed, "In Equateur province, the organization works in eight health zones that reach over one million people," (MSF 2000b, 34). An employee described what he called a 'very MSF' intervention for the dispersed population in Monkoto in Equateur:

MSF supports five health centres and the hospital, but it's totally arbitrary. We say, "this is for the hospital," but we don't know the complications of the doctor or his ability to manage it. We don't have any means to follow that. The health centre sends a bike to pick up the medicines, and the *chef de zone* doesn't have a motorbike, and can't see whether it's well managed or not. Generally the hospital's run by a central administration, but who knows in the bush?¹⁸⁶

The account suggests that MSF made a reasonable intervention, but that it might not have been optimally received, due to 'complications'. Whatever compromises were made 'in the bush', though, were not conceded in the claim that over one million people were being reached. The interviewee continued:

NGOs cover a lot of the country, but they're not very effective. They can limit epidemics – but even those they sometimes hear of too late or they are too small to warrant an intervention. The more general cover there is, the less they can respond to epidemics. Where there's no medical coverage, epidemics come and people die. Sometimes you hear about it later if someone comes on a bicycle and says that there was an epidemic in such-and-such a village and a hundred people have died. Should we intervene? Sometimes it's too late...With the rain and the war zones, it can take a month to arrive at some places. Boat, bike, motorbike, foot, to carry the vaccinations...You have to take the fridge, the materials, and in these conditions you just can't do it. It's not a question of money, you can always find money – but if you come across soldiers.

He described the physical conditions whilst retaining optimism about the strength of NGOs; the only serious constraint to epidemic control were the soldiers, whom he presented as specific hazard and a spoiler on an otherwise workable plan. A Merlin worker in Goma reflected on measles vaccinations:

How do you get down the road? All the bikes are broken. There were motorbikes coming from Uganda, and they've totally gone missing. There are a lot of people in power who have no hope of ever getting paid; they're out to line their own pockets, and I don't blame them.¹⁸⁷

Violence was a constant threat to the delicate safety of NGOs, and established conditions for stealing from them. When, in September 1998, the second war reached Bukavu, MSF-Holland, which was working there, terminated all contracts and evacuated expatriate staff until November. On their return they paid US\$85,000 compensation to sixteen employees as laws were interpreted and enforced by whoever was in control; "NGOs are just seen as a milk-cow,"

¹⁸⁶ 22/05/01, Kinshasa.

¹⁸⁷ 08/05/01, Goma.

observed one staff member.¹⁸⁸ World Vision also evacuated, returning at the end of 1998. An employee reported that US\$6m of equipment had been pillaged. The Uvira office shut and World Vision retreated to Goma, maintaining a small food distribution outfit in Bukavu. He added, “the judicial system is corrupt, so it is win-win for them if you fight it, and lose-lose for the NGOs.”

Corruption was an indefinite concept as institutions were imposed by occupying armies, whose agenda was officially violent and was accompanied by unofficial violence. The interviewee continued,

One guy claims we rented a jeep in 1995 or something, and is charging \$40/day plus the price of the vehicle. We didn't know it was in court. There are no signatures on the contract. This is a rebel-controlled area, but the DRC law applies everywhere. He won the case and can come round anytime and claim the value in assets. People know that the archives are burnt.¹⁸⁹

OCHA reported that “hundreds of vehicles” belonging to the UN and NGOs were stolen from the Kivus (OCHA 2001, vi). Congo ceded practically no waivers for humanitarian activities (although NGOs did not always pay airport tax). In 2001, MSF was paying twenty-seven types of tax, and were aware of six others that were (in some sense) due. Many NGOs resented paying tax, partly because they received no services, but also because they claimed their work was ‘humanitarian’ – it was ‘neutral’ and should not be engaged with ‘politics’ like tax.

Despite the resentment, they did pay: in Bunia to the MLC, when in Kisangani, Goma or Bukavu to the Rcd. Resenting paying on point of principle absolved NGOs of the responsibility for the decision to pay, and for the tax itself. This in turn allowed them to ignore their lack of autonomy regarding their own activity, and their inability to influence anyone else. By sticking with their rules, they became the victims of other people’s politics. Lautze et al, evaluating coordination in the Great Lakes, write,

Once the warring parties have determined when, where and how aid agencies operate, then it is they who are the principal source of strategic humanitarian coordination. This has major implications for the quality of access, and the uses to which humanitarian aid is put. (Lautze, Jones et al. 1998, 13)

NGO workers were clear about how people were breaking the rules, but were cagier about acknowledging how this affected the nature of their decisions; to do so would question the relevance or efficacy of the stated objectives. Rights and principles generated the opportunity to discredit actors who were not regulated by such concerns, but did not grant NGOs control over the strategic place that the discourse described. NGOs retained their perspective of

¹⁸⁸ 07/05/01, Goma.

¹⁸⁹ 11/05/01, Goma.

humanitarianism in a deviant world. The upshot was that assistance and violence occurred seemingly rather suddenly.

One NGO's security guidelines understated,

The security of the goods of international agencies and their personnel is probably not a priority for the regular armies deployed in the east of the DRC [Ugandan and Rwandan armies]. We cannot count on them coming to our assistance. (Translated from French)

On 26th April 2001, six ICRC workers were ambushed and killed in Ituri. Amongst aid staff it was considered the most serious assault on their personnel to date, and a rejection of international attention and assistance. The attackers were unknown, although suspicion fell on the Ugandan troops. The message was loud but unclear, and future operations and access rested, at least in part, with not responding to violence with acquiescence.

The Ugandans promised an investigation. At the agency meeting following the attack, one NGO worker voiced his ambivalence, "It's possible that the enquiry will take months. So the international community can put on the pressure, or can crack. What is it to crack? Either to go back to work, or to quit." A colleague reiterated, "There are two phrases which stuck with me: we can't go but we can't stay. Also, there's a lack of cohesion in taking the decision to go back in." A third held, "There needs to be a tactic for discrediting Bemba. Also the international community cannot just go back in. We have to wait for a while and then say *why* we're going back in." Another NGO representative moved, "There's a balance between security and saving lives... There's a real conflict between assisting the population, and leaving, when people will die because we're not there."¹⁹⁰ Some NGOs withdrew.

The murders of ICRC staff were not the primary concern of the Congolese. The same week a ferry had overturned in Lake Kivu, killing a hundred people or more, and the 100F banknotes had been invalidated, causing economic distress. HRW held, "All parties involved in the armed conflict in eastern Congo are obliged to respect the most fundamental guarantees established by international humanitarian law" (HRW 2000a). Whilst they may, officially, be obliged, in some more real sense, nobody was obliging them to do anything. OCHA maintained,

Humanitarian actors will continue to embarrass every belligerent, including non-signatory armed groups, by demanding access to the victims, tracing child soldiers, denouncing any new harm caused to principles of impartiality. They will try to make sure that those humanitarian clauses clearly spelt out in the Lusaka Accord (on school exams, vaccination campaigns, free movement of goods and persons) be fully endorsed and facilitated by everyone, failing which, bad players would be easily identified as not caring enough for the Congolese population. Cross-frontline family regrouping, but also initiatives in the fields of university, sport, health care, will continue to humanise the frontline until it just collapses like a Berlin wall. (OCHA 2001, XXVII draft)

¹⁹⁰ NGO/UN meeting 04/05/01, Goma.

Such confidence was not derived from experience in Congo, but from a fundamentalist belief in the ideology of rights and principles. Embarrassment proved unpersuasive, and the attack on the ICRC workers occurred days after the UN published its findings on the pillage of eastern Congo by Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi (UN 2001). The reality is that people *can* and *do* break all the rules. Stating objectives, finding them unwieldy and maintaining their validity anyway is as strategic as announcing, ‘you can’t do that,’ and people with real and unhindered interests in doing it retorting, ‘watch us.’ Then, ‘well, we don’t think you should,’ and ‘so what?’ Continued appeal to shame entrenches moral discourse, but involves ignoring the ways that people make choices and the opportunities they have. Macrae proposes, “Experience suggests that warring parties’ adherence to the tenets of international humanitarian law and human-rights law is contingent on their own strategic interests, and does not primarily reflect a response to pressure from humanitarian actors” (Macrae 2000, 94). This implies that the rules can be used by belligerents (on occasions), but not against them.

Intransigence

Eastern Congo was violent, but for an approach to be strategically persuasive, it would have to respond to the environment in which it was envisioned to operate. A universally applicable strategy is politically improbable, and in much of Congo assistance was not delivered. The government was disconsolate about the emergency response, identifying the coordination of interventions in occupied areas as particularly derisory, along with logistics and funding (Ministère de la Santé 2001b, 10). Significantly, whatever ‘strategy’ was being foiled in the east was thwarted in government-held areas as well. Expatriate travel outside Kinshasa and Lubumbashi was subject to authorisation by the Minister of the Interior, and a mining licence was required for mineral areas. Handicap International’s director held, “The ministry can’t do much; it’s obliged to help NGOs to do what they should be doing themselves. They’re very cooperative...Security [clearance] is no problem, it’s just a question of access, and access is limited.”¹⁹¹

In Kinshasa, NGO workers reported being restricted not by security, but by access; it was not a distinction made in other countries, where insecurity and inaccessibility were terms used interchangeably. The logic implied by drawing the distinction in Congo was that NGOs could not gain access, but that – apart from the government’s restrictions – assistance was neutral and impartial. The UN reported, “Regrettably, the Government (with the exception of the Minister for Human Rights) regards NGOs as a kind of enemy to be fought or, at best, as ‘political parties like the churches’ (as Kabila told the Special Rapporteur)” (UN 2000d, 25).

¹⁹¹ 30/05/01, Kinshasa.

The laws restricting expatriates' movements were viewed by NGOs as intransigence, but over time foreigners had taken more out of Congo, through mining and slavery, than the projects they had put in. Few aid workers have been in Kinshasa for ten years, but one who had explained the access issue:

Here there are no problems working in the western part of Congo. I think the problems foreigners have are problems that they provoke – their arrogance and attitude provoke problems. The head of WPF, he's there – he touches his salary. He'll tell you that there's an office in Mbandaka because there's a lot of need there. But nobody's doing anything in Equateur. He'll tell you that the authorities don't give him authorisation to go there, but that's his job. He has to establish the authorisation. There are forms of suffering that you cannot imagine. There are people who don't have clothes – a woman can't go out and work in the fields naked in front of everyone. It's awful. So he told me: if the government doesn't want me to help them, I can't be bothered to help them.¹⁹²

The account indicates that it was not merely that the rules were unpersuasive, but little effort was made. As far as the discourse was concerned, this involved no climb-down. Aid organisations could claim their rules, while submitting to the allure of what Ignatieff tags the 'seductiveness of moral disgust': "Let the brutes exterminate themselves" (Ignatieff 1998, 96). He writes, "Blaming the victim is one of the temptations of disillusion. A very great deal of exculpatory moral disgust circulates around the failures of the new world order, a self-excusing sense that 'we' tried and 'they' failed" (Ignatieff 1998, 99); it fits with the language of rules.

The story of how hard 'we tried,' though, has started to unravel, and NGOs could not support (or persuade the government to provide) basic infrastructure in Kinshasa. Meanwhile restrictions to NGOs' movements further afield fuelled complaints about the government, although these did not prevail on it to reform. The odd assistance programmes in Kinshasa (detailed in Chapter 4) hint at how – and possibly why – the government regulated NGOs' movements elsewhere with so little political organisation. Access to other areas of the country was not successfully negotiated by NGOs (and there was little funding anyway), and most international agencies did not trust Congolese staff to implement projects unsupervised. It was reciprocal: Kabila did not allow foreigners to travel because they might steal, and foreigners did not allow Congolese staff to travel because they might steal.

On coming to power in 2001, Joseph Kabila instituted the Freedom of Movement, formally lifting blanket restrictions on expatriates, but there was no change regarding mining permits. As NGOs gained some access, a Merlin employee accepted, "it's a very big problem that people want coverage, not necessarily quality. In some ways you can understand it – there are so many areas which are not funded at all." There was no strategy for ensuring the quality or quantity of assistance. A CRS worker commented,

¹⁹² 16/06/01, Kinshasa.

With an emergency, you have to restore things to a pre-war state. But here, when you start from zero, you can't do anything in six months in places where you've had no vaccinations for ten years. The scale of needs and the scale of money will scare away a lot of people... There's some expectation of impact, and emergency funding is for six to nine months.¹⁹³

Congo did not fit the definition of disaster or the assistance on offer. The expectation of impact was widely (if unofficially) jettisoned, and many NGO workers acknowledged that available assistance was unequal to the task identified by the principles and rights perspective. Fewer perceived this as fundamentally problematic; the discourse was not threatened, because what NGOs could do was constrained by the government or funding anyway. To the extent that it was a problem, it was not *their* problem, as they were not responsible for others who transgressed their rules.

Any persuasive leverage that might have been exerted by example was disassembled by the mismatch of events. NGOs officially collaborated with ministries, whilst resenting the government; they talked about impartiality, acknowledged unmet needs, and gave little assistance. The fact that the state was not functioning gave reason for NGOs to be in Congo; the same fact was reworked to explain their lack of progress. An MSF worker observed,

The state fixes norms for treatment, so it says for malaria such-and-such, for malnutrition such-and-such, and it fixes these norms for all the health zones. The state also names the doctor-director of the province. They all supposedly have a diploma in public health. In Mbandaka we had the choice between two bad doctors. The state also demands a plan of action from the doctors and the health zones, and from the different medical departments. It regulates, but as it doesn't have the means, it just sanctions. If it's bad, they say, "OK you have to close," but they don't – they just move elsewhere. The manner is repressive, but it's not very helpful. Normally the state would have rules – if you want to open a pharmacy, the state would regulate.¹⁹⁴

Describing the intimidating and unreceptive environment avoided remarking on the weak strategy of assistance. It did not indicate a basis for persuasive negotiation, and it is ironic that remarks about the unhelpfulness of erratic austerity came from an aid worker. An understanding that lack of accountability was politically problematic coexisted with obliviousness to the haphazard visitations of NGOs and the provocation that they might cause. Overlooking structural deficiencies of the response, though, did frame the interpretation that assistance was an – apparently surprisingly – frustrated assault on disorder, thereby granting it rationale.

The annoyance was shared; a government official observed, "There are lots of NGOs which do excellent work. There are others that are bandits. Some make decisions in Europe – this is unacceptable. They have to come through the government. There's a problem of trust and

¹⁹³ 28/05/01, Kinshasa.

¹⁹⁴ 22/05/01, Kinshasa.

management.”¹⁹⁵ He had different priorities when considering where pressure could be applied strategically, continuing, “Internationals allow us to overcome certain difficulties, but you have to tell governments outside to stop the war.” Because it’s us, not you? I asked. “Well,” he replied, “you’re funding Rwanda.”

Rwanda

In political terms, Rwanda’s circumstances exemplified the post-Cold War tension between the donors’ need to appear moral through their engagement, and the marginalisation of Africa.

Duffield captures the predicament for global powers of maintaining a ruled paradigm without the predisposition to implement it:

Liberal governance must achieve [its] goal through partnership, agreement and participatory methods. Southern governments and peoples must themselves embrace and carry out this radical agenda. In most cases, the difficulty of achieving this aim internationally has tended to push global governance towards accommodation and complicity with systems that differ violently from itself. This limitation of liberal power in addressing complexities has two main consequences. First, it continually creates pressures to drop its partnership approach and directly impose a radical agenda of social transformation: to change from liberal peace to liberal war. However, given that states increasingly have to act together, apart from a few special cases, securing the political will for such direct action is very difficult to obtain. Consequently, the main effect of the limitations of liberal power is that Northern governments and aid agencies have had to adapt to policy failure. (Duffield 2001, 261)

Rwanda was not going to be a cause for war; that had been tested before, and in more violent times. Political and economic conditions were such that Rwanda was a prime possibility for policy failure as far as the liberal project was concerned, but international interest in averting another genocide (or at least not being implicated in its genesis) maintained some involvement. In this section I explore the way that illiberalism can be criticised and overlooked, and how aid organisations – perceiving bullying – appealed to higher authority.

Troubling elements

In 1994, human rights conventions and humanitarian principles did not induce international action to protect or help the people attacked by state-led violence. Nothing elicited a response until Genocide was named, and then that did not work either. In the year following the genocide, survivors were “almost wholly forgotten” by international organisations (African Rights 1995c, xvi), and *Rwanda*, “*a waste of hope*” describes the UN Human Rights Field Operation as ‘surreal’, critiquing the excitement in international circles to move on (African Rights 1995b). It was not only about what NGOs could persuade anyone to do, or stop doing, it was about the world. Defending humanitarianism, Stockton offers,

Of course the humanitarian agencies and their staff are not perfect. But compare their response after the disaster of the Great Lakes with that of governments. While France, the UK and the US variously denied responsibility and buck passed furiously, the

¹⁹⁵ 16/06/01, Kinshasa.

NGOs got on with the Sphere Project, People in Aid, and the Humanitarian Ombudsman project. (Stockton 1998, 359)

Sphere was launched in 1997, and the new guidelines suggested that NGOs were moving both to regulate themselves and to woo back the confidence of donors and people in countries in which assistance was given. Sphere opened: “Humanitarian agencies committed to this Charter and to the Minimum Standards will aim to achieve defined levels of service for people affected by calamity or armed conflict, and to promote the observance of fundamental humanitarian principles” (Sphere 2000).

Over one hundred humanitarian agencies signed up to the Minimum Standards of the Sphere Project, although initial enthusiasm was dimmed by subsequent realisation that they did not have goals in common (Macrae 2002). According to Buchanan-Smith, SC-UK’s concerns that “what was being proposed was not do-able” abated “as it became clear that regulation would not be incorporated into Sphere” (Buchanan-Smith 2003, 15), indicating that Sphere was more about the role of NGOs than about self-regulation.

Sphere embodied a renewed confidence in assistance, and in some respects, the persuasive potential of aid organisations was high in Rwanda in the late 1990s: there was funding, most of the country was stable, and there was a single government. There are, though, two factors that made the situation particular. First, NGOs left the country within days of the start of the genocide; this undercut the chances of Rwandans viewing NGOs either as moral authorities or as dependable allies. Second, the government of Rwanda maintained political strength domestically, and pursued a course that many aid workers found troubling, both in Rwanda and in Congo. Who held power nationally was important, and people and government were more likely to fall victim to over-control than political entropy. Uvin talks of a ‘state class’,¹⁹⁶ “there was no bourgeoisie defined by its control over the means of production, but only a ruling clique defined by its control over the state” (Uvin 1998, 21). This left little space for the strategies of NGOs.

NGOs did not want to risk expulsion by challenging the government, and the official position was of collaboration, particularly with sectoral ministries. This, though, masked discomfort about the government’s agenda, and about NGOs’ position within it. An SC-UK worker asserted,

The government are not accountable themselves. If they were doing what they say they were doing, that would be different. The government has committed human rights abuses in the Congo – should we be dealing with them? We need to find the ability to work with them without getting too close.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ He writes about pre-1994 Rwanda, but states exclusion, structural violence and inequality remained.

