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The Great Lakes Refugee Crisis and the Dilemma of Contemporary Humanitarianism

Victoria Passant

Humanitarians are invaluable for providing life-saving assistance in emergencies. For this reason a discussion of the role and responsibilities humanitarians should have is of paramount importance. Recent developments in the international humanitarian community have seen a detachment from the traditional principles of the humanitarian movement. This dissertation investigates non-governmental organisations within the humanitarian sphere since the Great Lakes refugee crisis of 1994 and the dilemma it currently faces. It gives a detailed account of both humanitarianism and its problems during the mid-1990s and contemporary humanitarianism. It is argued that a detachment from the fundamental principles which underpin humanitarianism exposes the system to opportunities for failure; rather than an evolution beyond these basic principles, there is a need for them to be reinstated.

Introduction

Today humanitarianism finds itself at the centre of both fierce academic and public debate with theoreticians and practitioners polarised on a multitude of issues. It can be argued that the non-governmental organisation (NGO) humanitarian community has experienced a significant evolution over the previous twenty years and that contemporary humanitarian actors are experiencing a crisis of identity which poses major dilemmas for ensuring the efficiency of emergency relief. The Great Lakes refugee crisis, caused by the Rwandan genocide, was a poignant experience for the humanitarian system and offers an appropriate starting point for this evaluation. It was following this crisis that the very fundamental principles of the humanitarian movement began to be questioned. This study will assess the international NGO humanitarian community from the Great Lakes crisis to the present day and it will be argued that a detachment from the fundamental principles which underpin humanitarianism exposes it to increasing opportunities for failure. Rather than an evolution beyond basic humanitarian principles, there is a strong need to them to be 'reasserted critically' (Duffield & Macrae 2001:273)

Context

'The concept of humanitarian aid has almost an innate quality: assisting your brother or sister when their life is endangered is an instinctive expression of the survival of the species' (Ozerdem & Rufini 2005:51).

In its purest form, the fundamental notion behind humanitarianism is an altruistic duty to help the vulnerable. It was on this most basic and innate principle that Jean Henri Dunant, on the battlefield of Solferino in 1859, felt compelled to assist. Out of his compassion for the wounded of both sides of conflict, the 'concept of humanitarian relief during war was born' (Fox 2001:276). The concept was later institutionalised with the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1863. Out of the principles on which the ICRC bases its operations, four are at its core; neutrality, impartiality, humanity and independence (ICRC 1994). The principle of neutrality maintains that agencies 'may not take side in hostilities or engage at any time in

controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature'; impartiality directs agencies to make 'no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions' and that aid should be driven 'solely by need'; universality meaning 'all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other' and a worldwide right to assistance; and independence which states that humanitarian agencies must 'always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles' (ICRC 1994). The ICRC also strongly advocate the "humanitarian imperative" where any 'response must be based on needs, not any other factor such as political interests, cultural affinity, or availability of resources' (Vaux 2006:242). These principles aimed to 'depoliticise humanitarian action and create a "humanitarian space" insulated from politics' (Barnett 2005:274).

Since the establishment of the ICRC, the international humanitarian system has flourished and 'humanitarianism as an ideal has achieved an authority and reach that would have been inconceivable even twenty years ago' (Rieff 2002:24). However since its creation, the international political environment and nature of war has changed, and with it, humanitarian NGOs have altered also. The collapse of the Cold-War in 1989 had an unprecedented impact on humanitarian NGOs in which they gained new access to humanitarian crises and extended their reach into regions in which they were previously denied space. Countries involved in the Cold War lost interest in peripheral conflicts and 'geopolitically unimportant countries' (West 2001:3). Consequently, NGOs found themselves with expanded mandates due to this loss of interest by global superpowers and replaced affirmative political action. Furthermore, the early 1990s saw a 'redefinition and broadening of the international post-Cold War security agenda to include new threats, and in particular deadly internal conflicts which overtook the threat of war between states as the most pressing international security problem' (Frangonikolopoulos 2005:51). The September 11th attacks on New York altered again the geopolitical landscape and the "war on terror" has to some extent reignited the keen interest of Western powers in geo-strategic areas as part of their counterterrorism campaign.

By the end of the twentieth century, it was evident that the type of conflict was changing with a significant increase in inter-communal conflicts, demonstrating

considerable challenges for humanitarianism. It was the highly complex situation in Rwanda and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC) which is widely acknowledged to be a 'watershed for humanitarian affairs' (Fox 2001:285). The rapid proliferation of NGOs after the Cold War, combined with other factors such as vast media attention, led to a mass influx of NGOs into refugee camps in Rwanda's neighbouring countries. The camps held Hutu civilians fleeing a feared revenge attack by Tutsi within Rwanda, but also contained large numbers of former *genocidaires* who had been actively involved in the genocide. It was following this realisation for which humanitarians were heavily criticised. There was an understanding that the aid they were providing was feeding the criminals and aiding their rearmament and ultimately, doing more harm than good (Anderson 1999). The Rwandan refugee example combined with other problems of the early 1990s (e.g. Somalia) 'caused the entire community to undergo painful introspection that raised troubling questions regarding the legitimacy and effectiveness of humanitarian action' (Barnett 2005:725). The act of giving aid to those in need had never previously been questioned in the context of whether it was harmful and this realisation within the humanitarian community gave way to a significant alteration.

Following the calamity of Rwandan refugee camps emerged a more self-aware humanitarianism in which it was more widely understood that 'the type of wars where traditional roles of "soldier/civilian" and "combatant/non-combatant" that neutral humanitarianism would base itself on, no longer exists' (Duffield 2001:80). The humanitarianism that we see today contains NGOs with expanded mandates and an expanded self-definition of their role. This change has in turn led to the rise of new debate on the current situation within the humanitarian system and what exactly the appropriate role and responsibilities of humanitarian NGOs should be.

Aims and Objectives

The mission of humanitarian NGOs is to ensure life and prevent death. Following both man-made and natural crises, humanitarians are vital for providing life-saving assistance to those in situations in which governments fail or are unable to cope. For this reason the area of study demands and deserves attention as the importance of

humanitarian NGOs in crisis situations cannot be stressed enough. Of prime importance therefore is the discussion surrounding the way humanitarians should operate and the responsibilities they should accrue.

The current polarized opinion on the appropriate role of contemporary humanitarians is due in part to the conflict between ‘an individual ethical imperative to save life or alleviate suffering and a social organization designed to improve collective conditions of life’ (Calhoun 2008:90). Some call for a humanitarianism system which looks beyond its basic duty and others demand a narrow and strictly principled humanitarianism which focuses on providing neutral and impartial relief. This study investigates the field of international humanitarianism and its evolution since the Rwandan Genocide in 1994 and argues the need for a reinstatement of the original principles of the movement. Today, the field of humanitarianism is riddled with academic evaluation, debate and critique and ‘a shared concern with humanity inextricably bonds the contributions of scholars and practitioners’ (Hoffman & Weiss 2008:11). Consequently, what emanates from the literature is the central question of how should the role of humanitarian NGOs be defined in the 21st century?

To fully answer this question an in-depth analysis of the international humanitarian system is undertaken. The predominant focus is on the academic debates which have emerged over the past fifteen-years and the reasoning for this is a lack of critical humanitarian agency evaluation. Although more in-house evaluations have surfaced over recent years, the predominant discussion of humanitarianism remains in the academic sphere; the key academics referred to include Duffield, Barnett, Minear, Terry and Fox.

Chapter One, ‘The Great Lakes Refugee Crisis’ offers a detailed account of this significant event which had a lasting and profound impact on the global NGO community. An understanding of this crisis is invaluable for evaluating contemporary humanitarianism and for explaining its evolution. Chapter Two ‘Flaws in the System: Emerging Concerns from the Great Lakes’ discusses the main critiques of the humanitarian response in the Great Lakes crisis including agency proliferation and competition; agency coordination; accountability and professionalism; and neutrality

and impartiality. Chapter Three, 'The Cost of Transformation: A Critical Analysis' addresses the changes within the NGO community since the mid-1990s and establishes that significant alterations did occur. It engages with the criticisms of contemporary humanitarianism and argues that there is a valid reason for concern regarding the movement away from the foundational principles of humanitarianism and calls for the reinstatement or at least a reinterpretation of a neutral, impartial, universal and independent right to assistance. It is imperative to ensure that the humanitarian agenda remains both pure in intent and enables access to the highest numbers of recipients.

1. The Great Lakes Refugee Crisis

It would be 'impossible to analyse developments in the international humanitarian system without focusing on the emergency involving Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire between 1994-1996' (Fox 2001:285). The critiques of humanitarian NGOs during this time spurred a period of introspection for agencies and motivated the successive alterations which moulded the contemporary system. As a basis for subsequent chapters, the following pages offer a detailed description of the refugee crisis in the years immediately following the Rwandan genocide to explain the morally controversial situation and to contextualise the debates discussed in Chapter Two.

