

## **The politics of emergency and the demise of the developing state: problems for humanitarian advocacy**

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### *Abstract*

*This article discusses the dilemmas of humanitarian advocacy in the contemporary world. First the article considers the crisis of humanitarianism within the wider crisis of meaning in international politics which encouraged humanitarian advocacy. Humanitarian advocacy in the last fifteen years has drawn attention to how humanitarian crises have been precipitated by state policies and has sought international intervention to protect people. Accordingly humanitarian advocacy has become associated with challenging the national sovereignty of the developing state. However rather than the strong sovereign state lying behind today's humanitarian crises, the article contends that the weak state is the problem. The article suggests that the existing humanitarian advocacy paradigm risks legitimising further erosion of weak states. Humanitarian advocacy has arguably complimented neoliberal economic policies hollowing out the developing state and abandoning national development. The article concludes that humanitarian advocacy should prioritise reasserting the importance of humanitarian relief without conditionality and how to regain humanitarian access on the basis of consent.*

### **Rise of humanitarian advocacy**

MSF pioneered contemporary humanitarian advocacy under the motto 'Care for and Testify', challenging traditional humanitarianism's reserve. Its award of the Nobel Prize in 1999 demonstrates how humanitarian advocacy has been recognised internationally. Since the end of the Cold War, humanitarian organisations have not simply become more involved in lobbying for greater official aid and campaigning to increase private donations (in Band Aid-type appeals), but have sought to intervene directly in international politics. MSF humanitarians prominently appealed in the Western media for military intervention in Bosnia, and its stance has been adopted widely in the humanitarian sector. Officials from Save the Children were among those lobbying Western governments to intervene militarily in Kosovo. Save the Children's work has always been underpinned by children's rights advocacy, but this form of advocacy was new. More recently Oxfam, which has defined itself as a development organisation since the 1960s, has appealed for more robust responses to the Darfur crisis. Oxfam ranks its commitment towards advocacy as equal to its commitment to

development and emergency relief. Oxfam's direction indicates how development NGOs have taken up more advocacy work and campaigning on human rights. Indeed development activities in the rights-based development model increasingly take the form of advocacy work. Oxfam has become more closely involved in campaigns such as debt relief or international trade reform that previously it might have left to its sister organisation Third World First. British aid agencies have come together to campaign under banners such as Make Poverty History as well as conducting their own advocacy work. MSF is currently prominently involved in a campaign to make cheap generic drugs available to developing countries. Furthermore human rights organisations such as Amnesty International have also expanded their remit to include advocacy over international humanitarian law and begun cooperating with humanitarian organisations. Yet again human rights organisations such as the Aegis Trust or Genocide Watch have emerged which have primarily an advocacy role and do not conduct individual casework.

Humanitarian advocacy was embraced as part of a fresh approach when the crises immediately following the Berlin Wall's collapse cast doubt on traditional humanitarianism. Humanitarian advocacy promised to reinvigorate a demoralised humanitarian sector and forge new partnerships with populations in the South. The new humanitarianism has been preoccupied with the consequences of humanitarian aid, but what are the consequences of humanitarian advocacy and its impact on traditional relief work? This article discusses problems of humanitarian advocacy in an unequal world, drawing upon debates from British humanitarian politics. First the article considers the crisis of humanitarianism within the wider crisis of purpose in international politics, which encouraged humanitarian advocacy, linking it to the West's own political crisis at the end of the Cold War. Humanitarian advocacy in the last fifteen years has drawn attention to how humanitarian crises have been precipitated by state policies and has sought international intervention to protect people. Accordingly humanitarian advocacy has become associated with challenging the national sovereignty of the developing state. However rather than the strong sovereign state lying behind today's humanitarian crises, the article contends that the weak state is the problem. In challenging the authority of the developing state, humanitarian advocacy has complimented international politics and economics. First humanitarian advocacy has complimented international economic policies hollowing out the developing state and abandoning national development, thereby undermining the position of developing states within the international system. At the same time humanitarian advocacy for military intervention has complimented international political developments challenging the sovereign equality of states. Moreover its advocacy has encouraged the politicising and militarising of humanitarian aid which makes it harder for NGOs to resist the politicising and militarising aid in the war on terror. The article suggests that the existing humanitarian advocacy paradigm has helped legitimise the reassertion of an unequal international order, while compromising humanitarianism itself.