¹⁹⁷ 06/04/01, Kigali.

Within the scope of official collaboration, aid organisations varied in their assessments and openness of opinion. For example, regarding Solidarity Camps, which were established by the government with support from aid agencies, Unicef reported, “In Rwanda’s Solidarity Camps, the children who have survived the conflicts that devastated their countries are learning about cooperation and conflict resolution through recreational and cultural activities” (Unicef 1999b). CRS funded some Camps from 1998, “but not the ones where you learn to take a gun apart,” explained the representative. Solidarity Camps were held by HRW to be about military training if you were fortunate, but not in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi where,

[they] are meant to provide political education for people from regions in which the insurgency was strong or for people who have returned recently from the Congo...In these camps, participants do not learn to shoot. More than forty of the participants in a recent camp in Ruhengeri were, however, pressed to join forces departing to fight in the Congo. (HRW 2000c)

Such variation of stated opinion suggests that events were open to interpretation, and also that uncertainty existed, rather than a universalist strategy. Suspicion of the government was instrumental in increasing both compliance and frustration, and Pottier writes, “the guilt and debt of the international community, expertly exploited by the Rwandan government, meant that Westerners lost the right to ask ‘awkward’ questions of the RPF” (Pottier 2002, 156).

Duffield writes, “It is increasingly evident that *the aid technocracy is structurally incapable of understanding the situations in which it works*. This ignorance, however, is functional...it is the means whereby organisational power is made manifest and unaccountable” (Duffield 1996, 189). Functional ignorance nullifies strategy (or rather, redirects it) and can be used for describing events in particular ways. UNHCR, commanding assistance ideology in the immediate post-genocide period, proposed,

“Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, you feed him for life.” This expression may be a hackneyed development mantra, but it endures because it is based on a fundamental principle: promoting self-reliance breeds future responsibility and ability. (UNHCR 2000, 43-4)

It is more likely that it endures because it pins starvation on the man’s ignorance of fishing, rather than any difficulties he may encounter. It is based on the premise that things are bad for some technical reason, or irresponsibility and inability – that if you give the simple folk a prod they will fish for life. There may be nothing less appropriate for Rwanda, either in the description of the challenge, or in the formulation of means of persuasion to respond to it. Meanwhile the sentiment emanates from a conceit of ideological superiority, which demands that rules are imposed. It claims to be based on a ‘fundamental principle’, and does not emerge from practical investigation of how to achieve food security.

Bullying

Oxfam asserted, “Rwanda has difficulty attracting expatriate staff,” identifying reasons including threats from national staff and denial of work permits (Oxfam 2000b, 10). This carries some criticism of the failure of Rwandan people to create an environment that would make the country attractive to aid workers; it also assumes that Rwanda wanted to attract expatriate staff.

In the period after the genocide, the relationship between NGOs and the government was “increasingly strained” and forty-three had been “asked to cease their operations” in December 1995 (UN 1996); elsewhere the figure was reported as 38, of which 19 had already left (UN and MINIREISO 1996, 27). The remaining NGOs were required to sign an agreement with the government. Some refused but the process went ahead, and over a hundred registered with the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Social Integration. The government was unmoved by the assistance that had been provided, and the NGOs’ did not redeem themselves by signing. A representative from the president’s office reported,

It became increasingly clear as time went on, that even among some NGOs who officially registered and signed an agreement with the Government, their mandates conflicted with the declaration that an NGO should be governed by the aims which are non Governmental, non political, non sectarian and non profit making. (UN and MINIREISO 1996, 26)

He issued an assurance that the government was “committed to maintaining a favourable environment within which NGOs can operate,” before appraising the lack of impact, accountability, skills and capacities of NGOs, and slating the expense of expatriate staff. It was an attack against which NGOs were unlikely to apply moral pressure, and they sensed that they were being bullied.

The dismissal of some NGOs was resented by aid agencies as authoritarian and manipulative. Principles and rights credited NGOs’ intentions, and expulsion could be interpreted as an outrage against international morality. The government was perceived to be throwing out the NGOs that had drawn attention to its human rights record, and sending a signal to others. The line presented by the NGO coordinator in the Ministry of Local Affairs, conversely, was essentially an accusation of NGO incompetence.

J: They were working in the emergency and the outcome was not so much felt. The government took some steps to minimise the number of NGOs and come to a small number which is willing to engage in government activities.

Z: How did the government decide which NGOs should leave?

J: They had just to make some kind of evaluation of NGO activities.

Z: What were the criteria they used?

J: Depending on the plan of action. You’ve got inventory quotes. This includes all assets that belong to an NGO, and also includes funds that NGOs are going to invest in the country, it includes also projects...Checking on the reports submitted and the

inventory quotes – you find that there are gaps, what has been done and what was supposed to be done.¹⁹⁸

He showed resentment, but no examples. He had never heard of DFID, and when asked whether NGOs had difficulties attracting funds replied, “I had never got any complaint of any kind from any NGOs. What they need is a registration certificate, then they show it to donors.” The coordinator’s understanding was that NGOs presented a list of needs to donors, who then provided funds, and betrayed a lack of thoroughness and accountability, and a superficiality in the relationship between government and NGOs.

The introduction in April 2001 (following legislation passed in 1999 by the National Assembly) of the law requiring the registration of NGOs was resisted by aid organisations. The government claimed a coordination role, with influence over staff and budgets, and NGOs were concerned about the likely lengthy bureaucracy and the lack of right to appeal. The UN Special Representative (whose remit was limited by the government to advising on improving the human rights situation, rather than reporting abuse) recorded,

The fear is that it will prevent a number of legitimate and well-intentioned NGOs from operating in Rwanda. The Special Representative would like to urge the Government to consider these views and to ensure that the right balance is struck between the need for regulation and coordination, and the desirability of maintaining an active and independent civil society. (Moussalli 2001)

Referring to an ‘active and independent civil society’ without mentioning politics kept the discourse neutral, enabling NGO activity to be approved, whilst censuring the government were it to take anything more than a regulation and coordination role. The censure, though, was incomprehensible in literal terms. The comments brought an implied allegation of political repression, but no mention of politics, and no political muscle anyway. In terms of their strategic leverage, they were misplaced, as the government’s concern was not with what NGOs’ claimed intentions were, but with what they achieved, or failed to achieve.

Despite ill-feeling, registration applications were accepted with few exceptions, but if the previous expulsion of NGOs and the introduction of legislation implied criticism of the international involvement, the government was making no secret of it. On 7th April 2001 in the President’s Address to the Nation on Genocide Commemoration Day, Kagame declared his hand:

We should not be deceived that solutions will come from beyond our borders. That is not possible. Why? This is because the world we live in has no mercy. If the world were merciful, the Genocide would not have occurred. It occurred before the very eyes of the world, and they did nothing about it. (Kagame 2001)

¹⁹⁸ 20/04/01, Kigali.

Kagame had no reason to be content with any international settlement of domestic or regional issues (Waller 1996), and cited the indifference of others to justify his own violent solution. He (and other Rwandans) perceived NGOs as a subset of, and a sop for, the geo-political hierarchy, not as a moral or political challenge to it. His response to the regional opportunities and risks – sending troops to Congo – contravened the prevailing international spoken morality, and transgressed international and Congolese law. A UN Panel of Experts report found “mass-scale looting” and “systematic and systemic exploitation” particularly of coltan, diamonds, copper, cobalt and gold, that provided resources to the Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundian militaries as well as the Rcd (UN 2001).

If anyone was unsure about the UN report (which was published five days later, but the tenor of which was already known), Kagame continued his Commemoration Day speech by reiterating his security concerns:

What compelled us to go to Congo was our security. It was purely with the intention of preventing another genocide.

To date our explanation for having sent our troops to Congo has been reduced by a cynical world, to nothing. This cynical world is now accusing us of sending our troops to Congo because we are interested in precious minerals. Others say we are in Congo to kill people. We are accused of being responsible for the deaths of two million Congolese. That is the cynical, merciless and deceitful world I mentioned earlier. This is the world that chooses not to remember our suffering. They are attempting to erase our painful experience by these lies. They expect us to sit quietly and wait for another cycle of Genocide for them to fly in and dole out relief provisions to the survivors...

Let us work together to re-build Rwanda into a nation that is guided by the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and good governance. Only then can we truly say that Genocide will never again occur in our country.

Kagame was outspoken for a leader who was receiving large amounts of aid, but arguably he underestimated the world’s cynicism, or did not see how it could work to his favour. The UN Report encased some official reprimand of the forces concerned, but it relied on a ‘reasonable standard’ of proof gathered from voluntary contributions, and it had no convincing political or legal authority. Enough was said to expose ‘illegal’ activity and antagonise those to whom it was attributed – including Kagame – but nothing was going to stop them. The administration of official disapproval discharged the responsibility of the UN, or the ‘international community’: the problem had been investigated.

The UN’s report sealed general agreement across aid agencies. NGOs also registered scattered discontent in less official complaints about the government. Aid workers knew that they were in no position to claim moral superiority, given the history of aid in Rwanda, but not condemning slaughter was difficult, and if there was nothing wrong with it, and the displacement, destruction and poverty it occasioned, the conviction and legitimacy of assistance were threatened. The higher authority of universality, though, allowed NGOs a function. So whilst

the vocabulary of violated rights and principles framed admonition, it gave no persuasive leverage for NGOs to act neutrally or impartially.

Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, the ideological fundamentalism rooted in the indisputability of the rules allowed a clear, but not very useful, picture of the RUF, and foreclosed negotiations with the government.

“Brutal war”

MJM Saffa was displaced in Kenema. He recalled,

M: [The RUF] were engaging in mass killing. Some [civilians] were fortunate, some came before the rebels arrived. Some were trapped in the bush. We were there for months before we were able to travel and come.

Z: What did the rebels want?

M: They were gaining territory, burning houses, killing. Each time they move and meet people in the village they just get rid of them. They were moving in a large group. They were all armed. If you’re caught, if you’re a young kid they take you and train you.

Z: What’s their motivation?

M: I may call it wickedness. Even if they want to gain territory, that is not the best way. If you want to form a government, that’s not the best way.¹⁹⁹

Little suggests that the RUF were looking for a way that was acceptable to civilians, but their approach was successful in terms of gaining resources, forcing the political agenda and attracting international attention. Condemnation of the RUF was spearheaded internationally by NGOs employing human rights language:

Fatmata is a 14-year-old girl who has been abducted by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone’s brutal war. She had seen her parents killed and her village destroyed. Her captor took her as his ‘wife’, meaning she had to provide sex and cook and clean for him on demand.²⁰⁰

Thus begins any number of NGO reports; its morality assessment is clear and it focuses attention on the individual victim. What, though, was its purpose? Even if the discourse attracted funds from donors, it provided no leverage for gaining access; donors could pay NGOs to make statements about objectives, but not to fulfil them. Many of the RUF were not reading human rights reports, but nonetheless Amnesty International made ‘recommendations to the RUF’ (having identified rape as a weapon) to “take all measures to protect girls and women from rape and other forms of sexual violence” (Amnesty International 2000, 10). Such an approach could not genuinely be directed at the perpetrators of violence.

An MSF employee claimed, “We demand unhindered access to those in humanitarian need. This is based on International Humanitarian Law, essentially, and human rights... We demand

¹⁹⁹ 29/12/00, Kenema.

²⁰⁰ “Child Soldiers” The Psychological Working Group case study. Queen Margaret University College, Refugee Studies Centre, MSF-Holland, IRC, Mercy Corps et al. October 2003.

the right to give aid to people who need it.”²⁰¹ There were 2.4 million people in RUF territory out of reach of NGOs at the time, and demanding was proving unrewarding. NGOs could condemn the RUF, but had no contact with them, and so no means of material or moral persuasion. An OCHA employee commented,

Humanitarian agencies have taken quite a beating here. Their mandate is to reach the people, but who is in a position to negotiate with the RUF? You can speak to one commander, but others have another point of view. Humanitarian agencies cannot work in unsafe areas.²⁰²

The point is commonsensical, but also strange; emergency NGOs present themselves as working almost entirely in unsafe areas, deploying their moral tools to negotiate a path to the most needy. Universalist discourse states that assistance (theoretically) reaches people on the frontline; why it did not was explained by recording how the RUF were breaking the rules. In doing so the discourse also vindicated the NGOs’ proximity to the government. Despite some collaboration, though, as in other countries, NGOs acknowledged the authorities only for as long as they exerted no authority.

Harassment/ development

Confrontation surfaced when the government drew up its Policy Regulations for NGOs while the war was on-going. NGOs resisted, officially because agreeing to work in accordance with government priorities compromised humanitarianism. The Policy Regulations claimed political airtime from 1994, but the recurrence of fighting, particularly in Freetown, stalled the process in 1998 and 1999, when drafts were produced. In a workshop in March 2000, the document was challenged by NGOs, whose opinion was largely ignored. Whilst notionally the challenge was to the substance of the document, it was so severe as to mount, in effect, a rejection of the government’s involvement.

Another draft of the Policy Regulations materialised in August 2000, which NGOs, DFID and ECHO found unacceptable. It included conditions that all programmes be registered with the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning (MODEP) at a fee of US\$500, duty free vehicles be limited to five, all donor funds be declared, and all transactions take place through the banking system. An ACF worker judged that the Policy conflicted with ACF’s mandate as it entailed compliance with the government’s agenda, adding, “it is difficult to say we’re going to abide by that, but it’s not a political problem.” She assessed,

First, it’s normal that, as a government, it’s trying to regulate what’s going on. Secondly, money-making – and it’s a power issue for MODEP and Kadi Sesay [its minister]. For now, it’s time consuming, but it’s not in place. It had some impact in the way we clear expatriates and goods – delays, constraints in bringing in expatriates. The impact will

²⁰¹ 11/12/00, Freetown.

²⁰² 05/12/00, Freetown.

be firstly, more bureaucracy, secondly delays in implementing, and thirdly they can prevent us from implementing certain projects.²⁰³

There was some equivocation over who should benefit. A MODEP official asked, “Who are the beneficiaries? Who are their custodians...If you are leaving, the assets you have should be passed to the beneficiaries. You can either pass them direct or through the custodians, which is the government,”²⁰⁴ but the custodian role was failing half the country, and most government-allied areas as well. The contention, though, centred not around who was receiving services, but around how much the government was pressurising NGOs. An IMC worker claimed,

What the government of Sierra Leone wants is for NGOs to channel funds through them, like every other African government. They’re trying to control NGOs as much as possible. There should be communication between NGOs and the government of Sierra Leone, but this is harassment.²⁰⁵

An MSF-Holland employee agreed, “They’re looking for power; they’re looking at the re-registration as a means of getting rid of some NGOs...the first version was totally unacceptable, it was not an attempt to coordinate NGOs, it was an attempt to control them.”²⁰⁶ Referring to the stipulation that NGOs should have a mission statement in conformity with the government’s policy, she continued, “why should MSF’s policy be in conformity with the Government of Sierra Leone’s policy?”

Another question would be: *why would the government have an agenda different to the NGOs’?* The fact that NGOs were working solely in government-allied areas compounded the irony of their principled stance, but the shadow-boxing was key to a display of NGO neutrality, and for obscuring the triviality of the collaboration. A Concern worker accepted, “The [Policy] document goes against principles, but NGOs have to take it in good faith. If they don’t sign, they’ll lose their duty waiver.” There was no institutional support and no persuasive rebuttal of the demands that the government made. Choices for NGOs were between enumerating broken principles and accepting the agreement in ‘good faith’, to avoid paying tax.

A minority, whilst having qualms about how the process was undertaken, approved of the government having a role in the country’s development. A Plan employee (who was Sierra Leonean) acknowledged,

The guidelines from the Government of Sierra Leone are not against NGOs. They’re talking about coordination and organisation of efforts, which is no bad thing. It’s the right of a sovereign government – how can they coordinate if they don’t have information? Most NGOs are against it. The financial aspect is an attempt to control exoneration, and is a measure against briefcase NGOs – those which are not genuine,

²⁰³ 17/01/01, Freetown.

²⁰⁴ 25/01/01, Freetown.

²⁰⁵ 06/12/00, Freetown.

²⁰⁶ 11/12/00, Freetown.

and are just here to make money...The government is not asking for money. At the end of the year, NGOs should say how much they have invested. The government wants to know how much is being spent on behalf of Sierra Leoneans. Why is it a problem to submit proposals to the Sierra Leone government? Corruption takes two persons.²⁰⁷

Wrangling aside, the Regulations garnered some forbearance among international workers from the government's willingness to host the experimental intervention. Also, capacity building and strengthening institutions were on the aid agenda. This accommodation, though, did not come from the NGOs' appeal to the rules or more general credibility. A MODEP official revealed his irritation:

[The Policy] has not been fully implemented because of resistance from international NGOs. Bad habits die hard. Because they have not been accountable in the past, they are trying to resist this policy...The large number of expatriates affects the amount of money reaching beneficiaries. Because they pay expatriates ten to twelve times more than locals.²⁰⁸

The NGOs' concerns about implementation of the Policy were that the government would steal, or demand taxes, and that heads of mission were to be liable for everything that the agency did. Doubtless NGO workers considered their financial and legal privileges to be connected to their ability to provide assistance effectively, but they did not persuade the government of that. Strategically, rejection of the Policy was made as a point of principle: the government should not enforce stipulations on NGOs – on the contrary it should accept the internationally approved morality that the NGOs represented.

NGOs' resistance to the Policy Regulations was not as heated or provocative as in southern Sudan, and nobody was evacuated, asked to leave, or left on account of security concerns. While there was security in Freetown, NGOs discussed coordination with each other and some government officials. The interests of all concerned were to avoid mentioning anything outside the official neutrality and impartiality. The deadline came and went in February 2001; some NGOs had signed and some had not, and then it was not very important after all.

Legitimacy

On various occasions, authorities hosting assistance appealed to democracy, transparency and accountability, including when defending behaviour that NGOs cast as aberrant. Conversely, asked if there were problems with NGOs, the Sierra Leonean NCRRR Commissioner replied,

Yes, yes. Since 1991 there's been a huge rise in the number of NGOs operating in Sierra Leone, local and international. Many are operating and nobody knows what they're doing. If you hear about the number of NGOs that are working and compare it with the impact!...The government is under pressure to provide free materials, but wants to regulate the system, to know what resources are coming into the country. There's a concentration of NGO activities in some areas, and a total lack elsewhere.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ 04/12/00, Freetown.

²⁰⁸ 25/01/01, Freetown.

²⁰⁹ 25/01/01, Freetown.

