

# Humanitarianism Transformed

Michael Barnett

The scale, scope, and significance of humanitarian action have expanded significantly since the late 1980s. This article reflects on two ways in which humanitarianism has been transformed. First, its purpose has been politicized. Whereas once humanitarian actors attempted to insulate themselves from the world of politics, they now work closely with states and attempt to eliminate the root causes of conflict that place individuals at risk. Second, a field of humanitarianism has become institutionalized; during the 1990s the field and its agencies became more professionalized and rationalized. Drawing on various strands of organizational theory, I examine the forces that have contributed to these transformations. I then explore how these transformations have changed the nature of what humanitarian organizations are and what they do. In the conclusion I consider how the transformation of humanitarianism links to the relationship between international nongovernmental organizations and world order, including the purpose of humanitarian action and its distinctive function in global politics.

The global response to the devastation caused by the tsunami of December 26, 2004, was an extraordinary display of humanitarian action. Within hours of the disaster scores of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were providing life-saving medical attention, shelter, and water. Soon thereafter, though, compassion became a status category. Bristling from accusations that they were not doing enough, states began to outbid one another in order to avoid censure and gain stature. In addition to an unprecedented outpouring of financial support, states temporarily gave their militaries humanitarian assignments. The United States dispatched the U.S.S. Lincoln to the coast of the Indonesian province of Aceh to perform search-and-rescue missions and deliver relief. Businesses gave in-kind and financial contributions, and established links on their Web sites where customers could, with a click of a button, join the relief effort.

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This global mobilization was made possible by the great expansion of the humanitarian system since the end of the cold war.<sup>1</sup> Many states have developed humanitarian units within their foreign and defense ministries and have increasingly accepted the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention. Official assistance skyrocketed from \$2 billion in 1990 to \$6 billion in 2000. A growing number of international organizations, including the World Bank, provide some form of assistance. There has been an explosion of nongovernmental organizations dedicated to some aspect of humanitarian action. Perhaps more impressive than their proliferation is their growing sophistication. NGOs once operated with a relatively slow-moving machinery and were staffed by individuals who were expected to learn on the job. Now, however, most prominent agencies have a system of global positioning and delivery that allows trained professionals to get assistance quickly where it is needed. Médecins sans frontières (MSF), for example, grew from a two-room office in the 1970s into an international network of 19 semi-independent branches, with a combined annual budget of \$500 million, running programs in over 70 countries, with 2,000 international and 15,000 national staff. Finally, the very meaning of humanitarianism has expanded. Humanitarian action was formerly recognized as a separate sphere of activity, defined by the impartial relief to victims of manmade and natural disasters; now the term, according to many, includes human rights, access to medicine, economic development, democracy promotion, and even building responsible states.

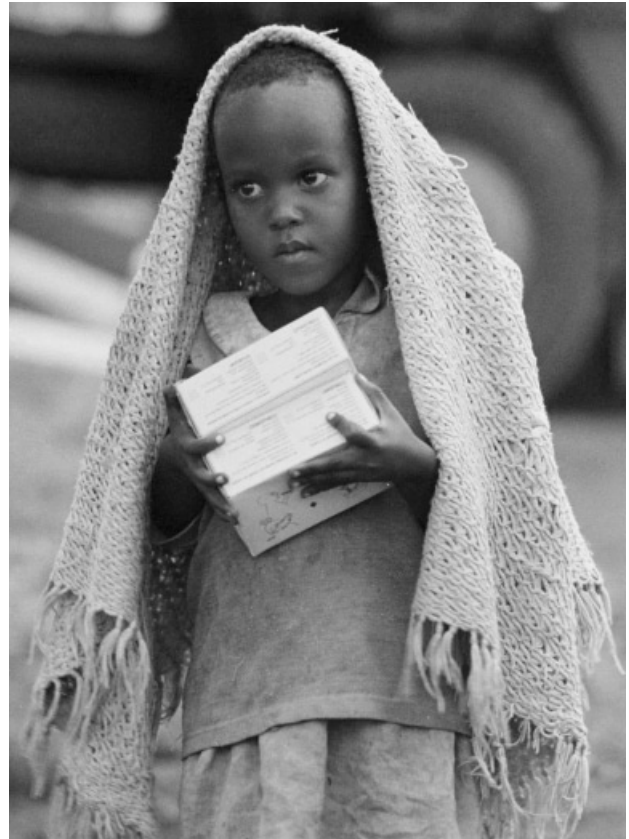
This article reflects on two defining features of this transformation of humanitarianism: the purpose of humanitarianism is becoming politicized, and the organization of humanitarianism is becoming institutionalized. Once upon a time humanitarian agencies used to define themselves

largely in opposition to “politics.”<sup>2</sup> Certainly they recognized that humanitarianism was the offspring of politics, that their activities had political consequences, and that they were inextricably part of the political world. Yet the widely accepted definition of humanitarianism—the impartial, independent, and neutral provision of relief to those in immediate danger of harm—emerged in opposition to a particular meaning of politics and helped to depoliticize relief-oriented activities.<sup>3</sup>

Many activities might alleviate suffering and improve life circumstances, including protection of human rights and economic development; but any actions that aspire to restructure underlying social relations are inherently political. Humanitarianism provides relief; it offers to save individuals, but not to eliminate the underlying causes that placed them at risk. Viewed in this way, humanitarianism plays a distinctive role in the international sacrificial order.<sup>4</sup> All international orders have winners and losers and thus require their quota of victims. Humanitarianism interrupts this selection process by saving lives, thus reducing the number of sacrifices. However, it does not aspire to alter that order; that is the job of politics.

Humanitarianism’s original principles were also a reaction to politics and designed to obstruct this “moral pollutant.”<sup>5</sup> The principle of humanity commands attention to all humankind and inspires cosmopolitanism. The principle of impartiality demands that assistance be based on need and not discriminate on the basis of nationality, race, religious belief, gender, political opinions, or other considerations.<sup>6</sup> The principles of neutrality and independence also inoculate humanitarianism from politics. Relief agencies are best able to perform their life-saving activities only if they are untouched by state interests and partisan agendas.<sup>7</sup> Neutrality involves refraining from taking part in hostilities or from any action that benefits or disadvantages either party to a conflict. Neutrality is both an end and a means to an end because it helps relief agencies gain access to populations at risk. Independence demands that assistance should not be connected to any of the parties directly involved in the conflict or who have a stake in the outcome. Accordingly, many agencies either refused or limited their reliance on government funding if the donors had a stake in the outcome. The principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence thus served to depoliticize humanitarian action and create a “humanitarian space” insulated from politics.

Yet these Maginot line principles defending humanitarianism from politics crumbled during the 1990s as humanitarianism’s agenda ventured beyond relief and into the political world, and agencies began working alongside, and with, states. During the 1990s humanitarian agencies began to accept the idea that they might try to eliminate the root causes of conflicts that place individuals at risk; this vision swept them up into a process of transformation and into the world of politics. Humanitarian



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arian agencies and states began to share agendas. States became more willing to act in the name of humanitarianism, fund relief operations, use their diplomatic and political power to advance humanitarian causes, authorize military troops to deliver relief, and consider the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention and the protection of civilian populations. Humanitarian organizations were torn by the growing presence of states, acknowledging their potential contribution but worrying about the costs to their principles. Because, in their view, there are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian emergencies, many lobbied states to apply military and political muscle to stop the bloodletting. Relief agencies working in war zones had to confront warlords and militias that demanded a king’s ransom for the assistance that was made necessary by their conflict and their intentional targeting of civilians; agencies occasionally sought outside intervention to provide armed protection and to help deliver relief. Yet the growing willingness of humanitarian organizations to work alongside states potentially undermined their neutrality and independence. Humanitarian principles were completely shattered in places like Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, where many agencies were funded by the very governments that were combatants and thus partly responsible for the emergency. The ever-present fear that fraternizing between politics and humanitarianism would corrupt this sacred idea and undermine agencies’ ability to provide

relief was becoming a daily reality. Reflecting the anxieties unleashed by this mixing of politics and principle, commentators spoke of humanitarianism in “crisis” and warned of the dangers of “supping with the devil,” “drinking from the poisoned chalice,” and “sleeping with the enemy.”<sup>8</sup>

Institutionalization represents another aspect of the transformation of humanitarianism. Before the 1990s there were relatively few agencies that provided relief; they had few sustained interactions; and they hardly considered establishing, revising, or maintaining principles of action, codes of conduct, or professional standards that would define the boundaries of the field. In the field they operated according to very few standard procedures and drew very little from scientific knowledge as they set up, often quite literally, soup kitchens. Their operations were frequently staffed by individuals with little or no experience, who jumped into the fray believing that all they needed was a can-do attitude and good intentions.