1.1. The Great Lakes Refugee Crisis

The Rwandan Genocide is a regrettable memory on the conscience of the international community. Beginning on the 6th April 1994 and ending on the 19th July 1994, the genocide resulted in the deaths of up to 1 million Rwandan Tutsi in less than 100 days (Terry 2002:155). The killings, which were orchestrated by the Hutu Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR), were part of a premeditated plan to exterminate the Tutsi minority. On April 6th 1994, a plane carrying Hutu President Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Cyprian Ntaryamira of Burundi was shot down as it came into land in the capital of Rwanda, Kigali. Both men were killed. Almost simultaneously the murder of Tutsi began. The speed and technical organisation of the genocide left thousands dead and displaced thousands more. It caused a mass exodus of civilians with more than 1.5 million Hutu Rwandese fleeing Rwanda between April and July 1994. As the Tutsi

Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), closed in on the capital, and the FAR faced imminent defeat, another exodus of Hutu refugees spilled into neighbouring countries seeking asylum from the threat of revenge attacks from Tutsi survivors; ‘in the space of just five days between 14th and 18th July, approximately 850,000 refugees crossed into Goma town’ (Eriksson 1996:27). Subsequently, a further 300,000 Hutu refugees fled westwards to Zaire following the closure of the French-protected zone in southwest Rwanda in August (Lischer 2005:78). It is estimated that collectively, ‘two million Hutu sought asylum in Zaire, Tanzania, and Burundi’ (Terry 2002:155) by September 1994. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) figures for September 1996 state that 533,000 Rwandese had fled to Tanzania, with 1,105,000 in Zaire (UNHCR, cited in Prunier 1997:375) – refer to the appendix for the UNHCR map of camp locations.

The wide media coverage of the refugee flow led to four hundred and fifty humanitarian NGOs to flock to both Rwanda and the various refugee camps (Ozerdem & Rufini 2005:62). The number of NGOs in Goma, Zaire, alone was 150 at the beginning of the crisis (Fox 2001:286). Minear describes the situation as a dramatic ‘example of agencies responding helter-skelter to a major crisis’ in which ‘NGOs jockeyed to be interviewed and become identified back home with the relief effort’ (2002:25). The predominant number of NGOs in the camps were international; from Europe and the US, all hoping to capitalise on media exposure and attract large donors. It also attracted a wide variety of agencies ranging from medical NGOs such as MSF to Save the Children, to CARE, with a range of backgrounds and origins

The limited knowledge of the history of the conflict in Rwanda and ‘the nature of its media coverage, led many media watchers to identify all the refugees as victims who had fled to escape the genocide’ (Adelman 2003:96). This perception of the refugees however was inaccurate. Among genuine Hutu refugees, the exodus also included thousands of *interhamwe* (Hutu militia) and a significant section of the political and military leadership of the defeated ex-FAR. Adelman calculates that an accurate estimation would be that of the near 2 million Hutu Rwandese who left Rwanda, 10-15 per cent had been active in the killings, meaning that out of the 900,000 he suggests were in Zaire, 150,000 to 225,000 were *genocidaires*. (2003:99). Therefore ‘genuine

refugees among the Rwandan Hutus in Zaire ranged from 675,000 to 750,000 (2003:99). The leaders of the FAR fled Rwanda with almost everything of any worth ranging from 'the state treasury down to door handles and window frames' (Lischer 2005:79). Terry explains that the ex-FAR and former government had 'considerable financial and military resources at their disposal: cash and assets requisitioned from Rwanda before they retreated, private and government foreign bank accounts, and arms sold by states willing to breach the United Nations (UN) arms embargo' (2002:160). The majority of the ex-FAR settled in Zaire, due to the sympathetic Zairian government. Initially, ex-FAR senior officials lived in hotels along the shore of Lake Kivu until the group had reorganised. The soldiers lived in the larger refugee camps, among genuine refugees, particularly in the Goma camps (Terry 2002). It is the camps in Zaire with which this chapter shall be primarily concerned.

Initially, the camps were highly disorganised. The first two months were marred by chaos and violence and 'from July 1994 until October, a virulent cholera epidemic killed 50,000 refugees' (Lischer 2005: 79). However, the ex-FAR leaders quickly gained tight control over the refugees and eventually, their 'control was absolute' (Adelman 2003:103). The *interhamwe*, ex-FAR and former government leaders managed to create a 'quasi state in the refugee camps in Zaire' and this was established through 'a well conceived institutional, political and administrative framework' (Adelman 2003:102). The former Hutu government and ex-FAR leadership were proclaiming to be a state-in-exile, controlling the refugees, re-training and rearming militia and planning for a return to Rwanda (Adelman 2003:103). Numerous aid workers confirmed that weapon shipments arrived regularly at Goma airport (Lischer 2005, Terry 2002) and although the Zairian authorities confiscated them, they were stored in warehouses controlled and maintained by the ex-FAR. The shipments included 'armoured cars, helicopters, 120mm armoured mortar carriers, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns, and military trucks' (Lischer 2005:81).

Insecurity in the camps was 'the primary tool used to control the refugee population' (Terry 2002:175). Those refugees who contemplated repatriation were threatened and accused of sympathising with the Tutsi RPF in Rwanda. Through intimidation and resource control, the militia managed to ensure that only limited numbers returned.

During the first two months, 140,000 managed to return, but ‘by September 1994 rumours of the violence inside Rwanda had combined with political intimidation inside the camps to turn the limited returnee flow to a trickle. By early 1995 it had stopped altogether’ (Prunier 2009:25). Security for aid workers was also unstable and the clear militarization of the camps led a coalition of NGOs threatening to withdraw in November 1994 (Lischer 2005:91). This coalition included 15 NGOs such as CARE, Oxfam, and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF). MSF withdrew from Zaire in November and later Tanzania in December (Prunier 2009:26) and CARE Canada withdrew following death threats issued to several of its staff members (Terry 2002:176). MSF withdrew on moral grounds believing that the danger of supporting the camps outweighed the imperative to remain. NGOs which withdrew were in the minority, with many such as Oxfam unsure of the most appropriate action but deciding to remain, arguing the ‘rights of refugees to receive aid superseded the problems derived from supplying it’ (Terry 2002:201).

Calls for the demilitarisation of the camps were met with a lack of international support. They were deemed too expensive, complicated or near impossible. In November 1994, the UN Secretary General proposed ‘a military solution, but this went nowhere’ as it was deemed to be too expensive and complicated. Subsequently, ‘on November 30, 1994, the Security Council precluded any military initiatives against the extremists’ (Adelman 2003:101). By early 1995, the security levels improved slightly within the camps. The reduction of violence was in part due to the deployment of a contingent of 1,500 Zairian military personnel who were organised by the UN. However, the most significant reason was the threat of NGO withdrawal. The manipulation of humanitarian aid and the importance of the refugees to the ex-FAR were paramount. Terry explains that ‘it was strongly in the interests of the former regime to quell the violence in the camps, to avoid jeopardizing the presence of the aid organisations and precipitating a deterioration of camp services’ (2002:177). If the NGOs had withdrawn, it would have significantly reduced ‘international sympathy for the refugees and compromised the efforts of the former regime to improve its international image in the hope of opening dialogue with Kigali’ (Terry 2002:177). Therefore, the regime established more sophisticated methods of control.

The leaders of the camps believed that whilst they controlled the population of Rwanda in exile, the new Rwandan government was in a weak position. African Rights conducted an in-depth account of the genocide and subsequent refugee crisis through interviewing those involved. Jean Bosco Barayagwiza, the former Director of Political Affairs in the Foreign Ministry of Rwanda was quoted saying “even if they [the RPF] have won a military victory they will not have the power. We have the population. They only have the bullets” (Barayagwiza, cited in African Rights 1995). Therefore keeping the refugee camps in tact was a high priority. Furthermore, the Hutu refugee camps were not caused by a natural movement of people fleeing danger, but were created intentionally by the ex-FAR leaders who feared being defeated in Rwanda. When RPF victory looked imminent, ‘Hutu soldiers shot into the air to stampede people to the border’ (Lischer 2005:79). The intention of the ex-FAR was arguably to create a state-in-exile; the ex-government and military leaders within the camps had control of \$30-40 million worth of Rwandan francs, combined with access to offshore accounts estimated to contain \$50 million (Prunier, cited in Terry 2002:163); had organised the camps into geographical administrative groups (*prefectures, communes, secteurs, and cellules*); levied tax from refugees of one dollar a month (Lischer 2005:91); and even held elections for commune leaders (Terry 2002:177). They enforced control at every level. Terry explains that the ex-FAR pursued both military and diplomatic attempts to regain power in Rwanda. However in terms of their military capabilities ‘their organisation on paper and in the minds of international observers was not matched by realities on the ground’ (2002:169) and therefore their strongest tool was thought to be diplomatic. They were depending on ‘the return of the two million refugees under their control’ (2002:170) and consequently, the refugees and particularly the aid that they used to support them, was their greatest resource.

The *interhamwe* launched numerous cross-border attacks into Rwanda and also against the Tutsi population of Kivu. The Tutsi communities of this region were collectively referred to as “Banyamulenge” and were not particularly liked by the Mobutu government in Zaire. Following Rwanda’s independence and Hutu “revolution” from 1959-61, 150,000 Rwandan Tutsi fled to North Kivu followed by a subsequent wave of refugees in 1963-4. This influx created a ‘sharp rift between Kivu’s local population – ‘*autochtones*’ or ‘natives’, as they called themselves – and those they now labelled

‘foreigners’ (Meredith 2005:529). Subsequently, for electoral reasons and pressure from local Zairian politicians, Mobutu refused to acknowledge the refugees as Zairian citizens and repealed the law to grant them citizenship. The region was blighted with violence in which thousands died and ‘north Kivu was already seething with ethnic tension when a million Hutu descended on Goma, bringing with them their virulent brand of ethnic hatred’ (Meredith 2005:529). In South Kivu, the Rwandan Hutu influx spurred further resentment of the Banyamulenge which now numbered 400,000 and encouraged by local Zairian politicians, Kivu *autochtones* joined with Hutu militia to attack them. Threatened by local anti-Banyamulenge forces and Hutu refugees, the Banyamulenge turned to Rwanda for protection.