The article then discusses what humanitarian advocacy might be more appropriate in the contemporary world to address the injustices manifested in humanitarian crises. British NGO advocacy work on poverty, international trade or debt relief continues to enjoy a radical reputation and has not caused the same contentions within organisations as humanitarian advocacy for military intervention. Yet how groundbreaking or useful is this advocacy work? Beneath the headlines of making

poverty history proposed NGO policies seem to accord with Britain's official line and merely advance aid policies already being contemplated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown or the Department of International Development. Meanwhile humanitarianism's unique role is being lost. The article concludes that humanitarian organisations should focus on securing universal humanitarian relief and how to regain humanitarian access on the basis of consent. In a world of unequal states, it is vital for advocacy to reassert humanitarianism's universalism and humanitarian relief being provided without political conditions.

### **International politics of the emergency**

Humanitarianism acquired new significance in post-Cold War international relations. Aid agencies are already nostalgically looking back at the 1990s as if not a golden age for humanitarianism, then an interregnum when 'the tide was definitely moving in the right direction' (Christian Aid, 2004, p. 2):

Here was a chance for a brave new world. One in which rich countries would lift emerging nations out of poverty and help them to stand on their own, equal partners on a new, more equal and more prosperous state (ibid., p. 10).

The War on Terror is portrayed as extinguishing gains for humanitarianism and ushering in a New Cold War, which subordinates humanitarian to security concerns (Christian Aid, 2004; Cosgrove, 2004). Yet there is more continuity in international politics than aid agencies care to acknowledge, confusing their elevation and presence in government policy-making with a progressive international politics. Regrettably humanitarianism's high profile in the 1990s was due less to a flourishing humanism than how humanitarian advocacy compliments the contemporary politics of emergency (Furedi, 2002; Laidi, 1998). The end of Cold War ideological divisions without major international conflict suggested new possibilities for a peaceful global order and boosted idealist against Realist accounts of international relations, especially in Europe, if not in the United States. Yet its end also revealed profound problems in domestic and international politics. Strikingly initial euphoria at the West's triumph over communism quickly gave way to pessimism over the future. Premature triumphant declarations of 'the end of history' soon rang hollow and came to suggest abandonment of grand historical projects instead of their realisation. Indeed security analysts were soon referring nostalgically to the Cold War period.

Importantly the demise of Cold War ideological divisions eroded political meaning and the legitimacy of public institutions in the West too. Cold War rivalry for influence in the developing world had fostered rival political visions of national development. A modernist project was galvanised in the West under international pressure to produce an alternative to counter the Soviet Union model of progress. This exigency also helped give a sense of purpose to Western societies. Consequently the loss of the Cold War political framework was experienced as disorientating rather than liberating. Progressive politics have fragmented in the West, and the emerging political discourse exhibits disenchantment with mass politics and universalist visions. Western politicians have struggled to identify sources of meaning and common values around which to cohere their societies. In the elusive search for meaning, the relativist age has found the Holocaust or contemporary catastrophes to be almost the only

remaining moral absolutes against which it can define itself. Western societies increasingly only seem to come together today in tragedy whether the sentimental mourning of Princess Diana in Britain or the public responses in Belgium against the paedophile killer Marc Dutroux. This problem is repeated at a local level where British city councils such as Nottingham have sought to reconnect to the public and recreate a civic ethos based on outrage against violent killings. The lowest common denominator definition of the good citizen as 'not a violent killer' or 'not a paedophile' reveals the exhaustion of progressive politics and how civic life is being reorganised around insecurity as opposed to a positive visions of the future.

Political disorientation has intensified feelings of vulnerability and risk consciousness, which creates urgency that 'something must be done' but responses lack the coherence derived from a larger vision (Furedi, 2002). The demise of grand historical projects has truncated political vision and encouraged short-term policy-making. Politics resembles crisis management as politicians erratically lurch from one issue to another as they seek to project a sense of purpose through action, that is, the politics of emergency (Laidi, 1998). So even before the World Trade Centre attack, Western politics was becoming subsumed into a security paradigm informed by heightened risk consciousness.

Humanitarian emergencies have resonated in the Western imagination over the last decade because they are symptoms not only of the failure of past political projects but today's politics that finds it difficult to do more than manage the present (ibid.). A disenchanted polity has an opportunity to feel engaged and vicariously vent their existential anxieties in the elemental struggle for survival that the humanitarian emergency throws up. Moreover the politicising of the humanitarian emergency transforms it into a modern morality play for Western audiences. Victims and villains are identified and elusive moral certainties are found in the absolutes of life and death. Finding catharsis in somebody else's emergency, the writer Dubravka Ugresic wryly observes, was the Bosnian conflict's attraction for so many Europeans (Ugresic, 1998). While those populations cast as villains have found their plight eschewed in international humanitarian circles as well as international politics (Fox, 2001). So even before the War on Terrorism was declared, the principle of neutrality was being abandoned by humanitarian officials in New Humanitarianism movement. Subsequently aid agencies have warned about the dangers of Bush's absolutism – that you are either with us or against us in the war on terror. But aid agencies overlook their own growing political absolutism in their readiness to apply the term genocide to a growing variety of conflicts such as the Dafur conflict in Sudan to support their demand for international intervention. These increased declarations of genocide draw attention to the scale of human suffering and underscore demands for something to be done, but are not necessarily helpful in understanding the character of a particular conflict and the political demands of the protagonists or formulating policies to address them. The readiness to invoke genocide effectively represents aid agencies' own form of declaring you are either with us or against us by labelling potential critics of intervention apologists.