Over the 1990s humanitarianism became more recognized as a field, with more donors, deliverers, and regulators of a growing sphere of action. Various developments and pressures propelled this institutionalization. The influx of new agencies, marching to their own drums, created confusion on the ground. Donors, who were providing more funds, expected recipients to be accountable and demonstrate effectiveness. Rwanda was a turning point.<sup>9</sup> A flood of agencies—many there simply to fly the flag and impress prospective donors—were feeding the architects of the genocide in camps in Zaire, fueling their rearmament, and potentially causing more harm than good. The Rwandan tragedy and other events caused the entire community to undergo painful introspection that raised troubling questions regarding the legitimacy and effectiveness of humanitarian action. States raised similar questions, leaving aid organizations worried about their funding base. In response, the field began to institutionalize. It became increasingly rationalized, standardizing basic codes of conduct for intervention, developing accountability mechanisms, and calculating the consequences of actions. It became bureaucratized, developing precise rules that ideally could be applied across different situations. It became professionalized, developing doctrines, specialized areas of training, and career paths.

The humanitarian sector welcomed elements of this institutionalization because they helped to standardize expectations, ease coordination in the field, enhance efficiency, and improve the quality of care to more populations. Yet other features were distressing, potentially changing not simply the organization of humanitarian action, but its very character. Many organizations were now demonstrating commonplace interests in self-preservation and survival, at times allowing these interests to overshadow their principled commitments. The development of standardized templates and guidelines made them less able to recognize and respond to local

needs. Rising concerns with efficiency in getting “deliverables” to “clients” hinted of a growing corporate culture; participants increasingly worried about protecting their “brand” and referring to the field as an “industry,” a “business,” a “sector,” and an “enterprise.” There were palpable fears that material and discursive borders that distinguished humanitarian agencies from commercial firms and even military units were disintegrating. If commercial firms were really more efficient at saving lives, and if nonprofits were acting like corporate entities, then exactly what distinguished the two? Politicization and institutionalization, each in its own way, called into question the very marks of distinction of humanitarian action.

Drawing from various strands of organizational theory, I consider the causes behind the expansion and politicization of the purpose of humanitarianism and the institutionalization of the field. Various global forces created new opportunity structures for humanitarian action: states gave more generously because it furthered their foreign policy interests; there was a surge of emergencies in the early 1990s; and a change in the sovereignty regime reduced the barriers to intervention. Although the general trend was toward expansion and politicization, humanitarian organizations did not respond uniformly to these opportunities. To understand this variation in response requires a consideration of, first, the organization’s identity and its initial understanding of the relationship between humanitarianism and politics, and, second, its dependence on others for symbolic and material resources. Although there were pockets of resistance to this politicization, arguably most existing and newly established organizations accepted these changes because they operated with a definition of humanitarian action that interfaced easily with politics and were dependent on states for their financing. The field’s institutionalization was largely triggered by challenges to its legitimacy and effectiveness, challenges from donors and participants, challenges that threatened its bottom line, and challenges that were addressed by making the field more rational, bureaucratic, and professional.

I then examine some of the effects of this transformation on humanitarian action. Much of the discussion of the effects focuses on politicization, that is, how the growing involvement by states is potentially compromising or distorting the essence of humanitarian action, whether these changes have been generally desirable, pragmatic, or self-destructive, and whether it is possible or even desirable to put the political genie back in the bottle.<sup>10</sup> But the possible effects extend beyond what humanitarian agencies do to include what they are. Any discussion of effects, of course, turns on some baseline understanding of humanitarian action. Such an analysis does not need to essentialize humanitarianism, to suggest that there was a settled or fixed meaning that existed for decades until disrupted by the post-cold war period. Nor does such an analysis provide an evaluative judgment as to whether these changes

are necessarily good, reasonable under the circumstances, or reckless. Instead, such an analysis merely needs to ask what was the general understanding of humanitarian action prior to the 1990s, consider how politicization and institutionalization has shaken that understanding, and, most importantly, explore whether such changes have potentially undermined the cornerstone principle of impartial relief.

Although humanitarianism is now firmly on the global agenda, the same cannot be said for academic research. Most research directly related to humanitarian action is produced by specialized agencies such as the Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Policy Group; it is almost always directed at the policy community. Some social science research is related to humanitarian action, including the literatures on humanitarian intervention, civil wars, democracy building, refugee studies, and peace-keeping. However, there has been remarkably little consideration of humanitarianism as an object of research. The body of the essay points to various lines of inquiry, and in the conclusion I link my account of the transformation of humanitarianism to a broader research agenda that concerns the relationship between international non-governmental organizations and world order, including the purpose of humanitarian action and its functions in global politics.

### Causes of Transformation

Environmental forces played a central role in transforming humanitarianism. Several important developments encouraged humanitarian agencies to move away from relief alone and toward the transformation of local structures, and to become more willing to work alongside and with states. Such developments led to its politicization. Yet not all agencies responded uniformly to these opportunities; consequently, I examine features of the organization and its relationship to the environment to help to explain this variation. Environmental developments also played an important role in shaping the institutionalization of humanitarianism. Similarly, although those in the sector had their own reasons for rationalizing, bureaucratizing, and professionalizing their organizations, pressures from donors and new international standards of legitimacy also played a critical role in institutionalizing humanitarianism. Yet not all agencies responded uniformly, and we need to understand why.

#### *Expansion and politicization*

Four global processes created new opportunity structures that foregrounded the "civilian" as an object of concern.<sup>11</sup> Geopolitical shifts associated with the end of the cold war and the demise of the Soviet Union increased the demand for humanitarian action in several ways.<sup>12</sup> There appeared to be more humanitarian crises than ever before.<sup>13</sup> Whether

in fact there were more crises or whether great powers were now willing to recognize populations at risk because their policies were no longer the immediate cause, the emergencies were on the international agenda.<sup>14</sup> As states paid more attention to them, they linked these populations at risk to an expanding discourse of security. During the cold war the UN Security Council defined threats to peace and security as disputes between states that had become or might become militarized, conflicts involving the great powers, and general threats to global stability.<sup>15</sup> After the cold war, and in reaction to the growing perception that domestic conflict and civil wars were leaving hundreds of thousands of people at risk, creating mass flight, and destabilizing entire regions, the Security Council authorized interventions on the grounds that these conflicts challenged regional and international security. Responding to both the post-cold war humanitarian emergencies and the growing prominence of the Security Council in this domain, the General Assembly passed a watershed resolution in 1992 that made the UN the new coordinating body for humanitarian action.<sup>16</sup>

States also warmed to the idea of humanitarian action. They were increasingly generous. Even more impressive was their increasing willingness to support operations whose stated function was to protect civilians at risk, and even to consider the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention.<sup>17</sup> States also began to treat humanitarian action as an instrument of their strategic and foreign policy goals. Since 9/11 many states, including the United States, have viewed counterterrorism and humanitarianism as crime-fighting partners. In 2001 former Secretary of State Colin Powell told a gathering of NGOs that "just as surely as our diplomats and military, American NGOs are out there [in Afghanistan] serving and sacrificing on the front-lines of freedom. NGOs are such a force multiplier for us, such an important part of our combat team."<sup>18</sup> States also discovered that humanitarian action could help them avoid more costly interventions. For instance, the major powers authorized the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) to deliver humanitarian relief in Bosnia in part because they wanted to relieve the growing pressure for a military intervention. Regardless of their motives, states were providing new opportunities for humanitarian action.

