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6

Aid

In discussing humanitarian aid in complex emergencies, it is tempting to start with the imperative of providing relief and then proceed to label anyone impeding this relief as evil or greedy, or both; the story of more or less benevolent intentions undermined by malevolent actors fits well with the much-favoured template of 'good versus evil' (and frequently injects it with distinctly paternalist, even racist, overtones). This chapter takes a rather different approach and examines the various reasons that different groups might have for contributing to an unhelpful outcome in relief operations, whether through blocking relief, through not providing it in the first place, or through not providing it in a form that is useful for the recipients. As with the approach to understanding wars, the chapter looks at the complex interaction of agendas leading to particular outcomes, and it avoids the assumption that human suffering (in this case, the suffering caused by inadequate relief) means that key actors have 'failed' (in the sense of failing in their main goal or goals). The chapter examines the priorities of international governments (first section), the priorities of powerful actors within the affected society (second section), and the priorities of aid organizations (third section). This puts us in a position to assess the degree to which 'failure' is actually *functional*. The fourth section focuses on policy implications and dilemmas. This chapter focuses primarily on emergency food aid rather than the provision of health services, shelter, and so on (though these are evidently also important).

Priorities of International Governments

Understanding the inadequacy of humanitarian interventions is impossible without understanding the complicated functions of 'humanitarianism' for donor governments and the extent to which these are consistent with *not providing relief to needy groups*. One function of 'humanitarianism' is strategic. During the Cold War, US relief and humanitarian assistance was integrated into counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam and again in the

US-backed counterinsurgency in Guatemala from the 1960s. When it came to famine in communist Ethiopia in the mid-1980s, major Western donors proved reluctant to give relief at all – until mass media coverage of famine in late 1984 produced a dramatic about-turn in policy.[1] In Sudan in the 1990s, geopolitics played out rather differently. Cold War concerns encouraged the courting of the Sudan government as an ostensibly friendly and democratic buffer state between socialist Libya and Ethiopia. This – together with the lure of oil – was the context for donors' emphasis on 'tribal' violence and their reluctance to highlight Khartoum's manipulation of ethnic violence and its obstruction of relief.

After the thawing of the Cold War, international political priorities continued powerfully to shape emergency responses. The subordination of aid to geopolitics was dramatically manifest in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 when the US was distributing food during sustained aerial attacks and President Bush memorably suggested, 'Can we have the first bombs we drop be food?'[2] In the ongoing crisis in Darfur, Sudan, a concern to get support from Khartoum in the 'war on terror' – together with a focus on achieving peace in the south – encouraged international 'soft-pedalling' in relation to escalating abuses in the region. Aid agency workers in Darfur have found themselves in a position reminiscent of the 1980s: as Prunier puts it, they have been 'first in the line of fire with no political back-up'.[3] In North Korea, humanitarian aid has been used in an attempt to prevent political collapse, to minimize mass migration into China (or even South Korea), and to put pressure on the government in relation to peace negotiations with South Korea and in relation to the inspection of nuclear weapons and the control of trade in nuclear materials. These geopolitical priorities seem to have led to a tolerance for very high levels of diversion (and poor monitoring) that would be considered unacceptable in most contexts.[4] Significantly, North Korea's inclusion in George W. Bush's 'Axis of Evil' led to a major drop in US food donations.[5] Geopolitical concerns have also affected humanitarian aid during renewed conflict in Liberia from 1999, particularly after press reports of links between al-Qaida and Sierra Leone's rebels (backed by Liberian President Charles Taylor). By July 2002, UN agencies in Liberia had received only $3.9 million of the $15 million requested at the start of the year; yet in the same period, UN agencies in Sierra Leone had received $58.8 million, and in Guinea, $37.7 million.[6]

In several recent crises, the provision of humanitarian aid has encouraged and legitimized international political inaction. Very often, media coverage has demanded some kind of action, whilst other considerations – including a desire to keep favour with host governments and a concern with

avoiding the deployment of UN peacekeepers – have simultaneously encouraged political inaction; humanitarian aid can serve a function in resolving this dilemma. Mark Duffield has drawn attention to a withdrawal of diplomatic interest from many parts of the world in the 1990s, something stimulated by the thawing of the Cold War and then further encouraged by the ill-fated US/UN intervention in Somalia in 1992–3.[7] In Sierra Leone for much of the 1990s, aid served as a substitute for vigorous diplomatic engagement; particularly damaging was the international community's virtual silence on human rights abuses by government soldiers. Eventually, malnutrition in some areas did become a major problem, but as an English aid worker in Sierra Leone told me in 1995: 'It's not really a food emergency at heart. It's treated as one because this is what aid agencies do.'[8]

The 'humanitarian' response to war in the former Yugoslavia contributed to the emergence in international policy circles of the phrase 'the well-fed dead', and in his book on war in the former Yugoslavia (with the ironic title of *Love Thy Neighbor*), Peter Maass expressed a common sense of betrayal arising from the neglect of fundamental security issues: 'What, [the Bosnians] asked, was the point in feeding us but not protecting us? So we can die on a full stomach? There was much truth to this: the main humanitarian problem in Sarajevo was not a lack of decent food but a surplus of incoming shells.'[9] Significantly, international willingness to use force against the Serbian forces seems to have been tempered by a felt need to protect aid operations. This included fears that air strikes would hit aid workers – a concern that the Bosnian Serbs sometimes exploited by positioning military forces close to aid operations. Traditional, more consensual peacekeeping (including the protection of humanitarian aid) did not mix well with peace enforcement and outright war.[10]

The story of Rwanda in 1994, as set out in chapter 8, was one of diplomatic inaction and withdrawal.[11] By contrast, the humanitarian aid operation for those who fled from Rwanda to Zaïre and Tanzania was one of the largest in history. A major Danish-led evaluation of interventions in Rwanda concluded that the provision of large-scale humanitarian aid to the (predominantly Hutu) refugees in Zaïre and Tanzania served to disguise the international inaction in relation to the preceding 1994 genocide.

That pattern has been replicated in Darfur more recently, where humanitarianism continues to serve as cover for weak political pressures and for a failure to use the economic leverage that the international community possesses in relation to the Sudan government. The International Crisis Group noted in 2004, 'The U.S. is still fixated on getting humanitarian workers into

Darfur, a worthy but insufficient objective.'[12] Subsequently, the international focus on AMIS (African Union Mission in Sudan) peacekeeping efforts seems to have reduced political pressure on the Khartoum government; the international humanitarian community's claims of providing 'protection by presence' seem to have had a similar effect whilst at the same time only very limited protection on the ground has been provided. Inhibiting factors here have included a desire to keep aid workers (especially international aid workers) *away* from the most dangerous areas, the frequent use of relatively inexperienced field officers, a reluctance to work alongside government actors (with the ICRC being an exception) and, most importantly, the willingness of the Sudanese government to sponsor widespread attacks on civilians despite the large-scale presence of aid workers in the area.[13]

Another important function of 'humanitarianism' for major donors has been limiting population flows. The Western initiative of setting up a 'safe haven' for Iraqi Kurds in northern Iraq was shaped, in part, by the desire to minimize (and reverse) potentially destabilizing flows, notably towards Turkey (a key NATO ally).[14] Limiting population flows also proved an important consideration in the former Yugoslavia. During the early years of the war there, Germany had been receiving large numbers of refugees from former Yugoslavia, while Britain and France were virtually closing their doors. Figures from July 1993 show that Germany had 340,200 such refugees and that Austria had managed to take 89,739; by contrast, Britain had received only 8,640 and France just 5,524.[15] From July 1992, Germany began putting strong pressure on other European countries to increase their intake of refugees. Increasing the strength of the UNHCR (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees) and the size of the humanitarian effort at this time was in large part an attempt to keep those displaced by war from becoming refugees. The British proposal for safe areas within Bosnia (on the lines of the safe haven set up in northern Iraq in 1991) also seems to have been linked to the German pressure to accept more refugees, as well as to a desire to find alternatives to the policy of air strikes and lifting the arms embargo – a policy being proposed, on and off, by the US government at the time.[16] These Bosnian 'safe areas' were to prove tragically unsafe, notably in the case of Srebrenica. Susan Woodward summarizes Western policy towards Bosnia as 'containment with charity'.[17]

Alongside a concern with containing population flows has been a growing concern amonst the international community with those who have been displaced within national borders. During the Cold War, some refugee flows were welcomed as evidence that ordinary people were

'voting with their feet' against a communist regime or a left-wing rebel movement. Relief to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and rebel-held areas was typically neglected amidst an expressed concern with the 'sovereignty' of nation states.[18] Indeed, those who managed to cross international borders and become refugees usually received far better assistance than those who were internally displaced (the latter having no specific treaty or organization to protect them).