Throughout 1996, the leader of the RPF and new Tutsi President Paul Kagame, ‘organised military training for Banyamulenge [...] and prepared units of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) for action’ which was the armed wing of the RPF (Meredith 2005:531). Eventually, ‘in November 1996 the Rwandan army invaded eastern Zaire, teamed up with the anti-Mobutu opposition groups and attacked the refugee camps’ (Fox 2001:286). They attacked the ex-FAR headquarters at Lac Vert and the Mugunga camp, on November 13 1996, causing 600,000 Hutu refugees to flee back to Rwanda (Meredith 2005:534). As the Rwandan army continued to advance, more and more refugees fled the violence, in which many died and many ex-FAR fled westwards deeper in Zaire to seek safety. The panic among refugees following the attack led to confusion on the whereabouts of hundreds of thousands of refugees and the actual headcount of those returning to Rwanda vary. Official UN figures suggest that out of the 800,000 in North Kivu, only 371,000 returned at the start of the mass repatriation (Prunier 2009:122). Disagreements ensued about the number and whereabouts of the remaining refugees. But a likely estimation is that 600,000 Hutu refugees remained in Zaire with the majority of them fleeing westwards. Prunier (2009) explains that rumours began that the RPA were killing the refugees which remained in Zaire and the fate of many is unknown. However, there were still hundreds of thousands which settled in the Virunga forests to the west and ‘they were to be a part of the next episode’ of violence (Prunier 2009:125).

1.2 The Eastern Congo Today

The situation in the Great Lakes region and particularly in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) still remains to be highly complex and the violence is yet to end. The region fell into a violent war following the death of Zairian President Mobutu in September 1997 and the instatement of new President, Laurent-Desire Kabila. In 1998, Kabila turned against 'his Rwandan backers to reduce their influence. Rwanda in turn flexed its newfound might and invaded the DRC for a second time. It was joined by Uganda, with both countries claiming self-defense against attacks from Congolese territory' (Neal & Pearson 2006:3). The natural-resource rich DRC, descended into uncontrolled regional war with multiple armies seeking to loot the country. In 2001, President Kabila was assassinated and replaced by his son Joseph Kabila who sought to create a regional peace agreement in 2001. Eventually, a peace accord was signed and in June 2003 all foreign armies, except Rwanda, left the DRC and the country saw a reduction in violence (Neal & Pearson 2006:4). However, stability has remained fragile and violence continues to erupt. The Kivu region still witnesses ethnic conflict against the Banyamulenge and Rwandan border by the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) which is comprised of ex-FAR as well as displaced Rwandan Hutus. The regional conflict in the Great Lakes area has caused the deaths of more than 5 million people since 1998 and caused 1.4 million to be currently internally displaced (Refugees International 2009). Despite a Goma Agreement being signed in 2008 to attempt to create peace, armed conflict has continued in the Kivu region and 'an escalation in violence in late 2008 led to over 250,000 new displacements in North Kivu' (Refugees International 2009). There remains a significant humanitarian and refugee problem in the eastern Congo and particularly, in the Kivu region. Even though the official end of the war was in 2003, many remain displaced.

The Great Lakes case study demonstrates the complexities which faced humanitarianism during this time. Knowledge of this event is imperative to understand the criticisms and changes which occurred within the system. The following chapter shall address the predominant critiques which emulated out of the mid-nineties.

2. Flaws in the System - Emerging Concerns from the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes refugee crisis created a moral dilemma for humanitarians and difficult ethical decisions had to be made. The situation was met by widespread discussion on the practice of those NGOs involved and specific concerns were highlighted. This chapter shall address the various strands of discontent with the NGO community and analyse the predominant critiques. Understanding the criticisms laid against humanitarians in the mid-1990s is invaluable to understanding the subsequent alterations and move towards a multi-faceted, political and varied system.

Section 2.0 will give a brief overview of the criticisms which emulated out of the crisis. The following sections will evaluate the four main criticisms: agency proliferation and competition; agency coordination; accountability and professionalism; and neutrality and impartiality. The chapter shall end with some concluding remarks on the problems of the humanitarian community in the 1990s.

2.1. Critiques

'Until the 1990s, the vast majority of aid officials barely bothered to discuss the possibility of dilemmas, ethical or otherwise, because of the presumption that none existed. Simply put, humanitarians held a near religious conviction that they could do no wrong...Rwanda changed all that' (Barnett 2003:406)

The Great Lakes refugee crisis had an unprecedented effect on the humanitarian system and led to a realisation that the actions of humanitarian agencies can have negative impacts. NGOs became the focus of fierce criticism when it was realised that the camps held not only genuine refugees but also Hutu militia and ex-FAR leaders. The manipulation of humanitarian aid was rife which placed agency workers in a difficult position. The militarization of the camps, combined with insecurity, caused many to argue that NGOs were feeding those responsible for the genocide and allowing them to re-establish themselves in preparation for a second wave of violence; it was regarded by many to be the 'nadir of a neutral and universal humanitarianism' (Duffield 2001:81). When Duffield describes the situation as the 'nadir' of fundamental humanitarian principles he voices the opinion of many that neutrality is morally impossible in

situations such as eastern Zaire. Whilst the ICRC remained convinced that neutrality was necessary to access all victims others such as de Waal, strongly argued that ‘as *genocidaires*, this group should not qualify for refugee status and should certainly not benefit from a multi-million pound aid operation’ (de Waal, cited in Fox 2001:285). However, by no means were all the refugees guilty of genocide. It was estimated that up to fifteen per cent of the refugees were directly involved in the killing, meaning that the number of genuine refugees in Zaire was between 675,000 and 750,000 (Adelman 2003:99).

These moral dilemmas questioned whether humanitarian workers should provide aid regardless of the history of recipients, or withhold aid knowing that genuine refugees would suffer. Fiona Terry, from Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF), poses a number of questions raised among her colleagues, such as ‘can we, in the name of moral principles, cease to aid a population in need?’ and ‘should we respect conventional medical ethics, treating anyone who needed it regardless of their history, or should we recognize our wider responsibility for what was happening in the camps?’ (Terry 2002:2). Terry refers to the “paradox of humanitarian action” where humanitarians can contradict their purpose by prolonging the situation they try to resolve. This paradox is what led many to question humanitarianism in 1994-1996.

The realisation of flaws within the humanitarian system were acknowledged and ‘institutions and NGOs, as well as academics, undertook a series of major critical reviews of humanitarianism’ (Ozerdem & Rufini 2005:62). The main critiques of humanitarianism which were raised following the refugee crisis can be categorised into four main areas of concern which are discussed below.

2.2. Agency Proliferation and Competition

The proliferation of humanitarian NGOs following the end of the Cold-War was unprecedented. This expansion created a ‘veritable “aid industry”’ (Terry 2002:236) in which unregulated growth led to inter-agency competition for funding and media-exposure. Growth of the humanitarian field is not in itself negative, but during the mid-1990s the competition between agencies eroded the purity of their motivations

(Prendergast 1996:4). The Great Lakes refugee crisis was a paradigmatic example of this problem.

Following the Rwandan crisis a Joint Evaluation was run by a Steering Committee compiled of representatives from 19 OECD-member bilateral donor agencies (Organisation for Economic Co-ordination and Development), plus the European Union and the Development Assistance Committee secretariat of the OECD, 9 multilateral agencies and UN units, the ICRC and five international NGO organisations (Eriksson 1996:5). The Steering Committee identified that ‘the unprecedented number of NGOs involved reflects [...] the reality that participation in large-scale, high-profile relief operations has become an important factor in the formation and development of NGOs’ (Eriksson 1996:31).

The symbiotic relationship with the media combined with competition over funding exacerbated the problems in the Great Lakes situation. Reporting is significant and it makes NGO response almost inevitable. For this reason, it was imperative for NGOs to remain in a favourable light to journalists and the public in order to receive public, private and governmental funds (West 2001). In eastern-Zaire, huge amounts of money were spent in the multiple refugee camps by international donors including the \$1.4 billion that was spent between April and December 1994 in Goma alone (Lischer 2005:90). Terry explains that the fight to be visible led to ‘flags, stickers and t-shirts bearing the logos of organisations, once a protective measure to alert belligerent parties to a humanitarian presence, became turf markers in the battle to secure a niche’ (2002:203). Agencies competed to be involved in the most media-friendly tasks such as caring for orphans, concluding that for many ‘the priority was to mount a high-profile program, raise the organisation’s level of exposure at home, and replenish bank accounts to ensure the continued viability of the organisation’ (2002:204). Even as an employee of MSF, Terry’s remarks concur with many others and it was a widely acknowledged criticism; NGOs lost sight of why they were actually present in the camps, where agencies were often ‘market-driven’ (Bradbury 1995:19).