The second development that propelled the encounter between politics and humanitarianism was the emergence of "complex humanitarian emergencies," that is, a "conflict-related humanitarian disaster involving a high degree of breakdown and social dislocation and, reflecting this condition, requiring a system-wide aid response from the international community."<sup>19</sup> These emergencies, which seemed to be proliferating around the world, are characterized by a combustible mixture of state failure, refugee flight, militias, warrior refugees, and populations at risk from violence, disease, and hunger. Such situations created a demand for new sorts of interventions and conflict management tools.



Relief agencies were attempting to distribute food, water, and medicine in war zones and were frequently forced to bargain with militias, warlords, and hoodlums for access to populations in need. In situations of extreme violence and lawlessness they lobbied foreign governments and the United Nations to consider authorizing a protection force that could double as bodyguard and relief distributor. These emergencies also attracted a range of NGOs.<sup>20</sup> Relief agencies that were delivering emergency assistance, human rights organizations aspiring to protect rights and create a rule of law, and development organizations keen to sponsor sustainable growth began to interact and to take responsibility for the same populations. The growing interaction between different kinds of agencies that hailed from different sectors encouraged a relief-rights-development linkage within a humanitarian discourse that became tied to the construction of modern, legitimate, democratic states.<sup>21</sup> As international actors began to think about the causes of and solutions to these emergencies, “humanitarian” came to include a wider range of practices and goals.

A third factor contributing to politicization was the political economy of funding. Although private contributions increased, they paled in comparison to official assistance. Between 1990 and 2000, aid levels rose from 2.1 to \$5.9 billion. Moreover, as a percentage of official development assistance, humanitarian aid rose from an average of 5.8 percent between 1989 and 1993 to 10.5 percent in 2000.<sup>22</sup> A few donors were responsible for much of this increase, and they also now comprise an oligopoly. The United States is the lead donor by a factor of three. In 1999, for instance, its outlays exceeded the total assistance of twelve large Western donors. Between 1995 and 1997 it provided 20 percent of total assistance; in the following three years its contribution rose to 30 percent. The second largest donor is the European Community Humanitarian Organization (ECHO), followed by the United Kingdom, several European countries, Canada, and Japan. Although various motives fueled this increase in giving, many states expected either something in return or evidence that their money was being well spent.

Finally, a change in the normative and legal environment also coaxed humanitarianism into the political world. State sovereignty was no longer sacrosanct; rather, it was becoming conditional on states behaving according to particular codes of conduct, honoring a “responsibility to protect” their societies, and having attributes such as the rule of law, markets, and democratic principles.<sup>23</sup> Their legitimacy became tied to their having the rule of law, markets, and democratic principles. These developments created a normative space for external intervention and encouraged a growing range of actors to expand their assistance activities. In some cases aid agencies were supposed to provide immediate relief during conflict situations, while in others, to eliminate the root causes of conflict and create legitimate states. Regardless of the pretext, the new

normative environment greased the tracks for more wide-ranging interventions.<sup>24</sup>

A flourishing human rights agenda also left its mark. The logic of relief and the logic of rights share important elements: they place the human citizen and humanity at the fore; they use the language of empowerment in attempting to help the weak; and they reject power.<sup>25</sup> That said, they also demonstrate divisions; the relief community will nearly always privilege survival over freedom, while the rights community is sometimes willing to use relief as an instrument of rights, that is, make relief conditional on the observance of human rights—a move many relief agencies view as nearly incomprehensible.<sup>26</sup> In any event, the fast-growing human rights movement pulled humanitarianism from the margins toward the center of the international policy agenda, and many relief agencies, increasingly adopting the language of rights, were glad to ride its coattails.<sup>27</sup>

Growing cosmopolitanism was also a transformative factor, for it underpins humanitarianism. Cosmopolitanism maintains that each person is of equal moral worth and that in the “justification of choices one’s choices one must take the prospects of everyone affected equally into account.”<sup>28</sup> The principle of impartiality presumes that all those at risk, regardless of their identity, deserve equal attention and consideration. The desire to help those who are suffering regardless of place means that borders do not define the limits of obligations. This cosmopolitan ethos, however, leads to different schools of thought in humanitarianism, schools that can be in tension.<sup>29</sup> Some humanitarians believe aid should be restricted to the victims of man-made and natural disasters; this branch emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and is most closely associated with the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC). Another branch of humanitarianism extends assistance to all those at risk and imagines eliminating the conditions that are hypothesized to render populations vulnerable.<sup>30</sup> As one aid worker wrote, “[I]n terms of the destruction of human life, what difference is there between the wartime bombing of a civilian population and the distribution of ineffective medicines during a pandemic that is killing millions of people?”<sup>31</sup> If individuals are at risk because of authoritarian and repressive policies, then humanitarian organizations must be prepared to fight for human rights and democratic reforms. If individuals are at risk because of poverty and deprivation, then they must be prepared to promote development. If regional and domestic conflicts are the source of violence against individuals, then they must try their hand at conflict resolution and attempt to eliminate the underlying causes of conflict.

### *Variation in response*

Although these changes in global politics created new openings for an expanded meaning of humanitarianism, aid

agencies were not uniformly receptive. Many, including the IRC and Oxfam, were ready, willing, and able to capitalize on new openings. They saw virtue in expanding their operations to help the powerless, and instead of being satisfied to help the “well-fed dead,” they could eliminate the root causes of conflict. Other organizations made a pragmatic decision to become more political, though they were cautious about every step and mindful of possible consequences. Still others clung to their principles and resisted what they viewed as the siren of politics. The ICRC and MSF fought the international currents and stuck to their “first principles.”<sup>32</sup>

Two factors account for much of this variance. One was the congruence between the organizational culture and these new openings. Humanitarian organizations can be sorted into two types—Dunantist and Wilsonian—according to their understanding of the relationship between politics and humanitarianism.<sup>33</sup>

Named after Henry Dunant, the patriarch of modern humanitarianism,<sup>34</sup> Dunantist organizations define humanitarianism as the neutral, independent, and impartial provision of relief to victims of conflict and believe that humanitarianism and politics must be segregated. In general, Dunantist organizations, which are often accused of seeing themselves as the “high priests” of humanitarianism, fear that the relaxation of their founding principles or expansion of their mandate will open the floodgates to politics and endanger humanitarianism.

Wilsonian organizations, so named because they follow in the footsteps of Woodrow Wilson’s belief that it was possible and desirable to transform political, economic, and cultural structures so that they liberated individuals and produced peace and progress, desire to attack the root causes that leave populations at risk. Although many of the most famous members of this camp, including Save the Children, Oxfam, and World Vision International, originated in wartime and thus concentrated on rescuing populations at risk, they expanded into development and other activities designed to assist marginalized populations. Over time they also undertook advocacy—like a growing number of human rights organizations that also belong to this camp. Agencies involved in restoring and fostering economic livelihoods also express a Wilsonian orientation. Wilsonian organizations are certainly political, at least according to the Dunantist perspective; however, even those who have subscribed to a transformational agenda present themselves as apolitical to the extent that they claim to act according to universal values and avoid partisan politics.