After the Cold War ended, there was increasing concern with improving assistance to the internally displaced. In addition to the 'safe haven' initiatives in northern Iraq and Bosnia, the 1990s saw aid operations that involved negotiating access to rebel areas not only in Sudan but also in Ethiopia and Angola.[19] In part, this reflected media coverage of almost unrelieved disasters. But many analysts have expressed concerns that the new attention to the internally displaced serves as a kind of 'Trojan horse' for a more covert agenda: the neglect of responsibilities under international law to provide asylum for refugees, whether in countries that border a disaster-affected country or further afield.[20] During the Bosnian conflict, some European politicians even argued that granting asylum to victims of human rights violations would be contrary to their so-called 'right to remain';[21] assisting or preparing for a refugee influx was sometimes represented as complicity in ethnic cleansing.[22] Where the international community has given the impression that security could be guaranteed within states (for example, through 'safe areas'), this in itself could encourage countries of asylum to ask why they should be receiving or retaining refugees from that 'protected' country.[23] Many Western nations have placed increasing restrictions on asylum and entry – for example, by using detention as a deterrent, by imposing visa requirements on asylum-seekers, and by imposing sanctions on carriers who transport asylum-seekers.[24] In April 2006, UNHCR Commissioner Antonio Guterres warned that since September 11, 2001, many states around the world had invoked security concerns to justify new restrictions on those seeking to enter.[25] Alarmingly, the right to asylum for those with a well-founded fear of persecution can lead potential recipient countries to minimize the persecution that is taking place. For example, UK Home Office reports have sometimes seriously underplayed the threats to returned asylum-seekers, apparently selecting evidence with a view to rejecting asylum-seekers.[26] As evidence of the Nazis' persecution of the Jews accumulated in the Second World War, Swiss officials and aid workers were playing down the human rights abuses in Germany – influenced, among other considerations, by the Swiss authorities' fear of having to accept a major refugee influx.[27]

Priorities of Powerful Actors within the Affected Society

The priorities of powerful local actors have often undermined the helpfulness of relief operations. As Vivian Lee has shown, it has proved tempting for aid officials to dismiss this as a shocking manifestation of callousness or evil, whereas what is needed is to try to understand the diverse motivations and pressures at play.[28] In line with analysis developed by Clay and Schaffer (discussed more fully in chapter 7), these considerations could then be taken into account in the design of policy, rather than noted in retrospect – perhaps under the heading of 'lack of political will' – as a reason why the 'good intentions' of policy-makers did not work out in practice.

A routine practice in international relief operations, whether in wartime or peacetime, has been to focus on the 'poorest and neediest' group, to 'target' relief at this group, and then to dispatch a quantity of relief deemed sufficient for the group's needs, usually with relatively few resources allocated to monitoring the fate of relief and rather little consideration of how to secure the cooperation of local authorities or even transporters for passing that relief to the most needy. However, the most needy groups will tend to be unable to stake a claim to relief for precisely the same reasons that they were exposed to famine and violence in the first place – because they lack political clout within the institutions of their own society.

This applies even in natural disasters. My research on the drought-driven famine in Darfur in 1984–5 showed that relief operations discriminated strongly against rural dwellers, migrants and pastoralists – groups particularly hard-hit by the famine.[29] The lack of political clout of disaster victims recently 'came home' to many in the US when Hurricane Katrina brought flooding to New Orleans in August 2005. The (mostly black) residents of low-lying areas proved gravely lacking in political muscle within relevant US authorities. One manifestation of this was that whilst city residents with cars could simply drive away, insufficient public buses were provided for those in flood-prone areas (who were known to be the least mobile). The government agency responsible for disaster response, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), had been run down by President George W. Bush almost as soon as he arrived in office. Significantly, FEMA was part of the Department of Homeland Security, and in the run-up to the disaster nearly 75 per cent of federal funds to local and state disaster units had been earmarked for dealing with terrorism.[30]

If disaster victims lack political clout in peacetime, this is all the more applicable in wartime – particularly where needy groups are being targeted for attacks by their own government.

When we examine the diversions and manipulation of relief by politically influential groups, three sets of agendas stand out. The first (which applies strongly in natural disasters as well as complex emergencies) is the priority given to protecting *resident* populations rather than migrants. The second is the economic agendas of powerful groups (again, an influence in natural disasters as well as complex emergencies). The third set of agendas (by definition restricted to complex emergencies) is military in nature. Apart from depriving victims of aid, the economic and military manipulation of aid can feed into violence. In general, the worse the targeting of aid and the higher the rates of diversion to those not suffering from famine, the more aid is likely to act as an incentive for violence.

Protecting resident populations

The obstruction of relief may be linked to *the protection of resident populations*. Those fleeing famine or war have routinely been seen as a threat by local populations and by local authorities. Significantly, a refugee or an internally displaced person will generally not constitute part of the political constituency of politicians and officials with responsibility for an area of influx. The principal mechanism highlighted by Sen and Dreze as preventing famine – the existence of democratic government – will not necessarily help *migrants*.

Apart from the possibility of bringing disease (chapter 5), famine migrants have often been seen as an economic liability (taking up land, damaging the environment, bringing down wages and/or boosting prices); the threat of high prices, for example, is implicit in Peter Cutler's model of high grain prices spreading out from the 'epicentre' of famine as people move away and grain moves in.[31] Those who flee famine or war may also be seen as a security threat – perhaps a source of crime or a vehicle for rebel infiltration. Such worries may not be unfounded: one factor facilitating the spread of war from Liberia to Sierra Leone in 1991 was that Liberian refugees unwittingly provided 'cover' for rebels (backed by Charles Taylor) to move into Sierra Leone; in 2000–1, Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea proved something of a magnet for violence from armed groups across the respective borders.

Local fears about displaced people are of long standing and should not come as a surprise. A widespread fear of migrants in medieval Europe has been documented by Michel Mollat in *The Poor in the Middle Ages*. Mollat

contrasted the charitable attitude to the 'true pauper', who was known to his or her fellow-villagers, with a widespread suspicion of the 'transient pauper', or 'vagabond': 'Next to nothing was known about the men and women who lived as vagabonds. Since they had fled their rightful place in society, might they not be rebels? Or disease carriers? . . . Hospices prudently offered shelter to "transient paupers" for only a limited period, and in times of alarm access to the city was denied.'[32] The restriction of hospice relief here is significant. Today, too, hostility towards migrants can encourage the withholding of relief. This was clearly the case during the drought-famine in western Sudan in 1984–5, as Save the Children Fund field reports demonstrate.[33] In the subsequent war-driven crisis with its epicentre in the south, these fears were redoubled: the late 1980s saw local authorities in northern Sudan frequently withholding relief from southern Sudanese migrants amidst concerns that they constituted a security threat as well as a health threat. Thus, alongside the attempt to gain resources from raiding and the attempt to eject people from certain areas of the south, there was a simultaneous unwillingness to receive them in the north. Together, the implications were *genocidal*, though it would appear that many of those contributing to this process did not have a specific intention of wiping out an ethnic group. Studies of other catastrophes – including even the Nazi Holocaust[34] – have shown that they may occur in stages through the interaction and unfolding of complex agendas.[35]

If fear of migrants may encourage a withholding of relief from them, it should also be recognized that such fears can encourage *provision* of relief in the areas of most intense outmigration. Indeed, responses to natural and human-made disasters (at the national or international level) have sometimes been most vigorous when a problem 'for them' becomes a problem 'for us' (notably as a result of migration).[36]

Economic agendas

Three possible economic benefits of manipulating relief apply in peacetime and wartime. First, relief may be withheld in order to maximize profitable price movements associated with war and famine.[37] Second, relief (or the lack of it) may serve as an instrument for securing resources in areas that are being depopulated; in such circumstances, military and economic purposes may be quite difficult to disentangle.