So once again, even before the War on Terrorism was declared, the principle of universalism some populations found themselves . The 1990s had their own absolutism

## **Western sustainable development advocacy, national development's demise**

The politics of emergency has had serious consequences for the developing world. An important aspect of today's truncated political vision is the low horizons it offers for the developing world, which can only increase the chances of humanitarian emergencies occurring. Developing countries have long found themselves caught between the inadequacies of the market and international development policies. The Cold War promises of national development were not realised. From independence, developing countries found it difficult to secure capital investment to industrialise their economies except if they were considered vital to the west's security interests. International development aid did not sufficiently compensate for the lack of capital investment and emphasised expert advice and training over capital investment (Galbraith, 1964). Moreover international development policy has always been conditioned by the international security climate. Western policy-makers arguably only embraced a modernisation agenda for the developing world as part of its strategies to contain the influence of the Soviet Union. From the inception of international development, Western thinking was ambivalent towards the industrialisation of developing countries. The policy literature speculated whether cultural change was needed before economic development could take off and whether industrial development was even appropriate, fearing it could destabilise societies and promote political radicalism with broader consequences for international peace and security (Pupavac, 2005, forthcoming). Western scepticism became more pronounced as Third World nationalism receded and international pressure to counter the Soviet Union eased. Since the end of the Cold War the national development of developing countries to the level of industrialised countries is simply not even an aspiration, let alone a prospect. International development policy today is substantially concerned with changing countries' cultures as the means (and meaning) of social progress.

The retreat from national development in official Western policy has been complimented by non-governmental development thinking. Indeed the very expansion of the international NGO development sector embodied Western scepticism towards the industrialisation of the South and developing states. If earlier underdevelopment theories were critical of international development policies for reinforcing international inequalities, they nevertheless saw alternative modernisation models as essential for developing countries to enjoy more equal relations with the advanced industrial nations. Conversely contemporary development thinking is essentially anti-development, that is, it does not want to industrialise, but enhance individuals and communities' existing means of survival. Its thinking is embodied in the much quoted maxim 'Feed a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for life.' The maxim has been repeatedly invoked since it was used back in 1960 by the UN Campaign Against Hunger. Technological progress carries negative connotations in NGO development circles, breaking the assumption of earlier development models, whether capitalist or socialist, which linked social progress with material and technical advancement. Low or intermediate technology is considered appropriate; the automation of production inappropriate.

The anti-development position of NGO thinking has long antecedents in Western Romanticism's hostility towards industrialisation expressed in the works of figures such as William Blake or William Morris. More specifically anti-developmentalism has been influenced by Western anthropological perspectives, which in turn informed

colonial administration. Leading twentieth century anthropologists were partly inspired by their doubts about their own societies, notably their concern with the alienating consequences of modernity, and a desire to find alternative ways of life which would support their progressive reform agenda at home by demonstrating the possibility of different ways of organising society. Anthropological thinking therefore considered it important to preserve the pluralism of cultures, because they thought traditional communities could provide insights for modern society. Their work often expressed alarm at how contact with modernity was destabilising the societies they studied. Hence anthropologists had serious reservations about international development policy seeking to transform the developing world on the lines of the advanced industrialised societies. Concerns over modernity's destabilising impact on traditional societies were taken up colonial administrators and shaped colonial thinking on development.

The earlier anthropological critique of modernisation strategies was reinforced by the counterculture critique of mass society that influenced radical politics in the 1960s and 1970s as it grappled with its failures. In trying to understand why the masses did not embrace radical politics, critics suggested that modern consumerism anaesthetised people and created conformists, inhibiting political radicalism (Marcuse, 1964). Political radicalism could only emerge from those outside the processes of the modern industrial state; therefore radicalism should be opposed to the idea of developing countries becoming modern industrial states like their own. Equally radicals were less and less enamoured by the communist model with the Soviet Union's suppression of dissent in Eastern Europe. State sovereignty was associated not with national independence struggles but with violence, whether the two superpowers' military interventions around the globe or their support for military regimes in the developing world. The counterculture critique idealised an authentic life of peasant farmers and independent artisans producing traditional crafts as still existing in parts of the developing world, but being crushed by development. This vision was further supported by the rise of environmentalism within Western thought expressed in books such as Rachel Carson's influential *Silent Spring* (1962), which condemned industrialisation as destroying the planet's resources. Its holistic vision wanted to minimise humanity's imprint on the planet and return to a simpler way of life, which balanced human needs against the needs of the environment. Environmentalist perspectives were absorbed into the anti-modernisation critique as it became codified into the concept of sustainable development.