Organizations’ understandings of the relationship between humanitarianism and politics help to explain their response to the transformations of the 1990s. The greater the discrepancy between organizational culture and environmental pressures, the more an organization will resist change for fear of political contamination; the greater the congruence, the more it will conform because such confor-

mity will not threaten the organization’s identity. MSF and ICRC, the two best known Dunantist organizations, spent much of the 1990s unsuccessfully attempting to police the borders between humanitarianism and politics. Wilsonian organizations not only capitalized on these openings, they frequently lobbied for them. Many humanitarian international organizations such as United Nations High Committee for Reform (UNHCR) exploited these changes in sovereignty to venture carefully into domestic space while claiming that they were not being political because they shunned any involvement in partisan politics. In fact, UNHCR actively lobbied for these changes by encouraging states to embrace the humanitarian agenda on the grounds that this principled position would further international peace and security.<sup>35</sup>

The gap between the moral and organizational mandate also may have contributed to the expanding purpose of humanitarian action. Organizations may have felt the need to expand in order to resolve the contradiction between their broad aspirational goals and the more narrowly circumscribed rules that limit their action.<sup>36</sup> Humanitarian organizations are empowered by moral claims or aspirations. Limited organizational structures make it impossible to fulfill these mandates, creating a reason for expansion into new areas. In attempting to relieve suffering, it is natural to aim for more than temporary relief, that is, for eliminating the conditions that produce a demand for humanitarian services.<sup>37</sup> For instance, before the 1980s UNHCR leaped into action only after populations crossed an international border. Yet many UNHCR staff bristled at these restrictions, wanting to take on a preventive role. In the 1980s UNHCR began trying to prevent refugee flows—to get at their “root causes”—and to lobby for “state responsibility.”<sup>38</sup> From there it was a small step for UNHCR to become involved in eliminating the causes of flight and ensuring that repatriated refugees stayed at home; toward that end, it began promoting human rights, the rule of law, and economic development.

Finally, resource dependence helps to explain organizations’ different responses to a broader definition of humanitarian action.<sup>39</sup> Humanitarian organizations do not survive by good intentions alone. They also need resources to fund their staff and programs; these resources are controlled by others. The willingness of others to fund organizations’ humanitarian activities is contingent, in part, on their perceived legitimacy and whether they are viewed as acting according to the supporting community’s values.<sup>40</sup> Existing organizations, especially those that were culturally inclined to expand, thus had every incentive to move in directions that were directly rewarded by states. Development organizations are exemplary here. By the end of the 1980s, development as a project had become increasingly discredited. Humanitarianism handed these agencies a new function and sense of purpose; they became necessary for post-conflict reconstruction and structural

prevention—central to humanitarian action and international and human security.<sup>41</sup> Newly established organizations, some humanitarian and some less so, found it advantageous to present themselves and their activities as quintessentially humanitarian. Existing agencies also were rewarded by expanding their activities. For instance, by becoming the lead humanitarian agency, UNHCR was in a position not only to expand its responsibilities, but also to demonstrate its relevance to the very states who paid the bills.<sup>42</sup>

### *Expansion and institutionalization*

Until the 1990s, humanitarianism barely existed as a field. There were only a handful of major relief agencies, including the ICRC, International Federation of the Red Cross, MSF, and various organizations such as Save the Children and Oxfam that began as relief agencies, moved into development, and then developed an emergency response capacity (though generally not adopting the discourse of humanitarianism). Although these agencies shared broad principles, such as humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence, there was no concerted effort to establish codes of conduct and standards of behavior to regulate the field and define membership. Those who participated in relief work treated it more as a craft than as a profession because, in the main, they did not claim that their qualifications derived from specialized knowledge, doctrine, or training, and did not see this as their life's work.

Yet in the 1990s humanitarianism became a field, with regular interactions among the members, an increase in the information and knowledge that members had to consider, a greater reliance on specialized knowledge, and a collective awareness that they were involved in a common enterprise. The field was becoming rationalized, aspiring to develop: methodologies for calculating results, abstract rules to guide standardized responses, and procedures to improve efficiency and identify the best means to achieve specified ends. Humanitarian organizations were also becoming bureaucratized, developing spheres of competence, and rules to standardize responses and to drive means-ends calculations. Professionalism followed, with demands for actors who had specific knowledge, vocational qualifications that derived from specialized training, and the ability to follow fixed doctrine.<sup>43</sup>

Sociological institutionalism helps to explain why humanitarianism developed in this manner. This branch of organizational theory emphasizes the “socially constructed normative worlds in which organizations exist and how the social rules, standards of appropriateness, and models of legitimacy will constitute the organization.”<sup>44</sup> The environment in which an organization is embedded is defined by a culture that contains acceptable models, standards of action, goals, and logics of appropriateness. Organizations are constituted by, and will be compelled to adopt, this

culture for a variety of reasons—though resource requirements figure centrally. As Scott and Meyer observe, this normative environment contains the “rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy from the environment.”<sup>45</sup> In short, because organizations are rewarded for conforming to rules and legitimization principles, and punished if they do not, they tend to model themselves after organizational forms that have legitimacy.

The environment also helps to explain institutional isomorphism, that is, why particular models spread.<sup>46</sup> There are three mechanisms: coercive, mimetic, and normative. The first two are most relevant here. Coercive isomorphism occurs when powerful organizations, such as states, impose rules and standards on other organizations. Mimetic isomorphism largely occurs in situations of uncertainty, encouraging organizations to model themselves after others that they believe are successful. Normative isomorphism largely originates from professionalization—the attempt by members of an occupation “to define the conditions and methods of their work, to control the production of producers,”<sup>47</sup> and to establish the epistemic basis for their authority and the claim to occupational autonomy. In general, sociological institutionalism emphasizes how organizations, desirous of symbolic and material resources and exposed to the same environment, will tend to adopt the same organizational forms.

The institutionalization of humanitarianism was largely driven by challenges to the emerging field's legitimacy and effectiveness—challenges that emanated from donors that paid the bills and members who were experiencing a crisis of confidence in reaction to new circumstances and shortcomings. These challenges were answered by rationalizing, bureaucratizing, and professionalizing.

A major feature of the field's rationalization was the attempt to standardize relief activities.<sup>48</sup> In response to the influx of relief agencies that were operating according to varying standards—a situation made doubly dangerous for agencies in the context of providing relief during conflict—and the growing evidence that different populations were being differentially treated, humanitarian organizations attempted to establish professional standards and codes of conduct. Several such initiatives stand out. In 1992 the ICRC, the International Federation of the Red Cross, and the Red Crescent Society (in consultation with the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response) began work on a ten-point code of conduct. Originally conceived as providing guidance during natural disasters, it was extended to cover conflict situations as well. The first four articles reaffirm the basic principles of the ICRC, and the last six identify “good practices” and methodology for relief operations. This document is used by various agencies to guide their actions in war zones.<sup>49</sup> Various NGOs also assembled what came to be known as the Providence Principles, which also aimed to introduce standardized rules

for delivering relief. The same desire led various NGOs to launch the SPHERE project to establish minimal standards in the areas of water, sanitation, nutrition, shelter, site planning, and health.<sup>50</sup> This development, in turn, led to the Humanitarian Charter, which endeavors to “achieve defined levels of service for people affected by calamity or armed conflict, and to promote the observance of Dunantist humanitarian principles.” The sheer proliferation of principles and exercises to establish codes of conduct represented an attempt to standardize the rules governing humanitarian action.<sup>51</sup>

Another feature of rationalization was the introduction of systems of accountability.<sup>52</sup> This development was pushed by donors, who began to apply “new public management” principles as they expected humanitarian organizations to provide evidence that their money was being well spent. These principles originated with the neoliberal orthodoxy of the 1980s. One of neoliberalism’s goals was to reduce the state’s role in the delivery of public services and, instead, to rely on commercial and voluntary organizations, which were viewed as more efficient. Because government agencies justified the shift from the public to the private and voluntary sectors on the grounds that the latter were more efficient, they introduced monitoring mechanisms to reduce the possibility of either slack or shirking.<sup>53</sup> Until the 1990s, humanitarian organizations largely escaped this public management ideology. Because humanitarian assistance was a minor part of the foreign aid budget, states did not view humanitarianism as central to their foreign policy goals, and states trusted that humanitarian agencies were efficient and effective; there was little reason for states to absorb the monitoring costs. However, once funding increased, humanitarianism became more central to security goals, and states began to question the effectiveness of humanitarian organizations, they were willing to do so.<sup>54</sup> Toward that end, states introduced new reporting requirements, developed new kinds of contracts, and demanded greater evidence of results.