Third, diversion may be profitable in itself. Appropriation of relief by powerful local actors would seem to be a factor in all disasters.[38] Again, purely economic purposes will be hard to separate from military goals. In

Mozambique in the late 1980s, the rebel group Renamo would frequently attack government Frelimo towns shortly after aid had been delivered there. In the Somali capital of Mogadishu, the prospect of gaining access to aid channelled through the city in the early 1990s was an important cause of inter-factional fighting.[39] Moreover, faction leaders benefited from their status as the principal intermediaries with whom the UN chose to deal.[40] Negotiating with warlords for aid access can strengthen the warlords' legitimacy and their ability to command the loyalty of their 'followers'. Significant profits were made from the protection of aid vehicles.[41] The potential spoils of an aid-dependent, centralized state were a major spur to violence. Conversely, the withdrawal in March 1995 of resources and contracts under UNOSOM (United Nations Operation in Somalia) seems to have had the effect of undermining the patronage systems of Mogadishu-based faction leaders' patronage systems.[42]

Aid may also encourage attacks when these attacks become part of a system that keeps aid flowing into the hands of the attackers or groups colluding with them in some way. This seems to have happened in Somalia.[43] The lure of aid may also encourage armed groups to confine 'magnet' populations to particular geographical areas, as Wendy James has shown in relation to southern Sudan.[44] In Sierra Leone, many citizens suspected that elites were inactive in bringing the war to a close in part because of the flourishing 'war economy' in Freetown in particular, where looted goods were flooding in and where rents had been artificially elevated by people fleeing rural areas and by the influx of aid organizations.[45] A key benefit for government actors has often arisen from the manipulation of exchange rates used by aid organizations.[46]

Reconstruction aid may also be manipulated with a view to resource control. In the wake of the devastating Indian Ocean Tsunami of December 2004, survivors' and fishermen's groups in Thailand and Sri Lanka registered alarm that the evacuation of coastal areas was opening the way for large-scale commercial exploitation of the coastland – for example, for hotels, casinos and shrimp farms.[47] In one assessment, Scott Leckie, head of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, observed that 'the tsunami provided a pretext for evictions, land grabs . . . and other measures designed to prevent homeless residents from returning to their original homes and lands'. India, too, has been affected. In Sri Lanka, fishing communities and others have been ousted from shorelands by a prohibition on building within 100–200 metres of the sea.[48]

The process of 'reconstruction' after Hurricane Katrina is also instructive. According to some estimates, some 80 per cent of New Orleans' black

population (the strong majority in low-lying areas) may never return. The government's failure to fund the mending of broken levees – and insurance companies' reluctance to insure new buildings without this work – has helped to stall reconstruction. Some local people have suggested that city authorities and corporate interests favour a 'whitening' of New Orleans.[49]

Military agendas

Forcible depopulation may serve military as well as economic purposes. Again, manipulation of relief is central to such strategies, whether it is governments trying to starve out rural populations or rebels trying to starve out government garrison towns. Chapter 5 noted, first, that those areas of Sudan and Ethiopia that were most in need of relief in major 1980s famines actually received only a tiny proportion of overall relief and, second, that these were areas of relative rebel strength. Meanwhile, respective government forces benefited from relief: for example, in Sudan in the 1980s and 1990s, international aid consistently helped to sustain the government's control of the garrison town of Juba in southern Sudan. In Mozambique and Angola, areas of rebel strength were also deprived of relief. In the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, aid crossing Bosnian Serb territory provided a substantial injection of resources for Serbian military forces.[50]

In the Darfur famine from 2003, as earlier in southern Sudan, government obstruction has significantly curtailed deliveries to areas of rebel strength. As UN Special Envoy Tom Vraalsen acknowledged in December 2003: 'Delivery of humanitarian assistance is hampered by systematically denied access. Khartoum authorities claim there is unimpeded access but they greatly restrict access to the areas under their control while imposing blanket denial to all rebel-held areas.'[51] The internally displaced people in the most desperate situation have been those caught behind rebel lines.[52] Meanwhile, humanitarian aid to camps in Darfur (while essential) has sometimes 'locked in' the forcible displacement effected by the Sudan government and its *janjaweed* allies.

One specialized way in which aid can be subordinated to local military objectives is the use of aid as 'cover' for military operations. In Darfur, Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) rebels, not to be confused with the SPLA, threatened to block relief coming from government areas, citing concerns that relief was being manipulated for military purposes.[53] Back in the 1980s, both the Sudanese and Ethiopian governments used aid shipments to channel arms to vulnerable garrisons, adding to the incentive for rebels to attack these shipments. In the oil-rich Bentiu area of Sudan, the presence of

aid agencies was used to deter attacks on strategic Sudan government positions.[54] Meanwhile, the rebel SPLA would sometimes try to protect its military installations by assembling civilians in the area.[55] All these manipulations impede the channelling of relief to the most needy. During Nigeria's civil war in 1967–70, the Nigerian government tried to starve out the Biafran rebels; partly to secure relief and partly for military reasons, the rebel Biafran administration mixed relief flights with those bringing in military supplies and insisted on night-flights to impede Nigerian government interceptions.[56]

The history of aid to refugees shows how aid has been repeatedly manipulated by powerful local actors. Refugees have often become pawns in military games, helping to provide cover, legitimacy and material resources that help to sustain a military effort.[57] International aid may play a part here: it may be consumed by fighters or by their dependants; it may be sold for arms; it may attract new recruits, and so on. The military functions of refugees were evident on the Thai–Cambodian border in the 1980s. At this time, massive Western assistance to Cambodian refugees in Thailand helped to revive the Khmer Rouge (responsible for some of the worst mass killings in history). Khmer Rouge fighters lived among and controlled civilian villagers.[58] Entire settlements would move backwards and forwards across the border with Cambodia, depending on the level of hostilities with the Vietnamese-backed forces inside Cambodia. In the context of the Cold War, Western powers were more hostile to the Vietnamese-backed regime in Cambodia than to their Khmer Rouge opponents.

Another warrior-refugee community was that inside Pakistan on the Afghan border in the 1980s. This community was largely controlled by the Afghan *mujahadeen*, who at the time were waging war (with Western support) on a Soviet-controlled regime in Kabul. Relief for these refugees played a part in building up the strength of the *mujahadeen*. While rebel *mujahadeen* trained in military camps, UNHCR found itself supporting their dependants.

Emergency aid to Hutu refugees in Zaïre was notoriously manipulated by militia fighters who had participated in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, something that helped them to rebuild their strength after fleeing the advancing Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Food aid and other relief supplies were diverted from the intended beneficiaries and were used to help the Hutu extremists to recover and rearm. Prunier noted that numbers were inflated by local extremists so as to get more aid, and that a great deal of relief was sold for cash to finance political and military projects.[59] Former government soldiers and *interahamwe* Hutu militias were

also able to recruit new members from the refugees. In addition, Hutu extremists seemed to be using refugees as protection against being arrested and as the basis for consolidating a mini-Hutuland that allowed incursions into Rwanda and that could perhaps facilitate a restoration of Hutu supremacy in Rwanda.[60] That meant intimidating those who tried to return to Rwanda, and the Hutu extremist leadership played on fears of Tutsi retaliation within Rwanda to convince Hutu refugees that return was too dangerous. Meanwhile, Zaïrean troops were helping to prevent Hutu refugees from leaving the camps, despite a serious outbreak of cholera.[61] The international community missed the opportunity to send a multinational force to separate and disarm the Hutu extremists, thereby putting aid agencies in an impossible position.[62] Kisangani Emizet notes that since the extremists had committed genocide, the international community actually had an *obligation* to separate them from *bona fide* refugees.[63]

Priorities of Aid Organizations

Another reason for the inadequacy of relief is that the interests and priorities of aid organizations are often at odds with the interests and priorities of those suffering from disasters. A fundamental problem is that organizational health (and individual careers) may sometimes be better served by satisfying donors and host governments than by satisfying the ostensible beneficiaries. This problem can interact damagingly with the agendas of powerful local actors.

Camps

Part of the critique of aid organizations has centred on relief camps. In her pathbreaking book *Imposing Aid*, Barbara Harrell-Bond took some of her inspiration from the work on asylums by Erving Goffman[64] and from the film about a mental institution *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. She argued that the favoured solution to refugees' problems (providing aid in camps) was actually part of the problem: it constrained the economic strategies of refugees and tended to deepen their trauma by exacerbating feelings of loss of control. Harrell-Bond, the founding director of the Refugee Studies Programme in Oxford, saw camps as tending to induce in refugees a sense of powerlessness and despair which aid organizations would then routinely turn around and condemn as 'dependency' and 'laziness'. Paradoxically, as Allen and Turton later emphasized, even refugees' ingenious attempts to get around the constraints of camp life – such as multiple registration for

relief and the practice of selling ration cards or relief goods – have often been interpreted by donors as signs of a 'dependency culture' in which aid has 'morally corrupted' the recipient (a longstanding concern among British officials, for example, both at home in the Victorian era and in the empire).[65] So the danger is that the victim becomes the culprit, and shame is redistributed away from powerful actors who reproduce a damaging system and towards the allegedly 'lazy' or 'deceitful' refugee.

De Waal's work on the 1984–5 Darfur famine showed that the heavy reliance on camps had had two damaging effects. First, the concentrations of people had increased people's exposure to infection. Second, confining people to relatively small geographical areas had imposed severe restrictions on their ability to pursue their economic strategies. De Waal showed that these were people's primary insurance against the famine process and he urged the importance of helping people to sustain their livelihoods in rural areas. While this Darfur famine was drought-driven (rather than a complex emergency involving widespread violence), camps have often been *particularly* favoured (and particularly restrictive) during conflict, when they can provide a means of controlling 'dangerous' populations and a source of legitimacy and resources for military endeavours.

