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Humanitarian agendas, state reconstruction and democratisation processes in war-torn societies

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Introduction

This paper responds to criticisms of humanitarian activities that assert that they harm rather than support processes of democratisation, accountability and other components of “good governance” in societies emerging from “complex political emergencies.” It does this by summarising the emerging critique of the “humanitarian international” (HI) as articulated by Alex de Waal,¹ one of the most prominent and polemical proselytisers of the death-knell of humanitarianism.² He argues that the HI’s processes are negative because they hinder the development of the strong bonds between state and society necessary for the development of democratic good governance.

The paper challenges de Waal’s claims. Firstly, the paper positions de Waal’s thesis against current “cosmopolitan liberal” theories of the internationalisation of democracy, whose framework is shared by the HI. It finds that his thesis has some strength at an abstract, theoretical and very generalised level. De Waal’s claim that states are a better locus for democratisation and institution-building processes than international organisations is supported.

Secondly, however, the paper goes on to examine the effects of humanitarian action on those in its receipt. This perspective suggests that de Waal’s thesis is too abstract and *a priori*. It argues that the processes of humanitarian action can inculcate a culture of “stateness” within its subjects. This new culture *can* (but does not necessarily) lead to outcomes propitious for democracy and “good governance:” an active and reciprocal state-society relationship capable of coping with the ravages of a new world “order” which undermines the very structures idealised by analysts such as de Waal.

This combination of culture and ideology, deeply rooted in the processes initiated by the HI forces brought into play in the aftermath of political and economic crises rooted in the diminished capacity of states, will not lead to de Waal’s imagined statist *status quo ante*. It may, though, contribute to the creation of a new and partially globalised “state class” and citizenry better equipped to deal with the global processes of state and societal restructuring in which war-torn societies are most intricately intertwined.

De Waal’s nostalgia for the state of days gone by seems quaint in the contemporary era of globalisation. This is an era in which states, as Mark Duffield notes:

have been effectively drawn into multilevelled and increasingly non-territorial decision making networks that bring together governments, international agencies, non-governmental organisations, and so on, in new and complex ways ... there has been a noticeable move from the hierarchical, territorial and bureaucratic relations of government to ...

¹ Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*, London, African Rights and the International African Institute with James Currey, 1997.

² Joanna Macrae, “The Death of Humanitarianism: An Anatomy of the Attack,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 17, 1 (1998), pp. 24-32, sets the standard for a general assessment of the assault on international humanitarian institutions.

more polyarchical, non-territorial and networked relations of governance.³

A subsidiary component within the criticism of de Waal's thesis derives from the above point. De Waal has misinterpreted the "new global order," its effect on Africa, and the role of the HI within it. Part of the reason for the disappearance of the state de Waal would like to revive rests within the global processes behind what could be called the "financial international."⁴ The international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and the global liberalisation of productive and financial capital they represent and facilitate, are partially responsible for the devastation of many third world states and the services they once provided.

The FI and the HI are both components of globalisation processes, but they are pulling in opposite directions and they are in no way equal forces. De Waal pays inadequate attention to the deleterious effects of global economic and financial restructuring on fragile "third world" state-society complexes.⁵ Thus he allows himself to place the FI and the HI into an unholy alliance in which they share power and blame equally. He bends his stick too far away from the FI. In so doing he chastises the King's men trying to pick up Humpty Dumpty's pieces more than he condemns the less visible forces accountable for the wobbly and delicate precariousness of the shell before it was pushed off the wall.⁶

This paper suggests, then, that the HI's actions in war-torn societies can lead to actors "thinking like a state"⁷ in new ways in spite of the global conditions militating against their positive restructuring. However, these actions are not yet enough. Given the destructive nature of the current era, contemporary HI activities are not adequate to the task of fostering democratic, accountable, and transparent relationships within states and

³ Mark Duffield, "Introduction," *Liberal Peace and the New Wars: Development and Security on the Borders of Global Governance*, forthcoming.

⁴ De Waal does not use the phrase "financial international," but if one is to attribute similarly conspiratorial tendencies to it as he does to the HI, the notion of a shadowy – or triumphant – global force should be likewise invoked.

⁵ The phrase "state-society complex," signifying the complicated and intricately intertwined relationships between these two concepts, too often separated, arises out of Robert Cox's work. See his collection, *Approaches to World Order*, with Timothy Sinclair, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996 and "Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium: Prospects for an Alternative World Order," *Review of International Studies*, 25 (1999), pp. 3-28.

⁶ This point owes much to, and is elaborated upon by, Mark Duffield, "Post-modern Conflict: Warlords, Post-adjustment States and Private Protection," *Civil Wars*, 1, 1 (Spring 1998); his "Globalisation and War Economies: Promoting Order or the Return of History?" *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 23, 1 (Fall 1999); and his forthcoming book.

⁷ This concept is adapted from James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: On How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998, although it implies more sympathy towards a "modernist" state project than does Scott. Scott, however, implies a distinction between "high-modernism" and what one might call a less-planned and state-imposed modernity. For the impression with regards to East Asia that this approach has made on a Hayekian, see the between David Moore and Chandran Kukathas, "Hayekian Interpretations: A Debate over the 'Asian Way' and Modern Liberalism," *Policy*, 15, 4, Summer 1999-2000, pp. 30-34 and Kukathas's instigating article in the previous issue. Non-subscribers to this obscure Australian Hayekian journal can visit <http://www.cis.org.au>

societies emerging from complex political emergencies. Humanitarian actors must develop and implement specific forms of *democratic* stateness during the relief and development phases of reconstructing war-torn societies. Longitudinal studies of the contributions of past humanitarian action towards “democratic stateness” in new and renewed states are needed to assess the efficacy of such processes, and to develop new institutional forms for such.

Methodology

Taking off from a discussion of de Waal’s *Famine Crimes*, this paper assesses how the activities of the humanitarian international in political crises fit with analyses offered by International Relations theoretical literature on the globalisation of democracy and the alteration of state-like processes and forms. Such a review can help understand how humanitarian actions affect processes of state-building and democratisation in war-torn societies, and how they are altered by contemporary modes of globalisation – be they neo-liberal, welfarist or ameliorative. The paper encounters two usually distinct social science disciplines as it merges development studies (within which “disaster” and “relief” studies” make up a distinct component and are themselves given a political dimension with the phrase “complex political emergency”) and international relations theory.

The empirical material incorporated in this paper was gathered during three days of archival and library research at UNHCR in Geneva. Rifling through Jeff Crisp’s files resulted in the filling of two large boxes of photo-copied material, ranging from QIP (Quick Impact Project) reports to working papers on UNDP-UNHCR “operational synergies” and World Bank Post-Conflict Unit press releases. More structured research in UNHCR’s Centre for Documentation and Research resulted in a collection of some primary, and mostly secondary, sources. The material gathered has thus served as an empirical anchor for this paper’s assertions about the capacity of humanitarian activities to encourage their subjects to “think like states” – and democratic ones at that.

The paper does not have to be read in its entirety. Readers may concentrate on the critique of de Waal, or focus on how theories of globalisation and democracy relate to the humanitarian agenda, etc. the following “table of contents” suggests.

1. *The humanitarian international exposed: a critique of de Waal’s Famine Crimes.*
2. *On the state in war-torn Africa: theories of the crisis of the African state, explicated to contrast de Waal’s work.*
3. *The globalisation of democracy and the African crisis: an examination of theories of “cosmopolitan democracy” in the International Relations literature in comparison with de Waal.*
4. *Thinking like a state and the “international of decent feelings”:* an attempt to show how humanitarian activities approximate state structures.

5. *Humanitarian action, “stateness” and democratisation in a Kenyan refugee camp*: a critical examination of a study of efforts to democratise a Somali refugee camp in Kenya.

6. *Other constructions of “stateness” in war-torn recovery areas and Conclusions and new research agendas*: a list of humanitarian activities which develop “stateness,” and some suggestion about what kind of research would lead to a deepening of democracy in them, and/or how to determine the ways in which such interventions affect the life of individuals and the actions of groups.

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The humanitarian international exposed

Humanitarian action has come under much fire lately. Even as he defends it, Michael Ignatieff has claimed that the institutions and practices of international humanitarianism are reaching a “mid-life” crisis.⁸ Alex de Waal, however, has made the much more strident claim that today’s humanitarian activities do more harm than good and that unless they are changed drastically they will continue to do so. This paper will assess his claims and assertions.

Firstly, a definition of humanitarian action must be attempted. Perhaps that is best attempted by elucidating what it is *not*. As James Orbinski put it when accepting the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of *Médecins Sans Frontières*:

There is a confusion and inherent ambiguity in the development of so-called ‘military humanitarian operations’. We must reaffirm with vigour and clarity the principle of an independent civilian humanitarianism. And we must criticise those interventions called ‘military-humanitarian’. Humanitarian action exists only to preserve life, not to eliminate it.⁹

Orbinski’s “independent civilian humanitarianism” may be somewhat biased in the direction of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the MSF. However, the

⁸ Michael Ignatieff, “Human Rights, the Midlife Crisis,” *New York Review of Books*, May 20, 1999. See also his *Soldiers’ Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, New York, Metropolitan, 1998, in which he defends humanitarianism – with qualifications.

⁹ Dr. James Orbinski, President of the MSF International Council, Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech, Oslo, Norway, on December 10, 1999.

practices and ideologies implied by such a notion include the tasks of United Nations agencies such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in spite of their more bureaucratically, multilaterally, and diplomatically bound functions. Their mandate is to protect and to relieve the suffering of the innocent victims of wars and “natural” disasters.¹⁰ It extends to the reconstruction of the conditions for the resumption of “normal” life when disasters and wars have ended.

The distinction raised by Obrinksi in the first line of the above quote is important, given that military invasion of a sovereign state in order to preserve international peace and security – or the interests of some states – is often called “humanitarian intervention.” Such confusion is added to by many other factors. Some humanitarian action ostensibly relieving innocent peoples’ suffering during wars and their aftermath (or those participants in war for whom the “rules” would otherwise be broken) is supported by states which by commission or omission may be politically (or economically) responsible for the crises. Humanitarian action can depoliticise crisis situations.

Thus it is little wonder that humanitarian activities are gaining a bad name. In addition to the military usurping the phrase, there is widespread “compassion fatigue,”¹¹ well-publicised cynicism about the motivations and practices of emergency aid workers and their peers in the United Nations and NGO systems,¹² and pessimism in the wake of an artificial post-Cold War exuberance. A satiated public in the “zones of safety”¹³ is bound to be cynical.