Growing scepticism towards modernisation among Western policy-makers was captured in E. F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*, which became the bible of the sustainable development model. Its publication during the 1970s oil crisis, which suggested to Western states how developing countries could challenge their access to cheap raw materials, secured Schumacher's arguments a large hearing. Schumacher argued that modernisation policies were damaging communities and livelihoods, and promoting greed and frustration, and were therefore counter to international peace and security. Development strategies should reject industrialisation and universal prosperity as a goal and concentrate on fulfilling basic needs, maintaining traditional communities and livelihoods by disseminating low technological solutions. In this vein, the recent Africa Commission states, 'Emphasis is placed on agricultural and rural development, as well as the need to deal with the challenge of rapid urbanisation' (Africa Commission, chapter 7, p. 2).

So while proponents of sustainable development readily condemn the past modernisation model as a western imposition, they are reluctant to acknowledge how their anti-modernisation arguments are no less a western import reflecting a long tradition of Western relativism, with strong antecedents in colonial development thinking. Conversely, while developing countries were often critical of the earlier international development programmes, this did not mean they were anti-development or favoured the new basic needs approach. Initiatives such as the 1974 UN Declaration on a New International Economic Order reveal that the developing states were demanding advanced technology to industrialise, along with equitable international terms of trade, as vital to become equals with developed states. Tellingly it was developing countries, notably the least developed countries, which championed the right to development in the 1980s against the growing anti-developmentalism in Western development circles.

Ironically, Western radical thinking therefore has come to share official scepticism towards industrialisation, although coming from opposing positions. Consider how small-scale non-wage production is championed as less exploitative than large-scale production and spreading ownership of the means of production (Sen, 1975). Previously the problem of ownership in large-scale production was seen as addressable through policies such as nationalisation or other forms of social ownership. Such solutions, however, no longer enjoy much support in development thinking, not only because of political, social and environmental questioning of industrialisation. The coinciding shift from Keynesian to neoliberal economics in Western economic policy in the 1980s championed the small state and opposed state intervention and state aid as creating dependency. The anti-state solutions such as micro-credit schemes offered by the retrenched sustainable development agenda have effectively complimented rather than challenged the anti-state agenda propounded by official donors.

The sustainable development model makes a virtue of people having to create their own employment opportunities to support themselves in the face of structural adjustment reforms cutting state welfare and public employment. NGOs talk in terms of promoting 'sustainable livelihoods', 'poor in markets' and how 'Corruption and the abuse of power prevent the benefits of free trade, privatisation and political change reaching the poorest' (Oxfam, \*). The theme of empowering people with the skills and confidence to start up their own micro-enterprises chimes with the ideology of neoliberal economics. As Mark Duffield observes, 'Sustainable development shifts the responsibility for self-reproduction from states to people reconfigured as social entrepreneurs operating at the level of the household and communities' (Duffield, 2005, forthcoming). In this vein, the recent Africa Commission aims to 'empower poor people to shape their own lives, including by investing in their health and education...' and emphasises the need 'to foster small enterprises' (Africa Commission, 2005, chapter 7, p. 2). A key aim Similarly Christian Aid's home page, for example, declares how it 'believes in strengthening people to find their own solutions to the problems they face'. While Oxfam speaks of people coming together across the world 'To end poverty for themselves, for others, for each other' (Oxfam, 2003/4). So in the name of not being patronising or imposing, people have to fend for themselves. It is essentially a containment strategy