The official version of rights and principles catalogues the horrors of war and the moral decrepitude of people involved, whether fighting, stealing or being uncooperative; it has also been seen to give ideological confidence to NGOs. These processes encourage the inference that the way that people ‘break the rules’ is what hampers assistance. There are two catches: firstly that assistance does not fulfil its side of the ‘bargain’ – the rules did not govern NGOs’ or donors’ behaviour (as was seen in Chapters 2-4). Secondly, there is no ‘bargain’. In the absence of control, perceived threats, or unquestioned morality, rules have to be agreed with some sincerity by all parties, even if there are cases of non-compliance. Dworkin observes, “a hypothetical agreement is not simply a pale form of an actual contract; it is no contract at all” (Dworkin 1977; Kymlicka 1990).

Few people in any of the situations described had well-founded reason to believe they would be assisted, or to depend on assistance if it was given. Even where projects were comparatively well funded, assistance went to the minority, and often not to the most vulnerable. Hence, there is no self-evidently moral, much less rational, reason to abide by the rules of distribution or behaviour. Opportunism is sensible, and violence is effective for influencing assistance (even though it sometimes shuts it down). Rational choice and collective action problems give some explanation of events – some people can get more by breaking the rules than by playing together.

There is, however, reason to believe there is more to it, and two further processes can be discerned. The first recalls Gilligan’s theory that shame – including ways in which people are made to feel insignificant – provokes violence. The rules of assistance confer shame by describing various activity, including military and political events, as ‘rule-breaking,’ labelling people criminal, unreasonable or incomprehensible. The second is that aggravation is multiplied by posturing, and the legitimacy necessary to promote a morality is not simply set back, but undermined, by restating inoperable rules. Thus the actions of NGOs, apparently undertaken to reduce dissonance between their claims and the reality had a provocative effect. The case need not be overstated, as assistance is a small part of life and its discourse is not the most decisive political voice. Demands were made on NGOs, though, and the evidence is that appealing to their own morality or a higher authority was not persuasive. There were two strategic errors in the techniques of persuasion: NGOs directed their reproach at people who had no incentive to listen, and they were not themselves perceived to be credible.

In southern Sudan, imposing distribution rules and insistence over the MoU resulted in animosity. The UN report on Congo did not bring parties to account, and was followed by violence against ICRC workers and political and military aggression from Kagame. In Sierra Leone, the RUF reneged on agreements with aid workers, and became more unpredictable as

NGOs retreated. NGOs made compromises in what they *did*, and not in what they claimed. NGOs left southern Sudan, provided little in Congo, implemented the government agenda in Rwanda and worked only in government areas in Sierra Leone. Meanwhile the continued espousal of universalist claims necessarily involved condemning some people and letting others down. Gilligan would consider this dangerous.

An apparent weakness of Gilligan's theory in this context relates to why there is not *more* violence, and experience shows that NGO workers usually enjoy a privileged security status in wars. If assistance delivery (and neglect) were systematically shame-inducing and provocative, there would be ubiquitous retribution. The answer is that there is, in that there are more reprisals than are immediately visible: NGOs are hard money and a soft touch, and everyone steals from them – spurious claimants or cowboy committees in IDP camps, agency employees, soldiers and militias, and local and government personnel. However, the shame caused by restating the rules can be offset, as low-level violence is bought out by turning a blind eye to thieving (or NGOs just leave) – NGOs' unaccountability, leakage and wealth cover irregularities.

Macrae suggests that there is a choice between abandoning and retaining principles for strategic purposes (Macrae 1998), but asking whether the rules should be abandoned in principle when they have been abandoned in practice lets slip the dishonesty they endorse. In reality the options are: *is it better to pretend to have rules* (which serve some tangential purpose), *or to have rules* (which would involve an overhaul of financial and political resources)?, with a third possibility of wariness of ideological fundamentalism in environments that other people control. The triumph for the institution of assistance is that the discourse overlooks the realm of implementation, and so presents a choice between rules and no rules.

Another strategy

NGOs' lack of headway in the countries studied discounts hypothesis (1b) – that stating the objectives is strategic to fulfilling them. Discussions, such as they were, were antagonistic, captivating and – eventually – largely pointless, and did not lead to more effective interventions. Disputes occurred in all situations, violent or otherwise, and NGOs did not create 'place' to pursue their stated aims. Critically, NGOs derived nothing strategic from the rules about what to do when it goes wrong, and when it did, nobody knew what to do: in Congo and southern Sudan, impartiality advocated withdrawing and not withdrawing. In Sierra Leone and Rwanda the rules generated only institutionalised white-noise in dealings with the governments.

Why do NGOs continue to invoke the rules, even at the expense of exposing themselves to charges of hypocrisy or political imbecility? A clue is given by the fact that reiterating the rules lays explicit claim to the moral highground. Gilligan writes,

Morality plays reduce the question to that of “innocence” versus “guilt” (the “good guys” vs. the “bad guys”). This is a simplification of human complexity into the ready moral categories of “good” and “bad.” (Gilligan 1999, 8)

Then, “but to judge someone “guilty” requires the judge to make the moral value judgement...it does not help us to understand the *cause* of a violent act – nor is it intended to.” Restating rules, according to Gilligan, is not intended to exert leverage, but pursues another strategy: he identifies how the judge and supporting legal system are strengthened and vindicated by accusing others.

Assistance discourse packages war as violation of rules, cutting out the politics inherent to the emergency agenda (Zetter 1998), and Berry claims it is possible to “corrupt war as an instrument of state policy” (Berry 1997, 2). ‘Corrupting’ war does not stop it from happening, but does have functions: Duffield writes, “Liberal peace has questioned violent conflict as a legitimate vehicle for social change” (Duffield 2001, 130), and argues that in doing so it moves from description of anarchy to the criminalisation of violence. The rules are instrumental in creating space for NGOs and donors to agree both on what was good (in principle) and whom to condemn (in practice), and this accord can be expected to have comforting psychological returns.

What appears as moral pressure on belligerents and authorities in host countries was anti-strategic in terms of pursuing the objectives, as it was maladjusted and confrontational. Hypothesis (1b) must be rejected, as stating the objectives did not persuade people to conform; nonetheless, there was strategy in presenting assistance as a moral act. Describing violence and politics as that which causes need or blocks assistance, and abuses human rights (rather than as military victories or political transformation) justifies to donors, NGOs or host populations certain responses to it including withdrawal, neglect and collapse. In all the countries studied, NGO workers justified themselves by their intentions. This potentially eased the dissonance felt by individual NGO staff and furthered some organisational needs vis-à-vis donors, but the justifications did not grant leverage over the political situations, or provide assistance that was commensurate with their claims. So listing the ways that other people break the rules is less illuminating than the observation that aid providers are playing a game.

6. The Game

Radda Barnen support a training centre in Aterieu, a small town south of Rumbek in southern Sudan. On 8th December 2001, we were driving there in two vehicles, along the hard-packed sand road. Part way into the journey we were stopped by soldiers; the SPLA were recruiting, and we were travelling with men who might be needed for the army. Not at all, insisted Radda Barnen, these guys are students at the training centre. The men stood, hands aloft, whilst the soldiers did some searching and questioning. Training opportunities approach zero in southern Sudan, and there was nothing remotely obvious about why the soldiers should allow those men to enjoy foreign resources whilst others were taken to the front. Assistance came into conflict with violence: it offered small chances to extremely few people, whereas mass mobilisation suggested a more radical shake-up. The situation by the side of the road was getting unsteady. Suddenly, “You see that white woman there?” said one of the Sudanese staff, pointing me out to the soldiers, “she’s the Commander for the whole of Bahr el-Ghazal.” It was not a moral truth, it was a gamble. Small tense pause; then the soldiers laughed, everyone jumped back in the vehicles and we drove quickly on.

We clattered along, Cassaun, the driver, cheerfully pointing out places he had been stranded for three hours once, during the rainy season, or five days. He went abruptly rather quiet, slowed nearly to nothing and manoeuvred over a bridge fashioned from a girder and a metal slab, with maybe an inch on either side. Clearing the bridge we watched the driver behind lose the front wheel over the edge, somehow pull it back, swing the rear section round, leap on the accelerator, and heave the vehicle over a four-inch spike (another engineering feature). It was weird watching, there being no Newtonian account of how he made the crossing. As we drove away, boss howling, others amazed, Cassaun and I glanced at each other; “God”, he muttered, as the only explanation of how they had made it.

The assistance game

Rejecting (1a) and (1b) entails abandoning the overarching hypothesis – that the objectives are stated because they *are* the objectives of aid organisations. I now turn more explicitly to my second hypothesis, that the objectives are stated because they allow some other end to be pursued. To examine this, I investigate the shape of assistance and its supporting mechanisms with two questions: *Who gets assistance, and why?* and, *How and why is assistance sustained in spite of its failure to provide in accordance with human rights and humanitarian principles?*

In this chapter I describe a ‘political morality,’ the administration of a morality that is inconstant and used for political purposes, and argue that it constitutes the game of assistance. I am characterising assistance as a game because it attaches disproportionate and symbolic

significance to some events and people, and uses these to distract attention from others.

Assistance is recreational as it does not realistically address suffering, and in that this is known by the people who control it. Its discourse polarises people providing and people hosting assistance, whilst facilitating collusion between the donors, who define the political morality, and NGOs, who play to it.

Herodotus, writing around 440BC, narrates how during a famine in the time of King Atys, the Lydians invented a number of pastimes, including dice, bones and ball. One day they would play, the next day they would eat, and thus distracted themselves for eighteen years (Herodotus, I.5). Vaux, in *The Selfish Altruist*, observes similar satisfaction in discussing plastic sheeting and taps: “Technical talk is especially comforting because it gives a feeling of solidarity when all else is sliding into death” (Vaux 2001, 44). Playing the game, rather than questioning its validity, distracts from the devastation.

The game holds that small change can save lives, proposing a role for assistance in the face of enormous evidence. The crux of its nature is the relationship between capacity and genuineness, a subject on which Jok gives a succinct appraisal. Assessing NGO workers gathering information, he writes, “the foolishness of the questions leads local people to question the seriousness of relief workers’ intentions or even capacity to help” (Jok 1996, 209). It can run the other way too: their incapacity to help demonstrates their foolishness and, by association, their game.

Who gets assistance, and why?

The game confers assistance unevenly whilst maintaining its universalist claims. Receiving assistance involves donors allocating funds, NGOs implementing projects, host authorities and populations allowing this to happen, and the assistance being of a kind and quantity that is useful. Chabal and Daloz assert that from ‘our view of Western development’,

Africa has often seemed to represent either the initial stage in our notion of progress or the dark opposite of what Western civilisation is taken to represent. Africa has always been – and most obviously continues to be – the backward or the barbarous continent. (Chabal and Daloz 1999, 141)

This would be reason to dispute the vantage-point of ‘Western civilisation,’ and the fact that depictions of Africa as backward or barbarous (in political and moral terms) endure indicts the supporting ideology. Analyses of development, Chabal and Daloz argue, are teleological or normative, and this is manifested in – and communicated by – the interacting agendas of assistance too. The teleological agenda pursues political legitimisation: people receive assistance if they perform functions that strengthen or further the donor agenda. Within these political priorities, there is a normative agenda described by a morality game: assistance is given to people who substantiate the dominant ideology by stoking its moral credibility.

The politically backward

The teleological approach sponsors people whom donors construe to be backward and trying to improve. DFID, for example, perceived the governments of Sierra Leone and Rwanda as technically slow, rather than politically motivated. More broadly, a pattern is discernible whereby donors fund NGO projects for people who are relatively willing and able to play the game. Playing does not involve abiding by all the rules, but complying enough not to pose a fundamental challenge, and entertaining the possibility that the game may work.

The majority of assistance goes to people in government-allied areas, but not all of them, and not the poorest. Some funding goes to people in opposition-held or occupied territories; again this goes predominantly to people who have a part in the game, but in a different way. They are people who offer some teleological ‘solution’ such as eradication (of child soldiers or polio), or who offer somewhere to plant a flag, which represents expansion.

At a WFP internal assessment mission in Sierra Leone, the Paramount Chief of Lokomasama told representatives, “we look forward to future assistance. It’s not co-operation, it is assistance. We’re dependent on you.”²¹⁰ This was not true, and there was minimal assistance going to Lokomasama at the time, but those who perceive an opportunity play for funds. Sierra Leone and Rwanda accepted assistance in different ways, and NGOs worked with the governments and civil administration, albeit with frustration on all sides. Irritation emerged because, as was seen in DFID’s case, donors needed the countries to fit a politically moral space, whilst keeping the discourse neutral. Also, it was ideologically problematic for aid to co-opt a weak government, and for it to support a government that was violent towards sections of its population and neighbours. Assistance discourse distracted from the fact that Sierra Leone’s stability involved violence from ECOMOG, Unamsil and British forces, and that in Rwanda, peace involved violently establishing a political base at home and an economic base abroad. What passed for transition to development was autocratic and, for many, debilitating.

As part of a broader intervention, assistance affirmed the presidents of Sierra Leone and Rwanda, easing their decision between gaining funds and ceding control. International support to Kabbah renewed patrimonialism (Richards, Jusu et al. 2001; Archibald and Richards 2002, 17): it granted him and the country resources, consolidating his domestic power. For other Sierra Leoneans, assistance brought advantages including jobs and status in lean times. As it favoured one side and discredited the other, it was widely perceived as international approval, rather than criticism. The RUF’s formation of a humanitarian wing, the Organisation for the Survival of Mankind, and their repeated calls for assistance to RUF-controlled areas, suggested

²¹⁰ 10/02/01, Lokomasama.

that they too considered assistance a measure of approbation (as well as a source of revenue, attention and equipment).

Kagame also gained nationally from external funding; his political strength reflected his military achievements, and although there was little shared understanding with the population, the government was enabled by aid to pursue its own development. HRW reckoned that in 1999, foreign aid paid 45% of the Rwandan budget, writing, "Still burdened by guilt over the genocide, the international community ignored reports of abuses and supported the Rwandan government generously, hoping thus to achieve stability in the region" (HRW 2000b). Playing the game is more attractive to host governments when its resources are significant. In Rwanda and Sierra Leone, net disbursements received constituted between 11% and 44.5% of the GNPs from 1997. By contrast, they constituted between 1.9% and 4.8% of GDP in Congo and Sudan (which says virtually nothing about southern Sudan) (UNDP *various years*).²¹¹

Who is not assisted relates to why assistance is not funded, why it does not reach its stated destination, and why it does not help if it gets there. In government areas, those who offer no successes receive little assistance: people who are destitute but not displaced, or who suffer from malaria, malnutrition or government attacks. They have no value in the politically moral economy. In government-allied areas of Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Congo (and also in relatively stable areas in southern Sudan), most of the rural population remained vulnerable, with scarce resources.

As has been seen, universalist objectives create limitless scope – and, in uncontrollable contexts, necessity – for justifying 'us' and criticising 'them', as blame is used to exculpate aid providers. When defining how bad 'they' are, appeal is made to the rules transgressed; when describing how hard 'we tried', reference is made to the discredited people to explain assistance failures. People who do not play the game are excluded from assistance, and this was Congo, even before the wars. Flora Chirwisa, WHO's NGO co-ordinator in Kinshasa, assessed,

There are not many funds here because there are not many funds here... There's been an embargo for ten years...they don't give to the Democratic Republic of Congo until there's democracy. Now there have been ten years without funding and this is the eleventh year and we don't know democracy. There's a war...it's politics, everyone has left. They've left Congo to Congo. I don't know if it's an embargo, but they don't give money.²¹²

²¹¹ Net disbursements US\$m received (as % of GNP)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Sierra Leone	130 (16%)	106.3 (16.9)	73.5 (11)	182.4 (28.7)	333.7 (44.5)
Rwanda	592 (32)	349.9 (16.9)	372.9 (19.1)	322 (17.9)	290.5 (17.1)
Congo	168 (3.2)	125.6 (2.0)	132.3 (n/a)	183.5 (n/a)	250.9 (4.8)
Sudan	187 (2.1)	209.1 (2.3)	242.9 (2.5)	225 (2.0)	171.8 (1.4)

Source: UNDP's Human Development Reports, 1999-2003.

²¹² 02/06/01, Kinshasa.

Donors talk about universality, but if they cannot include some people in their ‘universe’ or do not prioritise doing so, they cut off. They protect themselves with discourse that omits the political economy of where funds are coming from and going to, both from the definition of the problem and the cost of the solution. Exclusion from assistance deals with what cannot otherwise be dealt with; Minear and Weiss describe triage as the “most serious deterrent to developing a more effective global humanitarian community” (Minear and Weiss 1995, 199).

Some assistance went to southern Sudan and Congo, and much of it was lost; assistance was not well received, and often was violently challenged. Oxfam acknowledged that agencies had delivered assistance “through structures controlled by the very people responsible for the crimes committed in Rwanda” (Watkins 1995, 52), and donors’ ambivalence over the refuge and anonymity provided to the deposed government and Interahamwe after the genocide muted further response to eastern Congo. In the west of Congo, donors considered the government maverick and obstreperous; an IRC worker assessed, “The funders don’t really know what to do or where they want to work.” In southern Sudan there was nothing of international interest. Donors and NGOs treated the SPLA as a government when giving criticism (drawing attention to contracts and responsibilities), and as rebels when giving assistance (for example, by denying their authority).

Not playing the game attracts attention to transgressions of the rules. Darcq of OLS commented, People have done reviews and reviews. The percentage of food that was allegedly diverted was much less than in Ethiopia. It’s part of the anti-SPLA campaign that is part of everyone’s breakfast. They don’t talk about Ethiopia, Somalia and northern Sudan.

Access was not secured by the acrimony of Congo or the tri-partite agreement of Sudan. In Congo, armed groups and government stipulations meant that assistance was inaccessible to most people, regardless of their political persuasion. In Sudan government flight bans were adhered to by NGOs within OLS, and some non-OLS NGOs as well; other areas were routinely ignored. This raises, but does not pursue, the question of how inaccessible ‘inaccessible’ areas were: by consent of the UN, the government defined ‘war zones’ from 1995, despite the fact that the government was documented to have created insecurity to promote famine (Macrae and Zwi 1994; Keen 1994a; Keen 1994b). In terms of accessibility,

So important has donor pressure been in generating access that it is possible to periodicize OLS in terms of the waxing and waning of external pressure and the resulting humanitarian access. (Lautze, Jones et al. 1998, 15)

The game and its attendant discourse distracted from the fact that in all countries access was granted according to how it affected power: power over assistance (including appropriating it), power over the population (by gaining credibility from international attention or opportunity to pillage), and power vis-à-vis geopolitics. Nzongola-Ntalaja noted,

After barely two weeks in office, Joseph Kabila set out on his first diplomatic mission, to Paris, Washington, New York and Brussels, where he seduced the international community with his apparent willingness to change course. As in the halcyon days of neocolonialism, a regime with no legitimacy at home, and itself a veritable insult to the Congolese people, rushed to seek legitimacy abroad. (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 247)

Occupied or opposition territory was often the scene of violence, so any assistance allocated there faced being blocked or ransacked. Success stories, such as rehabilitated schools or hospitals (with or without supplies) are pivotal to assistance in fixing the possibility that it can work. Meanwhile, continuous displacement and short-term funding prevented projects from making foundations. Eliminating anything valuable made assistance less attractive to looters, hence guinea worm projects and hygiene promotion made it into the canon of assistance in southern Sudan.