As de Waal notes, there was a conception among aid agencies that ‘big is beautiful’ in terms of size of humanitarian response (1997:140). However, an over abundance of aid

within Rwandan refugee camps led to its easier manipulation. The tight control and extreme refugee organisation enabled the ex-FAR leaders to inflate the number of refugees in the camp through the conduction of a census. This led to an increased level of aid to the camps which was “skimmed” and sold on the Zairian black market to raise funds for the militarization and reorganisation effort (Adelman 2003:103). Furthermore, during the initial months of the refugee crisis, food aid was distributed to *commune* leaders who would allocate it - or sell it - as they chose. The vast amount of aid present allowed the ex-FAR not to have to support their followers and enabled them to concentrate on their political aims (Lischer 2005:90).

2.3. Agency Coordination

The Joint Evaluation of the Rwanda situation found ‘mixed performance in coordination [and] lack of clarity in division of responsibilities’ (Eriksson 1996:57). It concluded a lack of coordination led to slow delivery of some relief services. The Goma region has a volcanic landscape and consequently the need for heavy equipment ‘to build access roads into the camps to enable the sighting of health facilities and water storage and distribution systems’ (Eriksson 1996:29) was of paramount importance considering the mass outbreak of cholera within the camps. However, it is concluded that as the result of commitments by the US army ‘not being implemented and faulty information flows between Goma and the US Army base in Germany, it was not until the end of September that the heavy equipment capability was substantially increased’ (1996:29). The humanitarian culture at the time of the Rwandan refugee crisis was very much based on agency individualism; the need for exposure, the rush to be involved, and the limited willingness to cooperate with each other all had negative impacts on the relief effort. ‘Coordination was widely perceived as a threat to agency autonomy and media access’ (Minear 2002:25)

Within the context of the Rwandan refugee camps, UNHCR should have made attempts to organise a more cohesive humanitarian response. However, UNHCR ‘contributed to the coordination problem afflicting NGOs rather than take a leadership role in publicising and combating militarization’ (Lischer 2005:164) by threatening to replace any NGOs which withdrew. Furthermore, the absence of a strong host government in

Zaire capable of coordinating the relief effort necessitated the leadership role to be transferred to UNHCR which states that ‘the agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees’ (UNHCR 2009). However, in the case of Rwandan refugees in Zaire, UNHCR was shown to demonstrate a weak leadership capacity despite calls from NGOs to address the militarisation problem (Lischer 2005:164). The advantages of UNHCR leadership can be demonstrated in the Tanzanian camps in which it had the capability to limit the number of NGOs present thanks to the Tanzanian government only issuing visas to NGOs ‘that UNHCR designated, eliminating the freewheeling agencies’ (Minear 2002:22). Furthermore, ‘an innovative in-house arrangement also allowed UNHCR [...] to fund its chosen NGOs, short-circuiting the more laborious process of Geneva-based review’ (Minear 2002:23). This limited the amount of “wasted” aid, misappropriation and agency competition. It clearly demonstrates the vast variation in coordination. However, the need for individual agency preservation and culture of independence made the creation of strong leadership difficult as ‘priding themselves on their autonomy and flexibility, NGOs resist ceding authority to a coordinating entity’ (Minear 2002:24). ‘The response to the Goma crisis was an appalling advertisement for unfettered humanitarianism’ (African Rights 1995:1092) and a serious worry regarding agency cooperation and coordination emerged as a warranted concern.

2.4. Accountability and Professionalism

Practitioners and academics have stated accountability to be the cornerstone in attempts to minimize negative effects of aid (Prendergast 1996). It was specifically noted that the humanitarian system lacked accountability and regulation mechanisms which would ensure effective and coordinated relief responses. The Joint Evaluation stated that ‘the team was struck by the very limited attempts by agencies to obtain the views of beneficiaries on the assistance they were provided with’ (Eriksson 1996:32) and that even though aid agencies are accountable to the donors who fund them, they are primarily accountable to those they seek to assist. Due to the nature of funding and the desire for positive media exposure in the Zaire camps, open discussion ‘among the organisations about the failures or negative consequences of humanitarian action’ were limited (Lischer 2005:231). The ‘tendency by some officials and NGOs to emphasise or

inflate positive accomplishments and play down or ignore problems, resulted in distorted reporting' (Eriksson 1996:60). In practice, this meant the impact of humanitarian action was hard to monitor and as Bradbury explains, 'while international law supports the right of disaster victims to receive relief, the lack of regulation in the aid system means that beneficiaries have no redress for the inappropriate actions of relief agencies' (1995:19). Therefore, when 'things go wrong, as they have done in Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda, the UN and NGOs are able to hide behind the humanitarian label with impunity' (Bradbury 1995:20) .

There were also significant questions raised over the level of professionalism some NGOs demonstrated. The Joint Evaluation confirmed that some 'performed in an unprofessional and irresponsible manner that resulted not only in duplication and wasted resources but, in a few egregious cases, in unnecessary loss of life' (Eriksson 1996:59). Some of the NGOs present in Zaire were inexperienced and sent 'inadequately-trained and -equipped personnel' (Eriksson 1996:31). Many such as Prendergast (1996), de Waal (1997), and Terry (2002) argued that the existing mechanisms to guarantee professionalism and regulate practice were insufficient. The Code of Conduct, which was drawn-up in 1992 by the ICRC, and then later institutionalised in 1994, was a ten-point commitment outlining principles which NGOs should adhere. However, adherence to the Code is voluntary with no organisation established to act as a check. Other attempts included the Mohonk Criteria for Humanitarian Assistance in Complex Emergencies (1994) and the Providence Principles (1993). However, they all lack mechanisms to enforce them. A lack of Codes that work in practice do little to ensure a level of standardisation in quality. If agencies are not held to account then the risk of aid "wastage" and negative impacts of aid are arguably increased. Widespread proliferation and variation in agency procedure causes additional problems for 'monitoring compliance with humanitarian protocols' (Bradbury 1995:21) but the "do-as-we-please" approach runs the risk of agencies providing inadequate or inappropriate assistance, duplication of resources and "wastage". Without ensuring professionalism and delineating responsibilities, the risk that assistance could cause more harm than good remains.

2.5. Neutrality and Impartiality

Whether humanitarianism *should* adhere to the original principle of neutrality in controversial situations became a massive dilemma for humanitarians during the Rwandan refugee situation. Slim explored the principle of neutrality explaining that the incorporation of NGOs and complex emergencies ‘has given rise to a growing sense of moral unease among agency policy-makers and field-workers alike. More and more they feel confronted by “moral dilemmas” in their work’ (1997:244). Anderson (1999) who has written extensively on the negative side-effects of humanitarian aid, explains that ‘donor aid is not neutral [...] aid given during conflict cannot remain separate from that conflict’ (Anderson 1999:1), Macrae (1998) highlights that ‘historically, humanitarian values have rested upon the assumption that active military personnel and civilians can be distinguished’ (Macrae 1998:25) but the blurring of these distinctions in the Great Lakes refugee camps led many to argue this was no longer possible, therefore making the delivery of aid increasingly controversial. Within Zaire refugee camps many believed that the negative impact of remaining neutral was too significant to ignore.

African Rights’ account of the Rwandan Genocide and refugee crisis stated, ‘relief workers were quoted as saying that the priority was to feed the hungry, irrespective of what they had done in the past...these comments belie the extreme narrowness of the dominant humanitarian ethic’ (1995:1092). There were concerns that to remain neutral and impartial was to be complicit with the crime and this view became ‘an accepted orthodoxy between 1994-1996 (Fennell 1998:102). Ultimately, the principles of neutrality and impartiality were left with questionable credibility at the end of 1996 with some arguing that it was just a “fig-leaf” for the lack of justice and action to stop violence’ (Bradbury 1995:23). The implications of this criticism reverberated throughout the international humanitarian community and contributed to their decision to move away from remaining politically neutral. The issue of neutrality and agency-awareness to negative implications of assistance was now permanently within the mindset of humanitarians. The suggestion that the time had passed for traditional humanitarian principles gained significant strength during the Great Lakes refugee crisis where the negative impact of neutral aid delivery in this context could not easily be denied.

2.6. Concluding Remarks

The Great Lakes refugee crisis posed significant challenges for humanitarian organisations and the criticisms of the aid response were provocative and widespread. Never before had the provision of humanitarian aid split opinion so extensively and the principles of neutrality and impartiality been so fiercely challenged. MSF and CARE withdrew from the refugee camps due to the misuse of aid, but if widespread withdrawal had occurred and the refugees abandoned by the aid community, then thousands more may have died. The camps did contain genuine refugees who needed and deserved the assistance of the humanitarian community. Indiscriminate delivery of the assistance led to the perpetuation of the militarization and ex-FAR dominance, but I find this justification for a permanent detachment from a universal right to aid to be weak. The aid agencies who continued to operate within the camps evidently “wasted” a significant amount of aid which was misappropriated and in turn, supported the ex-FAR. However, I question the extent to which the refugee crisis would have been improved without them. The ex-FAR took significant amounts of money, military equipment and militia with them to Zaire, and would most likely continued to remilitarize and terrorise the refugee population in the absence of numerous NGOs (with likely support from the Mobutu government). In reality, despite numerous faults with the humanitarian response it should not justify the option of doing nothing at all. There is a humanitarian imperative and moral responsibility to provide aid to those who are vulnerable and this should always remain the core of the humanitarian system.