Yet there has never been as sophisticated a critique of the “humanitarian international” as that articulated in Alex de Waal’s *Famine Crimes*. Quite simply, for him, the “HI” does more harm than good. Such an assertion demands explication and, if warranted, critique.

De Waal defines the HI at least twice.¹⁴ It is both “cosmopolitan” and “international” and it is made up of an “élite.” It consists of “relief workers, officials of donor agencies, consultant academics and the like, and the institutions for which they work.” Without qualifying “the like” and thus tapping further into populist currents of anti-intellectualism, he goes on “by extension” to include “journalists and editors who faithfully propagate the humanitarian world-view.” Without defining this “world-view” explicitly, he goes on to enlist the French post-modernist philosopher Michel Foucault and American anthropologist Liisa Malkki in his critical battalion – and they are academics both! Using the former’s idea that power and control pervade all human

¹⁰ “Natural” is in quotation marks because it is well known that famines, for example, have many deep socio-economic causes, and they affect some groups of people more than others. To make one extremely simple spatial observation: floods and cyclones affect poor areas more than rich ones.

¹¹ Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the c fault: they make us “feel overstimulated and bored all at once.”*

¹² Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity*, Free Press, New York, 1997, for a view advocating libertarian notions of the free market, owing much to the philosophy of Ayn Rand. Graham Hancock, *Lords of Poverty*, London, Macmillan, 1989 is a less explicitly laissez-faire and more “populist” critique.

¹³ The phrase is Ignatieff’s, in *Soldiers’ Honour*.

¹⁴ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, pp. 3-4, 65.

action, especially efforts to be “helpful,”¹⁵ de Waal parenthesises this enigmatic phrase: the humanitarian international’s “growth is associated with the dominance of what may be called, to borrow from Foucault, a ‘humanitarian mode of power.’”¹⁶ He goes on:

The humanitarian international is avowedly dedicated to fighting famine,¹⁷ but it does not in fact operate in a way that enables this to be achieved. There are ‘successes’ and ‘failures’...but the unexpected consequences of humanitarian action are more significant. An exploration of the principles that drive ‘actually existing humanitarianism’ reveals that its power is exercised and its resources dispensed at the cost of weakening the forms of political accountability that underlie the prevention of famine.¹⁸

The phrase “political accountability” contains the nub of de Waal’s argument. Following Amartya Sen he claims that famine and other disasters do not occur in liberal democratic societies because the explicit political contract existing in all such societies actually works to make governments responsible to their citizens: famine will not occur because if it does, the government will lose power. By extension, other crises will not occur because governments are legitimate: by their nature the rules of the contract are consensual, so most people agree to be bound by them. Instability ensues when a contract is in the process of articulation. Outside intervention interferes with this process instead of hastening or strengthening it. The history of the development of this political contract in India is detailed to support this claim.¹⁹

This is a “politician” argument as opposed to the oft flouted discourse about the primacy of the economic, which allows much authoritarianism to slip through its back door. Political relationships of reciprocity between state institutions and citizens must evolve in societies in order for liberal democracy to flourish. Such a flowering makes governments very reluctant to allow famine to occur. To extend the logic, such social and political contracts force states to provide other economic goods to its citizens, or at least to establish the conditions by which wealth can be accumulated and redistributed in a just manner. They may even think twice about starting wars.

¹⁵ One wonders if it is coincidental that this post-modernist scepticism sounds much like neo-liberal thinking, which suggests that all state-workers are self-seeking opportunists using the language of “helping” to their own ends.

¹⁶ Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995.

¹⁷ De Waal’s book is primarily addressed to issues of famine, but he slips many times into discussions of wars and “complex political emergencies” without qualifying the shift. My concern is more with CPEs and their aftermath than with famines.

¹⁸ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 4. He does not acknowledge borrowing the “actually existing ...” phrase from Rudolph Bahro’s analysis of “actually existing socialism” in *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, London, New Left Books, 1978.

¹⁹ Arundhati Roy, *The Cost of Living*, London, Flamingo, 1999 would beg to differ. I should also note some thoughts that came to mind as I discovered that *Famine Crimes* was not held in any South African library in the computerised inter-library loan system I was using. Firstly: South Africans do not care about the rest of Africa. Indeed they may not even feel part of it. Secondly: I cannot recall famines in South Africa, even during the darkest days of apartheid. What does that fact do for the liberal democratic thesis?

Any forces – be they ostensibly beneficial or overtly nasty – which take away from that virtuous state-citizen dynamic are to be condemned. Unfortunately there are two social forces in today’s global political economy conniving to stop that reciprocal empowerment from unfolding in the third world (especially in Africa). Firstly, in as much as the activities of the humanitarian international replace many of the functions that states *should* do, the emergence of a liberal democratic contract is stymied. Furthermore, de Waal argues that the humanitarian international is only accountable to itself. Its actions do not foster a process in which citizens claim rights from and in return owe responsibilities to local states – or even global semi-states. Rather, foreign intervention is perpetuated.

One must ask, however, why the state is not doing what it should. This question leads us to the second of de Waal’s points about the internationalisation of governance and its detrimental consequences. What I will call the “financial international” – to give it the equality²⁰ with the HI that de Waal in effect denies – also contributes to the denial of state-society reciprocity. With its institutionalisation of neo-liberal structural adjustment policies, the FI has contributed just as much or more to the diminution of state capacity and the democratic dynamic as has the HI. Bureaucracies have become more insulated than ever from popular pressure. As Thandika Mkandawire has put it, they are “insulated international technocracies ensconced in key economic ministries.”²¹ New political contracts have not arisen from the ashes of the old, which according to the World Bank produced an “urban bias.”²² Worse, NGOs have taken over the welfare functions that states once performed, albeit ineffectively.

Thus the neo-liberal strategies for freeing the “market” have led to the “internationalisation of emergency public welfare”²³ and the HI and the FI work together to undermine the emergence of a liberal democratic political contract wherever they operate. Even though many HI multilateral agencies and their non-governmental sidekicks espouse an ideology that seems to be the opposite of World Bank-speak, they benefit from structural adjustment policies. The FI and the HI have made an unholy, albeit largely unspoken, alliance. As de Waal puts it, “the humanitarian international may be the ‘human face’ of neo-liberalism:” both are “linked to the decline of state authority.”²⁴

Although de Waal accepts some of their economic orthodoxy, his political criticism of the international financial institutions (IFIs) is hard-hitting. Yet he fails to attribute as much power to these forms of international governance as he does to the HI. He does not call the IFI agenda “hegemonic,” yet he does suggest that the institutions fighting famine

²⁰ Indeed, I would give the “FI” a primacy that goes beyond *primus inter pares*.

²¹ Thandika Mkandawire, “Choiceless Democracy,” Richard Joseph, ed. *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1999, p. 126.

²² De Waal buys into the “urban bias” approach by which the World Bank justifies its diminution of urban subsidies and services. For criticism see Massoud Karshenas, “Dynamic Economies and the Critique of Urban Bias,” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 24, 1-2 (October 1996/January 1997), pp. 60-103.

²³ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 49.

²⁴ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 66.

have an “unprecedented hegemony.”²⁵ Such imprecise use of political theory lends itself to abuse.

Thus public reception of de Waal’s work rarely notes his unhappiness with structural adjustment policies. The media tends to interpret de Waal’s negativism about the “humanitarian agenda” in a way that bolsters the dominance of free-market ideology. These representations of his views leave out his important criticism of neo-liberal policies. He thus appears akin to (right-wing) libertarian critics of aid such as Michael Maren, whose admittedly worrying catalogues of horror stories such as Somalia’s fit neatly into the agendas of those who want the market’s invisible hand to pick up all the pieces that colonialism left in its wake.²⁶ An *Independent* story cited by de Waal for other purposes borrowed Maren’s provocative “road to hell” title.²⁷ The *New York Times* has quoted de Waal to the effect that international relief agencies (especially NGOs) only rush into the sites of disaster to get on the news in order to get funds. According to this discourse, the result is “disempowerment of the people directly engaged in the crisis which drains their capacity to find a solution.”²⁸

The decried “professionalisation” of the HI de Waal portrays makes its agents appear the same as grey-suited World Bank economists and white-helmeted engineers: de Waal thus taps into and debunks the public’s admiration of youthful amateur missionary-Peace Corps types in order to call up counter-images of boring bureaucrats. To confuse this superficial similarity with deeply rooted ideological affinity is going too far, however. It substitutes the “lifestyle” categories developed by marketing and advertising consultants for good scholarly analysis. The latter should get to the bottom of structural antagonisms between market-rooted livelihoods and those based in more redistributive modes of production, reproduction and reconstruction – be they through traditional states, global institutions, or more or less spontaneous forms of social reciprocity. It thus contributes to the neo-liberals’ efforts to do the same thing – by contracting with NGOs, for example – rather than confounding them.

The stark images of disaster portrayed in de Waal’s work play into the hands of the global beneficiaries of neo-liberalism. He could be accused of forming an unholy alliance with these social forces (including the IFIs pushing neo-liberal policies). They espouse economic rights (for property owners) against social rights, and are merely ambivalent about the classical political rights de Waal defends so much more valiantly than the

²⁵ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 214. De Waal falls into the trap shared by many academics and polemicists with the imprecise use of the term “hegemony.” All writers exploring this territory should spend many months in the company of Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*, ed. Joseph Buttigieg, tr. Joseph Buttigieg & Antonio Callari, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, and, in the field of international relations, Robert Cox, *Production, Power and World Order*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987, before invoking that talismanic code.

²⁶ Maren, 1997.

²⁷ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 204, citing Richard Dowden, “Good intentions on the road to hell,” *The Independent*, (3 November 1996). Dowden was the African editor for *The Economist* – a liberal organ of the economic, not social, stripe.

²⁸ Paul Lewis, “Humanitarians Worry That a Helping Hand Can Hurt,” *New York Times*, February 27, 1999 on Global Policy Forum Website, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/aidhurt.htm>

humanitarian project. On that project, he makes a muted claim that “aid *can* be politically progressive.” However, that muffled support is quickly qualified by the statement that it can only be so if “there [are] deep political commitments that pre-date ... the arrival of aid, and remain ... more important than the aid relationship.”²⁹ If de Waal’s precepts about the economic and social benefits of liberal democracy are valid, one is tempted to wonder if aid is necessary in such a situation.