The drive toward accountability was not completely donor-driven, for those within the sector increasingly sought greater accountability—to recipients. It was not enough to be accountable to donors for how their money was spent; it shows it also was important to be accountable to the supposed beneficiaries of their activities. Accountability, therefore, increasingly meant identifying ways to improve agencies’ policies. These developments led to various system-wide initiatives, including the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).<sup>55</sup> In addition, in 1999 various NGOs initiated the Ombudsman for Humanitarian Assistance to address their accountability to “clients.”

Emblematic of bureaucratization was the effort by humanitarian organizations to develop technologies and methodologies to calculate the effects of their policies in order to demonstrate effectiveness and identify optimal

strategies. Prior to the 1990s few humanitarian organizations even thought to measure the consequences of their actions, assuming that the mere provision of assistance was evidence of their good results. Two developments shattered this blissful assumption. The first was mounting evidence that some humanitarian interventions might be causing more harm than good. Rwanda, in particular, burst the confidence of the humanitarian community.<sup>56</sup> In addition, donors began demanding results-based evaluations.

Measuring impact and demonstrating that humanitarian organizations are responsible for success (or failure) is a demanding methodological task. Humanitarian organizations must define “impact,” specify their goals and translate them into measurable indicators, gather data in highly fluid emergency settings, establish baseline data in order to generate a “before and after” snapshot, control for alternative explanations and variables, and construct reasonable counterfactual scenarios.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, they made considerable headway. Humanitarian organizations began to draw on epidemiological models in the health sciences and program evaluation tools of the development field. The United States pushed for creation of the Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Nutrition (SMART). Care International’s Benefits-Harms analysis, which borrows methodologies developed in the human rights field, helps relief and development organizations measure the impact of their programs on people’s human rights.<sup>58</sup>

Humanitarian organizations also moved to professionalize. Although relief workers still learn on the job, organizations increasingly draw on the health sciences and engineering, extant manuals, and specialized training programs run by private firms, NGOs, states, and academic institutions. Agencies increasingly recruit relief workers who have training in specialized fields. Although relief workers still have a high burnout rate, and most organizations have an impressive degree of staff turnover, many agencies now have full-time staff, who draw salaries with benefits packages and treat the field as a career. In addition, many premier agencies underwent a major change in their bureaucratic structure. Although operational divisions still carry tremendous prestige and influence, they increasingly compete with newly established offices dedicated to fund-raising and donor relations, staffed by those whose primary field experience derives not from refugee camps, but from marketing campaigns and pledge drives.

## Consequences of Transformation

The transformation of humanitarianism has left its mark, and humanitarian organizations hotly debate whether it is a mark of Cain. At times this debate appears to devolve into two equally stylized camps: one waxing sentimental about some quasi-mythical golden age of humanitarian action in which relief agencies enjoyed a space of infinite expanse, and another suggesting that the golden age is



around the corner because humanitarian agencies have never been better funded or better positioned to help more people at risk. Without getting pulled into this debate, I want to explore how the politicization and institutionalization of humanitarianism has left organizations more vulnerable to external control. States are now able to use direct and indirect means to constrain and guide the actions of humanitarian agencies in ways that agencies believe potentially violate their principles. The external environment more generally affects the organizational culture of humanitarian agencies—their identity, internal organization, practices, principles, and calculations. The discussion of the transformation of humanitarianism, in other words, forces us to consider the effects of power in terms of what humanitarian organizations do and what they are.

### *Power over humanitarian action*

States and international institutions can now compel humanitarian agencies to act in ways counter to their interests and principles. Although states have historically vacillated in their desire to use humanitarian action to serve their interests, the 1990s were unprecedented to the extent that states attempted to impose their agendas on agencies.<sup>59</sup> Toward that end, states began introducing mechanisms that were intended to control their “implementing partners.” Although such control mechanisms did not necessarily compel agencies to act in ways that they believed were antagonistic to their interests or principles, frequently they did.

The most important control mechanism came from the power of the purse. Sometimes donors make transparent threats. In 2003 U.S. AID administrator Andrew Natios told humanitarian organizations operating in Iraq that they were obliged to show the American flag if they took U.S. funding. If not, he warned, they could be replaced.<sup>60</sup> One NGO official captured the U.S. message in the following terms: “play the tune or ‘they’ll take you out of the band.’”<sup>61</sup>

Sometimes donors use more subtle, indirect, methods, for example, by insisting that agencies submit to coordination mechanisms. Coordination can appear to be a technical exercise whose function is to improve the division of labor, increase specialization, and heighten efficiencies. Yet this coordination, like all governance activities, is a highly political exercise, defined by power. The power behind coordination has not been lost on humanitarian organizations, especially when the donors are parties to the conflict or have a vested interest in the outcome.<sup>62</sup> Most famously, NATO in Kosovo and the United States in Afghanistan insisted on coordinating humanitarian action.<sup>63</sup> Although they justified their role on the grounds that it would improve the relief effort, they had more self-interested reasons: in order to sell the war at home, the combatants wanted the favorable publicity that came

with being televised delivering food to, and building shelters for, displaced populations. It also would help them win the “hearts and minds” campaign, integral to the war effort.<sup>64</sup> Humanitarian organizations, though, were now being coordinated by one of the parties to the conflict, compromising their neutrality and independence.<sup>65</sup>

The bilateralization of aid and the earmarking of funds also potentially steers individual agencies, and has produced disturbing trends in the allocation of aid. Multilateral aid is technically defined as aid given to multilateral organizations and not earmarked; these organizations, therefore, have complete discretion over how the money is spent. Bilateral aid can mean the state either dictates to the multilateral organization how the money is spent or gives the money to a nonmultilateral organization such as an NGO. Earmarking means that the donor dictates where and how the assistance will be used, frequently identifying regions, countries, operations, or even projects; this is especially useful if governments have geopolitical interests or pet projects. Since the 1980s there has been a dramatic shift away from multilateral aid and toward bilateral aid and earmarking. In 1988 states directed roughly 45 percent of humanitarian assistance to UN agencies in the form of multilateral assistance. After 1994, however, the average dropped to 25 percent (and even lower in 1999 because of Kosovo).<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, state interests, rather than the humanitarian principle of relief based on need, increasingly drives funding decisions. For instance, of the top 50 recipients of bilateral assistance between 1996 and 1999, the states of the former Yugoslavia, Israel/Palestine, and Iraq received 50 percent of the available assistance.<sup>67</sup> In 2002 nearly half of all funds given by donor governments to the UN’s 25 appeals for assistance went to Afghanistan.<sup>68</sup> If funding decisions were based solely on need, then places like Sudan, Congo, northern Uganda, and Angola would leapfrog to the top of the list.<sup>69</sup> In general, while there is more aid than ever before, it is controlled by fewer donors, who are more inclined to impose conditions and direct aid toward their priorities, undermining the principle of impartiality. Funding is now a several-tiered system, with the least fortunate getting the least attention.<sup>70</sup>

Humanitarian organizations bristled at these control mechanisms. Any organization will object to encroachments on its autonomy. Yet humanitarian organizations feared not only less autonomy, but also having to compromise their humanitarian principles. The language of principal-agent theory helps explain why. States see themselves as principals that provide a temporary transfer of authority to their agents, humanitarian organizations. Yet humanitarian organizations do not see themselves as agents of states or operating with delegated authority; they see themselves as agents of humanity that operate with moral authority. The very association with states and its presumption of delegated authority, then, potentially undermines

the moral authority cherished by most humanitarian organization. Indeed, if states fund humanitarian organizations in order to further their foreign policy goals, then humanitarian organizations are justifiably concerned. States' attempt to monitor and regulate humanitarian organizations almost by definition compromises their guiding principles.