The real failure in the Great Lakes refugee crisis was that of the international political community; the failure to separate the refugees demonstrated a lack of commitment by political actors and the transfer of responsibility to humanitarians. Ultimately, ‘humanitarians were asked to deal with what was primarily a political and security issue’ (Adelman 2003:127). The subsequent problems within the camps had a lasting impact on the humanitarian psyche and its reputation in academic discussion. The humanitarian system altered significantly since the mid-1990s both in response to the above criticisms and also due to the changing global environment and the following chapter shall address the current debate surrounding contemporary humanitarians to explain the new threads of debate and concern.

3. The Cost of Transformation - A Critical Analysis

The humanitarian system emerged from the 1990s with a distinct want to improve the quality of emergency aid and ensure it would never again be the subject of such fierce criticism. Disagreements on humanitarian practice were nothing new, but the critiques that emerged from the 1990s attacked the moral and ethical supremacy NGOs were believed to possess. However, even though change was prompted, criticisms have not ceased. Barnett (2005) states humanitarianism was ‘a victim of its own success [...] not only did humanitarian assistance expand in scope and scale, but also the very meaning of humanitarianism incorporated new sets of activities; both developments posited dilemmas that the relief community has not yet full sorted out’ (Barnett 2003:407). Today, many believe the NGO ‘community is ailing, experiencing a crisis of legitimacy, a paradigm shift, from neutrality and independence, to dependence on government and other interests’ (Frangonikolopoulos 2005:50).

The current debate ‘reveals deep divisions about principles and practices that are entangled with shifting currents of ethics, power and politics’ (Stein 2008:125) and ‘a struggle to (re)define the humanitarian identity’ (Barnett & Weiss 2008:5). Contemporary discourse is varied, coming from a range of ethical and political standpoints and discusses the emergence of what Duffield terms, “New Humanitarianism” (2001). This final chapter offers a description and evaluation of new humanitarianism, highlighting the predominant critiques and various opinions and argues that a detachment from fundamental principles exposes the system to opportunities for failure. A reinstatement of the fundamental principles of humanitarianism is called for, if not least a contemporary reinterpretation.

3.1. Multi-faceted humanitarianism

The founding principles of humanitarianism became the focus of fierce controversy by the end of the 1990s. Criticisms of the negative impact of humanitarian aid and ‘challenges to its legitimacy and effectiveness, challenges from donors and participants [and] challenges that threatened its bottom line’ (Barnett 2005: 725) led to the emergence of ‘new humanitarianism’ (Duffield 2001). Attempting to right the wrongs

of the past this contemporary humanitarianism demonstrates a ‘clear conscious attempt to [...] move beyond the traditional humanitarian principles that have guided aid agencies for the past century’ (Fox 2001:275). One primary aspect of this new humanitarianism is its more holistic approach. Originally, humanitarianism was defined solely as a mechanism to assist the suffering; however, it grew to include a ‘range of practices that might help individuals avoid future harm’ (Barnett 2003:410). This expansion of humanitarian activities has led to a closer relationship between humanitarians, developmentalists, human rights campaigners and peace-keepers. A majority of high profile humanitarian agencies such as Oxfam, CARE International and World Vision all state on their websites of their responsibilities to fight ‘poverty’ and ‘injustice’ (Oxfam 2009) and aim to do development, disaster relief and advocacy (World Vision 2009); clear evidence of a move towards multi-faceted humanitarianism.

Arguably, ‘the expanding scope and scale of humanitarian action created new opportunities for agencies to help more people than ever before’ and had transformed into something not ‘part of this world but a project designed to transform it’ (Barnett 2005:733). Rieff explains it became hard to understand why NGOs ‘wouldn’t or couldn’t include a broader concept of protection and reconstruction in their aims. Otherwise it would be never-ending work of just providing relief to a system which obviously doesn’t work for the citizen’ (2002:311). It began to be argued that without questioning its long-term effect aid could technically be “wasted”, as the root causes of the emergency would remain unaddressed. As Duffield notes, ‘from saving lives, the shift in humanitarian policy has been towards analysing consequences and supporting social processes’ (Duffield 2001:80).

International NGO mandate-expansion has not met universal agreement over whether it has been positive for the humanitarian system, and for those it seeks to assist. Many argue that it has caused more dilemmas for humanitarians as it confuses the boundaries between humanitarianism and development. Take the Darfur crisis; the problems in Darfur can be identified predominantly as security based and the protection of civilians was the paramount concern. This led to high levels of coordination between relief and human rights agencies. However, an evaluation report of the aid response highlights that the prioritising of protection ‘may have contributed to the problems of meeting the

operational demands of emergency relief programmes' (Minear 2004:91). Fundamentally the report concludes that Darfur raised 'a cautionary flag about the capacity of the global humanitarian apparatus to deliver in situations of widespread extremity' and it led to fears over humanitarian ability. There are real concerns that as humanitarian NGOs encompass new roles of responsibility their ability to achieve them all diminishes. I agree with Barnett & Weiss when they state that 'to define humanitarianism so that it includes nearly all conceivable acts that might potentially alleviate suffering would stretch the concept to the point of uselessness' (2008:11).

As the interest in human rights has grown over the past two decades, there is question over whether humanitarian NGOs should incorporate this within their framework. David Rieff, one the most evocative critics of contemporary humanitarianism, stresses the dangers of this new positioning of human rights, arguing NGOs who adopt a human-rights promotion capacity could withhold humanitarian aid on the basis of human rights abuses (2001:318). Barnett reinforces this concern stating 'human rights workers are frequently prepared to make aid conditional on human rights behaviour' (2003:411). Consequently, there is a major worry that as the spheres of aid, development and human rights blend, some may become "undeserving disaster victims" (Stockton 1998). Nicholas Stockton (former head of emergencies at Oxfam) argues that as NGOs become increasingly concerned with predicting whether their assistance is going to be received by just those in need, the option of NGO withdrawal or withholding aid will become increasingly popular. He concludes that 'the withholding of humanitarian aid as a substitute for judicial action is ethically and morally indefensible' (1998:355).

This rhetorical discussion paints a damning picture of humanitarians who are assumed to be willing to devalue the humanitarian imperative for long-term achievements in liberalisation and human-rights. However, reality proves that there is reason for concern. In Afghanistan, numerous NGOs suspended aid 'when the Taliban issued their edicts restricting women's rights. Here these agencies were clearly putting the basic need of the Afghan people second to human rights concerns' (Fox 2001:283). Tony Vaux (former Emergency Program Coordinator at Oxfam) describes Oxfam's involvement; Oxfam was responsible for the primary renovation of Kabul's water supply but later suspended its operations in 1997 on human rights grounds. This duty was purposely not

transferred to other agencies and ‘Oxfam took active steps to persuade the EU, UK government and others to suspend all aid in Taliban areas’ (2001:125). It was later estimated that 1,800 Afghans died from drinking unclean water. This action not only caused unnecessary death, but did not contribute to improving women’s rights. Ultimately, Oxfam ‘lacked any clear mandate from Afghan women. The position was derived, instead, from a global policy’ (2001:131). The Taliban viewed the anger on women’s rights as an attack on Islam and did little to create peace. In times of war ‘women’s rights had to take lower priority’ (2001:132). Consequently, even though women’s rights are an important issue, in times of conflict, Oxfam should not have pursued the issue ‘when it meant a choice between providing water and keeping up the principled stand’ (Vaux 2001:134).

The temptation to incorporate a human rights agenda within the humanitarian framework is understandable. However, humanitarians must remember their ultimate purpose of providing relief to those in immediate danger. The promotion of human rights is an important battle but not one that should necessarily be fought by humanitarian NGOs. Since 9/11 the increased presence of international NGOs in Islamic nations has caused a new disjuncture between agency workers and recipients (Atmar 2001). The forthright nature of NGOs in Afghanistan, including Oxfam and CARE, who promote western-centric ideals of human rights and liberalization has led NGOs to be seen as promoting Western ideologies and many ‘consider greater democratization, liberalization and emancipation to be overall destructive to the rebuilding of Afghan identity and to the preservation of traditional Afghan values’ (Waisova 2008:78). Great sensitivity to national, religious, cultural and gender identities needs to be taken at all times in order to gain access to as many recipients as possible; a narrowly-defined humanitarian role should be adopted in order to avoid this paradox.

There is also a recurrent fear in the literature of humanitarian agencies applying a “consequentialist ethical framework” to their operations (Duffield 2001). Duffield states ‘much of the criticism of humanitarian action has come from an ethical perspective’ and consequently a ‘counter-ethic has formed the basis of the present accommodation’ (2001:90/91) which attempts to predict outcomes in order to overcome ethical dilemmas.

The paucity of any direct examples of this link between choosing which crises to help based on future predictions is telling and therefore it could largely be described as a rhetorical concern. However, it could be argued that consequentialist intentions are evident in the allocation of governmental funding. Since 9/11 ‘nearly half of all funds given by donor governments to the UN’s twenty-five appeals for assistance went to Afghanistan’ (Barnett & Weiss 2008:34), arguably due to the hoped consequences this aid may create; a safer global environment and the reduced threat of international terrorism. Focusing on long-term humanitarian ends however, requires NGOs to deal with potential situations, which may not work out as predicted. Humanitarians would then have to adopt long-term projects and invest increased budgets – further widening their list of responsibilities. Afghanistan and Iraq have developed into long-term humanitarian projects, and ones which don’t have a foreseeable end.