Whilst sexual and gender-based violence can take place anywhere, rape has been a common occurrence in camps; so too have prostitution, the exchange of sexual favours in return for various benefits, and domestic violence more generally. The full extent of rape and other sexual violence is particularly hard to know since these crimes are very frequently under-reported – for example, because of fear of recriminations or fear of social stigma. But Agnes Callamard observed that many of the Somali women who had suffered rape in Kenyan camps had already fled similar experiences in Somalia. Kenyan police ignored their request for protection; some were themselves involved in the criminal acts. Meanwhile, the local structures of representation for refugees tended to be male-dominated. Callamard noted that UNHCR itself sometimes seemed reluctant to bring complaints before the relevant authorities. She also stressed the importance of practical steps like proper lighting and proper locks on sleeping accommodation.[66] In her study of assistance to refugees in Guinea from the early 1990s until 2001, Vivian Lee showed that the inadequacy of relief reaching woman and children was forcing many to resort to damaging strategies in the search for food and income, including the granting of sexual favours.[67] Such strategies may also include journeying long distances in order to get food or water or fuel (and thereby risking attack). Rape of women collecting firewood has been common in the most recent crisis in Darfur.

The hardships and insecurities associated with the refugee experience may themselves fuel the intensity of anger as well as a desire to wage war on whatever regime or group is seen as precipitating these hardships; again, camps can be part of the problem here. Zolberg et al. observed that '[i]ndividuals in exile may find that the most socially meaningful and economically rewarding activity is to join the militants. For many children growing up in camps and knowing nothing but a dependent, degrading, and fundamentally insecure existence, joining the battle is the only relevant future.'[68] The miseries of Palestinian refugees have clearly fed into conflict in the region; and in Afghanistan, the Taliban emerged from the hardships of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.[69] The uncertainty and insecurity of camp life may compound earlier traumas and encourage aggressive ideologies that themselves provide a sense of certainty and an explanation for suffering.[70] The anthropologist Liisa Malkki studied two groups of Burundi Hutu refugees in Tanzania, one in a refugee camp and one in a city nearby. Those in the camp tended to see themselves as Hutu who were forever opposed to the 'evil' Tutsi; but those in the city identified themselves as Burundians or Tanzanians and had little time for the racist imagery of the Hutu–Tutsi conflict.[71]

Restrictive treatment of refugees played a part in the origins of the humanitarian crisis in neighbouring Rwanda. When a Hutu-dominated government took over in Rwanda in 1959, political violence in 1959–63 caused thousands of Tutsis to flee to surrounding countries (including Uganda). Initially, many were confined to camps; many were re-confined under Ugandan President Milton Obote in the early 1980s when they were seen as a threat because of their previous support for Idi Amin. Meanwhile, the Rwandan government was denying them a chance to return, claiming that Rwanda was already overpopulated. In 1986, Rwandan refugees in Uganda helped Museveni to take power in Uganda; encouraged by Museveni, they launched an attack on Rwanda in 1990 with the aim of deposing the Habyarimana regime there, an attack that culminated in genocide. Of course, camps have been favoured for local political reasons and are not simply the work of international organizations. Even so, the minimal international pressure on Uganda and Rwanda to implement their obligations in relation to these refugees does seem to have fed into conflict in the region.

Harrell-Bond argued that while relief camps were for the most part dysfunctional for refugees, they nevertheless served important functions for relief agencies – for example, camps could be relatively easily organized and monitored, any improvements in nutritional status could readily be

measured and reported, and visiting journalists could come to publicize the good work of the agency.[72] Randolph Kent and Ken Wilson have both stressed how a concern with organizational health and growth can create a bias towards measurable and visible solutions to measurable and visible problems, including a bias towards shifting physical commodities to people once they have become thin in environments that can be easily monitored and publicized.[73] This is connected with a persistent tendency to give insufficient attention to livelihoods. A report on relief to Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya during drought in 2004–6 showed that livelihood support (for example, provision of water sources, fodder relief, veterinary programmes, livestock purchase) continued to be weak in comparison to food aid – a longstanding bias that has reflected the existence at various times of surplus food stocks (notably in the US) as well as the view that food aid demands less expertise and is less complicated to organize.[74] Distribution of cash – which directly protects livelihoods and empowers people to move – has tended to be neglected, with some significant exceptions.[75]

In complex emergencies, aid agencies' bias towards providing assistance in camps can play into the hands of governments who are rounding up populations into camps for their own reasons, perhaps as part of a military strategy or because of the fears of resident populations.[76]

A variation on the relief camp is the 'peace village'. This, too, may represent a dubious accommodation to host government priorities. A major independent evaluation of relief in the 1990s under Operation Lifeline Sudan noted that the Sudan government had established a number of so-called 'peace villages' as part of its strategy of promoting development, weaning people from relief, and achieving what the government called 'peace from within'.[77] The UN Development Programme (UNDP) adopted the term 'peace villages', and the UNDP, World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) all supported them. Yet these villages were essentially mechanisms for controlling displaced southern Sudanese and Nuba people, and for exploiting their labour on farms owned by northern Sudanese. Rebel-held areas of the Nuba Mountains were being systematically deprived of relief, and reduced rations more generally were helping to propel people into exploitative labour on commercial farms. The UNDP said it was aiming to 'resettle [returnees] in peace villages and then promote agricultural development to strengthen their attachment to land'.[78] Since the Nuba had been forcibly deprived of their land by the Sudanese government, the plan suggested an alarming degree of ignorance and witting or unwitting collusion in this dispossession.[79]

Silence and access

Like Harrell-Bond, Wilson and Kent, de Waal examined aid agencies as economic players, highlighting their economic interests and their concern with the pursuit of funding. In a sense, this strand of analysis can be regarded as part of a wider examination of economic interests during conflict. Without funding, of course, aid agencies cannot do any good. But de Waal focused particularly on the dangers of silence in contexts of massive human rights abuses, arguing that aid agencies have repeatedly kept quiet in order to ensure their presence (often a lucrative presence) in disaster zones. De Waal suggested that the UN's Operation Lifeline in Sudan from 1989 became an end in itself, more important than addressing the underlying human rights abuses, and that this preoccupation with securing access for relief gave the Sudan government important leverage internationally.[80]

The paradigmatic case of 'maintaining access' came during the Second World War. In the early 1940s, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was receiving important information from local representatives about massacres of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. Yet, as William Shawcross notes in his book *The Quality of Mercy*:

> By the autumn of 1942 about two million Jews had been murdered and so many reports had been received that the ICRC felt compelled to consider whether it should make its information public. An official drafted a bland statement that said merely that civilians should be humanely treated . . . even the bland draft was rejected – on the grounds that it might be seen as a violation of the organization's neutrality.[81]

Responding in 1948 to charges that the aid agency should have spoken out on the basis of its extensive knowledge of Nazi persecution and deportation of the Jews, a 1948 ICRC booklet noted:

> Protest? The International Committee did protest – to the responsible authorities. . . . A whole department of the Committee's work was to make one long series of protests: countless improvements in the camps [that is, the concentration camps], for example, were due to steps of this kind. . . . Every man to his job, every man to his vocation. That of the Red Cross is to nurse the wounded where it can with the means at its disposal. For the Committee to protest publicly would have been not only to outstep its functions, but also to lose thereby all chance of pursuing them, by creating an immediate breach with the government concerned.[82]

The dangers of this approach are all too obvious. They are all the greater when we consider Swiss government pressure on the ICRC to keep quiet

amidst fears that Switzerland would be overwhelmed by Jewish refugees.[83] Further muddying the waters were Switzerland's role in providing armaments to Nazi Germany, its fear of an imminent German invasion, and its economic windfall in the form of Jewish resources (including looted resources) that flowed into Swiss bank accounts.[84] During the Nigerian civil war of 1967–70, a Red Cross doctor named Bernard Kouchner became so frustrated with what he saw as the silence of the ICRC on Nigerian abuses (including the blocking of aid) that in 1971 he helped to found a new humanitarian organization called Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) with an explicit intention of bearing witness during emergencies. ICRC behaviour in the Second World War in particular has been subject to considerable soul-searching within the organization, and on rare occasions the ICRC will make public statements denouncing abuses. However, the dangers of silent compromise by NGOs and UN agencies – prioritizing access, not wishing to offend host governments – remain.