In adversity, assistance was sold as symbolic solutions, which were packaged for donor funding and bore a universalist mantle. ‘Eradication’, for example, intimated a global solution to a disease, although it entails no certainty that the disease *will* be eradicated. National Immunisation Days for polio took place in RUF territory in Sierra Leone, on both sides of Congo’s frontline, and in southern Sudan. Polio cases are few and generally not fatal (483 cases were reported worldwide in 2001). Unicef accepts, “Although polio is not the major problem confronting southern Sudan, it remains a visible and debilitating disease. In addition, the presence of the polio virus in the region is undermining the efforts of neighbouring countries to eradicate the disease” (Unicef 1999a, 26). Similarly, a study of social indicators after the genocide in Rwanda recorded a decrease in literacy rates and primary enrolment, a (significant) increase in infant and maternal mortality, and a 1.1% improvement in access to water. Progress was portrayed only by an increase in BCG and Polio vaccinations (from 82%-93% and 83%-99% respectively) (World Bank 1998). Donors buy solutions to parade the ideology of progress.

Duffield writes, “aid is no *substitute* for political action because it *is* the political action. It is now a tool of international regulation and is embedded in the networks and strategic complexes that make up liberal peace” (Duffield 2001, 88). It is political, but the observation that NGOs become political actors, or that aid is the principal policy in peripheral countries (Macrae 1998; Macrae and Leader 2000), understates the neglect. The interpretation that NGOs catch the consequences of other foreign policies overstates their capacity and dissent. NGOs claim independence, and sometimes operate in areas that donors avoid, for example MSF, Oxfam and IRC in Congo, but the costs of propping up infrastructure of huge countries when others are tearing it down, or supporting survival in politically intricate places are beyond the coffers of NGO core funds.

Victims of moral outrage

The normative approach of assistance operates within the political environment described above. It supports victims of the “other” – the opposite and barbaric (amputees, genocide survivors, famine casualties), particularly by appealing to abused rights and the principle of impartiality. Morality is conventionally understood as a counterbalance to politics, hence lobbying apparently promotes moral against political concerns. Perceiving how morality is employed as a tactic in the political game, rather than being a means of challenging it, contributes to an understanding of why lobbying is frustrated.

The political morality formalises condemnation; the twist is, though, that this is no more constant than the political engagement considered above. Certain forms of violence are abhorred, and assistance is bestowed symbolically on its victims. Other forms (or locations) of violence are ignored; the pattern is determined by how the morality of activity reflects on the aid provider.

In Sierra Leone from 2000, when some stability returned, NGOs experienced few funding problems, and work was limited more by their ability to expand and evacuate. In Rwanda, funding soared after the genocide, although it fell away later. Donor *pledges* were even grander, outstripping delivery by tenfold immediately after the genocide (Forman and Patrick 2000, 7). Jones writes, “Nowhere more than Rwanda have the methods of conflict been more brutal, or the methods of conflict resolution more apparently sophisticated” (Jones 2001, 5), but the failure of the latter consolidates disgust of the former. Apparent moral opposite-ness was influential in sparking shock in donor countries.

In the early 1990s, the RUF did not attract international attention, having no ethnic or territorial claims, and a sporadic political agenda (Richards 1996). Limelight was seized through hostage-taking and, later, hand-chopping and the use of child soldiers. Whilst this attracted curiosity, it did not promote the RUF’s cause but certified its opposition status, focusing pity on its victims. The RUF fed a variant of the Kaplan-esque horror of encroaching chaos (Kaplan 2000) not as a political security threat, but as a threat to moral security. Handicap International, the NGO leading work on prosthetics, registered slightly over five hundred amputees in government areas in 2000. Many amputees lived in a camp in Freetown and were supplied by NGOs, according to one observer, “so [the government] can show the world the brutality of the RUF.” In an interview, the unofficial line debunked the symbolism: “There may be another five hundred [amputees] in inaccessible areas,” said Handicap’s Programme Director, “Probably the majority are in accessible areas, as people who cannot receive medical attention tend to die. It’s important to be realistic and honest about figures, and they have on occasions been inflated by

politicians to attract attention to Sierra Leone.”²¹³

Daniel Kosia, demobilising in Port Loko, introduced himself as a gansta rappa. When I asked why he had demobilised he replied, “Well really, I’m tired to be in the jungle. I’ve got my own family in the city. We’re just fighting for nothing... Those in high command are getting all the benefits, and those in low positions are getting nothing.” His rap captured the political force of flash violence:

**ASSASINATOR D.N.L [Daniel]
TROUBLE MAKER...
RESEMBLE LIKE THE BOOM
OF HIROSHIMA, EVIL DIVEL
DOER MAKE THE WORLD
GO ROUND, LIKE A MERRY-
GO ROUND.²¹⁴**

International response spun round aspects of the conflict that presented a travesty of conventional warfare and morality “**FROM ZERO TO HERO/ WAR WARRIOR, MC TERROR**”. There were bad kids who ran to the bush, turned worse and wreaked revenge on a society that never could cope with them. Kosia rapped:

**MAMA NEVER KNOWN I CAUSE
STUPENDOUS TRIMENDOUS
MORE TROUBLE THAN A RABLE...
WHY YOU WANT TO FORK WITH THE
REGELOTOR, ENERVITOR
CREATOR, TERMINATOR**

This combined with a tale about diamonds: Africans blessed by curses and stricken by riches – the inversion of economics by unmeasured wealth and poverty. Diamonds, drugs, free pillage and jungle living made an enchanting immorality tale.

Rwanda’s internationally defining moment was genocide, which both demanded and defied moral engagement. After a million murders, the question, ‘how could they do that?’ is surpassed only by the question of reconciliation: ‘how could they do that?’ Whilst theories of coercion and state control are well known, international interest in giving assistance in Rwanda is retained through the morality story. As was seen in Chapter 3, peace and reconciliation was focused at the local, personal or even spiritual level, and excluded significant dimensions of violence. Cramer proposes that relations of force, rather than simply choices, would provide a more insightful focus for analysis, and cites Rwanda as a country in which relations of force have been institutionalised (Cramer 2002, 1858). The methodological individualism he critiques, though, serves a political morality: when submitted to liberal theory, the choices made by Rwandans are revealed simultaneously as rational human-ness and an appalling parody of it.

²¹³ 30/11/00, Freetown.

²¹⁴ 15/12/00, Port Loko; he wrote out the lyrics.

HRW had resident researchers in Sierra Leone and Rwanda: from a perspective counting body-blows the countries posed new challenges, inflating their moral currency, and constituting a freak show of modern ethics. The show was photogenic, but more significant was the moral titillation of violent abuse, child soldiers, mutilation and rape.

Observing over time provides evidence that the morality was disingenuous. Sierra Leone and Rwanda were deserted by NGOs and donors during the most intense periods of displacement and violence. Assistance increased as violence decreased, with heightened cause for NGO and donor confidence, and more convenient access. CARE, one of the largest operators in Sierra Leone, for example, increased its budget from US\$4m in 1996 to US\$12m in 2000, without external evaluations being made.

Similarly, funds were allocated to southern Sudan when people had started to starve, although the famine was predicted months in advance. More generally, Congo and southern Sudan did not horrify, although estimates of Sudan's war casualties stand at two million and Congo's twice that. Occasional attempts were made by NGOs or journalists to highlight freakish phenomena. This, though, was moral plunder, offering the donor the opportunity to worry (briefly) over a moral fix: is it right for children to fight? Or people to be starved? Or eaten? Congo has occasional media coverage of cannibals or minerals; southern Sudan has famines at intervals, but nobody knows who dies, and the expense and duration of assistance are distraction enough. These are the two aspects of moral despair of Africa: the impenetrable jungle/carnage and the unending desert/starvation. The assumption that things can only get better meets the reality that there is no guarantee, and no moral returns from a hopeless task.

How and why is assistance sustained?

The observation that things were improving in Sierra Leone belied the experience of many. A Freetown journalist told me,

We've been writing over time that what comes out of NGOs does not benefit the target people. Most of it is used to target and develop the NGOs themselves. If you want to measure the impact of NGOs on the people, you must have criteria. Have the NGOs created the necessary impact in alleviating the economic plight of the people? Whether the rebels have destroyed the most part of the country, whether an NGO has an impact on housing, whether an NGO has an impact on child mortality. If you measure infant mortality, we shall record the highest. Whether you consider income, we're at the bottom.²¹⁵

Charting who receives assistance and who does not has revealed how the game vindicates and strengthens the dominance of rich nations, indicating the political weight behind preserving assistance as it stands. It does not fully explain how donors manage the game, or why they vest

²¹⁵ 12/12/00, Freetown.

their moral credibility in it; so, *how and why is assistance sustained in spite of its failure to provide in accordance with human rights and humanitarian principles?*

Accepting that people are assisted differentially, that universalist rules continue to be espoused, and that aid organisations remain funded and staffed, demands an understanding of how parts of the story are excused or covered up. I examine denial as political and psychological processes that allow some elements to be ignored, thereby relieving the cognitive dissonance experienced by aid agency staff. Denial also allows new cognitive elements to be created through fantasy. In investigating how this happens, I draw on the theoretical analysis of Cohen, who defines denial as simultaneous states of knowing and not-knowing (Cohen 2001, 79).

Elements of denial are evident in the assistance described: NGOs exaggerate their impact, flatter donors, and simplify or gloss difficulties. They categorise people to exclude others, introduce unmonitored objectives, or acclaim their work with positive terminology. They enlist the hope (a relatively tolerated form of denial) that an inability to do everything does not discount doing anything. Denial has value for personal motivation and mental health; at an organisational level it maintains purpose. To the extent that interventions arise from analysis that is not factually accurate or rigorous, it is not necessarily the case that NGO staff are unaware of what happens, but uncertainty over what to do, and freedom to make extraordinary claims tempts them to deny, omitting parts that are too big – they both know, and do not know.

What is gained by denying? Essentially, it gets you out of trouble. Assistance is sustained because, and in order that, NGOs and donors stay out of trouble; but trouble from whom? Examining the processes has revealed no accountability to people in host countries, and various means of ignoring or silencing their opinions. Bollas identifies the “need to be innocent of a troubling recognition” (Bollas 1993, 167 [cited by Cohen 2001, 25]): donors and NGOs collude in denial which permits banter and finger-pointing, but evades denunciation by each other and observers. Assistance is sustained by the denial embedded in the discourse, through which aid agencies create space to contrive their moral status.

Assistance in Sudan is exemplary of the knowing and unknowing of denial, as NGOs’ objectives coexist with unsurpassed analysis of unyielding reality, and accumulated knowledge has not improved life in southern Sudan. The departure of official policy from reality can be traced to some sort of hope: the “interesting sub-text that arose out of post-Cold War optimism, the notion that negotiated access between warring factions for humanitarian aid could itself promote peace” (Bennett and Duffield 1995, xvii). By 1993, MSF asserted:

[OLS] has become an instrument of war, rather than a force for peace. The government has sought to wrest control of the operation, for instance by demanding that it has the right to approve all flight plans, including those to SPLA-held areas. It has been able to

do this because instead of dealing with an array of NGOs, it has had to deal with only a single, compliant partner: the UN. (Jean 1993, 20)

Despite such sentiments, it was not until August 2000 that the last MSF left OLS, “judging that the OLS had lost its capacity to negotiate unconditional access for humanitarian aid” (MSF 2000b, 28). More generally, too, the consortium nailed theatrical significance to an agreement made between the government of Sudan and the SPLA, the two groups most directly linked to pillaging civilians and perpetuating the war. Johnson highlights the tension for agencies “called upon to alleviate the effects of the disaster-producing activities of their major counterparts” (Johnson 2003, 145). Karim et al. note,

Given the critical views of the warring parties concerning OLS, it is worth considering why they have – if only reluctantly – agreed to its operation. This has largely hinged around questions of donor pressure and perceived gain, including that of the political recognition that a negotiated access programme confers. (Karim, Duffield et al. 1996, 41)

Denial avoids considering this, but the evidence is available: the SPLM’s retreat from MoU discussions demonstrated displeasure with the political recognition it received, and the continual dysfunction of its relationship with OLS showed that it made returns from irregular behaviour. Not acknowledging the political incentives meant that whilst the OLS agreement recognised a war, it denied its significance, motivations and effects.

Fabricated clarity

In all the countries presented, civilians were blocked from receiving assistance and were pillaged, tortured and murdered for the political, economic or psychological advancement of fighters. Assistance was sustained by fabricating clarity, and alliance between donors and NGOs was smoothed by the description of events. DFID observes,

The context to OCHA’s work shows disturbing trends with the continued erosion of compliance with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. This is seen both in terms of denial of access to people in need and through deliberate violence against civilians and aid workers. (DFID 1999e, 2)

There is a collision between the principles and rights approach and the looting approach, or an approach based on political or territorial gain. Talking about non-compliance maintains discourse in a field of good and bad, whereas a political investigation would ask: good or bad – for whom? Ignoring politics can look like naivety, for instance when aid workers are caught in crossfire, or looted when they are only trying to help. Given the environments in which NGOs work, the naivety is hard to believe. It is more plausible that the political or economic logic behind violence challenges the way that NGOs operate so intensely that it needs to be neutralised in the discourse by denial; violence is ‘breaking the rules’, no further discussion.

This is not a complicated manoeuvre; aid agencies’ practical monopoly on information spans not only reporting the substance, but also the intention, of their work. James Orbinski, receiving

the Nobel Peace Prize for MSF said, “Let me say this very clearly: the humanitarian act is the most apolitical of all acts, but if its actions and its morality are taken seriously, it has the most profound of political implications” (MSF 2000b, 79); probably nobody in the audience wanted to argue. Declaring assistance apolitical implies that no decision was taken, and nobody favoured. In the vacuity of analysis and responsibility, aid agencies say what they want: so they produce positive publicity to sustain the game.

How: fantasy

Cohen differentiates between three strains of denial: “*literal* (nothing happened); *interpretive* (what happened is really something else) and *implicatory* (what happened is justified)” (Cohen 2001, 103). I am adapting Cohen’s typology to the discourse of assistance, which not only rebuffs charges, but generates ‘place’ proactively to protect itself, whatever the reality. Fantasy is created: literal denial “nothing happened,” becomes: “*something happened!*” when it did not.

Radda Barnen’s project in Aterieu, the Aramwer School of Education, provides an innocuous example. It opened in 1996, running teacher training, and workshops for masonry, carpentry, agriculture and, for girls, tailoring; around ninety students were trained per year. Alfred Mayan, the coordinator, explained the selection procedure:

We write to the secretaries of counties that we want a certain number of the target age 14-22. The Commissioner goes to the Payam Administrator. He will call his executive chiefs that this number is wanted for training in Aterieu, and he will call the clan leader and they select the youths and they are sent to us. For the girls we take from 12-20. Any young man who has interest can come here and we give them other training, sexual education, environmental. There are some young men who have interest, but have no education – if they’re coming from the cattle camps. Those who have never been in school are in one group. We’re targeting those who have been to school and those who have not.²¹⁶

Apart from the not particularly exclusive “those who have been to school and those who have not”, there was a telling inversion of categories. ‘School drop-outs’ were elites, not reprobates: they had *some* education, rather than none. Radda Barnen, an international NGO, targeted the margins calling them drop-outs; southern Sudan complied, and appended others who were not so lucky. The centre was well stocked, and people were learning skill. Then the blight: Mayan told me, “Radda Barnen’s exit strategy is income generation.”

‘Income generation’ involved the grinding mill, lulu-oil pressing, school-uniforms and soap-making. The grinding mill was broken. The lulu machine had no seeds – they were out of season; the petrol was supplied by Radda Barnen. We walked around the centre; agriculture was taught in little rows of tomatoes. This was my first tomato experience in southern Sudan, and the seeds were provided by LWF and NPA. Water is from the pump, the agriculture supervisor explained, is brought over in a jerry-can in a wheelbarrow, and poured into a watering-can. Five

²¹⁶ 09/12/01, Aterieu.

minutes into the explanation the international inputs were: seeds, pump, wheelbarrow, jerry-can, watering-can. I wondered, apart from the inputs, how much tomato teaching was needed by people who already knew how to grow okra.

We moved to soap-making income-generating; similarly, this was the first soap-making I had seen in Sudan. Radda Barnen imported the ingredients; the breakthrough was not that soap was locally produced, but that *one* ingredient – the lulu-oil – was locally sourced (when in season). The soap was made, stored in piles in a warehouse and sometimes sold. It was implausible that profit could derive from selling soap at a fraction of the price of the cost of dragging the materials round the globe. And so to the workshops, where the tools, timber, nails and needles were supplied by Radda Barnen for their sustainability game.

I returned from Aterieu to Rumbek by motorbike. A few weeks later I ran into Cassaun, Radda Barnen's driver, in Lokichoggio. As we chatted, he told me that there had been a problem driving back. "The bridge?" I hazarded, "how did you know?" he asked, with all the optimism that it might have been alright. De Waal concludes,

The greatest harm done by the humanitarian international is to create delusion. Western governments and donating publics are deluded into believing the fairy tale that their aid can solve profound political problems, when it cannot. The humanitarians deceive themselves about their own importance. Most significantly, local people ('recipients' or 'beneficiaries') are deluded into believing that salvation can come from other than their own actions. Some tangible material benefits (many fewer than are commonly believed) are delivered, but at the cost of sustaining this tremendous, institutionalised delusion. (de Waal 1997, 221)

Delusion implies that people end up believing it, but this is rare. Delusion is limited to people who do not come into direct contact with the war and are able to avoid evidence that contradicts their official version. For the rest, such comfort is replaced by a bleaker ambivalence, eased by denial. NGO staff play the game not because they think it is true, but because – generally – they want it to be, and because it offers possibilities that reality does not; it bestows psychological and political rewards. The stability it accords allows assistance to keep going, during which time somebody can get something from Aterieu, even if they are not the target group, do not generate income, and have no tomato-farming prospects when they graduate.

Within Cohen's classification, the Aterieu project epitomises a fantasy permutation of literal denial, claiming something happened, when it did not. It could not withstand scrutiny, but receives none as donors and NGOs wanted to believe it. Creating a fantasy disconnects the discourse from reality, which renders the outcomes of assistance unimportant, and makes what is intended and what unintentional indistinct. Thus the fiction lays the foundations for interpretive and implicative denial. Interpretive denial (what happened is really something else) in the fantasy realm becomes "what didn't happen (the fantasy) is really something else (it is

reality)", and implicatory denial (what happened is justified) becomes "what didn't happen (the fantasy) is justified". The Aterieu centre, with no transport links, market or capital, cannot generate income; the 'income generation' fantasy is (contrarily) interpreted and justified by denial: "the fantasy is not a fantasy but anyway ineffectuality is unsurprising – what more would anyone expect?" Thus assistance is sustained because it sounds worthwhile, with an illogical rider that it achieves nothing.