It may be unfair to criticise an author for the way in which his work is interpreted by the media. However, de Waal does structure his argument in such a way that it is amenable to media interpretations lumping him in with the laissez-faire structural adjusters. Nowhere does he criticise the FI for having “soft” and “hard” agendas, but he accuses the HI of so doing, making it a more obvious target for journalists in search of a good black and white line. (The soft agenda is what the HI says it wants to do, such as alleviating poverty and reconstructing war-torn societies, while the hard one is what de Waal says HI organisations actually do, that is, expanding bureaucratic empires and increasing members’ salaries.³⁰) In so doing he also buys into the “rent-seeking” arguments – asserting that most state or redistributive workers are inherently destined to use their employers’ resources for their and their friends’ own ends – used by the IFI against state employment.³¹

As if to confirm his bias against the HI, de Waal employs rhetorical devices such as the notion of “the humanitarian mode of power.” He never mentions a similar “financial” mode. Perhaps the imbalance is only one of perception: de Waal may feel that criticizing the FI is old hat. It is no longer shocking to criticise the FI. Disrobing ostensibly saintly emperors scores better polemical points.

Media reception aside, the HI and FI alliance must be analysed. One understated aspect of de Waal’s critique deserving further investigation is its affinities with the agendas of “third world” politicians who have learned to live with and prosper by structural adjustment policies, but who have no desire to be subject to monitoring by NGOs. If there are links here, the human rights NGOs such as those for which de Waal works (but which fall under the ambit of his critique with amazing regularity, although they escape the “international welfarist” label he imposes on his unliked interventionists) will be in greater danger than the relief agencies. Furthermore, the weight of the de Waal critique

²⁹ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 137, emphasis his. I have changed the tense of the phrase, which in the text refers to a very concrete case in Ethiopia. The point he makes leads to the abandonment of humanitarian neutrality and impartiality and to the embrace of principles of “solidarity” which allow agencies such as de Waal’s to choose their allies in the Third World. See also David Campbell, “Why Fight: Humanitarianism, Principles, and Post-structuralism,” *Millennium*, 27, 3, 1998.

³⁰ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 66. To say that relief agencies are better at conflating soft and hard agendas than others conflate suggests that de Waal has not visited a World Bank Website. One could easily say that the World Bank counsels the market but builds up bureaucracies. Nor, it appears, has he consulted David Sogge *et. al.*, *Compassion and Calculation*, London, Pluto, 1996 – a vigorous self-critique of the NGO industry.

³¹ Andrew Hindmoor, “Rent Seeking Evaluated,” *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 7, 4 (December 1999), pp. 434-452.

leans away from problems within donor's stances towards the crises of transformation in post-Cold War peripheral societies: he is really focusing on symptoms rather than causes.

Unfortunately, these two avenues of further research cannot be investigated here. The rest of this paper will look at the effects of the combination of neo-liberal forms of globalisation and international humanitarian action on crisis-ridden African state structures, within the terms of recent international relations theory and then in the form of a brief historical survey. This paper will now assess the claim that the combination of the two apparently opposed socio-economic and political forces of the FI and the HI has contributed to the diminution of state capacity and developmental progress within the civil society-state relations of war-torn societies.

On the state in war-torn Africa

A large part of Africa's political economy resembles a "war mode of production."³² In 1998 and 1999, eleven of the world's 25 civil wars were being fought in Africa. According to the International Institute for Security Studies, sixty per cent of the world's 110,000 deaths from armed conflict in the past year occurred on this continent, including 15,000 in Ethiopia and Eritrea, 9,000 in DROC and 9,000 in Sierra Leone. Arms exports to Africa doubled from 1998 to 1999. Military spending was \$US11 billion. Outside of South Africa (which was undoubtedly selling some of these arms) military spending went up 14% while economic growth hovered around one per cent. Three-quarters of the continent's countries were involved in war in some way.³³ If in the late 1980s the conservative international relations theorist Robert Jackson argued that African states were "quasi-states,"³⁴ and scores of other texts rhymed off combinations of pejorative and descriptive labels such as "neo-patrimonial," "prebendal" and "predatory," now one has an ever harder job. "War-torn"³⁵ might just as well do the trick: war-torn states arise out of a war mode of production in a process which bears some resemblance to the violent and protracted process of "original accumulation" outlined by Karl Marx to portray Europe's often brutal transition from feudalism to capitalism.

However, it is dangerous to slap a Eurocentric framework on the political economy of war in Africa. These wars are not at all like the ones Westerners are familiar with from their history books. They are not "fordist" wars (large scale, extremely disciplined, very much part and parcel of modern capitalist modes of organisation, and playing a key role in the development of the economy and state), but a complex melange of pre-capitalist

³² Heike Behrend, "War in Northern Uganda: The Holy Spirit Movements of Alice Lakwena, Severino Lukoyo and Joseph Kony (1986-1997)," Christopher Clapham, ed., *African Guerrillas*, Oxford, James Currey, 1998, pp. 107-118.

³³ Richard Norton-Taylor and Owen Boycott, "Deadly Cost of New Global Warfare," *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, October 29-November 4, 1999, p. 20.

³⁴ Robert Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

³⁵ War-torn Societies Project (1998) Booklets on Projects in Eritrea, Guatemala, Mozambique and Somalia. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva. Also on <http://www.unrisd.org/wsp/pop2/toc.htm>.

and post-fordist modalities. The cocaine addled children-soldiers in Sierra Leone do not at first glance fit well into a political economy analysis, until one realises that the drug trade is the world's fastest growing economic phenomenon, and that child labour is an integral part of other components of the global economy. More obviously in the political economy framework is Savimbi's expert shift from reliance on Cold War, *apartheid* and Zaireois support to the more entrepreneurial selling of diamonds. So too was Charles Taylor's warlord economics, which had him supplying the French with 1/3 of their hardwood, and his annual gains of between US\$400 and \$450 million from 1992 to 1996.³⁶

These wars do produce wealth for their leaders, but they are not as inventive of new technologies, new forms of "discipline," nor innovative ways of generating revenue from "citizens" in return for representation. The European pattern of state formation and consolidation *à la* Charles Tilly³⁷ does not seem to be taking place. Rather, as Duffield has noted, the trend is something more like "neo-medievalism."³⁸ Or, if one returns to the historical records of colonial Africa, the warlord economies resemble the forced labour regimes of "traditional" authorities reinvented by the architects of indirect rule.³⁹

Duffield and William Reno⁴⁰ place the roots of this war economy within a context of decreasing resources available to states. The reasons for this diminishment include: poorer terms of commodity trade; the debt crisis and other aspects of the post-1970s global economic crisis; neo-liberal economic policies imposed by the IFIs supposedly in order to solve the debt crisis; the dispensation of less aid in the post-Cold War era (because the super-powers no longer have to compete for the allegiance of third world leaders); and the increasing negotiating power of multinational corporations. Thus state actors do not have the capacity to assist those aspiring to their class into their structures of power and privilege. In the context of increasing peasant and urban dwellers' poverty and the rapid transformation of land tenure and other property-relations, warlordism seems to be the inevitable result. To take a long view, one could suggest that up until the 1970s precolonial patterns of patronage and pillage in the hinterlands, already modified during the colonial era – Mamdani's evocation of "rural despotism" as the proto-typical colonial mode of power is appropriate here, if one adds that a transformation in property relations began in that era⁴¹ – were being transformed as the urban centred ruling classes attempted to absorb the rural elites and "modernising" subaltern classes into what could be called the national "patrimonial" state. By the end of the 1970s, though, that process stalled in the wake of the global economic crisis. With structural adjustment programmes and the end of the Cold War, there were not too many legs left on which the African state

³⁶ Duffield, "Globalisation and War Economies ...," 1999, pp. 27, 29.

³⁷ Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organised Crime," Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer, Theda Skocpol, eds. *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 169-98.

³⁸ Duffield, "Post-Modern Wars ...," 1998.

³⁹ Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996 revives this theme.

⁴⁰ William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1998.

⁴¹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and ...* 1996.

could stand. Without a drastic increase in economic growth and the structures for its distribution, the future promises to be much the same.

Africa is, then, in a condition of “durable disorder”⁴² far from propitious for a state-restructuring project. For Duffield, neo-liberal globalisation and market regulation lead to chaos rather than virtuous circles of growth, privatised rather than multilateralised international “security,” a democratic deficit within polyarchical networks of governance rather than a flowering of liberal representativeness and effective states, and informal, even criminal trade instead of conventional economic activity.

Contiguously yet contradictorily, the language of “development” has now come to include security: while neo-liberal developments appear to increase conflict and violence, aid agencies and northern ministries of foreign affairs play the chicken and egg game with development and security discourses. We hear that “development is now widely interpreted as vital for stability. Without stability, moreover, security is not possible. At the same time, security is a necessary precursor for development.”⁴³ Yet, when the crunch comes, less assistance is available for both the shell and the chick (or to put Humpty together again). Development budgets are reduced year after year. Post-Somalia angst meant that the western world’s police forces stayed at home while genocide was accurately predicted in Rwanda. Today, the great power prevaricates when groups resisting Kabila’s rule ask for the UN to make the peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC).⁴⁴

Even if one takes the “positive” (or orthodox Marxist) side of this version of “primitive accumulation” – that after the “mass dislocation and conflict [resulting] from a rapid programme of converting land and labour into commodities”⁴⁵ there would arise some sort of thriving capitalism – one must ask a number of cautionary questions. As Colin Leys queries, who will supervise such a programme?⁴⁶ Would the World Bank, the UNDP, and a host of other international and non-governmental organisations (to use the language of this paper, the FI or the HI) do it? Relatedly, if one accepts that imperialism played a helpful role in the consolidation of European capitalism, what does that mean for the rise of capitalism in the “third world” (especially Africa) if it has no empire to feed it and sell to? Moreover, as Michael Mann seems to claim, genocide is the “dark side of

⁴² Mark Duffield, 1999, p. 21. Chris Allen’s excellent “Warfare, Endemic Violence and State Collapse in Africa,” *Review of African Political Economy*, 81 (September 1999), pp. 367-384, makes the valid point that it is too easy to treat the instances of these wars as “in principle similar,” and that detailed historical analyses of all cases are necessary. However, he finds commonality in the collapse of what could be called spoils-seeking states.