It is not difficult to find examples of UN agencies soft-pedalling on abuses. Part of the mandate of the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is 'to advocate for the rights of people in need'.[85] Yet OCHA's public statements are often very cautious. In Sudan, it has often been oddly 'even-handed' in attributing blame to Khartoum and the Darfur rebels. The idea that disasters might be functional still finds little room: thus, in Sudan, bureaucratic obstacles to relief are described as 'inane' and OCHA adds that 'the people who lose the most are the Sudanese themselves', a strangely aggregated statement.[86] Over Darfur, the various UN agencies have lacked a common advocacy strategy, as earlier; political analysis has generally been weak; and the increased discussion of the need for 'protection' has run up against the reality that providing protection by mere presence, as noted, is often unworkable.[87]

On the faltering reconstruction in Chechnya as massive violence abated somewhat, Gordadze observed in 2004: 'By refusing any confrontation with Russia, UN agencies are complicit in the Kremlin's game by maintaining the illusion of a return to "normality" '.[88] The UN was projecting optimism that the situation was improving. But torture remained widespread and aid reaching the Chechen population was 'derisory' and subject to widespread appropriation.[89]

The Angolan government tried to demonstrate a 'normalization' of the recent war by relocating internally displaced persons to areas other than their area of origin. Christine Messiant noted that this was 'sometimes by force or with the lure of false promises'. She added, 'The vast majority of

relief agencies collaborated in this further "positive development", arguing that it was better for the populations to be out of the squalid camps.'[90]

In Sierra Leone, UN agencies contributed very little worthwhile analysis of the conflict. Frustration with UNICEF was high, particularly given its brief for children's welfare. One Irish priest and long-time resident told me in 1995: 'UNICEF are talking about iodized salt when the whole place is burning.' An analysis of interventions in Liberia by Jean-Hervé Jézéquel concluded that UNICEF had gone to considerable lengths to trumpet its 'Child-Friendly Spaces' – solid buildings inside Liberian camps – but had kept quiet on the recruitment of child soldiers, an issue where speaking out would have been seen as questioning the Liberian authorities effectively running the camps.[91]

Agencies sometimes defend the 'division of responsibilities' between human rights organizations and those focusing on relief. But some senior UN officials will privately admit that this is not producing a good result. A greater impact on the crisis – and a greater degree of protection – might come from jointly speaking up together.

Feeding into the silences on major political issues and into a kind of depoliticized 'humanitarianism' has been a tendency, noted by Derek Summerfield, to 'medicalize' suffering. Like Harrell-Bond, Summerfield explored the connections between distress among refugees/IDPs and the nature of the 'assistance' that is offered. He emphasized the dangers in medicalizing social problems (as notably with the label of 'post-traumatic stress disorder' or PTSD). He stressed that this risked deflecting attention from national and international responsibilities to put social problems right. He added that 'for the vast majority of survivors, "traumatisation" is a pseudo-condition; distress or suffering *per se* is not psychological disturbance. . . Much of the distress experienced and communicated by victims is normal, even adaptive.'[92] Suffering could be compounded if the individual was encouraged to think of him- or herself as a passive victim or as 'going crazy'. After working with internally displaced people in Eritrea, Astier Almedom noted that practical measures like keeping village units together in a camp setting could play a major role in social cohesion, and were often more useful than disease- or trauma-centred approaches.[93] Sara Gibbs noted that in Mozambique, local people linked reconstruction and recovery with individual and community *actions* rather than with individual discussions about the traumas of war.[94] A PTSD label tends to place trauma in the past, perhaps distracting attention from *current* difficulties arising from camp life, mistreatment in the country of asylum, or fear of repatriation.[95] Some degree of forgetting could be actively functional.[96]

Chasing the funding

A concern with organizational growth can encourage a concentration of NGO efforts on high-profile crises and even on those parts of crisis-affected areas that are easily accessible to the media. Over half of global humanitarian funding (as of mid-2005) was for Sudan.[97] A common tendency is for aid organizations to 'bite off more than they can chew'. While diplomatic disengagement created opportunities for NGOs to propose a role for themselves in 'conflict resolution', the ability of NGOs to resolve conflicts was easily exaggerated; NGOs may even have a 'comparative disadvantage' when it comes to influencing the behaviour of top government officials.[98] Duffield observed that humanitarian agencies were encouraged to step into the vacuum left by this diplomatic withdrawal and some aid workers saw themselves as *legitimizing* this withdrawal.[99]

A 2006 evaluation of interventions in Darfur found that some aid agencies had 'staked a claim' to areas where they had failed to deliver; moreover, the search for innovative methods was frequently crowding out more tried-and-tested approaches.[100] Publicizing one's own efforts may also be problematic for the recipient. Criticizing the prevalence of NGO T-shirts in one camp, a Kenyan aid worker told me: 'In my culture, if you have done something for someone, you do not advertise it – or you are humiliating them further.'

Donors have fads and fashions, and local and international NGOs may be quick to learn and adapt. One senior official at CIDA (the Canadian government's development arm) complained to me that NGOs were coming to CIDA and asking what these officials were ready to fund and how the NGOs should frame their proposals.[101] The Canadian official had hoped that NGOs would come with projects whose nature was determined by the intended beneficiaries. One analyst said of the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID: '[It] resembles the flame that attracts and may consume a moth that finds its light irresistible.'[102] A skilled NGO can pick up on the 'buzzwords' fashionable with donors – sustainability, rights, empowerment, and so on – and frame proposals accordingly.[103] Sara Pantuliano and Sorcha O'Callaghan have noted that in Darfur 'There is a general perception that some organisations have been re-fashioning their traditional assistance programmes in protection language because they have detected that protection is a new funding fashion.'[104]

Governmental pressures may be exerted by a roundabout route. In 2003, Save the Children UK was told by Save the Children US (which gets around 60 per cent of its funding from the US government) to retract accusations

that coalition forces occupying Iraq had breached the Geneva Conventions by blocking a relief plane from landing in northern Iraq; SC-UK stood by its statement, but reportedly toned down some later statements.[105] SC-US also objected to an SC-UK statement demanding the immediate lifting of an Israeli blockade on Gaza.[106] In 2004, CARE USA was receiving 75 per cent of its annual £320 million from the US government. In these circumstances, can it really claim to be an NGO? The organization's security in Iraq (where local director Margaret Hassan was abducted in October 2004 and later killed) will have been compromised by its close association with the US government.[107] Corporate funding also carries dangers of censorship and self-censorship.

Undermining state accountability?

If donor government funding has represented one (hazardous) opportunity for NGOs, the whittling away of the state in crisis-affected countries has represented another. Mark Duffield referred to 'the internationalization of public welfare', suggesting that programmes of structural adjustment and economic liberalization in the 1980s had proven to be a major institutional opportunity for NGOs.[108] As the state retreated from responsibilities for the provision of basic services such as health, agricultural extension and food rations, NGOs were ready to step into the breach.

In line with the argument outlined by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, Alex de Waal argued in his book *Famine Crimes* that the best protection against famine lies with accountable forms of government, rather than with the vagaries of international relief. He suggested that famine is not simply prevented; it is deterred by mechanisms for getting rid of politicians who fail either to prevent it or to respond to it. Yet humanitarian aid had frequently helped undermine governments' accountability to their own people.

De Waal stressed that humanitarian operations have often bypassed governmental structures in damaging ways, luring away skilled staff and reducing the sense of responsibility that is felt by governments for ensuring welfare. This argument has also been made in relation to Mozambique by Joseph Hanlon.[109] Some aid agency staff, too, have been very concerned about this, and one senior aid worker in Holland (Jan Birket-Smith of IBIS) told me: 'We see a very dangerous tendency in international NGOs and bilateral donors to push aside public institutions. You can't develop the concept of democracy by bypassing legal and democratic institutions. It's contradictory.'[110]

According to Birket-Smith, international NGOs' desire to bypass cumbersome official procedures had contributed to the bypassing of legitimate

state institutions in Mozambique, thereby moving much of the critical decision-making out of accountable institutions.[111]

De Waal saw humanitarian aid as frequently propping up rogue regimes, warlords and unrepresentative rebel movements – an argument that in many ways mirrored an earlier critique of aid by Peter Bauer.[112] De Waal stressed that humanitarian aid contributed resources for repression whilst tending to insulate leaders from the displeasure of their own people. One example – not discussed by him – is the way humanitarian aid helped to support the abusive military government in Sierra Leone from 1992 to 1996.[113]

Squaring the circle

Aid workers routinely have to 'square the circle' between massive need and inadequate funding. This runs the risk of a dishonest discourse that lets powerful governments off the hook and gives a false impression that an effective response is being mounted. In this context, the high turnover of staff in the aid world, the short-term contracts and the frequent inability to learn the lessons of experience can be seen as in some sense functional. Mark Duffield has referred to 'functional ignorance'.[114] 'Blinkered' ways of looking at disasters themselves have functions.