At its best, prioritising basic needs such as UNICEF's GOBI programmes have had significant success in improving infant survival rates despite the worsening economic situation in many developing countries. Yet however impressive these programmes are as lifelines for populations in precarious circumstances, it would be a misnomer to describe them as development or poverty eradication. Overall the sustainable development model leaves most of the world's population in poverty relying on household production, their lives dominated by the forces of nature, and very exposed without the safety nets that citizens of post-industrial states expect. Nevertheless, proponents of sustainable development have not wanted to abandon efforts to promote social improvement, even as their basic needs approach seeks to lower people's material expectations. Consider the Millennium Development Goals project, which claims to be 'an expanded vision of development', but expects states without having advanced materially to realise its normative agenda in 2015 including universal primary education and gender equality. For its vision makes changing culture and individual behaviour the primary means of social advancement in its idea of 'vigorously [promoting] human development as the key to sustaining social and economic progress'. In effect, they expect pre-industrial societies to adopt post-industrial norms, while based on enhanced tradition household production and eschewing the material comforts enjoyed by post-industrial societies. However, the demise of the national development drive is not returning countries to simple holistic life in harmony with nature, but is brutal and competitive. Crucially the sustainable development model does not address the limited capacity of the developing state, which can hardly be transformed into a progressive redistributive state guaranteeing its citizens' welfare without a developed economy and infrastructure. In so far as the problem of the weak state is belatedly being recognised by official donors or NGOs, the problem of the weak state is moralised in terms of corruption or bad governance. The material conditions underlying the weak illiberal state are side-stepped.

Reluctance to address contradictions in the sustainable development model relates to antipathy towards the modern industrial state, associating it with violence and injustice, and expectations of populations' self-reliance, material restraint and lower expectations. Somehow a benign, understanding, liberal, decentralised state is presumed possible when people are competing for survival. However the reality of a society organised around small scale family producers, pastoralists and strong communal or kinship ties is likely only to be able to support a precarious state with a weak relationship to the population and characterised by a nepotistic public sphere. What does advocacy for free public education and health care mean in the absence of national development? Even if this advocacy were to succeed, leaving aside welfare distribution problems without a developed infrastructure, such advocacy can only aspire to basic health care and basic education.

At the same time, the sustainable development model makes inequality between developing and developed countries an indefinite condition. Namely, abandoning the technological advancement of developing countries essentially means abandoning the advancement of equality between developing and developed states. These problems have not registered properly with international development advocates despite the disquiet expressed by developing countries towards the lowering of their prospects implied by the basic needs approach. Western anti-poverty campaigns such as Making Poverty History should be considered in this light. The campaigns are informed by a development model that does not aspire to universal prosperity and has redefined

poverty eradication in terms of managing survival through better self-reliance. Consider NGO debt relief advocacy, which has previously accepted the need for conditionality, although against conditions requiring public welfare cuts. More recently where debt forgiveness without conditions is formally advocated, conditionality seems to reappear informally. But NGOs are typically only cautiously demanding Western states increase debt forgiveness or 'cancel unpayable debt', while assuming the need for increased international supervision of indebted countries to root out corruption and ensure that government spending is organised around basic needs, rather than on defence, advanced technology and so on. So basic community health care spending is approved, but spending on high-tech hospitals is suspect as an inefficient use of resources. NGO advocacy envisages people in developing countries not adopting consumerist Western lifestyles, but retaining their more authentic simple ways of life, or more bluntly, they are envisaged as having a lower standard of living. Similarly too much fair trade advocacy assumes people in developing countries engaged in appropriately low or medium technology in micro-enterprises as opposed to large-scale automated production. Implicitly, in so far as developing countries are envisaged as trading in international markets it is based on unequal means of production, presumably through a rather paternalistic relationship with ethical Western multinational companies like the Body Shop or NGO shops. Moreover proposed fair trade conditions, like microcredit conditionality, also presume the right to dictate extra-financial terms based on the sustainable development vision of the ethical life.

The sustainable development doctrine originally evaded the political consequences of making inequality an indefinite feature of the international system, but advocates of the human security model which was elaborated in the 1990s are plainly abandoning the principle of sovereign equality. Ironically then the anti-development critique, despite its avowed antipathy towards modern industrial states, now endorses in the human security model those very states having greater powers against developing countries. The assumptions of the human security model belie the idea that the 1990s offered developing countries the chance to become 'equal partners on a new, more equal and more prosperous stage' (Christian Aid, 2004, p. 10).

### **Human security advocacy and international equality**

If the sustainable development model complimented the anti-state neoliberal economic policies, the human security model, which evolved in the 1990s, assumed the failing capacity of developing states to protect their populations and the necessity of reordering international relations to deal with this reality. The UN Charter 1945 established a collective self-policing international system underpinned by the principles of national sovereignty and sovereign equality between states. Each state is presumed to represent the interests of its own people and have the capacity to guarantee its own security. Interference in the internal affairs of states is outlawed in the Charter. Thus the viability of the international security system has been dependent on developing the newly independent states. The newly independent states looked forward to securing their capacity in the early heady days of international development, but incapacity has become an indefinite condition for many states in international development's demise, weakening the possibility of their being equal subjects internationally or moral agents domestically securing their population's welfare. Furthermore the collective self-policing security model is made untenable.