⁴³ Duffield, 1999, pp. 21-25.

⁴⁴ David Moore, “Congo: Chronicle of a Death Foretold?” *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, (Johannesburg), October 22-29, 1999, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Colin Leys, “Confronting the African Tragedy,” *New Left Review*, 204 (March-April 1994), pp. 44-45. Goran Therborn’s, “Critical Theory and the Legacy of Twentieth-Century Marxism,” Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, pp. 53-82, opens with the statement that Marxists are alone among modernists in combining a celebration of capitalism’s destruction of the “rural idiocy” and the various opiums associated with pre-capitalist social forms while criticising its contradictions, crises and conflict *and* imagining a better modernism.

⁴⁶ Colin Leys, “Confronting” p. 44.

[many forms of] democracy,”⁴⁷ does one accept variations on its theme if convinced of generous teleologies? Should one, with Edward Luttwak, “give war a chance?”⁴⁸ Can one really believe that the humanitarian international is slowing the wheels of history and thus stalling the emergence of a strong indigenous – and, one hopes against hope, liberal-democratic – bourgeoisie?

Whether the logic of de Waal’s argument leads to that of the “non-interventionists” is an open question (and that logic is weak in any case because it forgets about the “economic” intervention of global mining corporations, for one example, which is seen as a “natural” force). He does not advocate the cessation of the HI’s activities. In spite of his overarching critique he only offers relatively minor corrections to the system (e.g. a “professional ombudsman”).

In the end, as he concedes, humanitarian action must proceed, but it must “do no harm”⁴⁹ – a concept that is deceptive in the extreme. It is certainly difficult to see the HI as a dominant *cause* of Africa’s crisis. If an agency cannot be considered to be causal can it be described as being a key component of a “mode of power?” Perhaps the HI performs more of an *ideological* function than anything else. Its charitable attributes may cloak the brutality of the world system at its edges such that its legitimacy is questioned less often than otherwise might be the case. The “organic intellectuals”⁵⁰ who operate such legitimation apparatuses are well-rewarded for their work, while the subalterns in the field bear the brunt of tragedy, gaining hero status in recompense.

Such prognostications are ultimately metaphysical in nature. They are resolved in the very real ways in which humanitarian actors assist in the reconstruction of war-torn states. One of the issues raised by such practice involves whether humanitarian action should stop at the distribution of relief and the construction of means of protection for the victims of war, or whether, in reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction exercises, it should continue along the “relief-development” continuum into areas in which agencies such as the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development normally deal.⁵¹ The fact that the World Bank has recently established a “post-conflict” unit which meets the UNHCR agenda somewhere in the middle of this “continuum,” and that UNHCR and the World Bank are actively considering joint ventures in this area suggests that this is a crucial issue.⁵²

⁴⁷ Michael Mann, “The Dark Side of Democracy: The Modern Tradition of Ethnic Cleansing,” *New Left Review*, 235 (May-June 1999), pp. 18-45.

⁴⁸ Edward Luttwak, “Give War a Chance,” *Foreign Affairs*, 78, 4 (July-August 1999), pp. 36-44.

⁴⁹ Alex de Waal, “Democratizing the Aid Encounter in Africa,” *International Affairs*, 73, 4 (1997), p. 639.

⁵⁰ In the Gramscian sense: Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks, Volume I*, (ed.) Joseph Buttigieg, (trans.) Joseph Buttigieg & Antonio Callari, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991.

⁵¹ See Joanna Macrae, “Aiding Peace ... and War: A Comparative Analysis of the Evolution of UNHCR’s Policy on Reintegration and Emerging Debates on Relief-Development Aid Linkages in Chronic Political Emergencies,” paper for UNHCR, September 21, 1999 for an incisive critique of the teleological assumptions of such continuum construction.

⁵² In “Levelling the Playing Fields and Embedding Illusions: ‘Post-Conflict’ Discourse and Neo-liberal ‘Development’ in War-torn Africa,” *Review of African Political Economy*, 83, March 2000, pp. 11-28, I suggest that the World Bank’s establishment of a “post-conflict” unit is part of an effort to imbricate market principles in war-torn societies. A previous draft of that paper is part of the Flinders University Centre for

In order to analyse the ways in which reconstruction efforts relate to the political and ideological “function” of the HI, one must delve into some international relations theory on the globalisation of democracy and judge it against de Waal’s state-centred criteria for the construction of democratic polities. It would be useful, though, to summarise de Waal’s case before heading in that direction.

What is of concern for de Waal is that the unholy alliance of structural adjustment programmes and humanitarians (the FI and the HI) take away the means by which states can even begin to meet the democratic demands of its citizens. Multi- or bilateral, intergovernmental or non-governmental development and humanitarian agencies step in to fill the welfare and workfare breach, thus breaking the bond that should develop between state and the less well off members of society, who would constitute “popular civil society” if there was a dynamic state-society relationship.

The wealthier sections of civil society – be they nascent bourgeoisies or aspiring members of the intelligentsia – have no competent state to merge with or to importune for favours. Thus their more market-oriented members reach out to the IFIs and foreign capital while their more public minded souls work for NGOs or organisations such as churches and UNICEF. The state as a mediating agent for classes and other social groups inside a given territory has all but disappeared. So has its function of liaising between the local and the global – it just executes the demands of the FI and HI if it has adequate capacity to do even that. In addition, its inability to maintain the legitimate monopoly over the means and ends of violence has weakened it immeasurably. Warlords or regional hegemony, along with mercenaries, tend to fill the gaps. The international theorists of global democracy try to tell us this is a positive situation – but de Waal is not convinced.

The globalisation of democracy and the African crisis

The following section takes a preliminary look at theories of the globalisation of democracy, relating them to the humanitarian agenda and the development of “stateness” in war-torn societies. This work is at its very first stages, and will proceed here with reference to de Waal’s thesis about the deleterious effects of HI actions on the process of state-building and democratisation in the third world.

De Waal’s work was written in the context of deep debate about the relationship of democracy and globalisation. This is hardly coincidental: international relations theorists share his concern about the tenuous nature of liberal democracy in an era in which many states are losing their autonomy to the juggernaut of deregulated capitalism. In general, though, these theorists are more complacent about the relationship between the most

Development Studies, Discussion Paper No. 26, based on a May 7, 1999 “Embedding Globalisation” workshop with Stephen Gill. See <http://www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/dvst/pubs/pubs1.htm>. For broader implementation of similar methodology see Ian Taylor, “Hegemony, Neo-liberal ‘Good Governance’ and the International Monetary Fund: A Gramscian Perspective,” Morten Bøås and Desmond McNeill (eds.), *The Role of Ideas in Multilateral Institutions*, London, Routledge, forthcoming.

recent phase of globalisation and democratisation than he is. Indeed, many of them are “cosmopolitan liberals,” and see too much emphasis on the state’s sanctity as reactionary.

At first glance de Waal’s prioritisation of the state as the locus of a democratic political contract makes him appear to be a “social liberal” – a nationalist or a statist – in terms of international democratisation theory.⁵³ He appears to claim a special societal role for states *qua* states. But on a second look, he justifies his seeming anti-internationalism by asserting that well-functioning and contractually based states are the best shells for the rights of individuals. He is not a communitarian, thinking that dictatorial states are just as good as any other: the people in these states may well like things that way, so western liberals cannot impose their values on them. As Charles Beitz puts it, de Waal’s position is a cosmopolitan justification for privileging the state: if states can be shown to be the best possible defence for human rights in an unfriendly world, they deserve the support of liberals who are wary of states as a matter of principle.⁵⁴ De Waal says that the combination of neo-liberal and humanitarian policies advocated by globalists, be they World Bank technocrats or Oxfam back-to-the-earthers, all but destroy the development of a dynamic process within state-society complexes which would lead to mutually supportive and human rights-bolstering structures of participation and efficiency.

De Waal is not arguing in favour of states as mystical representative of a “people,” but supports them only if they implement, or concede to, a liberal contract.⁵⁵ For de Waal, such contracts will never exist in the international sphere. For Beitz and other internationalists they well might. Many of the latter, however, ignore the differences between the liberalism of structural adjusters and political liberalism. De Waal suggests that if the latter is allowed full swing, a social contract will develop which will encourage states to implement social democratic policies. For him, the African state needs some insulation from the ravages of the FI and the misguided charity of the HI. The “internally” generated causes of authoritarianism and inequality – and war – are thus

⁵³ Charles Beitz, “Social and Cosmopolitan Liberalism,” *International Affairs*, 75, 3 (1999), pp. 515-529.

⁵⁴ Beitz, 1999, p. 529.

⁵⁵ De Waal and the globalists both share an ignorance of the vicissitudes and ambiguities of nationalism, which in spite of its primordialist and authoritarian tendencies may well be the soil of the individualist liberty loved by modernists. This debate is too infinite to be dealt with here: suffice to mention the fascinating ruminations in John A. Hall (ed.), *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, in which the following *liberal* nationalist words are printed: “nationalism implies that loyalty to the nation should be the first virtue of a citizen... [it] should transcend loyalty to more particular identifications, personal, cultural, economic, or political, and that members of one’s nation have higher moral claims than members of other nations... Nationalistic moral doctrine is at odds with cosmopolitanism – the doctrine that one owes equal duties to all members of the human species – and with personalism – the doctrine that you owe your first moral obligations to your personal friends; and it is at odds with statism – that your first loyalty is to the state (except when one’s nation is a nation-state) ... Nationalist thinking is not incompatible with the belief that nations may be duty-bound towards other nations, indeed it is *internationalism* proper to observe (genuine) international law and to provide charitable assistance to other nations.” Brendan O’Leary, “Ernest Gellner’s Diagnosis of Nationalism: a Critical Overview, or, What is Living and What is Dead in Ernest Gellner’s Philosophy of Nationalism?” pp. 69-70, italics his. Transposed to Africa, one would ask O’Leary: “what of ethnicity?” Perhaps it is “personalism” on its way to nationalism. As for de Waal, it appears that he is not a nationalist, but may be a liberal *inter*statist, with the hopes that bi- and multi-lateral agencies and NGOs can contribute to state construction rather than cosmopolitan identities.

sidestepped. For the internationalists, these are the consequences of premodernity and will be swept away by the global waves of advancing liberalism. Their problem is the opposite of de Waal's: they see no contradictions in globalism's advance while he sees few hitches in sequestered and autonomous "national" experiments.