In spite of these concerns, there is support for multi-faceted and consequentialist humanitarianism. Vaux argues ‘humanitarian aid should play a role not only in saving lives today, but also in saving lives tomorrow’ (2006:249) and there is a strong argument to the idea that humanitarians should see beyond their immediate relief capacity. If NGOs have the ability and knowledge to move into new areas, and if these actions save more lives, then why shouldn’t humanitarian mandates be expanded? Barnett concludes, NGOs;

‘Must be prepared to fight for human rights and democratic reforms. If individuals are at risk 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’ (2005:727).

For example, in long-lasting complex situations, such as the eastern Congo, many NGOs felt compelled to pursue political lobbying and advocacy which aimed to alter existing cyclical problems. Oxfam is currently campaigning for an increased number of peacekeeping troops in the DRC (Oxfam 2009) and Save the Children UK are involved in long-term education projects (Save the Children).

Those in favour of an incorporation of consequentialist ethics into the humanitarian framework argue that without it, humanitarianism would ‘always be far from achieving its primary objectives’ (Ozerdem & Rufini 2005:58). However, there is a great deal of concern that this new tendency to “predict” outcomes jeopardizes the safety of those in need and we should be wary of NGOs and the reliability of their ‘economic, political and social forecasting’ (Stockton 1998:356). In contradiction to Vaux’s abovementioned statement, Duffield states;

‘while prophetic humanitarianism may have been naïve and the agencies involved many mistakes, one cannot help feeling uneasy about the new accommodation and its willingness to sacrifice lives today on the promise of development tomorrow’ (Duffield 2001:82).

This newly expanded humanitarianism signifies not only a ‘retreat from neutrality, but still more importantly of retreat from the universal right to relief based on human need’ (Rieff 2002:315). This puts people vulnerable to decisions made in the West. The theoretical discussion of new humanitarianism accurately describes reality in many cases, as a clear detachment from principles and expanded humanitarianism has created newly identified problems. The aforementioned examples of Afghanistan and Darfur demonstrate that caution is merited. It is hard to accept a humanitarian system in which consequentialist and goal-orientated agencies consider withholding aid on the basis of additional concerns. The merging of the development sphere with humanitarianism and the expansion of its mandate risks the possibility of NGOs over-monopolising responsibility. It is important to question whether expecting or allowing unelected and often unaccountable NGOs to fulfil certain roles is passing-the-buck in terms of responsibility. Is it the duty of humanitarian NGOs to improve human rights, engender development and encourage peace agreements or should these responsibilities remain in the political and development sphere? Additionally, should humanitarians withhold aid or add conditionalities based on factors which are arguably outside their remit?

3.2. Politicisation

Both ‘practitioners and analysts concur that during the past decade, political authorities at every level have become much more active interlocutors in humanitarian matters’ (Minear 2002:81). The politicisation of humanitarianism refers to both its increased

contact with Western governments and those who govern the countries in which they operate. Following the Great Lakes refugee crisis, there was a 'conviction that aid had to become more political, and that it could not remain bound by its original principles if it was to be effective' (Rieff 2002:308). Additionally, there was a strong argument that aid could never be neutral, as it is incapable of remaining apolitical in complex emergencies (Anderson 1999). The expansion of humanitarianism into new arenas has invoked a much closer relationship between government and aid agency as governments arguably see it as an opportunity to promote development (Duffield 2001). For example, the post-Rwanda years witnessed a significant increase in governmental sub-contracting of funding for humanitarian assistance; in 2005, Denmark channelled '36% of its humanitarian funding through NGOs, France 40% and the United States upwards of 60%' (Frangonikolopoulos 2005:52). This increased interaction between humanitarian agencies and western governments led many to become concerned that NGO's are increasingly influenced by western political agendas.

Vaux argues that the closer relationship between humanitarians and politicians is a positive result of the post-1990s era as it 'gives agencies greater profile, more resources, and more influence' (2006:241). However, how beneficial is this to those humanitarianism seeks to assist? Even though the profile of the agency and the levels of funding are increased, it is imperative that this boost in agency growth does not act as a trade-off for the loss of independence and the seeping of political ambitions onto the humanitarian agenda. As governmental donors earmark funds, independence is eroded as is seen in the post 9/11 era where governmental funds have been increasingly allocated to humanitarian missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

It is easy to see how the principle of agency independence could be compromised by politicisation of the field and there is the very real worry that it has left organisations vulnerable to manipulation. Barnett explains that Western States can now direct agencies to certain locations in which they have earmarked funding and encourage NGOs to 'act in ways counter to their interests and principles' (2005:731). He goes on to explain the alarming development in the way donor governments fund humanitarian missions;

‘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’ (Barnett 2005:731).

Tellingly, in 2002 almost ‘half of all funds given by donor governments to the UN’s 25 appeals for assistance went to Afghanistan’ (Barnett 2005:731). The allocation of aid would have been very different if the funds had been distributed on the basis of need. This clearly demonstrates that the political agenda of the West can manipulate the allocation of humanitarian assistance and warrants concern that governments are using contemporary humanitarianism as a juggernaut to promote a neoliberal transformation of the developing world. This is not to say that all aid agencies are willing to act as lap-dogs for politicians and ‘within the humanitarian community, different paradigms for conceptualising the humanitarian and the political and for guiding day-to-day work are present’ (Minear 2002:80). But, it is a real concern that whilst some NGOs seek high-profile government funding for earmarked regions, invaluable assistance is reduced in other situations with more pressing needs. In the post 9/11 world, and with security at the centre of global politics, the strategic earmarking of governmental funding is only likely to increase and be used by the West as a tool for the geopolitical containment of international threats (Slim 1997, Duffield 2001:541). There is the very real concern that humanitarianism will be increasingly used by Western political powers to “justify” military action. Kosovo and, more recently Afghanistan are prominent examples of the deployment of United States military in the name of fighting a “humanitarian war” – the name in itself a slight oxymoron.

In regards to Third World governments, there has also been an increased political role which NGOs have undertaken. In response to criticism that humanitarian agencies cannot remain isolated from local politics, NGOs have become actively engaged in vocalising opinions on conflict and warfare. An increase in complex emergencies has seen NGOs make decisions and adopt roles which are arguably political in nature; such as providing long-term welfare services and societal re-construction (Duffield 1997). Save the Children UK began operating in the eastern Congo during the Rwandan genocide to help Rwandan refugees. Although it remains operational within the region today, it has now expanded its role within the DRC to include training teachers,

building schools, and established a long-term presence in the region. It is also undertaken political lobbying to abolish national school fees (Save the Children 2009). Elsewhere, Duffield explains that in the case of Angola the government failed to maintain the public sector and ‘NGOs have become the main service providers’ (1997:533). In situations such as these, with a focus on long-term development goals, NGOs are dealing with situations which are slow to improve and not developing as planned (particularly in the DRC).

Fox raises important questions of whether ‘aid workers should be making important political decisions; ‘suddenly the unelected, often unaccountable and usually foreign aid workers become judge, juror and politician in Third World conflicts’ (2001:281). They are unelected, usually Western NGOs, and fundamentally, not politicians. As with the first part of this analysis, is it the duty of humanitarians to not only provide aid to those in need, offer physical protection, generate long-term development - but to fix the political realm and adopt these duties also? Where does the remit of humanitarians end? Ultimately, whilst ‘aid should be politically informed, as it increasingly is, it should not be politically driven [...] it is not the role of aid workers to serve this purpose, as political responsibility lies in the political not the humanitarian sphere’ (Ozerdem & Rufini 2005:66).

The question is therefore, does the politicisation of NGOs have a detrimental effect? I would argue that an over-monopolisation of responsibility and particularly the adoption of political roles could impact negatively on long-term post-conflict reconstruction. Adopting the responsibilities of long-term welfare provision and roles which belong to the political sphere transfers the obligation from the state to the humanitarian sector. The transfer of political responsibility acts a “scapegoat” for governments who don’t therefore, need to be concerned with meeting the needs of their people and maintaining a public sector. It does little to force nation leaders to be held accountable and stimulate change. It disconnects the state from the people and risks turning the aid community into ‘a humanitarian shadow state – it replaces the absent state, operates informally in the public sphere, and formally in civil society, enjoys autonomy and carries out humanitarian, social and political tasks’ (West 2001:9).

3.3. Institutional Learning

Out of the mid-1990s came an understanding that the structure of the system needed to be altered, with lessons needing to be learnt and accountability needing to be enforced. However, the area of institutional learning and increased accountability are two areas in which ‘the humanitarian enterprise has, by and large, responded haltingly and inadequately’ (Minear 2002:169). Although many aid agencies did address some of their shortcomings post-Rwanda in terms of improving levels of staff training and broadening their understanding of local and regional conflicts, ‘it is hard to award the humanitarian community with high marks when it comes to learning’ (Barnett 2003:412). When discussing the problem of institutional learning Minear outlines three main concerns;

‘One obstacle is the fast-paced nature of the enterprise, which puts a premium on quick action rather than analysis and reflection. Another is the tendency to approach every crisis as unique, devaluing earlier experience and leading to the repetition of earlier mistakes. A third is a certain defensiveness to criticisms’ (2002:173).