The pretence is twofold – that disaster affects people less than it does, and that assistance affects them more than it does – and the rationale plays concurrently and indefinitely to what is possible (what NGOs claim) and impossible (why they do not achieve it after all). OLS states,

Assistance to ensure survival and basic needs is understood from international law as a beneficiary right, not simply an act of charity. Humanitarian assistance strives to support preventive measures, mitigate negative impacts, ensure an effective emergency response and to facilitate recovery in a developmental way. (UNICEF/OLS 1999, 11)

The rhetoric reinforces OLS, nesting it within the international political morality. Meanwhile it bears no resemblance to what actually happens: assistance does not ensure survival, basic needs are not fulfilled, and any goods transferred are more pitiful than charity. Duffield et al. found,

OLS standards suggest that one [primary health care unit] should cater for 5,000 people and one [primary health care centre] for 20-30,000. Coverage is at most a quarter of what it should be, with only 270 health facilities in non-GoS areas, while the population estimates used by OLS suggest there should be nearer 1,000. OLS does not have the resources to reach its own targets. (Duffield, Jok et al. 2000, 46)

Denial courts funding but does not guarantee that people are actually helped. The report continues:

[The SRRA] suggests that accountability cuts both ways – it may not always be able to act as a credible counterpart but it is entitled to ask the providers of relief to meet the standards they have themselves set and to be open when they cannot. (Duffield, Jok et al. 2000, 47)

The game is sustained because accountability does not cut both ways; to create clarity, only half the story is told. Duffield writes,

The inability of aid policy to confront the complexity in Sudan has a number of implications. The most important of these is the tendency to reduce all the problems in the path of aid agencies, beneficiaries, development and so on to the effects and consequences of the ongoing war. (Duffield 2001, 254)

One example is the child demobilisation project, which denied the complexity of politics, security and education, preferring a story about boys carrying guns. The fantasy supported the interpretation that the demobilisation was real, as donor and NGO concerns converged irrespective of the Sudanese. As operations deteriorated, some NGOs pulled out or were uncooperative, souring relations between them and Unicef, which had both a funding and implementing role. The demobilisation was salvaged by further propaganda, which

demonstrated how playing or quitting makes no difference either to the project's reputed success or failure, or to the situation it was apparently addressing.

On 22nd October 2000, Salva Kiir, the Deputy chairman of SPLM/A, wrote to Carol Bellamy, Unicef executive director, committing to demobilise all children and not recruit more.

Demobilisation was in collaboration with SC-UK, IRC, Radda Barnen, Samaritans Purse, and some Sudanese NGOs. Unicef collected 3551 child soldiers from northern Bahr el-Ghazal and flew them to Rumbek, except some were not soldiers, and some not children. Unicef drew its authority from the Convention on the Rights of the Child to demobilise, "any person under the age of eighteen who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or any armed group in any capacity other than purely as family members." The general funding proposal was US\$2,741,025 (Unicef 2001b, 9), an average outlay of around US\$770 per child, which included six months in Rumbek and a flight back to Bahr el-Ghazal, to meet their familiar poverty. SC-UK distanced itself from the project in February 2001 in a letter to the Irish Times.

In interviews, people involved in the project's conceptualisation argued that the international definition of a child soldier was inappropriate for southern Sudan.²¹⁷ What made it inappropriate, if it was, was the militarisation of society: demobilisation would involve most children. In terms of outcomes, the offence was not simply that the boys were not significantly demobilised, but that nothing changed in southern Sudan and that, nonetheless, the project could be hailed to donors as a success. An employee of Radda Barnen, which had been demobilising a few hundred children each year since 1998, claimed, "Unicef diluted the issue by 'demobilising' children who were not soldiers. Finally it was seen as a violation of the children's rights because the children were being used for the benefit of adults."²¹⁸ The benefit was funding and moral credit for a game. The children were lined up and photographed: "This is not a game" Unicef told donors as the boys stood in staged military parade, although it is not evident from the photograph that the uniforms had been worn before.

²¹⁷ Interviews 15/10/01, Nairobi and 09/12/01, Rumbek.

²¹⁸ 05/12/01, Rumbek.



Children on parade.
This is not a game.

This is not a game (Unicef 2001a)

Phase II was to be carried out by a Task Force, comprising SRRA, Unicef, and three NGOs; in itself, sustaining the game implied its worth thusfar. I asked Dombeck Deng, the Project Officer, about conditions the children from Phase I returned to.

D: Unicef have started supporting schools in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal. They're drilling some holes there. It's only Unicef. NGOs have promised, but are not doing anything. But the process is very slow. The number of schools being supported is very few.

Z: How many?

D: There are no final figures.

Z: Around twenty?

D: It's ten and less. They promised to support schools, but then they say it's work for the community. Some areas are not accessible to Unicef: South Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains. Now [the children] are staying with the soldiers, although they are not active any more...

Z: What's the chief challenge you face?

D: Actually, with regard to the demobilisation we don't have problems because it's a commitment that has been given by the Movement. The problem we had was to convince the children to move from their home areas...The other problem is the families and communities where the children are being taken back – they're not happy because the education that they were promised will not be given in the way they want. The children joined the military for certain reasons and if you can't eliminate the reasons, they still have the opportunity to go back to the military. The NGOs promised this and that but haven't done it, so it's difficult to go to other areas.

Z: What are the reasons for joining the military?

D: There are several reasons. Security reasons, Bahr el-Ghazal is always under attacks from militias from northern parts of Sudan; when villages are attacked, civilians are targets. Children see their parents killed and go and stay with the army and don't go away. There have been some cases of families maintaining their children. They get food and shelter from the army, and some children do join for the purpose of revenge. If the child has education, health and social needs [fulfilled] they would not have joined the army.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ 10/12/01, Rumbek.

Deng both worked on the project and grasped its inadequacy, demonstrating that the official version was denial rather than error. In many situations, an upturned shared understanding exists between aid workers and host populations according to which *nobody* genuinely rates the assistance discourse. Individuals fiddle with the game to coax some resources to some people, but that again involves suppressing reflective enquiry. An employee in the Bukavu children's demobilisation centre in eastern Congo assessed the cyclical futility of assistance and violence:

Why do [the children] want to be a soldier? There's a war, so the authorities have to recruit. If there's a war, some kids will be abducted, some go because they want to take revenge for their big brother or cousin or someone, with a bullet. There are others who have nothing to do. Some are poor. Here the people are very poor; they have no money for school fees. The kids say "we have to go [to fight]", and the parents say OK...we tell the parents that they have to help the kids despite their poverty, and we tell the kids that even if they have nothing they should not join the military. Some go home, then go back to the military camp. Then we take them back here...there are some very isolated cases when they refuse to return because the same poverty will meet them there.²²⁰

Denial allows unofficial acknowledgement of the political environment to co-exist with the official version of neutrality and effectiveness. None of the staff on any of the demobilisation programmes said: calling it demobilisation does not demobilise people. Cohen quotes from Laing's book, *Knots*,

They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game. If I show them I see they are, I shall break the rules and they will punish me.
I must play their game, of not seeing I see the game.
(Laing 1971, 1; Cohen 2001, 45)

The motives, opportunities and processes of the Sudanese demobilisation matched those in Sierra Leone and Congo, and assistance more broadly. Denial and fantasy reassure aid workers, and vindicate the approach, the more so when other options are inconvenient. Staff are hired to perform the motions, and people hosting assistance tolerate its discourse in return for tomato seeds, jerry-cans, and the promise of education.

Why: incentives

Denial cultivates the fantasy that the rules guide and advance assistance to the benefit of people in host countries. In reality, donor decisions on what they want to give are clarified by considering what they want to gain. Randel and German report, "there have been increasingly strong calls for better coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, improved coherence and an integrated global response. At the same time, it is clear that the management of resources has become increasingly fragmented" (Randel and German 2000, 25). Whilst geostrategic incentives to engage in warring African countries are few, the political morality established by denial allows donors to make returns on three victories, thereby consolidating their position in the global political economy.

²²⁰ 14/05/01, Bukavu.

The first is the formulation of moral progress: as was seen in Chapter 2, donors have the ideological indemnity to define morality and describe their successes within it. Ratifying conventions sustains assistance by formalising discourse that colonises concepts of help. It demarcates symbolic concerns whilst promoting, with words such as 'right' and principle', the implication that these guide or influence how people are assisted. Levine writes,

[The Convention on the Rights of the Child] is the most ratified human rights treaty in the world with 190 governments behind it. It is also the most comprehensive since it deals with political and civil liberties as well as social, economic and cultural rights. With, typically, more than 50 per cent of war-affected people being children, it covers the largest and most vulnerable segment of the population. Critically, it has powerful moral weight since it builds upon the inherent neutrality of children. (Levine 1997, 13)

There are no costs to signing, and benefits in terms of membership to an international morality club. Political disparity alongside claims of equality is a standard combination: middle classes deny a class struggle and whites deny apartheid. Universalist ideals are crucial to donors in defending their political morality and status, and whereas donor countries have human rights conventions and humanitarian principles, many people in African countries at war do not have their rights fulfilled, or receive meaningful assistance.

The officially ratified discourse, which denies political motivation or analysis of power, secures a second victory: disallowing politics in host countries, violent or otherwise, authorises assistance to any or all in a conflict. Donors construct their policy towards Africa, for consumption by domestic constituencies, promoting the discourse of impartiality and neutrality, supposedly to create space for assistance in wars without taking sides. This, though, has not ensured people's access, or right, to assistance. The policies imply that donors will not forsake people who have violent, predatory or no governments; but delivery is not neutral or impartial, so people notionally included are neglected after all, at no cost to donors or their principles.

The third victory for donors is self-validation of their political perspective. Assistance discourse discredits other political structures enough to exclude leaders, but not enough to protect or provide for people abused by them. This has not led to the empowerment of the poor, peaceful political transition in countries where there is war, or to democracy. The donors' use of denial and fantasy means that withdrawal or failure of assistance is consistent both with lauding the principles (not upholding them), and with securing the victories outlined.

NGOs recite the rules because donors invest in the political impossibility they describe. The weakness of NGOs in effecting real change is their strength, and something that donors pay for, being more convenient for them than reform. Whilst NGOs discard their objectives as far as their own standards of implementation are concerned, they cannot abandon them in principle. NGOs do not enjoy the financial independence they claim, but more significantly, the weight of donors' discourse means that NGOs do not retain conceptual independence either – to disavow

‘humanitarianism’ would be ideological blasphemy. Appealing to impossible standards of an ‘ideal’ humanitarianism protects it from experiment: if assistance were provided impartially, would it save more lives? The denial-fantasy means that there is no change in the way that assistance is formulated or delivered, and no change for people adversely affected by war.

The irony is that assistance discourse champions the moral (including the truthful and the transparent), over the ‘political’ or ‘criminal’ – the untruthful and twisted. If the moral and the transparent are manipulative and deceitful, this undermines the integrity that apparently validated their legitimacy. The mechanisms by which the game is sustained are the inverse of the guidance and strategy apparently offered by the rules – the game is sustained because it pursues an alternative strategy, and because it manages (to a large degree) to obscure it.

Tactical confusion

Fabricated clarity is not an exhaustive explanation of the game’s longevity. NGOs and donors can say what they want, but why do they want to lie, when many aid workers are motivated by goodwill? A starting point for answering this is the perceived lack of alternative (or denial that alternatives exist). A Merlin employee in Goma assessed the cost recovery policy:

All medical NGOs are forced to charge, unless they have their own money, which is very few here. If we put in for staff incentives, we have eighty clinics and five people in a clinic. That’s five hundred people including the hospital – nobody would fund it...In a country like this, people are in poverty. 10% of people are having free treatment, but the staff don’t get any money if they treat them. On the whole it *seems* OK: people pay but some get free treatment. But it doesn’t work. We’re trying to find other ways of funding salaries, health insurancey-things. In Sierra Leone there was cost recovery, it wasn’t full, but people were managing their own funds – kerosene and things like that. Cost recovery on drugs, which country can do it? Do we know why we’re doing it? In the past people have said sustainability and all that rubbish. We’re so far from it. Countries like Uganda and Kenya which are relatively stable can’t do it. We want to find a way to get people money. Let’s be honest about it, say “this is why we are charging.” If you tell the staff not to charge, they won’t be making money and they won’t be there. It isn’t the right way, but there’s no choice.²²¹

It can be inferred from Cohen’s work that confusion will arise as denial leads a false trail, making literal versions of events harder (and less appealing) to perceive. NGO workers are trapped embellishing and seeing no choice. At an organisational level, too, alternatives to NGOs have been elusive, and denying unimpressive episodes and on-going suffering prolongs the game. Duffield asserts, “For some aid agencies, including the UN, the representation of themselves as a last line in defence against the growing forces of global chaos has a seductive and profitable allure” (Duffield 1996, 191). As donor concerns in African wars falter, NGOs are sustained for thankless work; they are exploited, but remunerated with panic money and proportionately increased profile. The process does not lead towards fulfilment of the stated objectives, so some confusion is necessary to maintain the game.

²²¹ 08/05/01, Goma.

Foucault, in examining societies' control of non-conforming elements, identifies a 'regime' of truth (Foucault 1980, 131), which sustains power. It delivers advantage to the core, even when the initial or stated intentions of the institutions are not fulfilled. Foucault's analysis of discourse and power elucidates how successes are gained without addressing the perceived problem. This has been seen in the fabrication of clarity, but a crucial difference between Foucault's institutions and assistance is the degree of control. He accepts that even within the Panopticon, the penal institution in which everything is observable, there are unmonitored events and unintended consequences for the powerful.

Foucault's analysis of power can be used to connect the contributions made by Cohen and Gilligan, to reveal the sources and function of confusion in imposing rules or denying consequences. Processes that are highly unequal and unaccountable, designed and managed by the stronger, and are not concerned principally with solving the problem identified, may have deleterious effects. The power to deny these drives the truth regime which dismisses or diminishes people who do not fit, but also provokes further consequences, characterised by retaliation or anomie: a cycle of denial and provocation sustains the game.

How: unrestrained action

As has been observed, activity that is officially ruled against is not always actually restrained, and the discourse promotes an 'us' and 'them' interpretation that makes 'them' and 'their' situation sound confusing. Nederveen Pieterse identifies a tendency in Western media to portray ethnic conflict such that: "(1) the perpetrators are mad, (2) the West and other onlookers are sane, and (3) humanitarian intervention under these crazy circumstances, although messy, is simply the best we can do" (Nederveen Pieterse 1998, 244). The perspective is replayed by the discourse of assistance. Clare Short offered,

Operation Lifeline Sudan...is the best we have available. It is extremely difficult to deal with a fickle Government and fickle factions fighting in the south, all of whom have blocked the delivery of humanitarian assistance when it suits their purposes.²²²

Arguably there is nothing fickle about these parties: they are fighting a war. By contrast, "ECHO assistance to Sudan peaked in 1994 and began to decline until the 1998 famine raised spending once more. But there is no indication that the decline in ECHO's funds – or any other donor's – was linked to a decline in need" (Duffield, Jok et al. 2000, 16), which suggests fickleness. Short went on, "The war is benefiting no one", which overlooked a lot of oil, stolen relief supplies and aid workers' salaries. Meanwhile, the Ground Rules assert, "Where humanitarian assistance is inadequate to meet the needs of all, priority must be given to the most vulnerable...the only constraints on responding to humanitarian need should be those of

²²² Hansard 29/04/98: Column 332.

resources and practicality" (Levine 1997, annex 1). Assistance is given where convenient; elsewhere there is reluctance and ambiguity.

The ambiguity is not trivial. Reno refers to 'clandestine economies' (Reno 2000) in the 'shadow state': "a very real, but not formally recognized, patronage system that was rigidly organized and centred on rulers' control over resources" (Reno 1998, 2). Others compare the formal state to a shell (Chabal and Daloz 1999) or a "decor of *trompe-l'oeil*" (Bayart, Ellis et al. 1999, 19). These authors discern a political smokescreen that appears modern, reforming and democratic, obscuring patrimonial, vertical political structures. Regarding Sierra Leone, Richards cites Reno's 'shadow state', observing,

Donor pressure in the post-Cold War period has demanded deep reforms – but the reformers are leaning not on a real set of institutions, but on a façade. The real state, much reduced but still fed in significant measure by diamond wealth, remains political in character. (Richards 1996, 60)

Reno describes Congo (then-Zaire) as "almost total 'predator state,' yet hosting a vigorous informal market" (Reno 1995, 16). The second economy, according to MacGaffey, is "that part of the total economy which evades the control of the state by depriving it of revenues from taxation; it is as much a political as an economic phenomenon" (MacGaffey 1986, 142). Given the lucidity of these analyses, extrapolating from what is immediately visible must be knowingly confusing. A GTZ worker, reporting Laurent Kabila's death and the installation of his son without factional fighting, wrote:

The real players stay so much in the background that not even members of the government and many high-ranking military officers know who they are. It is believed that in these circles hardly anyone knows who was a party to plan to murder Kabila and who was not. Nor has it yet been clarified who possesses the real power today, who advises or directs the new president, determines the political orientation, and keeps the army quiet. (Nour 2001, 1)

The account acknowledges a political process, but eschews investigating it. Aid workers are often aware of piecemeal lying and unreliability, and the fact that elements are hidden from them could support the interpretation that they can perceive only a disguise designed by African politicians to deceive.

However, the attractiveness of the argument, namely its explanation for the inglorious impact of assistance, is suspicious, and a shadow depends on its perceiver. An MSF worker in Freetown expounded on the rules politics:

The donors desire to coordinate: in Sudan the donors wanted to coordinate in order to have the weight of humanitarian activities in their pockets for if they wanted to do something. Donors call it 'overlaps' if they are paying money for beneficiaries – also what does 'beneficiaries' mean? Donor funding is defined by needs and beneficiaries. They want their beneficiaries not to be affected by other people's funding. This comes from a fantasy that a community such as NGOs can address all the needs, for example, of a country. But apart from the government, it's not the role of donors to address all

the needs within a country. There was a police and army here before the UN and ECOMOG arrived. The idea of a ‘shadow state’ was in vogue with NGOs a few years ago, and Sierra Leone would probably be brought as an example of something that seems to be a state but is not. But we have to be a bit humble – we’re not taking the country from nothing to nowhere.²²³

I met him again on the airstrip in Lokichoggio in February 2002 and told him that the war in Sierra Leone had been declared over. “By the RUF?” he asked, “No,” I replied, missing the point, “by the government.”