While criticising the cosmopolitans, Dennis Thompson makes a nuanced point about the "liberalisms" spreading around the world. He notes that the apparent globalisation of human and welfare rights is:

attractive, however difficult in practice. But the form of liberalism that is in ascendance today emphasises economic rights – the liberty promoted by the free market ... in the absence of any political authority to limit these rights when they threaten to undermine other liberal rights, economic liberalism is likely to dominate, even more than it does in domestic contexts.⁵⁶

Thompson alludes to the disappearance of the "political authority" that De Waal would like to revive in the form of a liberal democratic state (which he conflates and thus confuses with a social democratic one). Indeed, IFIs are on the verge of being global "political authorities" existing to promote economic rights rather than protect human and welfare rights. In this scenario, neo-liberalism is doubly ensured. Yet the internationalists think their system will provide the cake for the post-war state North Americans and West Europeans have grown to know and love. They include humanitarians, who believe relief for war-torn states can help; human rights activists,⁵⁷ who assume the universalisation of their demands can strengthen processes of democratic good governance; and structural adjusters (seen to have hegemony within the field of "development") who think that the market will lead to liberty *and* (rough) equality even if it takes a dictatorship to install it. If these are the choices offered by the cosmopolitans, it is not hard to side with de Waal.

De Waal says that within the confines of the current world (dis)order, "self-government" is impossible for Africans – especially those in war-torn societies – and that the humanitarian and financial international does more harm than good. He argues that non-governmental organisations ranging from the international heights of Amnesty International to the lowly local levels of the Organisation for Rural Associations in Zimbabwe, in combination with the multi-lateral IMF and the World Health – and Trade! – Organisations, will not do the liberal democratic trick. The ends are similar for statist de Waal and internationalists and cosmopolitans of many stripes. However, the HI and the FI have their means for their ends. Indeed, means and ends are embodied within the FI and HI alliance. De Waal does *not* think these means are sufficient, but he has nothing with which to replace them. He rightly fears the FI and the HI do not assist the revival of the state of his dreams. However, he has not found one in Africa to which he can make historical reference or ground future hopes.

⁵⁶ Dennis Thompson, "Democratic Theory and Global Society," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 7, 2 (June 1999), p. 114.

⁵⁷ Again, perhaps these include actors such as de Waal, although his analysis avoids the similarities.

He has not established a viable alternative to his lost utopia. Unfortunately, the “territorial [and institutional] entities”⁵⁸ formerly relied upon to enhance and protect the west’s liberal and welfarist aspirations has been severely weakened in the past couple of decades, and in Africa it may not have been there in the first place. De Waal cannot trust a new “network of regional and international agencies and assemblies that cut across spatially delimited locales.”⁵⁹ Problems associated with the dispersal of authority and accountability are acute in Africa, and exacerbated by power imbalances.⁶⁰

Yet there is no denying that we have to abandon ideas of hermetically sealed states to accept “overlapping political authorities ... [and] agencies and institutions of governance” – especially in Africa, where the colonial state, upon which the current state was established, has always been an artificial and thus fragile entity.⁶¹ It is futile to look for a pure notion of “state survival” and even “reconstruction” as states break up, and new structures arise in their “post-conflict” aftermath. Rather, one has to accept overlapping political authorities ... agents of the transnational community ... local agents of a regional good ... agencies and institutions of governance ... [and] the relations between authority structures and multiple scales as legitimate.”⁶² At the very least they are legitimate areas of study and institution-building, if not legitimately deserving of “loyalty.”

As one observes the breaking up and reformulation of African states, this warning is worthwhile, even while sympathising with de Waal’s point of view and appreciating the importance of developing a clear locus for the reciprocal exchange of socio-political rights and obligations. De Waal’s foregrounding of the issue of a “political contract” is crucial here: does a citizen make a “contract” with the World Bank, Oxfam or UNHCR? Can such “semi-states” bring the same interplay of obligation and entitlement that “national” states have come to represent and mediate?

De Waal’s points are strong, and in spite of lacking class analysis⁶³ are in close agreement with critics of neo-liberalism and NGO populism such as Björn Beckman.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ John Dryzek, “Transnational Democracy,” *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 7, 1 (March 1999), p. 44.

⁵⁹ David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 237, cited in Thompson, 1999, p. 115.

⁶⁰ Ironically, these disparities are reflected in the tomes advocating cosmopolitan governance. In more than 300 pages of *Democracy and the Global Order*, Africa ranks four references, one quoting World Bank promises to “stop ‘imposing’ foreign expertise on reluctant governments” with only polite scepticism (p. 111 n. 5). In Held’s co-edited *Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Daniele Archibugi and David Held (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Democracy: An Agenda for a New World Order*, Cambridge, Polity, 1995) Greenpeace and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation are in the index. Africa is not. De Waal would likely rest his case there. If a series of texts with the explicit aim of delineating the institutions and networks that will implement democracy around the world cannot see the continent in the mist – and fails to consider the conflict ridden contexts in which the humanitarian agenda is implemented – then de Waal may be right to write them off.

⁶¹ A point dealt with inadequately by writers such as Jackson, *Quasi-states ...* 1990.

⁶² Darel Paul, “Sovereignty, Survival and the Westphalian Blind Alley in International Relations,” *Review of International Studies*, 25, 2 (April 1999), p. 217.

⁶³ Mann, 1999, develops an appropriate means of articulating an analysis of class elements with the genocidal origins of nations and states.

⁶⁴ Björn Beckman, “The Liberation of Civil Society: Neo-Liberal Ideology and Political Theory,” *Review of African Political Economy*, 58 (November 1993).

De Waal is right to emphasise the importance of the African state as a project worthy of defence, and the imperative of a democratic political contract developing within it. (Yet he may err in his emphasis on “liberal,” given the incredible ease with which *neo-liberalism* can incorporate its tenets: but that is another argument.) However, it is the point of this paper to argue that de Waal has idealised an impossible vision of the African state and that he has overstated his case against the humanitarian international. It will argue that the HI can, and does, contribute to the capacities both of states – and state-like institutions – and citizens in times of complex political emergencies by suggesting that in these moments the HI can contribute to ways in which people begin “thinking like states.”

Thinking like a state and the “international of decent feelings”

In the wake of World War II, Louis Althusser expressed concern about his compatriot intellectuals’ humanitarian – yet angst-ridden – ethos. They thought all humanity was on the road to annihilation. He felt such pessimism threw working class hopes out with the bathwater of bourgeois despair. His words about “the international of decent feelings” may be relevant for this essay, which contemplates the end of the African state (and others in war-torn areas of the “third world”) as we know it, and those who are attempting to reinvent it.

... we are confronted with a phenomenon that is international in scope, and with a diffuse ideology which, though it has not been precisely defined, is capable of assuming a certain organisational form...one senses...a mentality in search of itself, an intention eager to embody itself in concrete form, an ideology seeking to define itself, entrench itself, and also furnish itself with a means of action. If this mentality is international, and in the process taking institutional form, then a new “International” is in the making.⁶⁵

What the “international of decent feelings” – de Waal’s humanitarian international and most of its academic analyses – conceals is ways of “thinking like a state”⁶⁶ evolving in times of complex political emergencies in the age of globalisation. Activities such as humanitarian assistance – and the “developmental” practices which occur further down the imagined continuum from war to peace – serve to “embed”⁶⁷ various ideologies and practices related to the interaction of states, social groups and individuals in immediate post-war periods of time.

⁶⁵ Louis Althusser, “The International of Decent Feelings,” *The Spectre of Hegel: Early Writings* (ed.), François Matheron, London, Verso, (1946) 1997, pp. 22-3.

⁶⁶ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State ...* 1998.

⁶⁷ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston, Beacon Books, 1944. In international relations, see John Ruggie, “At Home Abroad, Abroad at Home: International Liberalisation and Domestic Stability in the New World Economy,” *Millennium*, 24, 3 (1994), pp. 507-526. See also Moore, “Levelling ...,” 2000.

This section will argue that humanitarian action can actually strengthen state capacity and the possibilities of people forging dynamic links with bureaucratic and political institutions in war-torn societies, rather than further destroying both of these realms of activity. Ironically, the same may also be the case for the much more pervasive and influential neo-liberal activities that take place within the vacuums of “post-conflict” interregna, in spite of their laissez-faire rhetoric. The paper will argue that rather than contributing to the demise of the institutions of statehood, international humanitarian HI and FI action encourage subjects and citizens⁶⁸ during complex political emergencies⁶⁹ to “think like a state.”

The issue that this altered formulation raises is this: what *kinds* of states are people being encouraged to think of in the midst of wars and their aftermath? What sorts of “political contracts” evolve during humanitarian exercises? What expectations do refugees have of these “globalising” institutions? What relationships develop between the “authorities” in these agencies and individuals and institutions in home and host countries? How do ideologies and practices of “stateness” evolve within these new society-institution complexes while members of the HI and the FI are struggling to administer welfare to the subjects of war and/or pressing to create a market-enabling environment for them?

The issue is *not* only “are states being destroyed?” but also “what sort of states are being constructed, or reinvented?” And by “what kind” one must not only refer to the new state’s territorial boundaries, but, more importantly, what functions it is in the process of performing, what ideologies it is creating and reflecting, what kind of “organic intellectuals”⁷⁰ it is simultaneously creating and being created by – in short, how does it (and the various institutions in and around it) fit in with the new global (dis)order and what classes does it help to bring about and serve? One must ask what the means and ends of humanitarian activity encourage in the line of “thinking” about state-society relations. In the era of international peacekeeping, sub-state violence, and corporate mercenaries, the relationship of new state-like structures to the old redoubt of states, the “legitimate monopoly of the means of violence,” must be examined too. Orthodox discussions of these matters are blinded by a focus on the traditional territorial state. These perceptions must be replaced by new ones – much different “imagined communities”⁷¹ bringing into play boundaries, institutions and ideologies changed by the forces of globalised war, finance and humanitarianism.