Even though new humanitarianism demonstrates some significant changes from its preceding level of evolution, these alterations are not necessarily a direct, controlled and engendered response to previous problems. The humanitarian community has changed but learning lessons from the past has not created a fool-proof humanitarianism which is guaranteed to be equipped to deal with such situations again.

Firstly, there is a problem with evaluation and analysis. The notion of agency evaluation is a recent concept and surfaced in response to the situation in the Great Lakes refugee crisis; however agencies have adopted it to various levels. Frangonikolopoulos highlights that ‘evaluation material is rarely provided on a systematic basis, if at all’ (2005:62). The largest multi-donor evaluation of a humanitarian response was that of the Rwandan genocide and subsequent refugee crisis which resulted in a five-volume and highly comprehensive analysis containing suggestions for future institutional change. It did achieve some levels of success in encouraging alterations, with perhaps the most permanent outcome being the creation of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP). However even

accepting some successes, the suggestions of the evaluation and particularly the ‘momentum to implement its recommendations has waned’ (Minear 2002:177).

Terry (2002) and Frangonikolopoulos (2005) believe that the reasoning behind limited evaluation and subsequent agency learning is due to the fear of criticism and a preoccupation with self-preservation. NGOs depend on the satisfaction of donors to ensure financial stability. Consequently, ‘aid agencies have a strong institutional incentive to portray humanitarian action as an indispensable remedy for human suffering [...] and the negative consequences of humanitarian action are downplayed’ (Terry 2002:229). It is not only of importance for NGOs to impress the public, but also for the government to appear as if it is spending public money wisely on effective aid missions. Combined this leads to a lack of open discussion in the public domain of both successes *and* failures. Ultimately this concealed area of discussion leads to limited learning as pressures on NGOs to change are weak and without public backing. The effect of public pressure should not be underestimated and if the aid community was more transparent and candid in its evaluations, then the pressure to enact specific change would be increased.

An additional problem is the tendency to treat every situation as “unique”. All humanitarian situations vary on cause and context, but to isolate incidents is not helpful for lesson-learning. Minear stresses the importance of looking ‘beyond country-specific idiosyncrasies’ (2002:4). It is beneficial for NGOs to make comparisons with other situations, and they can offer early-warning signals for future crises. Terry also raises the interesting aspect of governmental manipulation; ‘rather than applying knowledge gained in the past to contemporary operations, donors, particularly members of the US government, have used “lessons” instrumentally, to support policy preferences’ (2002:238). Terry uses the case of the invoking of memories of the Khmer Rouge ‘to justify “less voluntary” repatriation from the Rwandan camps in 1996 and using “revelations” in 1997 of the abuse of refugee aid to call for tighter controls in the future’ which she calls a ‘shameless abuses of history’ (2002:238). Whilst it must be remembered that no two situations are identical, important lessons can be learnt by comparing similar situations and ‘the price of reinventing the wheel with each new

crisis is the repetition of mistakes and the obscuring of possible lessons' (Minear 2002:4).

One lasting criticism of humanitarianism that has followed it into the contemporary era is that of accountability. Humanitarians owe it to both the public who fund them, and those they assist, to be fully accountable and transparent. Various codes of conduct were created in the mid-1990s to attempt to regulate standards and quality, however many of these attempts lacked strength to enforce any real guidelines. The Sphere Project was the largest attempt of its kind to ensure accountability and was created in 1998 and revised in 2004 (Sphere Project 2004). However, it has some major flaws in being an effective and universal tool for NGOs and consequently, 'issues of accountability remain unresolved and uncertain' (Vaux 2006:242). The Sphere was 'supposed to guarantee the ethics of humanitarian action, but fails to shed light on how to reconcile competing principles' (Terry 2000:1). In terms of its strength, the Sphere Project did attempt to reassert the "humanitarian imperative" and create a "back to basics" or 'minimalist' school of thought' by separating humanitarian relief from development (Vaux 2006:247). However, the fundamental and pivotal flaw with the Sphere Project, like other such attempts at ensuring standards, is its lacks of an enforcement and accountability mechanism (Van Dyke & Waldman 2004).

It is important to note that attempts to improve accountability are central and it is of paramount importance to ensure accountability to civilians who receive humanitarian aid. There is a need to overcome the problems which emulated from the Great Lakes refugee crisis in terms of agency coordination and competition which would be greatly aided by a regulatory mechanism. However, there needs to be a mechanism established with actual power to make NGOs accountable but due to the institutional culture of humanitarianism and sense of individualism, the realisation of such a mechanism seems slight. Additionally, a lack of governmental interest in regulating the system works against the creation of a mechanism with the ability to impose law or sanctions on humanitarian NGOs.

3.4. Concluding Remarks

Many thought that the dawn of new humanitarianism ‘had the potential to simplify many of the challenges facing the humanitarian sector’ and ‘to offer a methodological framework for the new broader humanitarian community’ (Ozerdem & Rufini 2005:63). However, what the changes actually created was a much-less impressive and reassuring rebirth. New humanitarianism was met by a wave of new critiques. Conceivably something as morally provocative as humanitarianism will never have a harmonious NGO existence, but the concerns regarding contemporary humanitarian NGOs warrant serious attention. Ultimately, the entire *raison d'être* of the plethora of humanitarian agencies is to save lives. Consequently finding the most reliable and ideal method of humanitarianism that there can be, should be an overriding duty of both humanitarians and wider humanity.

The foundational principles of the humanitarian movement are argued by some such as Lischer (2005) and Ozerdem & Rufini (2005) to be outdated, impractical and impossible to follow in contemporary conflict. However, it is this willingness to disrepute and disregard the importance of these principles which is counter-productive to the humanitarian spirit. I wouldn't deny that ‘humanitarianism can no longer hide behind the façade of “altruism” and expect that all its actions will simply result in something good’ (Ozerdem & Rufini 2005:65) but I stress that ‘they must respect their commitment to impartial and neutral humanitarian assistance, and in so doing reassert the distinction between humanitarian action proper and the humanitarian motives of the few and powerful countries that finance their activities’ (Frangonikolopoulos 2005:71).

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to assess the humanitarian community from the Great Lakes refugee crisis to the present day and to highlight the various strands of critique which have emerged. It has argued that a detachment from the foundational principles of the humanitarian movement and the recent wave of new humanitarianism could be detrimental to the efficiency and effectiveness of agencies to assist as many recipients as possible.

The primary concern of many academics and practitioners is whether it is possible to adhere to Dunant's principles in modern complex emergencies where traditional identification of combatants and non-combatants is blurred. Some argue that 'humanitarian agencies cannot simply be compelled to act when and where possible, regardless of the possible negative impact of their actions' (Ozerdem & Rufini 2005:65) and that the foundational principles are out-dated and impractical. Others believe that the contemporary global system enables humanitarians to move beyond limited mandates and have 'the capacity and resources to be far more ambitious and to accept greater responsibility' (Vaux 2006:252). Barnett describes the "new function" of humanitarianism which 'no longer clings to the principles of neutrality, independence, and impartiality as a method of depoliticisation, but increasingly views the former two principles as a (unnecessary) luxury' (2005:734).

Whilst I do not dispute that the existing global system has changed dramatically since the days of traditional humanitarianism, I find significant reason for concern regarding the current trend within the humanitarian system and its apparent willingness to abandon the principles which should be at its core. Neutral humanitarianism did cause problems in Zaire, but there was no other option. If all NGOs had decided to withdraw from that situation, it would have been likely that thousands would have died. The real failure in this case, similar to the preceding genocide, was the lack of international political commitment to solving the crisis. Humanitarians should not be responsible for performing all the duties required in complex situations. The international political community should take responsibility for its duties to implement international humanitarian law and not expect humanitarian NGOs to deal with political issues. The worry is that as humanitarians 'over-identify themselves with the humanitarian imperative and its specific humanitarian duties so that, far from framing it as a duty for others [primarily the state], they will end up colonising the humanitarian ethic as their duty alone' (Slim 2002:122). Their ability is not limitless and the need is unrelenting, consequently, the primary focus of humanitarian agencies should be saving lives.

The merging of humanitarian and political spheres is further reason for concern as the purity of humanitarian motives may be compromised. Acknowledgments 'that humanitarian action might sometimes need to disregard the principles of impartiality

and neutrality in order to be more careful about possible negative consequences, the new aid orthodoxy also runs the risk of blurring important boundaries between humanitarian work and political action' (Ozerdem & Rufini 2005:65). Humanitarianism is increasingly used to promote development and as a tool by Western governments for conflict containment. However, humanitarianism cannot 'fill the vacuum of effective political engagement' (Duffield, Macrae & Curtis 2008:273) as was seen in the Great Lakes crisis.

The basic humanitarian principles 'are as valid now as they were in 1859...[and] it is absolutely right that the humanitarian system should be held accountable to these norms.' (Stockton 1998:359). Today, the move towards 'humanitarian conditionality and its accompanying hierarchy of concern' (Duffield 2001:107) is dangerous. Caution must be taken when predicting future consequences, and this supports the argument that humanitarians cannot and should not base decisions on presumed outcomes. The humanitarian imperative and moral duty to assist should be the principle motivation. In reference to practice of withholding aid for fear of it feeding combatants or being manipulated, Fox provocatively states;

'It is ironic that even the most hardened criminals on America's Death Row are entitled to food, water and shelter before they are executed. It is perhaps testament to the wholesale demonization of some communities in the Third World that they don't even qualify for a judge or jury before they are condemned to death' (Fox 2001:288).