Theorists of shadows, shells, and political illusions further understanding of the political dimensions, but their vocabulary enlarges the lexicon of denial. The theoretical concepts, in line with the language of assistance, appeal to objectivity and bring familiar licence to denigrate African politics. At the same time, the descriptions of shadiness tolerate functional ignorance – official versions are accepted when useful; but it is not genuinely unknown that the Congolese state is not the most formal officialdom, indeed the ‘political game’ has been documented (Mudingay 2002). “Considering the Congo inherently chaotic and irrational...guarantees that the events that occur there will lack political rationale” writes Dunn, arguing that “the extent to which the people in the Congo now find their country violently fragmented, preyed upon by external actors and marginalized by international inattention can be directly traced back to historical constructions of their identity” (Dunn 2003, 5-6). Whilst the discourse is outwardly useful to NGOs and donors, though, the shadow school is critical of assistance. For aid organisations to accept the analysis fully would involve conceding both that there are politics involved (rather than simply ‘corruption’ – a word that chimes with the rules terminology), and that they are not perceived usefully by the assistance perspective.

The compromise is reached by denial – ‘knowing and not knowing’: the formal state is recognised to be superficial, but limited effort is made to see beyond it. In practical terms, relief workers have short contracts, do not build relationships with ‘political’ figures, and rarely have relevant historical knowledge or linguistic skills. Donor personnel are usually based in capital cities, making it difficult to perceive further in political terms. If the predisposition of donors or NGOs is factored in, the shell corresponds to a superficiality in formulating assistance. The game offloads the confusion onto Africa. In southern Sudan, the arrangement agreed by donors, NGOs, the UN and the SPLA is the SRRA, a shell that OLS has nurtured. OLS mistrusts the shell, and feeds it cynically; SRRA loots, apologises and sits in OLS meetings. This does not achieve what OLS says it hopes for, but Schaffer would ask something like: *Why does policy antagonise and alienate, except that it is designed to?*

²²³ 07/12/00, Freetown.

The 1996 OLS Review proposes that on the occasions when donor pressure was used in southern Sudan, it was effective (Karim, Duffield et al. 1996). Largely, donors were unsure what they wanted, or rather they did not know what they wanted for Sudan. African Rights, for example, notes the compliance of donors and aid agencies in the government's agenda (African Rights 1997). Conversely, in 1998, USAID launched the Sudan Transitional Assistance for Rehabilitation (STAR), which relied on agreements between SPLM and NGOs. USAID gave US\$12.4m to non-OLS NGOs in 1998, and US\$25.8m in 1999 (EIU 1999a); US\$9m went directly to 'democracy training' for the SPLM. USAID followed STAR with Social Services Operations and Rehabilitation (SOAR) in 2000, "to strengthen the capacity of community groups and civil authorities in south Sudan," meaning the SPLM. The programme constituted a lack of confidence in OLS and a challenge to the government, but by focusing on the south and not the north, USAID interpreted the war as a southern problem. Thus it contradicted the SPLM/A, which addressed itself to national structural inequality, rather than a 'southern' problem (Johnson 1998, 57); (see also: Deng 1995; Lesch 1998). Carefully, the SPLM/A were contained and satisfactory, Khartoum was slightly confronted, and/but oil extraction was satisfactory as well.

None of this relates to the needs of people in southern Sudan, as the game conscripts confusion to mask a more potent reality: an Oxfam worker observed, "Chinese are also investing. France is there, BP, the British, they're the ones to build the pipes, and these are the organs who make the rules...But this is the way of the world, if you want to be rich, if you want to be powerful, you have to make some people to suffer."²²⁴ Continuing the game involves denying what is unofficially acknowledged. Darcq of OLS assessed,

Everyone's playing politics; the UN is forced to play politics because of the donors. It is led by the donors. They said: if you sign [the MoU] we will stop funding. ECHO said, "we don't talk to rebels." It's full of contradiction. Most of Europe is against the SPLM because they are sleeping with Khartoum to get oil...Rolls Royce, they say, "we are just sending engines." Well, what do they do with the engines? Go on holiday?²²⁵

In Rwanda, too, previous to the genocide, donors and NGOs perceived Rwanda as a paragon of development, and sustained their roles through collusion. Donors and NGOs did not like genocide and did not stop it; they also disliked villagisation, prolonged incarceration, Solidarity Camps and massacre in Congo (Rwandan troops eventually left Congo, having established their proxies). Uvin recounts from pre-genocide Rwanda,

I felt that the "game" of development, played out in an almost ritualistic manner among local governments, bilateral agencies, and international organizations (with increasing NGO participation), was leading to exclusion, inequality, frustration, cynicism and a potential for conflict. (Uvin 1998, 5)

²²⁴ 03/10/01, Nairobi.

²²⁵ 24/10/01, Nairobi.

This allowed the genocide to be perplexing, and even genocide was denied by discourse of ‘humanitarian consequences’ (Power 2001), ‘humanitarian crime’ (Rieff 2002, 161), then ‘genocidal crimes’, to avoid responsibility in international law. Playing to the shell involves cynicism that does not engage with elites and also marginalises the rest of the population by not examining assistance or its impact; it generates confusion and does not restrain action. The mismatch between the commendable shells and real politics means that, except by coincidence, there is no link between assistance given and what it may sincerely be expected to achieve.

This has implications for withdrawal. When assistance is accused of funding violence or donor interest palls, withdrawal offers aid agencies a final escape, but cynical money to a shell disorders what withdrawal achieves. Richards argues that patrimonialism faces crisis as aid diminishes, as there is less money for the constituencies (Richards 1996). Indirectly (as assistance is distributed) withdrawal destabilises whatever hierarchy imposed its peace through patrimonial favour, and the impacts of this are not readily perceived, still less controlled.

The upshot is that confusion over what withdrawal achieves can play back into sustaining assistance through what Jok identifies as a ‘recurrent dilemma’: “should we continue trying to help people with food aid in the knowledge that a significant portion of it will be diverted by the soldiers, or should the lives of those starving people be risked in the name of efforts to force warring parties to seek peace settlement”. He observes that, of the options, it “usually ends up in favour of the former” (Jok 1996, 208). It is true that NGOs do not determinedly starve children to force their parents to peace, but the dilemma is often not profound: providing substandard relief allows people to die, and withdrawing it does not bring peace.

Why: restrained thought

Leopold traces how, particularly as security decreases, NGO staff retreat into their compounds and focus on internal ideological issues, cutting off information channels and at times attracting resentment by exaggerating the danger to themselves (Leopold 2001, 107). Some unrestrained action in wars can be dangerous to aid personnel, making it harder to explain why they maintain the denial; would this not be evidence of genuine misunderstanding? A conundrum is enlightening: NGOs espouse neutrality, implying that they are aware that antagonism is stirred by biased interventions. Why, then, is there surprise when biased interventions are met with violence? Chomsky identifies Orwell’s epistemological problem as the question of why we understand so little, when there is so much evidence available: my answer would be that denial can be too successful. The solution Chomsky offers is to detect and translate Newspeak, and “discover the institutional and other factors that block understanding and ask why they are effective” (Orwell 1954; Chomsky 1986, xxvii).

Some factors have been detected: labelling activity ‘rule breaking’ denies its political weight or overemphasises the choices made; requests for more assistance were described as ‘dependency syndrome’, rejection of assistance was ‘dis-dialogue’, or a need for sensitisation. The expulsion of NGOs by governments was disrespect for human rights, halving a small primary health care kit by an NGO was not. Inaccessibility did not undercut, but boosted the claim of neutrality as defining areas as ‘inaccessible’ (self)-justified not delivering assistance. Policy was conceptually corrupted: privatisation in southern Sudan, peace in Rwanda, access and demobilisation in Congo, universality which was selective, child soldiers who were adults, shelter which created homelessness in Rwanda, democracy (enforced by foreign armies) in Sierra Leone. Whose game is it? ‘Humanitarian’ describes the intention (or claimed intention), and from the actor’s viewpoint. It is humanitarian because NGOs say it is; assistance is impartial because NGOs say it is, people have rights because donors say so.

Newspeak blocks understanding and is effective because there are incentives to play, and there is an arsenal of defence vocabulary – insecurity, constraints, end of project, lobbying, targeting, sustainability – which shields, but does not really explain, anything that NGOs do. The outcomes of assistance are uninteresting, as the shortfalls are already accounted for. The discourse describes who is right and wrong according to the political morality that it stakes out, and interpretations expand to fill the gap – accessibility interlocks with the limits of competence, dependency with sustainability, malnutrition is redefined to fit the available food.

Foucault notes that a passage from Euripides’ Ion is frequently mistranslated as “Let’s speak about something else,” preferring, “Let us try another kind of discourse” when the line of questioning proved fruitless (Foucault and Pearson 2001, 46). An alternative discourse is illuminating: stating “there is no right to health in Congo” or “we deliver assistance in deference to the Sudanese government”, or “Kabbah’s constituency gets fed first” presents an accurate account of assistance, and also exposes the politics and the gains that aid providers make on the game they play. Additionally, though, it would expose NGOs to the shame that would result from acknowledging the unlikelihood of their approach.

Evading shame is crucial for NGOs and donors as they know that what they do cannot really be justified, whilst claiming a moral perspective. One way of evading shame is to make it invisible, even to yourself: using Gilligan’s analogy, shame provokes aid providers to stab their own eyes. Turning punishment on oneself changes shame to guilt, according to Gilligan, a culture characterised by self-punishment (penance), suicide, punishment from others, masochism, martyrdom and self-sacrifice (Gilligan 1976, 153); it is associated with an over-estimation of one’s own destructive power.

That is not the end. The perversity of guilt as a psychological mechanism sustains NGOs: after upheavals, funds and enthusiasm are rekindled by the prospect of learning lessons. Rieff writes that after the debacle in eastern Congo, “It seemed as if the humanitarianism that emerged was both more chastened and more ambitious than ever” (Rieff 2002, 191). Self-punishment reinstates NGOs centre-stage; internal correspondence shows that NGOs agonised over the MoU in southern Sudan, institutionalising guilt, then resumed normal activities. Assistance achieves its goal at the price of itself: NGOs win by continuing to play the game, but this is incompatible with perceiving reality in any way that could lead aid organisations to correct themselves. The ill-effects of assistance, its regressive politics, frustration, short-termism and provocation feed back into the apparent need to sustain assistance in the form it has been given in the past. To some notable (and occasionally catastrophic) extent, NGOs succeed in blinding themselves, but it is their choice to do so.

The Score

Why are the objectives stated? Investigating assistance has confirmed hypothesis (2): the objectives are stated because they allow some other end to be pursued. There are benefits for donor countries in institutionalising a political morality, framed by the official discourse, for operating in non-geostrategic countries. The calculated function of the stated objectives within this political morality is to provide shared terminology for a perspective that serves the international hierarchy. The less calculated and sometimes unwelcome consequences are cognitive constriction – the perception that there is ‘no alternative’, and provocation through high-handedness or unreliability. Both these incidental consequences lead to the objectives being restated, and to the continuation of the game. The motivation of aid staff does not need to be malicious, but the objectives stated lead to the negative effects of which NGO workers are (at some level) aware. The only reason people may not notice is because they have incentives not to.

If the incentives to blindness are removed, it is easy to see. Visiting a group of Sudanese women who had received small midwifery kits, an Oxfam evaluator turned to the impact.²²⁶ According to the women – ‘traditional birth attendants’ – all obstetrics problems had been resolved and no children were dying at birth. They were playing along, momentarily. As the evaluation team left, the women sang, “You come from Nairobi and London and you just eat and sleep. You’ve never done any work as you don’t cultivate,” before singing about how all the Sudanese partners were in the SPLA. People acknowledge power when it impacts on them in dangerous ways and when denial would weaken, rather than protect, them; they see the political disaster and the causes and effects of the war. They also see where NGOs fit into the hierarchy, the

²²⁶ Evaluation 24/11/01, Mayanthou.

money when NGO vehicles arrive, and how little is for them; but they sing in Dinka, which is not a language spoken by foreign aid workers.

In choosing a discourse that half-perceives and misperceives, stunts analysis, and abdicates responsibility, donors and NGOs win their game, but lose the war. People may – under one interpretation – be breaking the rules, but they are still on the pitch, and protracted or systemic conflict reveals the flippancy of the game. The critique that this entails of assistance necessitates guarding the discourse and entrenching its ideology not *although* but *because* it is known to be obstructive. The rejection, disruption and loss of assistance is indicative of its quality and nature, not because it is reasonable to ambush aid convoys, but because analysis holds such events to be politically predictable and provoked, and therefore avoidable.

7. Conclusions

NGOs and donors produce and consume their own versions of events, reinforcing ways of looking at things, and ways of looking away. The CRS Vision Statement claims, “Solidarity will transform the world to cherish and uphold the sacredness and dignity of every person; commit to and practice peace, justice and reconciliation; celebrate and protect the integrity of all creation” (CRS 2000). Similarities between humanitarianism and religion are not subtle, and questioning principles and rights is like sitting in a Vatican confessional telling the Pope that God does not exist. It is not something I have done, but I would imagine the Pope would say either that there is an external God or, if he were feeling liberal, he might say that faith is personal and to the extent that I believe, God exists.

The reality of assistance feels like a guilty secret, but it is not a secret: in an interview, a GTZ employee recounted that she was trying to impose some order in Congo. She continued, “Since the 1960s, it’s always social and it can’t solve anything like that. Of all the countries of the Third World which have developed, none of them has received aid.” People know; “It’s all been eaten,” she said, “Our approach is to tell these people, ‘you’re not important in the world market.’ This country has a lot of things, but it has no organisation.”²²⁷

To claim that faith is personal may be reasonable, if religion is too. What, though, when it affects the Congolese? What when it is not simply what you think, but a matter of resources, impact and death? I have reached my conclusions after long journeys, but when I try to explain them, people happily tear them apart. These people have not necessarily been to Africa or worked with aid agencies. I have a friend whose PhD was on the surface tension of metals, and nobody tells him, “We all know metals are hard, look at cars and fridges.” Why do people speak with confidence and vehemence about things they have not seen? I think that at a personal level, as on professional and institutional levels, Africa is a playground for moral tricks.

When people tell me there are rules, people are equal, and we are working towards an ideal, I say that there are no rules, people are not equal, and we are not working towards an ideal. These are empirical observations, and incite more dreaminess about how things *should* be. The trick is keeping it ‘moral’, maintaining *both* that it is moral to perceive, analyse and intervene in a certain way, *and* that it is moral that the situation persists, in that no responsibility was involved. The position is shaky, and can be sustained only by excluding experience and analysis from calculations of how to respond.

²²⁷ 16/06/01, Kinshasa.

Not breaking the rules, not playing the game

The title *Not breaking the rules, not playing the game* proposes that the ‘rules’ associated with need and assistance do not structure a serious attempt to overcome suffering in countries at war. My critique has five strands; firstly, as was explored in Chapters 2-4, what are presented as non-negotiable rules and standards are conceptually dubious and inconsistently applied. Secondly, what the discourse frames as ‘breaking the rules’ in host countries provides a smokescreen for the implausibility of the approach, as was discussed in Chapter 5. Thirdly, and also considered in Chapter 5, condemning or criminalizing people (as opposed to offering different opportunities or incentives) has proved uncertain in persuading them to reform, or combating destitution. Fourthly, as was argued in Chapter 6, the rules confer politically moral benefits on aid providers, whose agenda is protected by the neutralised terminology. Lastly, the discourse blinds the people who use it, making assistance insensible to reform and potentially provocative. My thesis holds that it is not that people in countries hosting assistance are breaking the rules, but rather that they are not playing the game – they are not investing in the aid providers’ myth or pandering to the cynicism. This can be met with the repost: *but it’s not a game!*

Denying the game sustains it. Reference to the stated objectives re-asserts the scope (universalist), and the motivation (the alleviation of suffering). Smillie and Minear find,

One of the most striking and disquieting themes to emerge from the hundreds of interviews [they conducted] is that mistrust and opacity pervade humanitarian financing and donor behaviour. Some donors express a surprising degree of doubt as to the capacities and even the *bona fides* of front-line UN agencies and NGOs. (Smillie and Minear 2003, 5)

Correspondingly, CRS claim “CRS/Sudan’s approach in responding to the acute needs of the Sudanese people can be summarized in three broad themes: Capacity and Peace Building/ Rehabilitation and Development/ and Emergency and Relief” (CRS 2000, 3). The budget shows: emergency relief 83%, peace and justice 1% (16% other expenditures) (CRS 2000, 12), suggesting that peace is for the donors and food for the hungry. Donors and NGOs deceive each other, because they have different specific interests in the game; they avoid coming to blows by fragmenting at implementation, and denial. Whose fault is it when it all falls down?

The population of southern Sudan has been criticised for failing to abide by assistance’s rules. Harragin and Chol, though, observe, “South Sudan is poor because of 30 years of war, not because it is an anachronistic society with leaders who are any more venal and abusive than anywhere else” (Harragin and Chol 1998, 54). They implicitly accept that progress is unlikely while war continues. The evaluators of ECHO add that peace might be disappointing too:

Whilst ECHO recognises that peace is a pre-condition for absolute self-reliance, its analysis does not consider that peace may not necessarily address the root cause of the problem of the south. The failure of the 1972 agreement to address the unequal and antagonistic relationship between north and south led to the resumption of war in 1983.

The 1998 famine, the worst since the one that gave rise to OLS in 1989 – is still portrayed largely in terms both of problems of access and diversion of aid, rather than as a direct result of the conflict. As a result of this failure to incorporate the political economy of Sudan into the planning process, there has been little variation in the types of programme undertaken since the 1980s. (Duffield, Jok et al. 2000, 18)

OLS achieved little in over a decade, and the Nuba Mountains were isolated completely by the initial OLS agreement, falling between northern and southern sectors. People living there were subjected to genocide (African Rights 1995a) and international neglect (Bradbury 1998). They were candidates for the most assistance, and received nearly none (there were some flights to government-held areas from 1996, and a few non-OLS NGOs worked in some other areas).

Those who have not received assistance cannot be blamed for its malingering, and reveal more starkly its nature. In 1999, ten years after OLS's inception, the Interagency Nuba Mission undertook the first UN mission to the Nuba Mountains, along with four NGOs. It assessed an area it reported "wholly self-sufficient in agriculture before the war":

The blockade has effectively stalled the economy in the SPLM area. It has prevented access to essential goods such as fuel, clothing, salt and soap, and to crucial services such as education, health and water supplies. The lack of availability of tools, seeds, materials, and equipment, has inhibited improvements to food production, health provision, and a betterment of the living environment. At the same time, the denial of access to a major part of the most productive land has severely reduced food security in the area. (UNCERO 1999, 25)

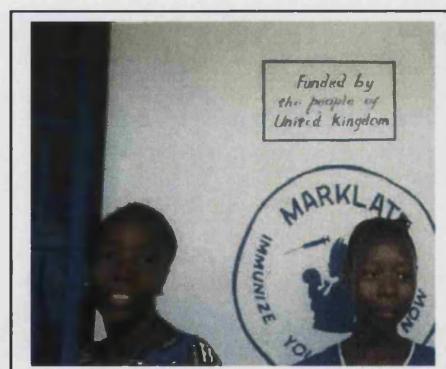
That was life; as for death, "War related trauma appeared the most common cause, with over 25 percent of adult males reportedly killed in the last ten years...All other causes of death appeared relatively insignificant" (UNCERO 1999, 40). Without diminishing the experience of people in the Nuba mountains, the methodology can be critiqued. There was, for example, "one doctor for 300 000 population" who works "between 4 and 8 hours weekly" for a total population of 200,000 (UNCERO 1999, 34). Whilst the observation is dramatic, it is also nonsensical. The assessment team had limited access, and advocated collecting data from other areas, recommending that programming "should...strive to address both GOS and SPLM areas as a single humanitarian aid and rehabilitation programme that promotes the peace process through preventive development initiatives" (UNCERO 1999, 9). There was no explanation of how, or who would fund it or establish security, and it did not happen. In September 2001, the UN made another assessment, which took two hours after eight weeks wavering. Six NGOs and the Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organisation appealed on behalf of 85,000 people affected by a government offensive that had taken place in May. In November, WFP delivered two tonnes of food there for the first time: 23.5g each.