James C. Scott’s *Seeing Like A State*,⁷² from which this essay derives the idea of “thinking like a state,” bears a debt to Polanyi’s observation that institutions of the

⁶⁸ Mahmood Mamdani, *Subject and Citizen ...* 1996.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Goodhand & David Hulme, “From Wars to Complex Political Emergencies: Understanding Conflict and Peace-building in the New World Disorder,” *Third World Quarterly*, 20, 1 (February 1999), pp. 13-26 and whole issue. Fiona Terry, “Reconstituting Whose Social Order? NGOs in Disrupted States,” presented at conference on “From Civil Strife to Civil Society: Civil-Military Cooperation in Disrupted States,” 6-7 July 1999, Canberra, Australia. To be published in conference proceedings.

⁷⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks ...* 1991.

⁷¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso 1983.

⁷² James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State ...* 1998.

modern capitalist “market” were “imposed by a coercive state in the 19th century.” Even now, the market is “an instituted, formal system of co-ordination ... dependent on a larger system of social relations which its own calculus does not acknowledge and which it can neither create nor maintain.”⁷³

If one takes the “tragic optimist’s” view of history, it can be argued that post-conflict societies are undergoing a settling down process after some of the most violent moments of the coercive establishment of capitalist states and economies.⁷⁴ New and quite coercive states, the products of ethnicised or nationalised resolutions of the age-old transitional problem of original accumulation (or, to move from Marx’s language to that of the World Bank, the “universalisation of property rights”) are in the process of formation and consolidation. Do the humanitarian and the financial internationals help to create and maintain these tentatively emerging state- and market-like structures? Do they contribute to the construction of distinctive state forms in “post-conflict” societies? Although Scott does not state directly that the IFIs might be akin to a global state, one could extrapolate that they are international institutional attempts to oversee the many peripheral “coercive states” of which he speaks.⁷⁵ Perhaps the “larger system of social relations” on which Scott says “the market” depends could be what is now referred to as “social capital,”⁷⁶ a concept brought into play by the World Bank as if to push its agenda while avoiding the problem of the state (resurrected, but not resolved, in the Bank’s 1997 Development Report, *The State in a Changing World*).⁷⁷

The combination of HI and FI practice in the wake of complex political emergencies suggests the imposition of “modernism” and its attendant tensions. These antagonisms range from those between the ethics of care and the “private vices” of markets, to the differences between institutionalisation and individualisation, and to the contradictions of class formation and reformation while one mode of production changes into another. FI and HI agendas are both modernist, but the differences they represent mean that any attempt to place modernity within a strait-jacket – as is the wont of much of post-modernist and post-colonial thought – is ridiculous. Similarly, to suggest that their combined actions serve to undermine “the state” is off the mark, unless one has a very limited conception of that very contested formulation.

One can transform Scott’s notion of “seeing like a state,” which he uses as a metaphor for a “high-modernist” mentality that plans everything to death. The notion of “thinking like

⁷³ Scott, 1998, pp. 388, n. 106, 351.

⁷⁴ John Sender, “Africa’s economic performance: Limitations of the current consensus,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 13, 3, (Summer 1999), pp. 89-114. Mann, “The Dark Side ...” 1999 could be considered a “tragic optimist” but with a more sociologically and state-centred approach than Sender’s economicist – but strongly reliant on state-spending – one.

⁷⁵ David Moore, “Levelling the Playing Fields ...” 2000.

⁷⁶ Ben Fine, “The Development State is Dead – Long Live Social Capital?” *Development and Change*, 30, 1 (January 1999), pp. 1-33.

⁷⁷ World Bank, *1997 World Development Report: The State in a Changing World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, subjected to some criticism in David Moore, “Sail on, O Ship of State: Neo-Liberalism, Globalisation and the Governance of Africa,” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 27, 1 (October 1999), pp. 61-95.

a state” is more nuanced. “Thinking like a state” can be shorthand for something like “imagining one’s existence as tied up in social relations in which bureaucratic management is democratically accountable and participatory organisations play a big part.” More negatively, states can be imagined and experienced as brutally coercive and authoritarian, the “instruments” for the control of one ethnic group over another or the construction of a “nation,” or as bulldozers for the construction of capitalist roads.⁷⁸ If either or both of the humanitarian and the financial agenda contribute to the establishment of these ways of thinking and acting, then the modes in which they do so should be studied.

During the traumatic time of war and its concluding phases, the ways in which the HI and the FI condition the subjects of these new state structures will be deeply embedded. Wars and their aftermath are “shock therapy” in which whole ways of life and thinking are altered (for those who survive them) and powerful external agencies can alter the cultures and ideologies of the disoriented. The FI realises this: the World Bank’s *The State in a Changing World* encourages global policymakers to reshape “the values and norms of the state and the state’s relationship to the economy” at times of external threat or economic crisis – “when the normal rules of the game are in flux.” Another time recommended for winning friends and influencing people is during a new regime’s honeymoon (which may be an optimist’s way of saying “post-conflict situation”).⁷⁹ If the HI does not grasp this, it should. It may be in a “battle of ideas” with the FI (if it is not, it should realise that too!).

The victims and the protagonists alike will learn new ways to “think like a state” during wars in which international and/or multilateral (and private) armies participate – as belligerents and as peace-enforcers, makers or builders – and UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs observe or administer relief. They will participate in altered modes of “stateness” in refugee camps for the internally displaced and those beyond their old borders. They will take part in new relations of bureaucratic power in the processes of rehabilitation, reintegration and reconstruction while they “return home.”⁸⁰

Yet de Waal’s polemic ignores this side of the humanitarian international. He is so angered at the HI’s failure to come properly to the rescue of the “failed states” that he attributes blame to the HI for their failure. Chronicle after chronicle recounts how humanitarian aid often does more harm than good, thus breaking the cardinal rule of the vocation. If not doing very visible “good,” then it is easy to say that the HI is the cause of state breakdown. De Waal’s classic on the famine in Darfur, Sudan simply suggests that

⁷⁸ Such notions are informed by Althusser’s idea of “ideological state apparatuses” and Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s corollary, “repressive state apparatuses.” Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” *Essays on Ideology*, London, Verso, 1984; Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980.

⁷⁹ World Bank, *The State in a Changing World*, pp. 155-6, 144.

⁸⁰ James Ferguson’s *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Capetown, David Philips, 1990, informs us that much about the aid industry really concerns the construction of new forms of bureaucratic power: I will contend that they are not all disabling. Lisa Malkki, “Refugees and Exile: From ‘Refugee Studies’ to the National Order of Things,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995), pp. 495-523, reminds us that “home” for refugees is never what it was imagined.

the charities in the area did the wrong thing: they supplied food instead of sanitation and jobs.⁸¹

But in the past few years, the discourse has become stronger: the humanitarian international cannot do the right thing. The criticism comes close to asserting that reliance on private NGOs, the aid agencies of bloated western states, and venal African élites to assist recovery from natural or political disasters is destructive from the moment of conception. It claims that any activities from the well-meaning outside world leads to corruption at best, and prolongation of war or disaster at worst. The HIs assist warlords through political, economic, and de facto diplomatic recognition by negotiating with them for passage through insurgent controlled areas, or for access to airfields for the landing of food-bearing planes. The food in the planes is usually the wrong type, it ends up making profit for the merchants who steal it or bribe aid officials to buy it, its cheap availability discourages small commodity producers from planting their seeds for the next harvest – and it benefits highly subsidised western agribusiness. The communities surrounding refugee camps are changed irreparably.⁸² Some members of the HI (if one includes the evangelists in Mozambique who befriended Renamo in Mozambique) even sell arms to the insurgents they think are on the right side of heavenly justice.⁸³ All of these narratives fit seamlessly into a discourse of discontent: a discourse that says attempts to do good inevitably go wrong.

This world-view fits in with leftist cynicism asserting that nothing but a working class revolution (or perhaps the perfect vanguard of a peasant-worker alliance) can set things right and all else serves capital or chaos. It tallies with realist non-interventionism on the conservative side and with the state-centric right in the discipline and practice of international relations (this ideology lets venal élites do what they want). It fits with laissez-faire economists, Ayn Randesque libertarians, and even small-liberal advocates of good-governance who counsel the long road to institutional renewal and governmental capacity before trying anything else like popular renewal from below or dependency inducing and corruption causing welfare from above. It is close to what Albert Hirschman has called the rhetoric of reaction: the three horsemen of perversity, futility and jeopardy mean that paralysis is the best answer.⁸⁴ It is such a counsel of despair that one can almost foresee the response to Peter Singer's suggestion that Americans earning more

⁸¹ Alexander de Waal, *Famine that Kills: Darfur, Sudan, 1984-1985*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989.

⁸² For an excellent analysis of some of these issues in a Burundian refugee camp and its surrounds in Tanzania, see Beth Elise Whitaker, "Changing opportunities: refugees and host communities in western Tanzania", New Issues In Refugee Research, Working Paper No. 11, UNHCR, Geneva, <http://www.unhcr.org/epau>

⁸³ For excellent combinations of political economy and post-modernism on some of these issues which do not reinforce the dominant discourse, but could be manipulated to do so, see David Keen, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-1989*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994; *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*. Adelphi Paper 320. London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998; "Aid and Violence, with Special Reference to Sierra Leone," *Disasters*, 22, 4, (1998).

⁸⁴ Albert O. Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility and Jeopardy*, Cambridge, Mass., Belknap, 1991.

than a basic-needs income of \$US30,000 should give the rest away:⁸⁵ “it would cause more harm than good – leading to corruption, dependency, aid to warlords, inappropriate food etc.” Similar arguments would be made about a Tobin tax.

The perverse logic of his argument leads de Waal to swing from modesty to grandiosity in his advocacy of changes to the humanitarian aid regime. His humble measures are negative: he advises the HI not to obscure power relations, not to seek the media limelight, and not to claim long-term solutions in situations of relief (de Waal condemns statements about “justice” and “long-term development” being served up by humanitarian actors⁸⁶).

These measures seem to be Band-Aids stuck on to his relentless register of despair. Yet in spite of writing a whole book on humanitarianism as a “mode of power” the reader is warned (rightly) that the HI has much less influence than “arms manufacturers, civil servants in donor treasuries and a host of others”⁸⁷ – but not specifically the IFIs! On the more visionary scale, he ranges from suggesting choosing the “committed” political group of one’s choice⁸⁸ to advocating the appointment of an ombudsperson⁸⁹ or international auditor or commissioner.⁹⁰ Between the utopian and the banal, he adds a “third way” of better public service techniques akin to the discourse of “good governance,” and more reliance on African NGOs. Finally, de Waal appears to advance the cause of something that might be called the “political international” which would “tell the truth:” both about the reality of politics and the limited HI role.⁹¹

Such advice ignores the reality that while the humanitarian “mode of power” operates very state-like institutions are in being formed. They can become instruments of “democratisation.” It is to one case study of such a process of “governmentalisation” that this paper now turns.