The case of Sierra Leone shows how needs were squared with resources. Although the severity of the conflict there tended to increase over time, the level of the ration was actually reduced – from 350 grammes of cereal per person per day in 1992, to 300 in 1993 and again to 200 in 1994 and 1995. The WFP was facing a major funding crisis in the region; with the catastrophes in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda taking attention and resources away, donors were supplying only a fraction of what they had pledged.[115] Global shipments of cereal food aid plummeted from about 15 million tons in 1992/3 to about 5 million four years later.[116] Refugees in neighbouring Guinea were also suffering. A MSF report concluded: 'There has been sustained pressure to reduce quantities of food aid since 1992. Every year since 1992, there has been an increase in the number of refugees, but there has been a yearly decrease in the amount of food aid distributed.'[117]

How could these low rations be justified? If the response could not be brought into line with the assessed needs, it was tempting to bring the assessed needs into line with the actual response. There was an emphasis on the coping strategies of the Sierra Leoneans and a simultaneous emphasis on the importance of avoiding dependency. Ration reductions, it was said, would boost these coping strategies. A shift 'from relief to development' was seen as possible even in the midst of conflict.[118] Duffield has

stressed that situations that a decade ago were regarded as warranting a relief intervention were by the 1990s coming to be seen as an opportunity for rehabilitation and development.[119]

Melissa Leach has shown how the failure to supply significant relief to Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone was rationalized, after the event, as 'a policy of integration' that cleverly absorbed Liberians into Sierra Leonean communities, something that ignored the social and economic strains caused by this absorption.[120] Although some refugees in the Sierra Leone/Liberia/Guinea region had good access to land, the presumption of access to land and associated coping strategies was falsely generalized not only to refugees across the region but also to internally displaced people in urban areas. Relief to Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea and Liberia appears to have been phased out prematurely on the assumption that they had become 'self-sufficient'. Many returned to conditions of considerable danger in Sierra Leone as a result.[121]

Meanwhile, inadequate relief was also blamed on security obstacles. They were considerable, but they were not always as immutable as they were made to appear. Although the Sierra Leonean government and UN organizations tended to attribute attacks on aid convoys to the rebels, many of these attacks were carried out by government soldiers, often the same soldiers who were supposed to be protecting the convoys. Lorry drivers repeatedly called for Nigerian and Guinean ECOMOG troops to escort convoys, but these requests were ignored. The fact that other kinds of violence were usually being blamed on the rebels made it particularly difficult for the UN system to envisage – or move towards – a solution for the more remediable security constraints on relief supplies.

As in several crises in Sudan, systematically exposing impediments to the actual receipt of relief would have required an investigation and discussion of many facets of the emergency – the abuses by government forces and the emergence of economic interests in continued conflict – that major donors (notably within the UN system) seemed anxious to ignore or to dismiss.

Zoë Marriage has argued that aid aganecies err when they express implausible universalist goals such as 'we will reach the needy'; in reality, the number of people reached with humanitarian aid in conflict zones has usually been severely constrained (for example, by resource limitations and by aid agencies' sensitivity to insecurity). The broken promise of humanitarian assistance, she suggested, is particularly provocative when it comes in the context of other broken promises – such as the promise of state or international protection. Marriage urges that it would be better for NGOs to commit to limited but doable tasks than to express universalist aims that

perpetually founder. Meanwhile, some measure of 'respectability' within this dysfunctional system is maintained by the way interventions are discussed. Drawing on sociologist Stanley Cohen's work in particular, Marriage suggests that aid workers have found a number of mechanisms that feed into the denial of aid's ineffectiveness. For example, when budgets are tight, 'targeting' helps square the circle, implying that significant impact is possible with insignificant contributions. Inadequate aid has been excused on the grounds that this at least avoids creating 'dependency'.[122]

Particularly within a context where the 1945 UN Charter guarantees economic and social rights, it has often been relatively simple for development organizations to re-label what they are already doing as 'human rights'.[123] Making humanitarian aid conditional on human rights observance can give the appearance of 'tough action' and can save resources. It is very unlikely to help the victims, however.

Mark Duffield points out that with emergency aid increasingly being phased out in favour of development aid, it becomes easier for donors to threaten or carry out a total or near-total cut-off of aid even to countries undergoing severe conflict. In Somalia in 1995, even emergency relief was made conditional to some extent on warlords' behaviour, with particular objections being raised by donors to the use of Islamic *sharia* punishments. In Afghanistan too, even humanitarian aid was linked to human rights observance by the Taliban. Duffield accused donors of hypocritically championing the rights of women in Afghanistan so that former commitments regarding unconditional humanitarian aid could be quietly dropped.[124] Aid was selectively provided to opposition-held areas of Serbia in 1999.[125] In Sierra Leone in 1997–8, international trade sanctions on the military junta were extended in practice to humanitarian aid.[126] Under pressure from NGOs to clarify that humanitarian aid would not be affected by the sanctions, UK Minister for Development Clare Short said, 'We must be sure that the aid will not be delivered or used in such a way as to prolong the current crisis.'[127] In theory, the international sanctions imposed on the junta exempted humanitarian aid; yet in practice food aid dried up and high rates of malnutrition and mortality began to emerge.[128] In Angola, UN agencies confined support to the government side while sanctions were placed on UNITA. Messiant observed: 'For over three years (from the end of 1998 to the beginning of 2002), hundreds of thousands of Angolans were unable to request or receive assistance: more than 3 million were estimated to be beyond reach in 1999, with an additional million at the time of the [April 2002] ceasefire.'[129]

Joanna Macrae has commented that placing conditions on humanitarian assistance was 'not just the result of "bad" foreign policy guys trying to

manipulate humanitarian aid, but follows from the logic of integrating developmental and conflict management objectives also advocated by NGOs and the UN.'[130]

Repatriation

UNHCR has increasingly adopted the priority of repatriation to country of origin, a policy that chimes rather disturbingly with the far right's emphasis on repatriation of immigrants.[131] Indeed, the organization declared the 1990s to be the decade of repatriation.[132] In line with major donors' priorities, UNHCR assumed a 'preventive' protection responsibility inside the former Yugoslavia, without having the number of staff or the influence over armed groups to fulfil this task; meanwhile, it went along with major donors' increasing distaste for major resettlement schemes.[133] In a context where it has uncertain funding and relies heavily on the US in particular, UNHCR has found it difficult to adopt a firm defence of the principles in the 1951 Refugee Convention, including the principle that no refugee should be expelled against their will to a country where they fear persecution (the principle of 'non-refoulement').[134] In 1991 Kurds fleeing towards Turkey were quickly lured back from the mountainous borderlands by promises of security that the international community was ill-prepared to meet.[135] During the 1990s, UNHCR's adoption of categories like 'temporary protection', whilst appeasing governments reluctant to welcome large numbers of refugees, posed a significant threat to the institution of asylum.[136] UNHCR helped in the involuntary return of half a million Rwandan refugees from Tanzania in 1996, announcing that all refugees were expected to return home by the end of that year and that economic and agricultural activities in the Tanzanian camps would be suspended. Tanzanian troops forced refugees fleeing *away from* Rwanda to turn back towards the border. UNHCR was mindful of the possibility of Rwandan attacks on Tanzanian camps, where many genocidaires had taken refuge, attacks that had just occurred across Rwanda's border with Zaïre/DRC. But the organization was also mindful of the declining availability of funding for Rwandan refugee programmes, with diminished support from the US particularly notable.[137] As Michael Barnett pointed out, UNHCR's commitment to genuinely voluntary repatriation has been substantially eroded, and the right to decide has been decisively relocated from the refugee to UNHCR itself.[138] At the turn of the century, speedy repatriation of Kosovar Albanians led to the exodus of some 200,000 Serbs and Roma from Kosovo.[139] After the Taliban was overthrown and an Afghanistan

Interim Authority was set up in December 2001, over 1.7 million refugees were encouraged to return from Pakistan and Iran, often to conditions worse than those in the countries to which they had fled.[140] The move also diverted limited funds available for reconstruction. UNHCR spoke of a 'facilitated return', a term it has used when it does not regard the situation as suitable for a 'promoted' return. Turton and Marsden suggest this may be a 'semantic device' to allow international community to put pressure on refugees without appearing to breach agreed norms of voluntary repatriation.[141]

Policy Implications and Dilemmas

Critique of the critique

Analysing the manipulation and shortcomings of humanitarian aid is one thing; knowing what to do about it is another. A key problem is that any 'solution' is likely to run into its own set of problems and manipulations, which must in turn be analysed and incorporated into policy decisions. A worrying example – particularly for those like the current author who have in the past contributed to researching the 'political economy' of war and aid – is the way critiques of aid have been harnessed to projects of inaction and penny-pinching. There is always a danger that critiques of aid will be used to justify the denial of relief to people who need it.[142]

Nick Stockton has argued that critics who emphasized the medium- and long-term dangers of emergency relief actually helped – in practice if not in intent – to legitimize a contraction in relief-giving and an increasing international tolerance of other people's malnutrition and general suffering. Stockton highlighted the meagre international response to crisis in the remaining Hutu refugee camps in eastern former Zaïre and those fleeing west in early 1997, when death rates reportedly reached 300 per 10,000 people per day (the highest figure ever reported anywhere).[143] The fact that this population was tainted by association with genocide, together with fears of a Hutu extremist revival, contributed at some level to this weak international response.