The concept of human development as distinct from national development has captured the imagination of the demoralised international development community, while the associated concept of human security relates to enforcement and harnessing the higher priority (and resources) given to security by Western policy-makers (King and Murray, 2001-2002; Mack, 2004). Against the presumptions of the Charter, the concept of human security highlights that states may fail to secure the interests of their population and that states too often violate individuals' security. Canada and Japan as donor countries have been prominently involved in elaborating the concept, Canada primarily in relation to humanitarian intervention and Japan primarily in relation to its development aspects. The UNDP within the UN system has been most closely associated with promoting the concepts, notably in conjunction with its human development index of basic needs and rights, which ranks countries in accordance with their compliance. Despite wide appeal in development circles, the concepts have been criticised as rhetorically attractive but of limited practicability for populations (King and Murray, 2001-2002; Mack, 2004). This is unsurprising given development's anti-materialist turn and its expectations of self-reliance.

Predictably human development rankings categorise many developing countries as widely failing their populations while categorising the advanced industrial countries as generally securing their populations' welfare. Yet the human development index was inspired by the desire to demonstrate that social progress is possible without material advancement. A broad correlation between per capita income and ranking is consciously contested in the human development literature, and cases countering this linkage emphasised, although the commonly cited examples of China and Cuba might suggest rather different conclusions being drawn from the sustainable development model championed by the human development literature! Developing countries find themselves caught between the contradictions of an anti-materialist development outlook and idealist accounts of international relations. Importantly for low ranking developing countries, there has been a tendency to interpret states' rankings as moral rankings, rather than material rankings. Accordingly human security scales are used to distinguish unethical states, which violate their population's security, and responsible states, which provide human security. Human security enforcement strategies entrust the international community of responsible states to intervene in violating states on the behalf of vulnerable populations. Thus the human security model essentially challenges developing countries' legitimacy and enhances the legitimacy of Western powers to intervene around the world, undermining the principle of sovereign equality between states.

Intervention is positively endorsed in the human security model contrary to the UN Charter. The Charter's prohibition was based on fears of its potential abuse by powerful states. Tellingly discussions over the human security model have neglected the potential conflict of interest between intervening states and the populations of developing states, or indeed between Western NGOs and the populations of developing countries. This neglect is striking given how the concept of human security pointedly draws attention to the conflict of interests between a state and its population. NGOs talk of their international relations in terms of belonging to an intimate global community as if we are living in one big inclusive extended village, where people enjoy an equal voice and mutual ties of accountability, where wealth

does not matter, and individuals in the South can just pop along to their neighbours in the North. In this vein, Oxfam talks of its 'interconnectedness':

Oxfam is a world wide network. A community that's crossing continents. Linking villages, towns, countries. Connecting individuals who live thousands of miles apart. And from Bangalore to Bolton, from Tokyo to Tajikistan, this community is changing lives. People across the world are coming together with a shared goal (Oxfam, 2003/4).

A direct disinterested relationship is being assumed by NGOs by-passing the developing state where NGOs place themselves as voicing the interests of people in developing countries rather than their delegitimised governments. The unequal distribution of power in this relationship is unacknowledged. In the unequal relationship, NGOs are political gatekeepers, determining which voices in the developing world they will represent, how their problems are represented and addressed, along with their implied role as economic gatekeepers in fair trade or debt relief. The possibility that NGOs might be drawn to certain voices that echo their thinking is overlooked.

Meanwhile official policy-making is taking for granted the acceptability of intervention to aid organisations, including military enforcement, and talking about mechanisms for more efficient coordination between Western governments and non-governmental organisations in global governance. That intervening states and humanitarian organisations may have conflicting objectives is disregarded. Such is the acceptability that Western governments have frequently found themselves criticised by aid organisations for not intervening enough in crises around the world, even following the controversial military invasion and occupation of Iraq. Moreover humanitarian war was a concept that humanitarian organisations helped legitimise in their demands for military enforcement in the Balkans during the 1990s. The collapse of humanitarian space in Iraq caused serious disquiet, because humanitarians were identified with the Western military forces as legitimate targets, but has not prevented various humanitarian and human rights organisations demanding more robust intervention elsewhere since then, including interventions by-passing the UN Security Council. Thus in November 2004, an Oxfam press release declared that, 'The European Union must step in to the void left by the UN Security Council's failure, and take action to stop the violence in Dafur' (Oxfam, 2004).

Western governments can happily live with criticism endorsing them having a greater role. The moralisation of human insecurity in developing countries has provided something against which Western states can define themselves, while the endorsement of humanitarian enforcement has given them a flexible foreign policy tool. When the weapons of mass destruction grounds for the invasion of Iraq proved shaky, the British government invoked the humanitarian card. Politicians over the last decade have frequently observed they cannot intervene everywhere, but the idea that they should be intervening has boosted their weakened sense of purpose and helped them manage their crisis of legitimacy at home. They have at least been able to take a moral stand and point to violations of peoples' security in the developing world, even if they have found it difficult to identify common values at home.