Humanitarian action, “stateness” and democratisation in a Kenyan refugee camp

De Waal is not the only critical observer of the humanitarians in action. Jennifer Hyndman’s Foucauldian analysis of gender policies in UNHCR camps in Kenya states that they are “sites of neo-colonial power relations where refugees are counted, their movements monitored and mapped, their daily routines disciplined and routinised by the

⁸⁵ Stephen Romei, “Twenty-five Years ago Peter Singer argued that Animals should be treated like Humans: Does He Now Think Humans Should be Treated like Animals?” *Australian Weekend*, December 18-19 1999, Review, pp. 6-8.

⁸⁶ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 220.

⁸⁷ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 217. Also see, with recommendations more far-reaching than de Waal’s, Mann, “The Dark Side ...,” 1999, pp. 44-5.

⁸⁸ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, pp. 137, 219.

⁸⁹ De Waal, “Democratizing ...” 1997, p. 639.

⁹⁰ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 216.

⁹¹ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 1997, p. 221.

institutional machinery of refugee relief agencies.”⁹² Within this context, “radical” democratisation measures are doomed to fail.

In spite of its radical negativity (much of which derives from holding to a romantic idea of “community,” deviation from which is bound to disappoint), Hyndman’s analysis raises some crucial issues of “democratic stateness” and the humanitarian agenda. She analyses a CARE Canada initiative to implement “community” self-management in UNHCR operated refugee camps for Somalians in Kenya. The aims of the initiative were to “forge links between donors funding refugee agencies, the agencies assisting refugees and the refugees themselves.” Its initiators hoped that “decision-making power concerning refugees and camp affairs be transferred to democratically elected groups of representatives from among the refugee community.” Some of the male elders in the camps selected themselves as the “democratic representatives” and to the dismay of the self-sacrificing NGO workers, demanded remuneration for the job.⁹³

Hyndman thus notes that one of the problems encountered in this experiment was the revival of “traditional power among refugees and reinscribing elders’ enclaves of autocratic authority.”⁹⁴ Many other fissions and fractions within the camp residents, especially between them and their supervisors, “complicat[ed] any power-sharing agreement or notion of a unified community.”⁹⁵ (Perhaps it should be noted that the UNHCR financial officer was against this NGO idea of “empowerment,” because it was not “efficient and effective.”) Hyndman also expressed a discomfort with the fact that coercion was exercised while “headcounting” the camp residents so they could gain ration cards. However, most refugees participated in these “categories of entitlement” because otherwise they would perish.

Also of negative impact, and as if to undo the power that the NGO-UNHCR alliance was handing over to the refugees, the latter were not given any economic power. They could make some decisions about priorities but the funds and resources to follow them through were provided by an NGO that would also check for “fairness” (perhaps that word is akin to “good governance”). For Hyndman, this was not enough. For her, the only way CARE and UNHCR could avoid reproducing a “neocolonial power structure” was to relinquish the “economic means” to “enable refugee self management to occur.”⁹⁶

Hyndman’s post-modern contradictions – many of which are replicated in her own mode of analysis and prescription – illustrate the tensions inherent in the (re)introduction of “stateness” into war-torn societies. De Waal might have liked some of the aspects of the experience about which Hyndman was ambivalent. Liberal democrats shy away from communitarianism and prefer institutionally mediated individual activities. In typical post-colonial fashion, Hyndman was not sure whether to honour the authenticity of tradition or to condemn the male chauvinist elders who selected themselves onto these

⁹² Jennifer Hyndman, “Refugee Self-Management and the Question of Governance,” *Refuge*, 16, 2 (June 1997), pp. 16-22.

⁹³ Hyndman, “Refugee ...,” 1997, p. 21.

⁹⁴ Hyndman, “Refugee ...,” 1997, p. 19.

⁹⁵ Hyndman, “Refugee ...,” 1997, p. 20.

⁹⁶ Hyndman, “Refugee ...,” 1997, p. 21.

“democratic” committees and kept women well in the background. Should the Canadian CARE workers have hesitated to introduce western feminist sensibilities – liberal, socialist, and radical all in one, addressing “issues of discrimination, violence, and systemic material inequality” – and backed off in the face of “ethnic, clan and other relations of difference?”⁹⁷ One doubts she would advocate that, but her post-colonial side comes close to it. No matter: the process so haltingly started in the Kenyan camps was one of cosmopolitan and institutional liberalism, not communitarianism.

In short, Hyndman claims that the refugee camp environment did not create or empower “communities:” the camp managers’ strategies “allude to the politics of institutions, not communities.”⁹⁸ One looking for “stateness” in situations like these would say: “precisely.” One looking for liberal democracy would shy away from “community” if it meant traditional autocrats reinventing themselves for modernity’s ends. Socialists too, would hesitate at handing over the reigns of power to “primitive” authorities. But they all might celebrate the chance for the refugees to participate in what the humanitarian agenda could offer of “modernity” on the margins of war. They might also note that the construction of “stateness” is always a contested process, but it is “progressive” in the context of war-torn situations.

Similarly, it is a tenet of western liberal philosophy that there be no taxation without representation. It seems that the “community self-management” experiment was implementing a degree of representation without taxation, which no doubt is an extension of liberal principles rather than a complete turning of them on their heads. Hyndman did not appreciate the granting of political power to the community – or institutional – representatives without also granting them more economic power over resources which they did not generate. This she referred to (twice) as “reproducing neo-colonial power relations.” However, she was not quite prepared to allow the (old male) elders the right to exercise their perception of their entitlements: her liberal feminist side sees their cultural sovereignty as a cynical paycheque and she seems not to advocate the payment of their wages. Hyndman also noted that many women participated – as a matter of necessity – in activities that neo-liberals advocate: credit schemes, small shops in the camp markets, and the collection and sale of firewood.⁹⁹ However, it is only between the lines that one could read a call for the institutionalisation of these activities so they could underlay some political power (a chancy proposition in any case).

All in all, Hyndman dismisses the “community empowerment” approach to the democratisation of war-torn contingency as “part of a strategic discourse which consolidates the institutional power of refugee relief organisations.”¹⁰⁰ A more multi-dimensional perspective would note that the tensions she illustrates are those of “stateness” coming in or returning to displaced societies. Within her well illustrated tale

⁹⁷ Hyndman, “Refugee ...,” 1997, p. 18.

⁹⁸ Hyndman, “Refugee ...,” 1997, p. 20.

⁹⁹ Hyndman, “Refugee ...,” 1997, p. 21. In communication after the first draft of this paper, Dr. Hyndman wished to emphasise that she does not advocate neo-liberal policies and that women resorted to these strategies out of dire necessity. Nonetheless, it is possible that neo-liberals would see income generating activities such as those as more desirable and “empowering” than well-meaning democratic experiments.

¹⁰⁰ Hyndman, 1997, p. 16.

one can discern the many apparatuses of a state complex: finance, legitimacy and ideology, repression, “discipline,” representativeness, and even “market preparation.” In the absence of longitudinal study one can only speculate whether some of these democratic dilemmas accompanied these citizens in the making as they trekked back to their former homes, or forged new existences in their latest residences.

Other constructions of “stateness” in war-torn recovery areas

A look through UNHCR documents reveals hundreds of instances of nascent “stateness.” The process of assisting the victims of war has become much like that of governing “states.” The panoply of activities undertaken in humanitarian emergencies and their aftermath take on “modernist” institutional forms resembling the rules, regulations and roles one finds in western states. They include de facto law enforcement,¹⁰¹ codes of conduct,¹⁰² building schools and other physical – and social – infrastructural elements,¹⁰³ the streamlining of administrative procedures to ease the management of contracts between multilateral and bilateral agencies and scores of NGOs,¹⁰⁴ and high level negotiations about co-operation and co-ordination between representatives of “development” agencies such as the World Bank and/or the UNDP and “humanitarian” agencies such as UNHCR.¹⁰⁵ (The latter seem as complex as the diplomatic dances between states – and involve budgets larger than those of many states.) Other related activities and analyses thereof include food security,¹⁰⁶ “capacity-building”,¹⁰⁷ women’s

¹⁰¹ Jeff Crisp, “A state of insecurity: the political economy of violence in refugee-populated areas of Kenya,” *New Issues In Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 16, UNHCR, Geneva, December 1999.

¹⁰² Nicholas Leader, “Humanitarian Principles in Practice: A Critical Review,” *Relief and Rehabilitation Network (RRN) Newsletter*, December 1999.

¹⁰³ Jeff Crisp and Lowell Martin, “Quick Impact Projects: A Review of UNHCR’s Returnee Reintegration Programme in Nicaragua,” Geneva, UNHCR EVAL/QIP/12, November 1992; Kimberley Clark, “Mozambique’s Transition from War to Peace: USAID’s Lessons Learned,” Africa Bureau Information Center, Research and Reference Services, United States Agency for International Development, Center for Development Information and Evaluation, Washington, PN-ABY-178 April 1996.

¹⁰⁴ “EC Push for NGOs to Form Consortia,” *RRN Newsletter*, 15 (November 1999), p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ E.g. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Co-operation Directorate, “Coordination/Concertation Between Principal Actors, (Note by the UNDP and UNHCR),” submitted for discussion at the 5th Meeting of the DAC Task Force on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation, DC(96)7/ANN7, 17-18 June 1996, 3 June 1996; UNHCR Memorandum: “DAC/OECD Task Force on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation,” PTSS/RSRU/LM/97/0304, 14 May 1997; Guido Ambroso, “Reintegration, Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Demobilisation: World Bank and UNHCR Approaches and Prospects for Cooperation,” UNHCR Hargeisa, November 1998; Division of International Protection, Brookings Institution and UNHCR Round Table Reintegration Gap, “Reconstituting National Protection and Promoting Social Reconciliation,” November 1998; UNHCR/Brookings Institution Round Table: Aid for Social Reintegration, Reconciliation and Sustainable Recovery,” n/d.

¹⁰⁶ Reginald Green, “Food Security in Refuge and Return: Some Aspects of Entitlements, Markets and Modalities,” *Reconstructing Livelihoods: Towards New Approaches to Resettlement*, Refugee Studies Programme Conference, September 1-13 1996, Oxford.