Ultimately, neutrality, impartiality, universality and independence offer boundaries and guidance to humanitarians and as the role which they undertake becomes increasingly complex, these principles are compromised and the purity of motivations threatened.

The Future of Humanitarianism

The question remaining is how should the humanitarian system move forward in the twenty-first century and how should its role be defined? In truth, humanitarian action must be driven 'not by ambitions to solve all of the world's problems, but by a more modest aim to alleviate suffering irrespective of colour and creed when all else has

failed' (Duffield, Macrae & Curtis 2001:273). Reform of the current system is needed along with a movement towards re-establishing a moral and principled framework.

According to Minear (2002), politics and neutrality are conflicting paradigms. Therefore, in order to operate in a neutral manner, humanitarian agencies need to distance themselves from the political sphere. This is not to say that they should be politically inept, nor that they should not always remain aware of the political context, but they should not operate with political agendas. Perhaps, like MSF which acts as a witness and vocalises injustice, humanitarians could adopt a moral voice but refrain from becoming actively involved in promoting human rights or political reforms. To engender a shrinking of responsibility and a return to principles will require 'a more collective approach among the agencies and greater willingness to challenge public opinion and the self-interest of Western donors' (Vaux 2006:252). It is a fact of our globalised world that humanitarianism cannot remain isolated from politics but it must not lead to the 'use of humanitarian aid by agencies to pursue political ends' (Fox 2001:288).

There is also a strong need for a more cohesive humanitarian community. Although the term "community" has been used within this study, it must not be taken to mean that humanitarians are linked by anything beyond a common moral duty. The community contains a vast array of agencies, all originating in response to different crises and based on various ideologies. This plethora of agencies makes it difficult to come to system-wide conclusions and recommendations but it would be highly beneficial for the future success of the system if there was more interagency agreement.

The terrorist events of 2001 and the post-9/11 world is one in which 'the pursuit of peace and security has assumed a new meaning for major Western powers, especially the United States' (De Torrente 2004:26). Even though the problems which were raised in Chapter Three are yet to be overcome, the post-9/11 world has added a further dimension to these problems. Nicolas de Torrente, the Executive Director of Doctors Without Borders (MSF-USA), discusses the trend to combine humanitarianism with politics, and increasingly within the western security agenda. He argues that the "global war on terror" seeks to bring aid organizations into the fold by projecting the view that

the Western world faces an existential threat and by arguing that fence-sitting is impossible and ultimately immoral' (2004:26). He stresses the concern that the incorporation of humanitarianism into counterterrorism missions places the neutral, impartial and universal delivery of aid in jeopardy as the largest amount of funding will be earmarked for regions which concern the security of the West.

The US in particular seems able and willing to monopolise the humanitarian sphere to protect its national security. It entices the creation of a humanitarian system which does not respond to the needs of civilians but the wants of global superpowers and this is of a concern for the future credibility of humanitarians. There is something uncomfortable about the direction in which the relationship between the political and humanitarian sphere is heading and particularly of this new – and predominantly US – accommodation of using humanitarianism to further counterterrorism missions. Using relief in this way risks NGOs having to deal with situations which do not progress as planned, Afghanistan being a recent example. This all adds to the argument set out in Chapter Three that there is a 'need for politics to withdraw from the humanitarian arena' (Barnett 2005:64) to enable and ensure a more universal access to assistance.

Unfortunately, suggestions such as the one of this study are likely to remain conjectural as the probability of them disseminating into reality is unlikely. One of the problems which has remained with humanitarianism is its apparent inability to learn, react cohesively to problems and create accountability frameworks to ensure system-wide quality. The vast variation of agency viewpoints within the humanitarian system makes lessons and suggestions for change 'appear pedestrian and not translate easily into sharp edged policy recommendations' (Hoffman & Weiss 2008:272). The slow dissemination of suggested changes calls for a need for both academics *and* practitioners to enthusiastically engage a proactive reinvention plan. Whilst there remains no panacea for all the difficulties facing the humanitarian community it is imperative that it attempts to continually strive to improve. The role of humanitarian agencies in the coming years should be to reinstate of primary focus of delivering high-quality, neutral, impartial and universal emergency relief; 'while there may be a need to reform the humanitarian system in response to changes in the international system, this does not

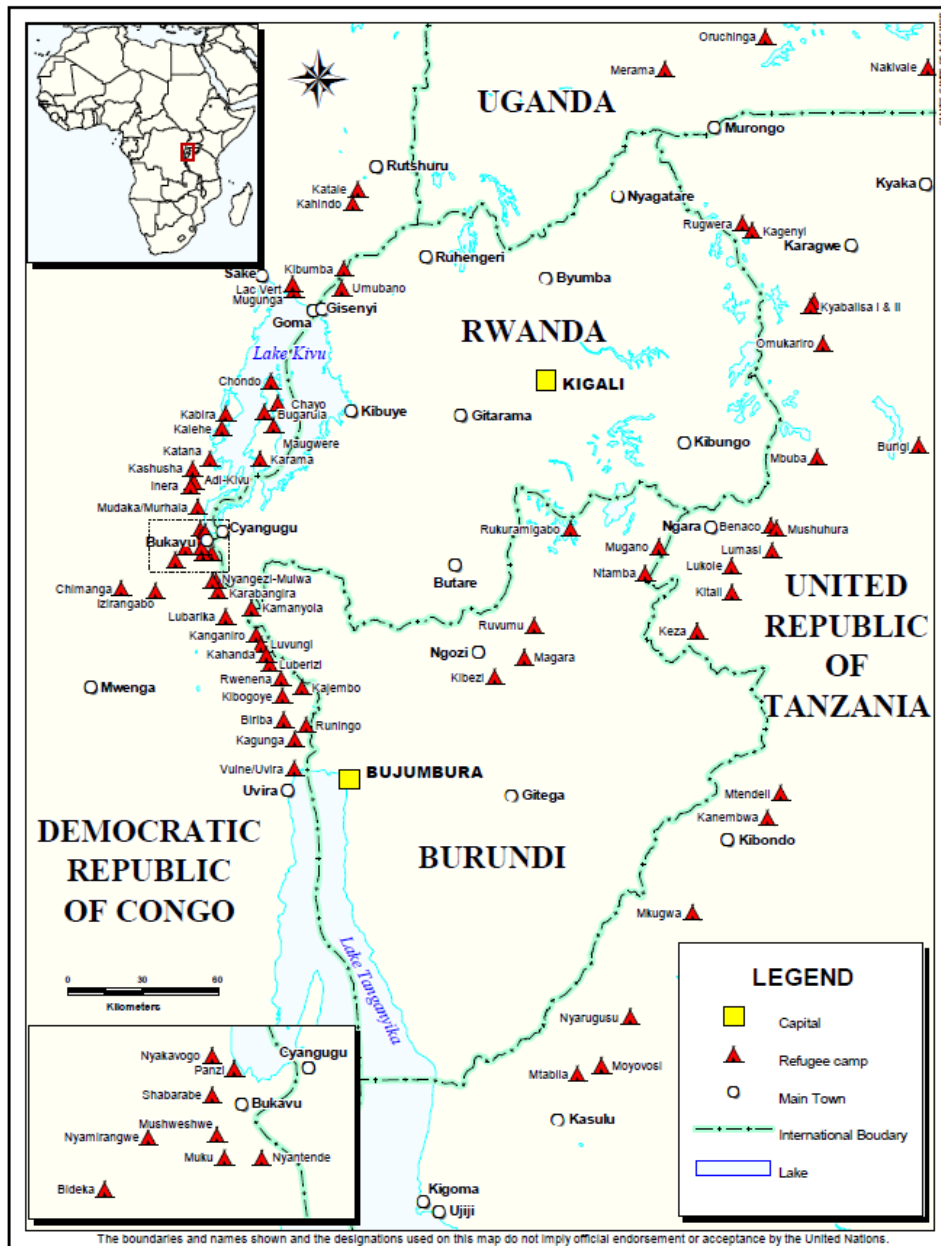
mean the abandonment of the principles and values underlying humanitarianism. Rather, they need to be reasserted critically' (Duffield, Macrae & Curtis 2001:273).

Taking into consideration the post-9/11 dimension to humanitarianism combined with the concerns outlined in Chapter Three, the future of the community is likely to be both troublesome and challenging. The predominant dilemmas facing contemporary humanitarianism include concerns of its new multi-faceted nature; the politicisation of the field; the lack of institutional learning; and now also its incorporation into the global "war against terror". These dilemmas are yet to be overcome and an essential and pressing question at the end of this first decade of the new century is how should the role of humanitarian NGOs be defined? The answer is a reinstatement of neutral, impartial, universal and independent humanitarianism which will assist all, regardless of location, ethnicity, culture, history or political affiliation. Only by readopting these principles and reasserting the humanitarian imperative will the universal delivery of aid be safeguarded.

Appendix One

UNHCR (1998) *Refugee Camps in the Great Lakes Region*. UNHCR Mapping Unit [online] [Accessed 2nd March 2009] Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/3ae6baf210.html>

REFUGEE CAMPS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION (As of 1995)



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