### *Humanitarian action redefined*

The new environment and the transformation of humanitarianism is also leaving its imprint on the organizational culture of humanitarian agencies, producing changes that potentially undermine the core principle of impartial relief. The transformation of humanitarianism, as already noted, includes an expansion of the practices and goals associated with humanitarian action. This logically means that many humanitarian organizations are, in other words, articulating an expanding set of goals. Goal expansion has several possible consequences. It can lead to traditional goals being displaced. Relief was formerly an end in itself, but agencies are increasingly considering its relationship to other goals. For instance, rights-based agencies have demonstrated a greater willingness to use relief in order to promote basic human rights. Not only does need cease to be unconditional, but aid organizations might now also be attempting to determine who is worthy of aid, thus acting much like the nineteenth-century relief workers interested in helping the "deserving poor."<sup>71</sup> There is growing anecdotal evidence, moreover, that as many agencies have increasingly emphasized advocacy, rights, and peace building, they have not maintained their capacity for emergency relief, harming their response capacity to situations like Darfur.<sup>72</sup>

Bureaucratization is associated with the growing priority of base organizational interests such as survival and funding.<sup>73</sup> Reflecting on the emergence of the "Humanitarian International," Alex de Waal argues that in the competition between "soft interests" such as performing relief well and "hard interests" such as organizational survival and prosperity, noble ideals increasingly lose.<sup>74</sup> Ideals are particularly threatened when agencies need to interact with new donor environments to fund their activities. States' new contract mechanisms, including short-term contracts, competitive bidding, and reporting rules, have introduced perverse incentives for agencies that care about funding as much as they do about protecting populations at risk. Humanitarian organizations might doctor their performance indicators in order to transform failure into success, compete in areas in which they do not have a comparative advantage in order to secure funding, or fail to report shortcomings or the misuse of funds by subcontractors in order to avoid jeopardizing their contracts.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, because visibility can be a prerequisite for getting funding, many organizations prefer publicity to

critical but very unglamorous work.<sup>76</sup> In the camps in Zaire following the Rwandan genocide, humanitarian groups rushed to the scene in order to show the flag and impress funders back home. Working in an orphanage photographs well and brings in revenue, but building clean latrines and sanitation systems does not—even though it is equally if not more essential for saving lives. Such a set of incentives might create market failures. De Waal posits a Gresham's Law for humanitarianism: bad humanitarian action can crowd out good action because humanitarian organizations are rewarded for being seen rather than for saving lives.<sup>77</sup>

Evidence also points to agencies' shifting what they consider to be appropriate action, thus redefining their principles and practices. Relaxation or redefinition of neutrality and independence can introduce new rule-governed behavior that can compromise impartiality. For example, one former Oxfam official reflected that his organization had become so supportive of NATO intervention in Kosovo that it forgot that genuine impartiality demanded that Oxfam and other relief organizations should have been on both sides of the border—helping Kosovar refugees and Serbian victims of NATO bombing.<sup>78</sup> Humanitarian organizations also might develop new rules that potentially undermine the safety of populations. As it attempted to navigate state pressures, UNHCR altered its underlying rules and principles of action in a way that increased its propensity to put the lives of refugees at risk.<sup>79</sup>

This transformation also can subtly alter the ethical principles and calculations used by agencies to guide their policies. Humanitarian agencies are demonstrating a shift from deontological, or duty-based, ethics to consequentialist ethics. This development is driven partly by a growing concern with the negative consequences of humanitarian action and the related desire to measure effectiveness and impact.<sup>80</sup> Previously humanitarian organizations were instinctively guided by deontological ethics: some actions are simply good in and of themselves regardless of their consequences. Ethical action consists of identifying these intrinsically good actions and then performing one's moral duty. The growing concern with unintended consequences, however, has contributed to an ethic of consequentialism: whether or not an action is ethical depends on the outcome. The issue for humanitarian organizations is becoming not whether aid has negative and unintended consequences—for it almost always does—but whether, on balance, it does more harm than good.<sup>81</sup> Consequentialist reasoning requires agencies to identify the outcomes of concern—and as their goals expand, the outcome variables that must be considered expand, too. Accordingly, agencies have an incentive to consider how relief might affect development, human rights, and peace building—potentially eroding the idea that agencies should give on the basis of need and not on the basis of other goals.

The desire to measure impact and effectiveness also can abrade a central element of the humanitarian ethic: a desire to demonstrate solidarity with victims and to restore their dignity. Relief workers, in Rony Brauman's words, aspire to "remain close to people in distress and to try and relieve their suffering."<sup>82</sup> They do so by providing not only relief, but also compassion and caring. The ethic of humanitarianism, in this respect, includes both consequentialist and duty-based ethics—it seeks to provide life-saving relief and holds that the motives matter for assuring benevolence. Yet can such nonquantifiable values as compassion be operationalized when attempting to determine the effectiveness of humanitarian action? Is it possible to quantify, for instance, the reuniting of families, the provision of burial shrouds, or the reduction of fear and anxiety among people in desperate situations?<sup>83</sup> If they are omitted from the model, the model might redefine how humanitarian agencies think about impact, downgrading basic ethical motives in favor of measurable outcomes. If the measurable variables are no longer dependent on the subjective needs of the "beneficiaries," will they even be consulted?

Measures of effectiveness, then, and the growing reliance of agencies on rational-legal principles to generate their legitimacy, might undermine the moral authority of humanitarian organizations. If the legitimacy and value of humanitarian action is based strictly on deliverables and producing measurable outcomes—saving lives at the cheapest price—then why not hire a private agency, if available?<sup>84</sup> After all, the victim probably does not care if the blankets are delivered by a commercial firm or a nonprofit agency. If aid agencies are increasingly drifting toward rational-legal principles as a way of defending their legitimacy, they might not only have difficulty competing with commercial firms but also might undermine their moral authority. The presumed difference between the Wal-Marts and the World Visions is that the former does not have moral authority while the latter does. What happens, though, when humanitarian agencies increasingly base their legitimacy on their ability to measure up to standards set by modern, commercial firms? Such a development might very well undermine what makes humanitarian action distinctive.

## Conclusion: Humanitarianism and World Order

Humanitarianism can only be understood in relationship to the world order that constitutes it. Although much scholarship has focused on how principled actors have changed world politics by pressuring states to take the high road and redefine their interests, I have inverted this claim in examining how global politics has reshaped the nature of humanitarian action.<sup>85</sup> The environment that surrounded humanitarianism changed in profound ways during the 1990s. The expanding scope and scale of humanitarian

action created new opportunities for agencies to help more people than ever before. A practice that was once restricted to relief and emergency assistance has become—like communism, nationalism, liberalism—an *ism*, not part of this world but a project designed to transform it.