The problem of human security in developing countries is real. However the demand to erode international equality between states and expand Western governance of other countries is an alarming antidemocratic conclusion to draw which reverses the political progress made in the international system during the twentieth century and resurrects the idea of liberal imperialism. Indicatively the human security model only proposes third class social justice for populations in developing countries. If we consider the experience of Bosnia as perhaps the best, most comprehensive case of governance beyond borders. Yet after a decade of international administration, there is over forty percent unemployment, and the public welfare system is being reduced, not expanded. The population is expected increasingly to create its own employment through micro-enterprise and provide its own welfare through private insurance. Interestingly, post-conflict economy recovery in Bosnia under international administration has been much weaker today than after the Second World War. Meanwhile international administrators seem much happier elaborating social policies which are susceptible to moralising or bureaucratic target-setting such as quotas as opposed to policies capable of generating real changes in the political, social and economic prospects of the population.

Within international humanitarian work, there is an evident growing preference for moral advocacy over material aid as its efforts have been criticised for creating dependency or feeding killers. Consider how the two UN ad hoc tribunals for former Yugoslavia and Rwanda (the former much more than the latter) swallowed up twenty percent of the UN's funds at the height of their funding, whose main beneficiaries have been human rights advocates and other professionals (like me!) rather than the victims themselves. This pattern is being repeated at different levels, encapsulated more recently for me at a meeting on the Dafur crisis. The UN Humanitarian Coordinator Mukesh Kapila was highly animated in his address about how the international community should be prosecuting war crimes, leaving less time to devote to the pressing humanitarian aid needs of refugees. The conscious or unconscious priorities made in his address may seem a trivial matter to draw attention to but they illustrate how humanitarian advocacy is becoming skewed. The consequences of this skewed advocacy can be seen in the perversity of the UN warning that food rations may have to be cut in the refugee camps to levels below caloric requirements in the same month it announces the International Criminal Court is taking up the Dafur case. The discrepancy in resources suggests the international community is keener to take a moral stand on Dafur than properly feed the very refugees whose suffering it is invoking.

The degree of international commitment and sustained efforts to provide security and create a viable state in Bosnia is probably exceptional rather than rule. More striking is the rather arbitrary, superficial and short-termist character of foreign interventions, which do not seem to be based on a rational analysis of security risks or evident plans of what to do once intervention has been initiated. The interventions create much sound and fury (shock and awe), but to what end is vague. Policy is made on the hoof. Meanwhile the humanitarian intervention advocacy literature has been dominated by the right to intervene military but has had relatively little to say about what happens after intervention. In the words of Zaki Laidi, there is a desire to project moral and military authority in the absence of a clear political project (Laidi, 1998). Consequently today's interventions are not evolving into the same formal or embedded relationships between ruler and ruled of liberal imperialism past. Phrases

such as 'empire-lite' (Ignatieff, 2003) or the more damning 'hyper-active attention deficit disorder' (Ferguson, 2004) are being applied. The informal interventions of non-governmental organisations are proving to be a useful compliant mechanism in today's ad hoc global engagements.

### **Humanitarian advocacy's direction?**

The re-legitimising of international inequality between states and the informal political role being delegated to non-governmental organisations in governance beyond borders creates serious problems for humanitarian advocacy. It is too easy for aid agencies to become cheerleaders for Western posturing over the state of the developing world. Despite the extensive soul-searching in the 1990s, the humanitarian sector as a whole still underestimates the ramifications of this reordering for humanitarian work. Interestingly one of the strongest recent warnings on the dangers of humanitarianism becoming dangerously entangled with Western foreign military missions comes from the research director of the MSF-Foundation, considering MSF pioneered today's politicised humanitarian advocacy (Weissman, 2005). Fabrice Weissman's report pointedly observes humanitarians' endorsement of the concept of humanitarian war has compromised humanitarianism's meaning. He argues that humanitarian organisations must therefore bear some responsibility for becoming targets and being unable to work in places like Iraq or Afghanistan. In the light of NGOs demanding intervention in Darfur, Weissman asks:

After the Iraqi and Afghan populations, will the Sudanese people on the wrong side of the front line become the newest victims, abandoned by humanitarian organizations forced to evacuate the country after their symbol has been militarized (ibid.).