¹⁰⁷ “Adapting Capacity Building Strategies to the needs of War-torn Societies,” Discussion Paper for Economic Development Institute of the World Bank and UNHCR workshop, 21-24 October 1996, Washington; Deborah Eade, *Capacity Building: An Approach to People-Centred Development*, Oxford, Oxfam, 1997.

civic organisations,¹⁰⁸ the “political dimension of protection,”¹⁰⁹ and refugees in elections.¹¹⁰

All of these aspects of humanitarian assistance indicate the predominance of politics and thus “stateness” in every mode of UNHCR’s activity. They deal with issues of international relations, legitimacy, territoriality, welfare functions, the mediation of class and gender conflict, and – that prime Weberian criterion for “stateness” – the “legitimate” monopoly of force. If the displaced and unsettled returned citizens falling under the mandate of humanitarian agencies cannot trust a state – or mercenaries – for protection and the enforcement of laws and customs, then it may well be that agencies doing their best to avoid the question of coercion and violence are forced into those roles.

The next few words can only point in the direction of this evolutionary process – but at this point it is clear that more research is needed to come to grips with this phenomenon. What should be made clear from the outset, however, is that agencies such as UNHCR may well be involved, willy-nilly, in fundamental processes of societal and state formation in third world “war zones” which are equivalent to the transformational processes in mid-millennial Europe. They led to “modern” states and capitalist societies, but it took centuries and many of them had empires in the “third world” to help them along their way.

Aside from that historically sweeping statement, however, there are at least three aspects of the humanitarian agenda that are *not* clear from the studies and reports attesting to the “stateness” inherent in humanitarian actions.

Firstly, the extent to which these processes bring democratic *forms*¹¹¹ of governance, be they of the local state or of international institutions, to the people under their “care” is as yet undetermined.

Secondly, following from the first, it is not clear whether these processes strengthen or diminish the “democratic dialectic” between the actors in these processes and “their” states. Does the HI serve to destroy such links? Does the cosmopolitans’ suggestion that such links are best made with international organisations hold water?

Thirdly, congruent with the second question: do humanitarian activities in war-torn zones contribute to the construction of capacity within state *and* “civil society?” Recognising the tendencies within civil society discourse to downplay the class contradictions within

¹⁰⁸ Krishna Kumar, “Empowering Women’s Civic Organisations in Postconflict Societies: The Role of International Assistance,” Evaluation Proposal for Center for Development Information and Evaluation, USAID, Washington, n.d.

¹⁰⁹ G.J.L. Coles, “UNHCR and the Political Dimension of Protection,” August 1995, Belley.

¹¹⁰ Center for Policy Analysis and Research on Refugee Issues, Refugee Policy Group, “Draft Report – Refugees in Elections: A Separate Peace,” Washington, September 1997.

¹¹¹ I use the word “form” here to distinguish the formal structures of the HI as opposed to their *content*, or the actual participatory relations between these agencies and their “citizens.”

it,¹¹² this question asks: what is the class nature of the society being “rebuilt” and what are the concurrent ideological practices being engendered by agencies (NGO, bilateral and multilateral) and states?

These are the issues differentiating a social-democratic/welfarist agency from a neo-liberal one. If there is a “cold war” now it is not between state socialism and Keynesian capitalism, but between Hayekians and Keynesians (or possibly those adhering to the philosophy of the less well-known Karl Polanyi¹¹³) and their utopias. Policy statements missing these distinctions simply waffle on the issues at stake and avoid setting out priorities. A good example of veering between “statist” and “civil society” perspectives¹¹⁴ can be found in a Brookings Institution and UNHCR Round Table document:

It is crucial for states emerging from violent conflict to first secure the commitment and participation of all levels of society to a process of reconciliation. Where civil society has broken down, the first priority is to recover the credibility and legitimacy of the state. A pre-requisite for post-conflict recovery, however, also entails the rebuilding of national institutions and addressing the underlying economic and social problems. All aspects of the rule of law often also need to be assisted in order to become functional. Fostering socio-economic justice would require re-establishing national institutions, such as a well trained police force; a credible and independent judiciary and other legal personnel; support for the re-establishment of bar associations and mechanisms for peaceful resolution of civil disputes including property rights; the building of democracy; the reconstructing of the public service and other services; the restoring of a free press; the access and the re-distribution of land and other assets where necessary; the re-availment of economic opportunities; assistance in the prosecution of those accused of war crimes, genocide and other serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law; as well as assistance in the institution and implementation of amnesties and guarantees, particularly, for returning refugees. All of these factors amount to the strengthening of the civil society which may already have been established with the ending of the conflict, however, the need exists to identify actors to address the activities required to fill the gaps that may exist.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Ellen Wood, “The Uses and Abuses of Civil Society,” in *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

¹¹³ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1944; Harold Lacher, “The Politics of the Market: Re-reading Karl Polanyi,” *Global Society*, 13, 3 (1999); James Lie, “Embedding Polanyi’s Market Society,” *Sociological Perspectives*, 34, 2 (1991).

¹¹⁴ These perspectives can be translated in the liberal world of Atlanticist policy discourse as oppositions between Keynesianism and neo-liberalism, because it assumes that “civil society” is an uncomplicated and conflict-free zone of freedom, not the main arena for class conflict.

¹¹⁵ Brookings Institution and UNHCR Round Table Reintegration Gap, “Reconstituting National Protections and Promoting Social Reconciliation,” Division of International Protection, 17 November 1998, n.p.

The document says that a “first priority” is to restore the credibility of the state. However, in the next breath it asserts that a “pre-requisite” for recovery is the rebuilding of “national institutions” (begging the question of whether the notion of “national” is equivalent to that of the “state,” both of which are barely emerging or broken down in any case) and “addressing the underlying economic and social problems. The list goes on in a somewhat circular fashion. It could be justifiably accused of “everythingism.”

Contrary to this “everythingism” is the clarity of the aforementioned World Bank’s *The State in a Changing World*. It asserts that where states do not have the capability of doing anything else, they must establish the “universal public good:” private property rights. To revert to the language of Karl Marx, that is the process of “primitive accumulation” – the long, protracted and very violent process of social change which moved Europe from feudalism to capitalism. It would be repetitious to recall that this process went on *sans* democracy, *sans* human rights, *sans* everything – but it would be also wrong, because the battles concurrent with it proceeded as struggles for those demands.

It remains to be determined whether or not the wars in the context of the contemporary “third world” have similar motivations. What is certain, however, is that the humanitarian agencies are intricately involved in them. They carry into them discourses derived from pastoral principles which have evolved over centuries, strengthened by struggles within and against states and against *certain* elements within “civil society.”¹¹⁶ They can only be strengthened by a knowledge of their opposites, along with the pitfalls of “interventionism” de Waal highlights so effectively. A research agenda combining the two concerns of ideological contestation and the contradictions of “the humanitarian mode of power” could only be carried out with long-term studies of the individuals subjected to them.

Conclusions and new research agendas

Bereft of their post-colonial covering, Hyndman’s thick descriptions are models of such research. If we substitute the chimera of “community” by more prosaic notions of “institution-building” and the ideological patterns they weave, we can observe the reconstruction of society-state relations in the midst and in the aftermath of “complex political emergencies.” Humanitarian interventions involve the ideologies and practices of “stateness.” They bring UNHCR and other multilateral agencies into what is traditionally seen as the territorially defined “state’s” domain: the use of force, the distribution of welfare, financial management, negotiating relationships with organisations in civil society, and creating and maintaining legitimacy, to name just a few. The myriad of policies needing implementation if any war-torn society is to reach the stage of “post-conflict” at which the implementation of a “market-friendly” environment would be sustainable suggests that state construction is an integral part of

¹¹⁶ See Adam Hochschild’s *King Leopold’s Ghost*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1998, for the depredation in the late-19th century Congo – and the interactions of human rights activists in and out of states emerging from that epitome of laissez-faire globalism (which is eerily similar to the globalisation processes we are experiencing a century later).

that agenda.¹¹⁷ A reordering of perspective is all that is needed to adjust the modality of analyses to one that interrogates the “stateness” of UNHCR actions. Research should be oriented towards studies of the consequences of such activities – be they “relief” or “development” – on the ways in which those who will soon be “citizens” instead of “subjects”¹¹⁸ are “thinking like a state.”

UNHCR needs more research on what sorts of practices carried out in refugee camps and reintegration exercises begin to enable the people under such enormous stress to exercise power over the members of the HI, the FI and even the PI (the political international) – and those within their own “communities” who exhibit the worst characteristics of “stateness.” If the humanitarian international is going to take some of de Waal’s criticisms to heart and to recognise the inherent embeddedness of its activities in the politics and economics of crises and their resolution, the aspects of their activities impinging on “democratisation” must be taken into account. There is no doubt that the HI is so busy administering “relief” that such political questions will seem luxurious or simply a nuisance. However, they can be sure that the other side of “the international” – the FI – is not taking such questions lightly.

Part of this research would be the question of how subjects and citizens who have gone through the refugee process actually deal with the states under whose power they are ruled in the “post-conflict” moment, be they “back home” or in new, reconfigured states. Their experiences have no doubt made them think of states in mostly horrific ways. It has yet to be discovered what sorts of new states they are thinking about, how the contending humanitarian and financial internationals have affected these perceptions, and the results of these altered realities and perceptions on their futures. Such longitudinal projects would be complicated, but they will be necessary unless the HI is going to remain in the ever-diminishing “relief” category of the “relief-development” continuum while the FI makes its way on the levelled killing fields.

The political contract that de Waal advocates can only be buttressed by HI actions. De Waal’s one-sided polemic, however, obscures the complexities of such relationships and their unfolding. Yet in the end de Waal’s perspectives and agendas are complementary with those of the HI. Both the PI and the HI must realise the mutuality of their agendas. They will only be successful if the HI is more aware of its *politics* and if de Waal and similar scholar-activists recognise that they have been talking the prose of stateness all the time.

¹¹⁷ See Geoff Harris (ed.), *Recovery from Armed Conflict in Developing Countries: An Economic and Political Analysis*, London, Routledge, 1999, for an excellent summary of tasks. Dare one raise the question: what would be the processes involved if a “market-sceptical” society was a conceivable project?

¹¹⁸ To borrow the evocative phrase, again, from Mamdani, *Subject and Citizen*, 1996.