These changes in humanitarian action suggest that it has a new function in international politics. Originally its distinctive function in the international sacrificial order was to interrupt the selection process by saving those at immediate risk. It did not pretend to be anything but palliative. Yet this temperance movement also served an ideological function, helping to reproduce the geopolitical order because it reduced pressures that might have demanded its transformation. Consider modern humanitarianism's origins. By the mid-nineteenth century, changes in military technology were making war more brutal; there was little tradition of medical relief; and the emerging profession of war reporting was transmitting gruesome pictures and accounts of soldiers left to languish and die on the battlefield. Publics were beginning to rebel at these sights and to express pacifist sentiments. In response, state and military elites co-opted Dunant's platform, removed its more radical proposals, accepted new rules governing how to tend wounded soldiers on the battlefield, and thus demonstrated to their publics their commitment to humanize war. Humanitarianism, in other words, helped to rescue those on the battlefield—and the system of war. In fact, decades after founding the ICRC, Dunant concluded that humanitarianism had been co-opted by the states-system; he walked away from reformism and embraced pacifism.<sup>86</sup> Recent developments in international humanitarian law can be interpreted as serving a similar function for the war machine as they lessen the demand for more radical change in the global-military order.

The drift of humanitarian action from relief to root causes indicates a shift in its role in the international sacrificial order. No longer satisfied with saving individuals today so that they can be at risk tomorrow, humanitarianism now aspires to transform the structural conditions that make populations vulnerable. Toward that end, aid agencies desire to spread development, democracy, and human rights, and to join a peace-building agenda that aspires to create stable, effective, and legitimate states. They are carriers of liberal values as they help spin into existence a global liberal order.<sup>87</sup> Although their transcendental, universal, and cosmopolitan commitments might appear to threaten an international society organized around the nation-state, in fact most of their activities do not challenge the states-system, but instead are designed to create a more stable, legitimate state organized around these supposedly universal principles.<sup>88</sup> Humanitarian organizations may or may not be part of a neoliberal agenda, and they may or may not resemble the missionaries of the nineteenth century. But by their own admission, they view their social purpose as promoting liberal values in order to make the world safer, more humane, and more just.

Humanitarianism is now more firmly part of politics. Certainly it always was part of politics to the extent that its actions had political effects and relief workers saw themselves as standing with the weak and against the mighty. Yet humanitarian agencies restricted their ambition to saving lives at immediate risk in part to keep states at bay and preserve their goal for relief. They are now firmly, and in many ways self-consciously, part of politics. Humanitarianism no longer clings to principles of neutrality, independence, and impartiality as method of depoliticization, but increasingly views the former two principles as a (unnecessary) luxury. Humanitarianism and politics are no longer discursively constructed in binary, oppositional terms; instead, their points of intersection are many, and humanitarianism's meanings increasingly are defined by the sort of politics once viewed as its *bête noire*. Humanitarianism, in short, is self-consciously part of politics. It is increasingly an *ism* that is no longer satisfied with reforming the world, but now has ambitions about its very transformation.

This transformation is forcing humanitarian organizations to critically reexamine two defining self-images. One is the belief that they operate strictly on behalf of others, are devoid of power,<sup>89</sup> and are as weak as the individuals they were trying to save. Many humanitarian organizations now have annual budgets that rival those of the states that are the objects of their intervention, and they are no longer content to stand outside of politics but are increasingly part of governance structures that are intended to transform states and societies. Humanitarian organizations can no longer pretend that they lack power—including power over those with whom they stand in solidarity.<sup>90</sup>

These developments also challenge their self-image as representatives of humanity. As a recent report regarding the current and future challenges to humanitarianism puts it, “Many in the South do not recognize what the international community calls the universality of humanitarian values as such. . . . Humanitarian action is viewed as the latest in a series of imposition of alien values, practices, and lifestyles. Northern incursions into the South—from the Crusades to colonialism and beyond—have historically been perceived very differently depending on the vantage point.”<sup>91</sup> Indeed, if humanitarianism increasingly reflects globalization and Westernization, then there are good reasons why those in the Southern hemisphere view these agencies as the “mendicant orders of Empire.”<sup>92</sup> Although such observations are nearly as speculative as the claims to universality they are meant to replace, there has been little research into how the recipients view Western alms and whether other traditions of relief and charity also share values associated with the Western tradition of humanitarian action.

Humanitarianism is now balanced on the knife's edge of various tensions, tensions that have become more pronounced as it has become (more self-consciously) part of

politics. Humanitarianism is now precariously situated between the politics of solidarity and the politics of governance. Humanitarian workers traditionally saw themselves as apolitical as they defied systems of power and were in solidarity with the victims of a sacrificial order. As they become increasingly implicated in governance structures, they find themselves in growing collaboration with those whom they once resisted. Whether they will be successful at this more ambitious agenda remains to be seen. Whether they are or not, though, humanitarian action might very well be an effect of the very circuits of power that they once viewed as part of the international sacrificial order.

## Notes

- 1 On the recent expansion of the humanitarian system, see Blondel 2000; de Waal 1997, 68–72; Macrae 2002; Minear 2002, chap. 1; Roberts 1999. For an account of the growth of humanitarian organizations that focuses on external forces, see Lindenberg and Bryant 2001.
- 2 In this way, humanitarianism is a logocentric, which Jacques Derrida observes is in play whenever “one privileged term (logos) provides the orientation for interpreting the meaning of the subordinate term” (Nyers 1999, 21). See also Cutts 1998, 3; Malkki 1995; Warner 1999; Minear 2002, 76
- 3 This definition draws from Stockton 2004a, 15.
- 4 Bradol 2004.
- 5 Douglas 2002.
- 6 Pictet 1979.
- 7 The ICRC's principles are largely the industry standard, though there are debates about the priorities of these principles, their operational meaning, and even their relevance. Forsythe 2005; Terry 2002; Weiss 1999; Duffield 2001a; Minear 2002; Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 1996, 14–18.
- 8 Rieff 2002; Minear 2002; Donini 2004; Duffield 2001a, Slim 2004a, Leader 2000.
- 9 Terry 2002.
- 10 De Torrente 2004, Anderson 2004.
- 11 Slim 2004a.
- 12 De Waal 1997, 133–34.
- 13 On the epistemology of “humanitarian crisis,” see Stockton 2004a.
- 14 Slim 2004a, 155–56.
- 15 White 1993, 34–38; Howard 1993, 69–70.
- 16 General Assembly Resolution A/RES/46/182, 19 December 1991, Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations.
- 17 Lang 2003; International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001; Holzgrefe and Keohane 2003; Wheeler 2000; Slim 2002c.