If MSF has found itself burnt by being too closely associated with Western foreign adventures, other humanitarian or human rights organisations are less wary. Least wary of all in advocating military interventions in the name of humanitarianism are probably newer human rights organisations such as the Aegis Trust who, not being engaged in relief work, do not have to face the consequences of their stance on the ground. If they worry about too close an identification of contemporary military humanitarianism with past imperialism, they try to square this with the idea of ground troops coming from non-Western countries. But such niceties actually echo past colonial strategies of 'getting savages to fight barbarians' (Duffield, 2005 forthcoming).

Generally, in so far as a consciousness of a changed climate is expressed, the changed climate is too easily put down to the War on Terror as if humanitarian advocacy could continue as usual if only Western governments did not lead their security priorities to divert aid from humanitarian concerns. The humanitarian organisations have been slow to acknowledge properly how their own political advocacy has facilitated this reordering and undermining of the UN Charter, despite the compelling research produced by individual NGO staff on the political, social and ethical problems thrown up by humanitarian enforcement. Inconsistently NGOs have criticised the failure to get a prior UN Security Council resolution authorising military intervention in Iraq, although they have previously and subsequently testified to their willingness to dispense this requirement of international law in demanding military intervention in

Kosovo or Dafur in the name of humanitarianism. Evidently the practical consequences for individual humanitarian missions such as the collapse of humanitarian space in Iraq have registered more than the broad ethical dilemmas raised by the concept of humanitarian enforcement. Furthermore the huge response to the Asian Tsunami has reinforced complacency that humanitarianism will be all right after all and dampened the impact of some insightful reflections on humanitarianism's future.

There is a final more general observation I want to make on the growth of humanitarian advocacy, which requires more reflection. Tony Vaux provocatively entitled his book *The Selfish Altruist*. Perhaps today we should speak of the narcissistic altruist. Namely that today's preference for advocacy is not unrelated to today's narcissistic cult of publicity. There exists a long-standing idea in philosophy that for charitable acts to be truly virtuous and not vanity they should be secret. These ancient strictures may be harsh and impracticable (how would an organisation raise funds for its aid programmes?), but I highlight them because today's desire to be seen to be doing something in high profile emergencies such as the Asian Tsunami is skewing aid priorities and undermining the principle of universalism. The temptations of advocacy over ordinary aid relief are evident when the latter has been attacked for damaging economies and feeding killers. Advocacy directly elevates an organisation's profile in a manner that ordinary aid provision does not. In advocacy one can claim the moral high ground without the hassles and responsibilities of implementing policy. Nor does one have to deal with any contradictions of policies in practice.

Moreover the distinction between doing good and being seen being good is being lost in today's campaigning which too often only seems focused on mobilising the latter. Its style flatters individuals that they are changing the world through trivial gestures. 'It only needs to take you a matter of minutes every month, but it will help us to literally change the world', states the Make Poverty History campaign web site in its white wristband initiative.

By wearing one you are part of a unique worldwide effort in 2005 to end extreme poverty - you're saying that it's time to stop the deaths of more than 200,000 people every single week from preventable diseases (ibid.).

The noughties' wristbands favoured in various campaigns (displacing the badges favoured in the 1980s or the ribbons of the 1990s) epitomises the trivial fashion statement masquerading as commitment. Historically items of clothing have often been used to symbolise one's allegiance to a particular political, religious or moral cause. However today the symbolic gesture has become the action itself and emptying it of any meaning. Wearers essentially draw attention to their own morality, without having to commit themselves to anything beyond the gesture. Indicatively, the web site states, 'Wearing the White Band in 2005 is about sending a message that you want poverty to be stopped. You can wear it any way you like.. *The really important thing* is that you just wear it.' Revealingly the emphasis is revealing on *you* and *showing* and you demanding something must be done, 'The important thing is that you show your support and say enough is enough.' This lowest common denominator politics also belies the image that NGOs have created a vibrant mass movement behind their activities.

What humanitarian work or advocacy is appropriate for the 21st century to address injustices in humanitarian crises and make humanitarian crises less likely? This article has criticised the focus of much existing humanitarian advocacy as tending to reinforce international inequalities instead of overturning them. Insecurity is an inevitable condition for most people in developing countries because their weak states without a developed economy and infrastructure will lack the capacity to guarantee their welfare and rights, whatever their political hue and whatever the level of international supervision. Ultimately humanitarianism is concerned with affirming a universal humanity and recognising the humanity of every individual. International inequalities make humanitarian relief necessary, but difficult to get right. Premature declarations of belonging to a global community cloud the reality of unequal relations. While moralising the conditions in the developing world is reinforcing international inequalities, with dubious results for those in whose name the advocacy is conducted. In striving to affirm a universal humanity today, humanitarian advocacy should prioritise reasserting the importance of humanitarian relief without conditionality and how to regain humanitarian access on the basis of consent.

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