Pottier questioned what he called a widely received 'fairy-tale' – the idea that Hutu refugees were 'liberated' by attacks from groups in Zaïre, freeing them up to return voluntarily to Rwanda in November 1996. Food aid was actually being cut off, and there were concerted military attacks on refugee camps by armed elements of the Banyamulenge – of Tutsi origin but long-established in the Congo – in alliance with the Rwandan government.[144]

(Meanwhile, the Tanzanian army was using force to repatriate Hutu refugees there back to Rwanda, with UNHCR accused of complicity in this, partly because of a joint statement it made with the Tanzanian government calling for repatriation within a month.)

Pottier argued that a fear of Western casualties fed into the preference for an 'African solution to an African problem' and that this preference was in effect embraced by UNHCR. In the UK and the US, the dismantling of Zairean camps and the repatriation to Rwanda were hailed as a triumph. But there were hidden victims. The massacres that followed killed about 232,000 Rwandan refugees, according to Emizet's calculations.[145] Faced only with Mobutu's crumbling army, the Rwandan-backed forces (now in alliance with Laurent Kabila from northern Katanga and known as the Alliance of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo) pushed on to take the capital city of Kinshasa in May 1997 – seven months after attacking the refugee camps. Some Hutu refugees were tracked down and killed at the opposite end of the huge country of Congo/Zaïre, when Kabila's victory was already assured. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees were denied humanitarian assistance, with the Rwandan argument arguing that the mass repatriation meant international humanitarian intervention was no longer necessary. Where aid was provided, it appears sometimes to have been used by the forces of rebel leader Kabila to get refugees to assemble, after which aid agency access would be cut off and killings would be carried out. Emizet's verdict was a damning one: 'There was little in the way of public protest in the West, and the silence that greeted the massacre of refugees was overwhelming.'[146] Part of the reason was that the Rwandan government, collaborating with Kabila at this time, enjoyed a privileged moral status as victims of the 1994 genocide.

Hugo Slim, an academic and policy analyst with a background in Save the Children Fund and the UN, acknowledged that de Waal's arguments were important, but suggested that it was dangerous to withhold a definite good or benefit for the sake of an unknowable future good. Slim distinguished 'deontologists' from 'consequentialists' (a category in which he placed de Waal). Deontologists believe that some actions are simply good in themselves, and so one has a duty to do them regardless of the consequences. In an aid context, a deontologist might believe that it is always good, and therefore a duty, to heal a person's wounds if one can. The International Committee of the Red Cross adopts a position quite close to this. However, according to consequentialist ethics, actions must be measured as good or bad according to their wider consequences. Thus, Slim suggested, an adherent to this system might believe that it is not good to

heal some people's wounds if it means they will return to battle and kill children. Slim observed that: 'Ethics for consequentialists becomes the complicated and uncertain process of anticipating wider outcomes and holding oneself responsible for events well beyond the present time.'[147] Slim neatly encapsulated some elements of the debate when he wrote:

> A minimalist duty-based approach to the ethics of relief programming will invite the wrath of consequentialist critics whose stinging rebukes will harangue such agencies for their naivety and irresponsibility. A more maximalist approach which tries to take account of consequences will be plagued with uncertainty, speculation and endless calculation about possible outcomes, as well as the temptation (to which the western liberal conscience is already too susceptible) to feel personally responsible for every terrible thing that happens in one's theatre of operations.[148]

On the basis of his case-studies, Slim leant towards the deontological position. For example, he argued that to have withheld relief from Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaïre in the hope that the Hutu regime in exile would not be able to regroup and might not choose violence again would have meant working on the principle of doing evil so that good may come – a position consistently rejected in Christian moral theology. Slim also gave weight to the danger that speaking out will lead to reprisals against an aid agency or its staff.

A related concern with de Waal's argument centres on procedure: how are the kinds of difficult decisions advocated by de Waal actually to be taken? Traditional humanitarian action has at least the merit of possessing a relatively straightforward and comprehensible goal: the immediate saving of lives. If relief is sometimes to be withheld because providing it risks fuelling a war, who would make such a difficult decision, and what mechanisms of representation might give that decision legitimacy?[149]

Emergency aid is only one part of the political economy of war – the system of economic benefits which arises from (and often prolongs) conflict. Many wars have been fuelled by struggles over natural resources and trading profits (notably drugs) more than by emergency aid itself.[150] It is notable that much of the the critique of emergency aid was developed in relation to countries – Sudan, Ethiopia and Mozambique – that lack easily exploitable high-value commodities. The relative economic and strategic importance of aid is much lower in countries with a substantial drugs trade (such as Burma, Afghanistan and Colombia) or a substantial trade in diamonds (such as Angola and Sierra Leone).[151]

One might also doubt whether the withdrawal of emergency aid from a crisis-torn country is really likely to foster the emergence of a famine-

preventing political contract on the lines advocated by de Waal. A much stronger case can be made that long-term assistance supports abusive regimes (see chapter 8). As de Waal points out, promising reconstruction efforts in Somaliland show what can sometimes be done even without large-scale international assistance.

When it comes to avoiding the creation of camps, the most desirable course may not always be the most feasible. In the face of the various criticisms of refugee camps, Jeff Crisp (of UNHCR) and Karen Jacobsen have suggested that, for a refugee, a camp might be safer and materially more secure than self-settlement. They noted that refugees and their leaders may actually organize themselves into camp-like settings even before UNHCR or other agencies turn up. They also noted that camps may not actually mean confinement, and that what they call the 'anti-camp' argument 'tends to ignore the fact that local populations in countries of asylum also have rights – including the right not to be dispossessed of their land'.[152]

Crisp and Jacobsen went on to suggest that UNHCR's policy was actually to avoid establishment of camps if there were viable alternatives. It is often host governments that insist on camps, perhaps to prevent local integration of exiled populations, to facilitate early repatriation, and/or to attract international assistance. Amnesty International has noted that large numbers of migrants have often been granted refugee status in neighbouring African countries only so long as they confine themselves to camps. Crisp and Jacobsen also make a tactical argument: given the difficulty of getting countries to accept refugees in the first place, demanding that refugees be free to settle where they want may encourage host governments not to admit refugees at all.

Pushing relief through

In complex emergencies, the hijacking of emergency aid for geopolitical and/or local political purposes would seem to be more the rule than the exception; but this is not an argument against emergency aid *per se*. The best way forward would be to retain the humanitarian ideal of providing relief and protection to those most in need but to adopt a more politically informed approach that will both facilitate this humanitarianism project and highlight that emergency aid can never be sufficient on its own.

When it comes to pushing relief through to those who need it most, one practical step (paradoxically) is to move beyond the focus on the 'target group'. If aid is to reach its designated target, there is a need to take account of those with an economic, political or military interest in

blocking it. Trying to overcome this may involve: widespread distributions (to minimize envy and incentives for robbery); close monitoring and political/diplomatic pressures as problems arise; and support from major governments and multilateral organisations for NGOs when they come into conflict with those impeding relief. Too often, the misappropriation of aid has been dismissed as a so-called 'problem of implementation' – and in particular a problem for implementing NGOs – which is therefore not the responsibility of the major donors (who may fund the programme but may be reluctant to use their leverage to make sure the programme works).

The *type* of aid may also be important. Paul Richards has written of the need for 'smart aid', aid that is likely to get through political structures and roadblocks. He mentions information as one such item.[153] Relief can be stolen after it has been distributed, and one way of miminizing this has been through distribution of cooked food, a practice used extensively by the ICRC in Somalia during the 1991–2 famine. At the same time, the ICRC's use of multiple entry points and the wide geographical distribution helped reduce incentives for plundering aid shipments; this kind of plunder was commonplace when aid was shipped through the capital of Mogadishu.[154] The emphasis on minimizing warehouse storage time and effecting quick distributions also reduced the opportunities for plunder.