- 18 Secretary of State Colin Powell, remarks to the National Foreign Policy Conference for Leaders of Nongovernmental Organizations, October 26, 2001.
- 19 Duffield 2001a, 12; also see Edkins 1996; Weiss 1999, 20; White 2000.
- 20 Kelly 1998, 174–75.
- 21 Duffield 2001a.
- 22 Macrae et al. 2002, 15. For a good overview, see Randel and German 2002.
- 23 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001.
- 24 Macrae 1999, 6–7.
- 25 Chandler 2002, chap. 1.
- 26 See Bouchet-Saulnier 2000. See also Leader and Macrae 2000; Chandler 2002; Minear 2002, chap. 3.
- 27 Chandler 2002, 21.
- 28 Beitz 1994, 124. See also Linklater 1998, chap. 2.
- 29 Calhoun 2004.
- 30 Cosmopolitanism and the discourse of humanity have not always led to impartiality as understood today, because those who claimed to be “humanitarian” and act in the name of humanity also could reflect a discourse in which some peoples were more human than others and thus more deserving of assistance. See Finnemore 1996.
- 31 Bradol 2004, 9.
- 32 Sommaruga 1999; Tanguy and Terry 1999; Rieff 1999.
- 33 This classification derives from other taxonomies, including Minear 2002, 78; Stoddard 2002; Weiss 1999; Donini 2005. Feinstein International Famine Center 2004, 54, argues that how agencies position themselves around these categories is determined by various factors, such as management and leadership, institutional culture, networks, and geographical and programmatic scope. Solidarist organizations are another branch; they openly identify with one party to a conflict and thus do not care about neutrality. Although I (and others) focus largely on international nongovernmental organizations, there are various international organizations whose principal mandate is humanitarian (and ICRC, the patriarch of the humanitarian community, is neither a nongovernmental or a international organization). Beginning after World War I and then increasing after World War Two, states established various international organizations, including the UNHCR and the World Food Program, to help them carry out their humanitarian obligations. State sovereignty, though, significantly shaped their working definition of humanitarianism and its relationship to politics. At the beginning of the last century states cautiously evoked the language of humanitarianism for fear that such transcendental concerns might swamp their core interests and undermine their sovereignty; consequently, they used sovereignty to fence in what these international organizations could do and these organizations, in turn, cleaved to the principles of consent, neutrality, and impartiality in order to signal to states that they knew their place. The changing meaning of sovereignty, particularly noticeable after the Cold War, though, opened up space for many international organizations to use a more expansive understanding of humanitarianism as they became more deeply involved in domestic space. See Barnett 2001 for a discussion.
- 34 Appalled by the carnage wrought by a fierce battle between French and Austrian forces in Solferino, Italy, in June 1859, Dunant, a Swiss citizen, appealed to the local population to tend to the thousands of suffering soldiers. Based on his personal experiences, Dunant wrote an account that became a bestseller in Europe and stirred European elites to consider his proposals for regulating war and administering to the wounded. These discussions produced both the Geneva Conventions, which established international humanitarian law, and the ICRC, which was to be an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusive humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war.
- 35 UNHCR 1990.
- 36 Barnett and Finnemore 2004, chap. 6.
- 37 Another factor potentially influencing this expansion is psychological, deriving from personal strain of relief work. Relief workers migrate from one nightmare to another, comforted only by the fact that, at best, they provide temporary relief. This sort of existence takes a very high emotional toll. Wanting to believe that they are helping to build a better world, relief workers began to treat human rights, conflict resolution, and nation building as extensions of humanitarianism. See Rieff 2002.
- 38 Chimni 1993, 444; Coles 1989, 203.
- 39 The heart of the resource dependence approach is that “organizations survive to the extent that they are effective. Their effectiveness derives from the management of demands, particularly demands of interest groups upon which the organizations depend for resources and support. . . . There are a variety of ways of managing demands, including the obvious one of giving in to them” (Pfeffer and Salancik 2003, 2).
- 40 Meyer and Scott 1983, 140.
- 41 Duffield 2001a; Donini 2004; Duffield, Macrae, and Curtis 2001.
- 42 Loescher 2001.
- 43 For definitions of rationalization, see Weber 1947; for bureaucratization, see Beetham 1985, 69; for professionalization, see Ritzer 1975.

- 44 Orru, Biggart, and Hamilton 1991, 361. See also Scott 1987; Scott 1995; DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Meyer and Rowan 1977.
- 45 DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 140.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 150–54.
- 47 Larson 1977, 49–52; cited from DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 152.
- 48 Leader 1999.
- 49 International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent 1995.
- 50 Gostelow 1999.
- 51 Another innovation was the Consolidated Appeals Process, established in 1991 by the UN General Assembly in response to the growing perception that there were too many agencies appealing to too many donors for too many different sectors in too many situations. In order to improve joint planning and quickly mobilize funds and target them for high priority areas, the UN decided to act as a coordinating mechanism. By 2002 there had been 165 different appeals. See Porter 2002 for a review.
- 52 Smillie and Minear 2004, 215–24; Slim 2002a; Mitchell, 2003.
- 53 Macrae et al. 2002, 18–21.
- 54 De Waal 1997, 78–79.
- 55 Slim 2002a.
- 56 Anderson 1996; Terry 2002; Slim 1997; Vaux 2001, chap. 3.
- 57 Humanitarian Policy Group 2004; Fearon 2004; Darcy 2005.
- 58 O'Brien 2002.
- 59 Feinstein International Famine Center 2004; Donini 2005. Smillie and Minear 2004, chap. 9. These claims are consistent with principal-agent analysis. See Bendor, Glazer, and Hammond 2001, 20. For applications to international relations, see Thatcher and Sweet 2002; Nielson and Tierney 2003; Hawkins et al. 2005.
- 60 Natsios 2003.
- 61 Quoted in Smillie and Minear 2004, 143.
- 62 Minear 2002, chap. 2; Macrae et al. 2002, chap. 3; Donini 2004.
- 63 Rieff 2002, chap. 6.
- 64 States also wanted to see for themselves what was occurring in the field. Toward that end, they began sending representatives to relay firsthand accounts of assistance activities and began developing the capacity for independent needs assessments and strategic analyses. An immediate consequence was that humanitarian organizations no longer benefited from having privileged and highly authoritative information. Because the authority of NGOs comes from their practical experience from “the field” (Slim 2002b, 4), this development might undermine their discretion.
- 65 A major controversy in this regard concerns whether the willingness of aid agencies to align themselves with the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq is one cause behind the growing perception that aid workers are no longer given immunity during war.
- 66 Randel and German 2002, 21.
- 67 *Ibid.*
- 68 Smillie and Minear 2004, 145. See also Macrae et al. 2002, Jeffreys 2002, Porter 2002.
- 69 Many in the humanitarian sector agree that while the global response to the tsunami was impressive, it was disproportionate in relationship to need. In fact, because MSF believed that it had more than enough, it asked donors to unrestrict the funds so that they could be channeled to another region in greater need; if they refused, MSF attempted to return the donations.
- 70 In response to the politicization of priorities, humanitarian organizations entered into a dialogue with the principal donors to try to establish more impartial standards. The result was the Good Donorship Initiative. See Harmer, Cotterrell, and Stoddard 2004.
- 71 Rieff 2002.
- 72 Interview with official from the UN Office for the Coordinator of Humanitarian Assistance, New York, March 8, 2005.
- 73 Harrell-Bond 2002; Barnett and Finnemore 2004.
- 74 De Waal 1997, 65–66.
- 75 Cooley and Ron 2002; Darcy 2005.
- 76 Smillie and Minear 2004, 143.
- 77 De Waal 1997, 138–39.
- 78 Vaux 2001.
- 79 Barnett and Finnemore 2004, chap. 4.
- 80 There also were growing calls to measure “need”—to replace subjective and emotional assessments with more objective criteria as a way to reinforce the impartiality principle and bring more attention to forgotten emergencies. In short, objective indicators are the best way to reestablish values and principles. See Oxley 2001.
- 81 Slim 1997; Duffield 2001a, 90–95; Gasper 1999. Because it is nearly impossible, if not slightly macabre, to try to calculate whether aid saves more lives than it takes, some organizations have reasserted the importance of the principles of independence, neutrality, and impartiality for determining whether they should provide aid. See Weissman 2004.
- 82 Brauman 2004, 400.
- 83 Darcy 2005, 8.
- 84 Hopgood (forthcoming).
- 85 Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999.
- 86 Hutchinson 1996.
- 87 Boli and Thomas 1999.

- 88 Duffield 2001a. See also Fox 2001.  
 89 Fisher 1997.  
 90 Kennedy 2004; Duffield 2001a.  
 91 Feinstein International Famine Center 2004, 55.  
 92 Hardt and Negri 200, cited in Donini 2005, 2.

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