The minutiae about the doctor's working hours are useless, as was 23.5g of food, but they were detailed nonetheless. The investigation, indicators, recommendations and response epitomised the game. Itemising information ducked questioning why the UN and NGOs undertook the

mission, whether it was inspired by the possibility of providing assistance promoting relief, rehabilitation and peace, or to divert attention from the disaster that was assistance elsewhere in southern Sudan. It also valued the details above consideration of whether the government allowed access in order to help people living in the Nuba Mountains, or to distract from the slaughter round the oilfields. Thus credulity was retained for the interpretation that helping people was foremost, and that this was facilitated by the type and import of the data gathered.

Where assistance *is* provided, comparable stories emerge. Bonthe district, in southern Sierra Leone, endured its hardest times between 1995 and 1998, and World Vision arrived in 1998. I interviewed an employee, who described the programme from when an American came “to give poor people old cloths and pray for them;” it had expanded, had around eighty vehicles, supported clinics, and was building and rehabilitating wells.²²⁸ Outwardly, the process was thorough – reports were sent monthly to Freetown, the Ministry of Health and Unicef, and quarterly to DFID; there was weekly supervision, with workshops for clinic staff.

The first clinic we visited had no well or latrine, because it was not on the original proposal. It had a fridge, but no gas; also no patients. “World Vision comes weekly to oversee and work with the staff to make sure they are doing the right thing,” the nurse told me. The second clinic was the chiefdom health centre. It had a fridge, but the vaccinator was on holiday. The number of patients had fallen from 50-60 per day when the clinic opened, to 10-20 per day. The third clinic was actually run by MSF, which was handing over to World Vision – according to an MSF worker, because the clinic was ‘horrible’ and they could not keep it. The fourth clinic again had no patients. The nurse explained, “here is poor because the place is not near to the people. Sometimes we can get six or seven [patients], sometimes it comes to five;”²²⁹ and so on.



Bonthe clinic, funded by the people of UK

My investigations were curtailed by a radio message from the World Vision Freetown office prohibiting my research. I had requested in writing to the Bo office to visit the clinics, and although the staff there had responsibility for managing the project, they were not trusted to liaise with a student. The prioritisation ranked managing a project below the imperative that no information escaped, and the order came from the only non-African employee.

²²⁸ 04/01/01, Bo.

²²⁹ 08/01/01, Bonthe district.

I returned to Bo, and a couple of days later travelled northwards and into Tonkolili district with a British aid worker, Mike Downham, who headed Medical Research Council (MRC) and adopted an opposite approach, which included tenacity through times of serious fighting and perseverance after looting. “Looking back it was quite dangerous,” he conceded. We set off at 8.30am, filling the vehicle with piles of drugs for the clinics, then babies and sick people. The area was not secured by Unamsil, bordered RUF-territory and was defended by Kamajors.

Some other NGOs had been working there, but had left for various reasons. MRC supported six clinics, which treated around 5000 patients a month. All the clinics had patients and staff. As I interviewed the nurse in the last clinic, Downham disappeared to check on a girl with suspected polio. On our way back we called in on the Chief of Gbonkolenken to discuss the politics of the RUF agreeing to open the road.²³⁰

The headway made by Downham subverts the rules. Aid workers – sometimes at an individual level – who do not play the game, provide assistance successfully *because* there is no surveillance. Downham was funded by DFID and the money was cut during the 1997 junta; asked about the implications, he answered, “I survived.” He was under scarcely implemented pressure to evacuate in May 2000, but he was in Bo, and the money was already in the bank. He negotiated his own security, rather than describing areas as inaccessible, although his safety was not always assured. The palpable frailty of the implicit recommendation is that Downham’s knowledge and experience were not insignificant. He had lived in Sierra Leone for thirty years, knew, and was known to, hundreds of Sierra Leoneans on all sides of the conflict, and supported scores of children through school according to no needs-based assessment or self-justifying morality. There was nothing neutral about his assistance or politics, and his survival strategies could not fit the boxes of a job application form.

The argument is not that this is how assistance *should* work, but that this is how it *does* work, which is – in reality – more significant. Downham’s success highlights limitations in the conventional paradigm: what if small amounts of unmonitored, politically biased or oblivious assistance, delivered by (often inexperienced) staff who do not speak the language in six-month tranches do not reduce suffering?

Implications for theory

The theoretical challenge arising from de Waal and Uvin’s work (cited in Chapter 1) related to why assistance is monochrome: why are the same infirmities observable in different organisations working in different contexts and over time? De Waal, writing in 1997 quotes Randolph Kent, writing in 1987 quoting Giovanni Ciraolo in 1928 describing aid as “slow, poorly organised, and in great degree, inefficient. The money is so often badly distributed,” and

²³⁰ 21/12/00, Bo; clinics visited 10/01/01.

expounding on the ineptitudes of aid workers and the embarrassing charity of governments (Kent 1987, 33; de Waal 1997). Were the shortfalls of assistance a result of oversight, misunderstanding, or technical inability, the reams of criticism would have been incorporated to transform it. The opposite is observable: exceptional critical analysis exists alongside exceptionally poor assistance. Reform is broached, and critiques are devastating; and then less so. The discourse is entrenched, and with it the weakness of assistance – official language is professionalised, paralysing implementation.

I have endeavoured to contribute to three aspects of theory with my thesis. Firstly, my methodological approach has been to investigate assistance without presupposing the value of the stated objectives, and I have observed what use they have through small-scale qualitative analysis. Secondly, my major empirical finding is that, within the global political economy, powerful countries administer a political morality as a means of engaging with, and profiting from, places that are considered of little strategic value. Thirdly, at an analytical level, I have drawn on psychological literature to enhance the theory of how assistance operates and is sustained. This affords some understanding of how it is that reform is evaded, despite the evidence available and the analyses of assistance that have been made.

Methodological – discourse critique

Evaluative readings of the events described in this thesis would conclude that assistance is a weak tool for addressing the suffering caused by conflict. One interpretation is that the lack of funding makes it weak – there is no ‘political will’. This assumes that goods can be distributed in significant quantities through existing mechanisms, and that increasing funds will lead to more effective assistance. A more critical reading would be that assistance is harmful, misunderstanding its environment and impacts; that there is little of it limits the damage. Both positions retain the assumption that there is a humanitarian agenda, described by the official discourse, which assistance is attempting – but somewhat failing – to pursue.

Belief in a humanitarian agenda relies on epistemological foundationalism: that indubitable rules exist and can be built upon. This attracts the challenge that the assistance perspective is predicated on ‘truths’ that do not hold (and if they are ‘moral truths,’ this does not make them more compelling). Therefore I have rejected an evaluative methodology, instead exploring why the objectives of assistance are stated – why those objectives, and what is gained by espousing them.

The methodology I have chosen has allowed me to compare the formulation of discourse with donor allocations and NGO projects, to examine how interests are both pursued and obscured. Through qualitative research into individual scenarios, I have enquired into delivery and the outcomes of assistance, thereby gaining more insight than can be achieved by a quantitative

assessment of what funding goes where. I have used this methodology to uncover how the rules of assistance establish a perspective that is not conceptually helpful and spawns excuses, and to identify other factors which, in practice, steer assistance, directing it always towards the same path.

Empirical – political morality

The methodological angle has allowed me to observe both how donors and NGOs generate objectives, and how they deliver assistance. As there is no causal link between the rules and the delivery – the objectives do not direct implementation, and implementation does not fulfil the objectives – the impacts of assistance are unhinged, randomising what it achieves in host countries. The upshot of this is that it is anti-strategic in terms of reducing suffering. What is significant for those providing assistance is that the spoken universality gives cover for selective delivery, and (often poor) examples from implementation are used to buttress the stated objectives.

A political economy analysis describes how power is distributed, but the contexts studied have not concerned only, or even principally, conventional power relations or interests. The existence of assistance attests to the fact that donors have some reason to engage in countries that are geo-strategically marginal, albeit with limited financial and political budgets. My empirical finding is made within a political economy analysis. It is that a ‘political morality’ is used as an element of power in the processes of assistance; it appears moral, whilst serving the donors’ agenda.

As universalist objectives give way to particular interventions, the strategy is in the selection: consistently, decisions are guided by how NGOs and donors can provide goods in exchange for political morality returns. This selectivity reinforces the supporting politics, whilst incurring no responsibility either for what goes wrong or for what is neglected altogether. Donors and NGOs pillage Africa *morally*: moral returns – determined by the discourse – are delivered to the stronger. This finding challenges the usual dichotomy between intervention and withdrawal, and enhances understanding of assistance as the *result* of the world’s tired policies towards Africa, not an engine for change. The implication is that the question: *What would happen if all NGOs withdrew today?* is answered with: *There would be more tomorrow*; and they would be the same.

The first facet of the political morality is that it locates the assistance arena principally with the individual, for example, through human rights terminology and focusing on individual needs. It imagines survival within the reach of victims of violence, providing food distributions, demobilisation, sustainability and local peace. The maximal range of the perspective is the national level and is tended to by discourse on governance, which positions war and its resolution within state borders. The perspective accepts that individual suffering, political

malaise and marginalisation from international consideration results from war, disregarding what the war results from, how it is funded and what it achieves. “The fiction of local struggles (“ethnic,” “religious,” “historical,” or otherwise picturesque)” writes Farmer, “is exploded by any honest attempt to understand” (Farmer 2003, 233). More political analyses of conflict are not difficult to construct, but the political morality perspective is preferable for the powerful as it protects the international hierarchy.

A second facet of the political morality is that the discourse values the input – counting dollars and sacks of food – over the outcome for people in countries at war. This means that response is credited by being repeatedly offered, rather than discredited by the fact that the situation persists. The political prioritisation of inputs has a psychological corollary; assistance is assessed and justified by intentions, not accomplishments. This, together with a symbolic significance that the discourse bestows on assistance, disproportionately merits the contribution made, and protects assistance with exclusive and often bizarre discourse. Seaman writes, “the system is a system to the extent that its component parts are linked by public information and opinion, and the resources generated by information” (Seaman 1995, 20).

Investigating how power is communicated through morality discourse has shown how disparate activities are corralled to serve a unified and unspoken agenda. By defining the location of the war, and the intention of assistance, aid providers can accept the lesser charge of helping people who are near the road – a selectivity that can pass as expediency (or incompetence) – but defend assistance from the more profound political probing. Assistance is monochrome because the statement of objectives, combined with the pursuit of other priorities, allows it to expand or contract according to how much it is convenient to fund, rather than to reform.

Analytical – integrating psychological theory

Some parts of assistance, though, are inexplicable with a conservative political economy analysis, and these demand psychological explanation. In a sense, a political economy analysis can explain, or even predict, the allocation of assistance, but the sacks and dollars query the continuing devastation: where has all the assistance gone? and likewise, where has all the analysis gone?

These questions relate to a blockage (whether intended or otherwise) in understanding assistance, and in the processes by which that understanding can be improved. I have introduced some psychological theory of how assistance is sustained, to gain insight into unstated intentions and also whatever outcomes are not calculated, but may be calculable. This applies the work of Gilligan and Cohen to enhance analysis of the ways in which assistance is given, and how some suffering is overlooked or exacerbated.

Examining the political and psychological processes of shame (as provocation) and denial (at individual and organisational levels) has revealed how and why assistance operates in the way that it does. The decontextualising perspective described by the avowed rules, the way the strictures are abandoned in practice, and the claims of moral superiority when viewed from a shame analysis, lead to the conclusion that assistance is not simply weak or misguided, but inciting and counterproductive as people react to hypocrisy or frustration. Additionally, the rules have been appealed to in circumstances in which people or events are unlikely, unwilling or unable to be moved by shame.

Unpacking denial has clarified how some people are overlooked, why aid organisations offer the same 'solutions' that have failed in the past, and why analysis is not employed to practical effect. Denial allows the political processes of funding and war to be obscured by promoting a perspective that frames apparent solutions: resolutions to gather more information, develop comparable data and improve coordination can be made in perpetuity. Such apparent solutions indulge the game that assistance is given according to information on comparable need, that aid agencies aspire to be coordinated, and that assistance is within striking distance of the task its discourse describes. However, gathering small amounts of tailored information does not (after a while) lead to comprehensive understanding, as it is undertaken to prove, not enquire, and there are no channels for discussion with people receiving (or impeding) assistance.

I have developed the analytical apparatus further by interweaving the theories of shame and denial, uncovering the reinforcing mechanisms by which certain events and forms of behaviour are provoked, then overlooked, or dealt with in a way that does not actually address them. Shame is provocative, and denial obstructs possibilities of reforms; furthermore, the unwelcome consequences of assistance feed back into the dysfunction, making the alleviation of suffering (and the improvement of assistance) even less likely.

Why is assistance monochrome?

The game results in assistance that veers towards a convenient path, whilst maintaining unrealistic objectives, and runs into familiar constraints. Relief agencies with apparently distinct cultures converge around operational styles, and have predictable weaknesses because they have incentives to collude in stating objectives that do not create opportunities for improving assistance. Processes that allegedly make assistance challenging – declaring human rights and humanitarian principles – in fact make it monochrome; they define a perspective that constricts analysis and demands excuses. The rules are politically malleable and lack authority, and legitimise (and necessitate) unhelpful denial and shaming.

The examination of DFID provided an example of how inventive policy did not effect a change in operations. Instead, the liberty that DFID had to develop policy and appraise its activity was

employed for political advantage. Similarly, NGOs, whilst presenting various identities and appearing to stand at some distance from donors, did not resolve how to gain access, or how to reduce the disparity between the task their objectives described and the resources available to them. As the monochrome nature of assistance derives from the combination of unaccountable objectives and limited operational capacity, the ICRC can be expected to fall within similar analysis, so far as implementation is concerned. That said, the ICRC is likely to have advantages over NGOs when achievements depend on formal diplomacy, and when the constancy (or autonomy) of the mission or funding are deciding factors.

The ultimate justification of assistance is power, and monotony is explained by the fact that outcomes in host countries are insignificant to those who design assistance. A power analysis (which includes an understanding of how the political morality strengthens the powerful) defeats a minimalist defence of assistance, which justifies assistance on the basis that it provides something to someone. A minimalist defence does not explain why the particular processes, mechanisms, principles and rights associated with assistance are chosen; why are thousands of pounds spent on building a few wells, and why do validations of interventions stem from how much is spent and what is intended, rather than what is achieved? As has been seen, what is done attains symbolic importance, but does not rationalise the existence or expense of assistance.

Analysing power relates assistance to the global political economy, and also proposes some ways of assessing what faith people have in the moral order described by rights and principles. The privilege of power is that people can have faith in an abstracted morality, even when this is not practically applied. The abstraction avoids considering power, and allows people to continue to believe in the political morality, and carry on providing assistance, whilst they acknowledge (to varying degrees) that the two are not directly connected. I have explored how this works through the analogy of a game, which involves mimicry, symbolism, tactical moves, and the denial of reality, which present different ways in which aid workers and organisations maintain belief in the perspective they propose.

In Sierra Leone, NGOs serviced sections of the population that were convenient to assist, tolerating the myth that helping some people was like helping everyone, but on a smaller scale. Assistance concentrated resources in government-held areas, particularly in major towns. DFID in particular, and several NGOs, gained moral credit from their interventions, despite the fact that assistance was late, inconsistent and biased. In Rwanda, helping some people entailed maltreating others, as they were undermined by assistance and the people it supported. Rwanda offered moral returns as it was a post-genocide setting; this attracted not political support, but confused assistance whilst the government's politics were at once funded, ignored and condemned.

Decisions pertaining to Congo and southern Sudan were similar, except that it was hardly convenient to assist anyone. Some people who were useful to the donor agenda were selected, and funds were channelled through NGOs, but appreciation that the task vastly outstripped the political and technical resources allocated meant that NGOs spent energy in Congo on lobbying. Lobbying, though, when not accompanied by political sway, strengthens donors – they appear to be challenged. NGOs pose as a counterbalance; they play to the game that donors want to help those most in need – if only they knew, they would allocate resources to Congo. In southern Sudan, gathering information was an end in itself as funding and flight restrictions limited providing assistance.

Assistance is monochrome because the collusion that maintains it forecloses mechanisms of analysis and reform: what is offered is rarely what is needed, and the processes involved damage people receiving and giving assistance. The result is that assistance has uniform traits: the same interventions are mobilised, buffered by excuses. As conditions deteriorate, assistance becomes less useful, and the excuses more elaborate and contradictory. The game continues – nothing results from more of the same information, and the objectives presented are so extraordinary that they cannot be discussed sensibly with people in host countries. Not only is there no reason to enquire into outcomes, there are strong reasons not to.

Implications for practice

The primary implication for practice is that if assistance is to reduce suffering, donors and NGOs need to enquire further and accept different information. Information that is consciously denied needs to be acknowledged. Other information is harder to perceive, due to institutional blindness, but is still accessible if actively sought.

A start can be made by seeking alternative perspectives and investigating outcomes. Musa Kalokoh, formerly of the RUF, was demobilising in Daru, eastern Sierra Leone. He had been at the camp for over a year, waiting to receive the US\$300 TSA for reintegration, and was unconvincing by the international prejudice and vacillation over responsibility for demobilising him. He said,

You cannot only listen to the side of the government...the government did not know our problem...they should help us find jobs. Secondly, the government – not the government but the international community – should give us TSA. You can't expect me to go to my parents, I'll be a wrangler.

The camp was guarded by Ghanaian soldiers, serving with Unamsil. The soldiers sat behind a string of barbed-wire, but the movement of the half-demobilised RUF in and out of the camp was not restricted. The tarpaulins, from which the living booths were constructed, had started disappearing, and each party blamed the other. The demobilisation team, previously supported

by DFID, had found their hand weakened when DFID withdrew, and they did not defend themselves or respond to the insults hurled at them in the camp. Abdul Sesay was another resident:

A: They disarmed our brothers, they told us when they disarmed us we should go to Kenema and they would help us with jobs. But most of our brothers are now in the cells because they are caught by the curfew order, because they did not have a lodging place. They went to DDR and were told to come back the next day, but then they came back and there were no jobs. So those boys were caught by the Kamajors because those Kamajors are enemies to us...Secondly, if you don't have any work, at later time you are trying to find work, and you are in the street *long* time and you have finished all your 30 grand [Le30,000 travel allowance], how can you be in this community? Finally, will you think those of my brothers left in the bush will disarm? If the first one came out and you did not treat them well, do you think they are going to come? I am going to say to my friend, "stay inside, because in the bush you are going to eat more than Le30,000." Those of our brothers who are living in the bush are living [more] comfortable than us. Our clothes, you cannot even compare...