A variation on the idea of widespread distributions is the idea of aid policies that help an entire area, both local people and those who have been displaced. Again, this is different from simply targeting the most needy. Spreading assistance in this way can help to make assistance to the displaced more locally acceptable. It can reduce local conflict, and can make an influx of refugees more acceptable. Practical steps include developing markets and infrastructure.[155]

Another idea that may help in pushing relief through to the most needy is the adoption by aid agencies of various standards and codes of practice. This carries at least the potential of professionalizing assistance and getting away from the idea that relief is a charitable act whose recipients should be grateful for anything they get. Codes of practice can also seek to guard against fuelling a war economy. Relevant projects here include the Providence principles (in the US) and the Sphere project (arising in large part from a major evaluation of responses to the Rwandan genocide).[156]

These initiatives are not uncontroversial, however. MSF has not embraced the Sphere project. Indeed, MSF staff have expressed concern that the Sphere project could further encourage an existing trend where NGOs are seen as technical agents of the donors, with donors using the

standards to exert control over NGOs.[157] MSF staff also fear that inability to adhere to the minimum standards could lead to inaction by some agencies, who may prefer easier tasks. These fears are not without foundation. A 2006 UN report on relief to Darfur noted that aid agencies' attempts 'had the unintended consequence of discouraging some actors from undertaking activities, which they knew could not reasonably meet the minimum standards, even if doing so would have filled a critical gap'.[158] There is also a danger that targets and standards might discourage activities (like protection) that are relatively hard to measure.[159] Other projects aimed at increasing accountability include the Code of Conduct, ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action) and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership–International.

Another innovation came in Liberia in 1996 when NGOs implemented a Joint Policy of Operation after massive looting of relief resources in Monrovia. NGOs made it clear that they were not prepared to put up with repeated looting; they limited activities to essential life-saving tasks; and they tried to ensure that they were not played off against each other by local warlords. Phillippa Atkinson and Nicholas Leader observed that cooperation between humanitarian agencies at this time helped put civilian protection on the agenda, feeding into a peace process in combination with a range of more diplomatic and legal pressures.[160]

Another possibility is for major donors to give more flexibility to major relief organizations like the WFP and UNHCR in how funding is allocated between regions. In many ways, the trend has been in the opposite direction, with donors tending to keep an increasingly tight rein on the destination of funding. Humanitarian aid could be improved if donors decided to reward needs-assessments that gave due weight to political obstacles and how these might be overcome, as well rewarding evaluations that gave an honest and detailed assessment of what went badly as well as what went well.

Certainly, there is a tension between those who suggest that humanitarians should be prioritizing the delivery of relief to the needy and those who wish to take a broader and longer-term view of the political impact of aid. However, the two positions are not always as contradictory as they appear. Where serious attempts are made to push relief through to the needy in the face of military and political obstacles, there may be important political as well as humanitarian benefits. In fact, precisely because shortage and famine are manipulated for military and economic purposes, pushing relief through to reduce shortages becomes more than simply a humanitarian act; it becomes a radical political act that challenges power structures and exploitation. In particular, confronting – rather than disguising or

ignoring – the blocking of relief leads donors and NGOs towards an analysis of the political forces that may be trying to produce a disaster. For example, paying closer attention to the diversion of relief in Sierra Leone would inevitably have highlighted government soldiers' role in stealing relief, bringing greater attention to the army's role in more direct forms of violence against civilians.

Although the crisis in Darfur has again seen silence in effect traded for access, speaking out can sometimes *improve* access. As one very senior UN official said in 2004, 'For 14–15 months, there *was* no access [in Darfur]. It wasn't a question of compromising access. It was a question of winning access' (my emphasis). Large-scale access was granted only in May 2004 (as the rainy season was about to begin).[161]

Emergency aid that is genuinely focused on the needy may encourage the presence of both aid personnel and journalists in areas where they can witness and publicize acts of violence; and this mechanism may be of increasing importance, given the apparent diminution of diplomatic interest in many parts of the world that are deemed to lack strategic importance. Hugo Slim has suggested that a kind of division of responsibilities between relief agencies (with some choosing to speak out and risk expulsion) may be the best option in these situations.[162]

Another radical effect of pushing relief through – if it can be done – is that it tends to reduce asset transfers. Thus, humanitarian aid is also an economic intervention. Rangasami's analysis of 'desperation' sales and purchases during a famine demonstrates that, if more humanitarian aid can be successfully channelled to those who need it, then price movements driving famine can be mitigated.[163] Those buying staple foods at artificially high prices will become less desperate to buy, and this will reduce the price of the staple foods. Those selling livestock and other assets (including labour) at artificially low prices will become less desperate to sell, and this will increase the price at which these assets are sold. Reducing 'desperation' sales and purchases means pushing through relief to people who still have some assets and who are still in their home areas. This, it should be noted, is a different task from simply targeting the poorest. Indeed, targeting the absolutely poor (once they have lost all their assets and perhaps even the ability to work) may be play into the hands of those who benefit from desperation sales and purchases.

Pushing relief through to the needy in the face of political obstacles can also have the beneficial effect of supporting a just political cause. The classic case here was humanitarian aid to Tigray and Eritrea, where relief amounted to a form of solidarity with a rebel war effort that was

eventually successful. Humanitarian aid to southern Sudan has also helped to sustain a war effort that many regard as just. Of course, it could be argued that the advantages of sustaining a righteous struggle are outweighed by the disadvantages of sustaining a destructive war, but cutting off aid to the needy in the hope that this will bring war to an end is extremely optimistic as well as morally untenable.

Another case where aid has served as a source of solidarity is northern Iraq. After the 1991 Gulf War, international assistance helped to sustain Kurdish autonomy in the face of intense hostility from Saddam Hussein's regime. Additional aid would have been more helpful still, and the very slow progress in reviving the Kurdish economy and supporting the Kurdish administration had the effect of encouraging intra-Kurdish disputes, allowing Saddam Hussein to forge alliances with elements of the Kurds (notably the Kurdish Democratic Party). This culminated in an incursion by Iraqi troops into the major Kurdish city of Erbil in 1997.[164]

Pushing relief through can also include an effort to channel resources to representative institutions (for example, traditional elders, self-defence groups, women's organizations), even if these can only be found at the local level, as advocated by Mark Bradbury for example.[165] This is likely to help such institutions in the battle for the allegiance of civilians, including those who might otherwise be recruited as fighters.

Insofar as aid impacts on conflict, not all of this is negative. The *lack* of relief during famine in western Sudan in 1983–5 was one factor feeding into the impoverishment of the Baggara pastoralists and their subsequent raiding of the south.[166] Even aid that is stolen can help reduce market prices and prevent people from turning to violence in order to sustain themselves, as experience from Somalia suggests.[167] During civil war in Sierra Leone, aid workers reported that weak delivery of relief was contributing to a dangerous sense of exclusion, with displaced people in particular often facing a stark choice between joining armed bands or joining the ranks of the destitute and starving. Aid in the form of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration is often vital in smoothing the path to peace.

Providing relief and providing security may be complementary. One promising initiative in Darfur has been the distribution of fuel in an attempt to minimize women's and girls' exposure to rape during wood-fetching,[168] though many women have still been relying on fetching wood for income, highlighting the importance of also looking at livelihoods. At one extreme, aid workers have sometimes used humanitarian supplies as a bargaining tool for sexual favours; while dismissing these workers is a good idea, a more fundamental intervention – as Lee demonstrates – would be to tackle

the ideological and material and political environment (inadequate rations, inadequate representation for refugees) that encourages abuse.[169]

Stressing the continued relevance of the humanitarian ideal, Geoff Loane, a very experienced aid worker with the ICRC, advised aid workers at a workshop to: 'Know the politics, so you can negotiate the minefield.' Important questions, he stressed, included: How are people manipulating you, what is the level of diversion and what is diverted aid being used for? How does assistance match up to the need and what is the geographical distribution of both? Humanitarian workers and other interested citizens also need to challenge the discourse that says or implies there can be a purely humanitarian solution to a human rights crisis. They should challenge the discourse when it falsely implies that responsibility for a crisis lies equally with 'both sides' or with 'tribal rivalries' or with 'the collapse of authority', even though these descriptions may be particularly convenient for those (notably, UN agencies) who do not wish to offend national governments. It will always be important to put politicians on the spot and to try to embarrass them into prioritizing the protection of human rights (especially the right to life) over the other political and diplomatic games they may seek to play. Too often, the humanitarian world has allowed itself to be manipulated into letting politicians off the hook. Perhaps the key way to make humanitarian aid more effective would be to focus not simply on *deficits* and *needs* but also on *strategies* – facilitating the (non-damaging) strategies of disaster victims and counteracting the strategies of those who manipulate disasters for personal or political gain.