Z: How long did you stay in the bush?

A: Six years.

Z: What made you decide to leave?

A: I decided to leave the bush because they told us that if you disarm, after two weeks they would give us TSA. Some of us have been in the bush for quite a long time. We have no place to stay. They say that they will give us zinc for building, but they don't give it. And they say they want peace. Do you think that will make us happy? We are not. When we were in the jungle they told us that we should have foam, those mats which they use to pray in mosques, they only give us those sticks mattresses. Two blankets, one drinking rubber [bottle], one washing bucket for twenty-five men, one lump of laundry soap, then one lump of bath soap. They said after every week we should get one soap. It has reached one month now and no soap. I think you people are coming just provoking us. Even Lomé, they didn't follow it. So many papers, but nothing will happen...They said micro-credit – only to children. If I went to that town to get water, they would not give, because they say that we are rebels. They [pointing to the guards] are criminals; they are not Ghanaians, they are ECOMOG. It is they who are removing the tarpaulins. Because we have killed them, that is why they want to return death to us.²³¹

Sesay's account demonstrates how people are aware of their political situation. He did not disarm because that was 'good' or he was 'good'. He did not rate the Lomé Agreement or the demobilisation assistance on the purported intentions of the people involved. On the contrary, he was explicit that promising one thing and delivering another was provocative. It can seem far-fetched that assistance plays to a single agenda, but in understanding how it operates, it is important to appreciate how pervasive the political dominance is, and what the implications are. People receiving assistance cannot make cross-country comparisons, but they know that the resources transferred do not constitute a viable attempt to help them, they are aware of wealth disparities alongside universalist talk, and they know that they are not sincerely consulted on how assistance is given or what it achieves.

²³¹ 12/01/01, Daru.

Sesay was making strategic political decisions, and expecting others to do the same. Having accepted the possibility of peace, he felt duped, and from his analysis, plausibility and commitment emerge as crucial elements of a strategy to assist people. They are invisible to a rules approach, which states how things are, and assumes that people will join in (or blames them when they do not), and are also obscured from examination by cynicism, which fosters superficiality. Two questions to ask when assessing stated objectives are: is this plausible (including, is it possible)? and, is there commitment to it? This enables a strategic assessment of the technical and political capacities of parties involved.

The following recommendations are not vital to aid organisations or to the dominant political agenda. They make some organisational aspects more difficult, by endeavouring to unstitch the collusion between NGOs and donors and the superficiality of the relationships established in host countries. The game is played because it is worth it for aid providers. In what follows, I assess how assistance can be made more logical, to increase the possibility of it reducing suffering.

Plan B, NGO assistance and withdrawal

In Chapter 1, I identified a shortcoming in detracting from NGOs: withdrawal does not provide a solution to suffering. In addition it is often resented by host populations: in Sierra Leone, and to a lesser extent in other countries, people appreciated assistance when it occurred. (This is not a massive accolade, as the same could hold if goods were thrown from a truck). From my thesis another observation emerges: what is achieved by assistance is as confused as what is achieved by withdrawal. Both relate to spoken intentions not outcomes: withdrawal is decided by what NGOs or donors do not want to be involved in, rather than what it achieves.

When assistance is perceived to be failing, evaluative prescriptions are to increase it (on the basis that there is not enough), or to decrease it (on the basis that it is doing harm), or sometimes both. Advocating for more assumes that more is possible and that increased assistance would increase impact. Instead, NGOs could act strategically to reduce suffering by taking responsibility for what resources are available, and deliver them in a way that pursues goals logically. This involves progressive politics, serious investment, and constructing underpinning mechanisms that can critique delivery and lead to modification.

Plausibility

A key recommendation is that the analysis and claims made by NGOs must be plausible. The strategic cost of professing implausible objectives is that in colluding with or deceiving others, NGOs blind themselves, appearing pompous and ill-informed to people in host countries and naïve, insignificant and useful to donors.

I have discussed the epistemological foundationalism of the rules perspective; two criticisms of foundationalism are that the category of unquestionable truths is problematic, and that, even if truths were to exist, building on them has no inherent merit. An epistemological answer is given by coherentism, defined as “a theory of the structure of knowledge or justified beliefs according to which all beliefs representing knowledge are known or justified in virtue of their relations to other beliefs” (Audi 1995, 133). Achieving coherence between beliefs about the environment and the impact of actors on it creates the possibility of NGOs defining a plausible role for themselves.

Plausibility is contrary to universality, and claiming universalist objectives stymies judgment of what is plausible. Plausible claims are limited, and stand to be proved wrong; their benefit would be that NGOs could pursue them, acknowledging their own real capacity, and clarifying what vulnerabilities remain.

To be plausible, NGOs need to perceive and describe situations, interests and power in ways that are believable and intelligible. This involves employing words that other people use; nebulous and exclusive vocabulary packages assistance as extraordinary, and violence as weird. Much of the discourse used by NGOs is incoherent in literal terms, but carries political weight, and ‘humanitarian’ itself is not a word used except to claim credit for alleged intentions, or pity for victims. Prising open the discourse is imperative if NGOs are to communicate meaningfully with people in host countries, within organisations, and when approaching donors.

If NGOs assemble a reasonable description of the environment and actors, it is possible for them to construct a credible analysis of the political mechanisms at work, including how violence and assistance operate and interact, and to act on plans that relate to their strength and strategic place. This involves assessing their status vis-à-vis the population and authorities, and casting light on the shadows caused by superficial relationships between host countries and aid providers. In the responses studied, the logic of what led to what was dubious, contradictory or lacking; the assumed processes were unviable, making the stated intentions inconsequential. A more causative account of what happens is necessary within NGOs, and one that provides donors with an opportunity to invest in particular outcomes. Additionally, unless people receiving assistance also understand it, interventions are likely to be interrupted, as people who do not receive assistance often disbelieve or scorn claims of neutrality and impartiality.

The discourse of rules provides language for agreeing on apparent objectives and overlooking sub-standard implementation, and if NGOs undertook what it was plausible for them to achieve, they would not fall so easily into complicity with donor agendas. Avoiding the terrain for collusion and denial involves NGOs not making claims about people they are not in contact

with, or political actors or events over which they have no influence. Instead of protecting the politics of donors, NGOs would be less confusing and more credible if they acknowledged and explained their bias: how and why are they guided by donors? What developments in Sierra Leone meant that NGOs did not talk to the RUF? This opens their own eyes to analyse the situation. *Should NGOs work in RUF-held territory?* is different to: *should NGOs work in SPLA-held territory?*, but the principle of neutrality blurs them.

Commitment

There is no holy grail; establishing a plausible agenda does not guarantee achievements for people in host countries, but it grants NGOs a clearer view of their own activities and makes inroads into the donor discourse. My second recommendation is that NGOs should commit to fulfilling the agenda they propose. It is not merely that NGOs should aim lower to avoid disappointment, but that by committing specifically to what is plausible, NGOs can challenge the discourse and engage with the associated politics.

In order to commit, NGOs need to assess their own engagement. I have noted the goodwill of many NGO workers, but meeting staff who speak African languages is rare. In Rwanda I met many who did not speak French, and most NGO workers are incapable of talking with the majority of the population for whom they claim to speak. Not understanding at the linguistic level is compounded by disrespect for committed study of history and politics: relying on NGO briefings perpetuates the game – that there was a famine in such-and-such a year, that X% of people live without access to clean water, that this can be solved by providing food and water.

A second facet of NGOs' engagement relates to the misleading expectations NGOs evoke. NGO workers, especially in capital cities, live like ministers or militia leaders: travelling in private vehicles, drinking in designated bars, eating special food, living in guarded houses, shopping in exclusive shops, and establishing separate security procedures. These indicators of wealth and power are more visible to people in host countries than caveats in texts about participation that they never see. The privilege NGO workers display reflects their position in the global economy, not the impact their assistance makes, and accepting benefits whilst denying responsibility creates tension in the political and social relations they build.

If NGOs are to address suffering, they need to invest in the countries in which they operate. Wars go on, and NGOs come and go, so they need to take advice on, rather than decree, how activities can be sustained. The failure to take other views into account has been identified not as oversight, but as a political mechanism for insulating a particular response. Instead NGOs need to analyse what the strategic advantages are for people in host countries, and how assistance interacts with them; they also need to take rejection seriously, and adapt.

Understanding how assistance is perceived by people in host countries would contribute towards a strategic approach, and also to the safety of staff.

The political bias of the donor agenda has been identified as decisive in excluding some people from assistance. If NGOs are to counter this, they need to challenge the agenda by putting international standards in perspective. It is obvious after thirty years, for example, that donors have not, in any plausible sense, committed to the target of 0.7% of GNP for aid, or invested in principles and rights. Hence, there is naivety in saying 'donors should live up to their pledges'. If NGOs assess the agenda to be harmful to people in host countries, they should refuse to implement it, and open debate with donors. Examples were seen of NGOs lobbying donors for more money, but there was no coordinated challenge to any donor from NGOs. To be strategic, NGOs need to take decisions and responsibility within each organisation. This would give them a political identity for which they can be held accountable, and thus counter the impunity of the political morality. They could also commit to pursue tasks in coordination with other NGOs.

According to the evidence in this thesis, the most plausible plan that NGOs can commit to is to establish a base in a major town and supply assistance, acting as technical support for the government or authorities. Where there is a concentration of NGOs, they need to acknowledge their combined economic and political influence; they need to describe a task commensurate with their budget, train staff and work towards infrastructure, rather than creating camps or other parallel systems. A strategy is dependent on NGOs establishing alliances from the outset, including technical training of national staff, delegation of responsibility, and genuine consultation. NGOs need to negotiate their role within a country with respect to the economic and legal systems or disorganisation; any work that circumvents, ignores or over-rides politics, is set up to be destroyed. NGOs can capitalise on their asset, which is resources, to establish networks for goods to be transported to areas where there is no fighting, whilst being clear that their mandate is not universalist.

At the same time, NGOs can incorporate frankly the fact that they are working in countries at war. This necessitates understanding politics, including the security constraints of governments and populations, and how these affect how assistance is perceived and used. NGOs must be prepared to withdraw or employ different approaches, and it is unsafe for NGOs to presume that their projects are sustainable beyond the structures and the materials that they provide.

Congo rules

A Congolese man told me that the war in Congo was the result of hospitality: the Congolese welcomed the Rwandans, who then got comfortable and stayed, and started stealing. Whilst there is simplification in the telling, it makes sense in a way that accounts dependent on

cannibalism, human rights, decontextualised malnutrition, impartial assistance and frustrated lobbying do not. It acknowledges the mineral potential of the country, the international interest in that, the political ramifications of the genocide in Rwanda and accompanying international neglect, the impunity sponsored by war, and the ways that power is channelled to the stronger.

Plan A

One problem with Plan B is that it relies on self-regulation, and there is little plausible about that, or committed to it. In the diction I have adopted, Plan B is that NGOs should avoid mouthing the rules. They would operate in countries at war more constructively by making commitments to plausible action, and learning from the process, than by appealing to the rights and principles perspective that greases the unstated donor agenda. The plan has the second drawback that donors have no incentive to fund assistance that does not award them politically moral returns. This calls for Plan A, which is to break the game.

NGOs may do what they can, but what they ‘can’ do is defined by the impossibility of what they undertake. Real progress is not connected to a set of rules, but to relationships between people and events. Evaluating NGOs’ failure to bring universalist assistance overstates their role, fuelling the game; fault can be found with their pretence, and the confusion and retribution it generates, but it is not the case that everyone else is supporting Congo whilst NGOs are getting in the way. The background to this is: seeing as the big picture is not going to change, is it not better to do what little is possible? This flies straight into the observation that things are bad because of the bigger picture and that without changing that, the small picture cannot be altered.

At a church service in southern Sudan, the preacher exhorted the congregation to look at the diocese with both eyes open when making gifts because, he said, if we look at it with only one eye, we do not care about it at all. “No,” shouted a woman in the congregation, “when you’re firing a gun, you close one eye, so you can focus on your target.” For NGOs, targeting passes for pragmatism, but conscripts the idealism (or surrealism) that significant impact can be made with insignificant contributions. Meanwhile, what appears as idealism – addressing global issues – actually proposes a realistic agenda in political terms, but it is not captured by the rights and principles perspective and cannot be addressed by assistance: political reorganisation is unfeasible, but necessary if things are going to change. The implication is inescapable – probably things will stay the same.

Assistance uses internationally defined morality to mask selective implementation, and is generated by big donors pretending that people suffer for small reasons. This assembles a moral clarity, and with it the implication that disposing of it is morally muddling. In reality, it is the

reverse, because the order is feigned: the alternative to the rules is arbitrariness, and when assessed according to outcomes for those in countries at war, assistance is arbitrary. Gilligan writes,

Nothing threatens humanity more than the continued survival of the psychological anachronism called morality. And yet, paradoxically, nothing threatens humanity more than the accomplished central fact of the modern world, namely, the death of morality. In this situation nothing is more urgently needed than the development of the more mature affective and cognitive capacities, love and psychological understanding. (Gilligan 1976, 155)

Applied to the present context, Gilligan's theory would contend that without psychological understanding and respect, assistance cannot mature beyond the anachronism of morality which it simultaneously champions and destroys. I noted earlier some similarity between the arguments of Gilligan and de Waal; both also detail misgivings about masquerades of morality. As redress, de Waal advocates a political contract between African leaders and their constituents, and Gilligan argues that people should be respected or they become violent. For practical prescriptions to be extracted from these theories, though, both arguments require a greater degree of resolve to achieve respect and responsibility, and broader agreement over what responsibility or respect is appropriate, than has been observed.

It is about power: the power of rich nations has not cajoled Africa to respond to the political morality of assistance, and the power inherent to justice – whether as respect or responsibility – has not succeeded in challenging the global hierarchy. The conclusions follow firstly that progress cannot be forced, it must be reached, and secondly: respect and responsibility cannot be promoted without reassessing power.

Engagement needs to be democratised in rich countries, and amended from 'assisting'. Mobilising against suffering demands a transformation from the political and psychological dysfunction that characterises relationships between rich countries and Africa. There need to be political constituencies in donor countries, which reject the racism and patronisation to which Africa is subjected.

Immediately, this entails formal and informal education: people need to know about how power is distributed internationally, how survival is enhanced and restricted, the significance of agriculture and trade, and the impacts of war on economics. Some NGOs do advocate, and conduct campaigns (Oxfam is notable: for example (Oxfam 2002), on trade, conflict and education). Few dispute their non-political status, and professing neutrality ensures that NGOs speak chiefly to the converted and sap the political challenge.

Assistance and its discourse have transpired to be cogs in what Foucault describes as a 'regime' of truth. Respect and responsibility are incompatible with the 'us (solution)'-'them (problem)',

the valued terminology, or the point-scoring of the political morality. Promoting survival involves giving strength to other truths, developing strategy from interventions that work, rather than from things that *should* work. The challenge is not to say that the Congolese are useless to the world economy (with the implication that they *should* try harder), or say that they are equal (on the basis they *should* be), but to reconfigure the relationship between the core and the marginalised and how their truths are understood.

When national constituencies are formed in powerful countries, political pressure can be mounted on their governments by asking questions and staking support on outcomes.

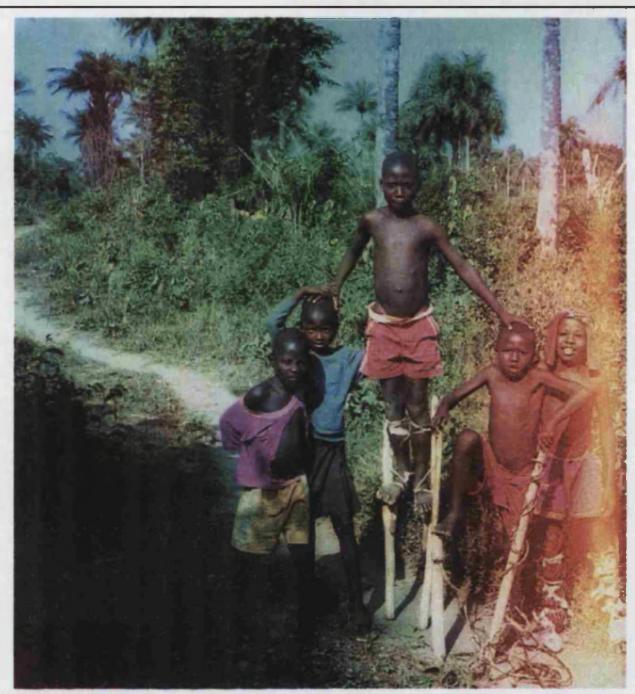
Proceeding by democratic processes cuts through the impunity of assistance. One neglected group identified were the rural poor in all countries studied; it is not complicated to collaborate with these people, except that their existence is not valued or respected. Diffusing the incentives for war, rather than denying the profits made from violence, cannot be achieved without a substantial redistribution of wealth, commitment to infrastructure, and a reworking of trade relations. It also involves prioritising an arrangement in which people have sufficient material and political goods to defend their lives.

Building psychological understanding and an appreciation of responsibility (and where it lies) at a national level can potentially affect how relations are formulated internationally, by holding politicians accountable to their constituents, rather than resigning to humanitarianism and talk about accountability to beneficiaries. Democratisation of the process in rich countries would harness the international political economy, and could confront the interests and power bases of governments and private companies. It would counter denial by mobilising around political interest, not game-playing, so it would not mislead down short-cuts and blind alleys; its fabric would be the attitudes, assessments and communications between people in powerful countries and people in Africa. These can prioritise processes that result in people having water, food and health care; it is not a humanitarian project, or a development project. It is not a project at all, it is a means of engaging that is not undermining.

The task is massive, which is why so many people die. For those whose lives are threatened, finding ways of surviving is urgent. For people in rich countries, it has proved less so, and the question of survival has been drowned by other priorities, including how to feel or appear good, and how to justify errors. In this thesis, I have examined the discourse and delivery of assistance, finding that relatively positive results occur when donor agendas to strengthen their political morality and status coincide with what it is useful for people to receive, and through individuals' expertise. Evidence shows that this disregards most people in countries at war. I have concluded that, to the extent that resources can usefully be distributed, assistance needs to commit to a coherent and plausible agenda. A more critical task is to change the way that people

in powerful countries think, moving from the anachronisms of pity, assisting and morality. The process is tough, both in terms of building constituencies and in finding progressive political direction. Also, it is a process, not a solution, and can deliver only as much as there is commitment to; its advantage is that it calls time on the game.

Kids on stilts, Sierra Leone



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