

Sociology of Humanitarian Intervention: Bosnia, Rwanda and Somalia Compared

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ABSTRACT. Among the key problems of “humanitarian intervention” in international law and international relations are the dynamics of sovereignty and the question of selectivity in intervention. The causes of conflict in the major cases of “humanitarian intervention,” former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Rwanda, are discussed under several headings: the end of the cold war; economics and scapegoating; ethnic politics?; media war; external influences; and politics of displacement. Ethnicity, although generally considered a cause of conflict, is not an explanation but rather that which is to be explained. The terminology of ethnicity is part of the conflict and cannot serve as a language of analysis. The core causes of conflict are authoritarian institutions and political cultures and the politics of hard sovereignty, while external influences play a significant role. Revisiting “humanitarian intervention” in this light, it clearly provides no solution for structural problems. The crucial problems, democratization and the fundamental restructuring of state–society relations, are not even on the agenda for they fall outside the parameters of conventional wisdom, which is trained to think in terms of state sovereignty, national interest, international security. “Humanitarian intervention” reinforces authoritarianism, hard sovereignty, militarization. For “humanitarian intervention” to contribute to conflict resolution, what is required are postconventional political options such as new types of state, partial forms of sovereignty and democratization. Meanwhile “humanitarian intervention” offers a mirror of global politics as they actually exist.

Civilizational myth: that good violence (“we”) shall win over
evil violence (“them”).
—JAN ØBERG

“Humanitarian intervention” (hereafter HI) deserves to be put in quotes because it is a deeply ideological notion. Marking a frontier of international relations in the age of globalization, HI raises the question of political responsibility in the era of

globalization. Since we are aware of and connected to events taking place in distant parts of the world, informed of the sufferings of people in distant lands, what are the consequences for our way of being in the world, for our sense of political engagement? The emotion involved may be termed long-distance compassion; the realities are murkier. On the one hand, HI inaugurates a new kind of citizenship, the citizenship of humanity, while on the other it treads in the footsteps of conventional interstate politics which, however, itself is in transition. HI is a two-faced operation, idealism caught in the wheels of realism, realism outflanked by realities.

HI marks the cusp of a time of transition. Behind us lies the era of the statist paradigm, the billiard ball model of interstate relations. A long period of deepening interdependence, accelerating since the late-nineteenth century, has narrowed the scope and changed the nature of sovereignty, which is now increasingly circumscribed by international conventions and implicated in transnational economic relations. In the postwar world the political effects of globalization were contained within the framework of the cold war. The UN Security Council was a cold war arena, its sphere of operation circumscribed by superpower veto.

The end of the cold war marks a new stage in HI. Conflicts that had been contained because of cold war geopolitics and ideological alignments have come to the fore. Human rights abuses that used to be condoned because they were committed by allies in the name of cold war authoritarianism (“our son of a bitch”) are now viewed in a different light, as the background becomes foreground. The possibilities for intervention have also changed. “Over 250 vetoes were cast in the Security Council before the beginning of this decade,” notes the Danish minister of defense Hækkerup (1993: 22), “but the end of the cold war is gradually rolling back the former impotence of this world organization.” This circumstance also delimits the workings of HI: “The very factor which led to the new practice of humanitarian intervention—namely, the possibility of agreement in the Security Council—has also contributed to the difficulties regarding purposes and methods of operation” (Roberts 1993: 13).

But is HI not a replay of imperialism, under the guise of humanitarianism? More precisely, was imperial expansion itself not habitually justified by humanitarian aims—to end the Arab slave trade in Africa, to end human sacrifice and “cannibalism,” to end widow-burning in India, to bring civilization, progress and the rule of law to the lands of savages? There are profound differences, however, between the White Man’s Burden and *mission civilisatrice*, and contemporary human rights internationalism. The former were one-way street justifications with in-built racism while the latter is being actively endorsed in the countries involved. Besides, human rights standards also apply to the hegemonic countries (Vincent, 1992).

The present threshold of argument is that few would still defend the statist paradigm and the hard notion of sovereignty-above-all. The practice, though not necessarily the principle, of HI is increasingly widely accepted. Around this mean positions vary considerably. This essay will lightly review (because this is done better elsewhere) positions in international law and international relations, consider the causes of instability and conflict in the major cases of HI, and come back to HI to ask whether it addresses these causes, and in what form it could possibly do so.

Perspectives on Humanitarian Intervention

In international law, the standard basis of intervention has been Chapter VII of the UN Charter, according to which coercive intervention in the affairs of a state is justified

in case of a threat to international peace and security. This has been duly invoked in most cases of HI, and to justify UN sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa and against Southern Rhodesia. It has *not* been invoked in Resolution 688, which authorized humanitarian assistance to the Kurds in northern Iraq in 1991. This circumstance has “added to the debate over whether a new practice is emerging that puts ‘people above government’” (Stanton, 1993: 14; Barzani, 1993). UN intervention in Somalia was again justified on different grounds, in the words of Boutros-Ghali (1993: 292), “the legal basis of this intervention was the absence of a government.”

The status of this debate is the search for a balance between state sovereignty and human rights (Thomas, 1994; Deng, 1995). Part of this is the tacit acknowledgment of an interregnum, a transition between the principle of non-intervention and an emerging practice of transnational crossborder political responsibility, which also involves global civic institutions. As long as international law remains anchored in the statist paradigm, no legal basis for intervention will be available outside Chapter VII. “In the current state of international society,” according to Adam Roberts (1993: 13), a firm critic of HI, “there is absolutely no possibility of securing general agreement among states about the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention. It will, and perhaps should, remain in a legal penumbra. . . .” Caroline Thomas (1994: 17) argues for caution in departing from the principle of non-intervention, since this has also contributed to democratization in interstate relations, affording “some protection for weak states against the predatory tendencies of some stronger powers.” Elsewhere on the spectrum of positions, a case is made to “recast international legal principles so that the international community itself would become the guardian of human rights around the world,” on the basis of a “Commonwealth of Humanity” doctrine (Gillespie, 1993: 219).

In the sphere of international relations, the key problems of HI include the question of authorization, selectivity, and the absence of a general doctrine. Its authorization under a variety of multilateral fig-leaves such as regional bodies (as in the US intervention in Grenada) exposes HI to regional interests. UN Security Council authorization regularizes the practice of HI, but also shifts the problem to the nature of the Security Council as an arena of the hegemony of the permanent members. This is reflected in the problem of selectivity and “double standards.” Other instances than the Iraqi Kurds, Somalia, former Yugoslavia and Rwanda have “shocked the conscience of humanity” but have *not* led to HI—massacres and political repression in East Timor, massacre in Kampuchea, shootings on Tienanmen Square in Beijing, dictatorship in Myanmar and Zaire, catastrophe in Sudan. According to Roberts (1993: 12), “Humanitarian intervention seems for the most part to be confined to cases in which there has been extensive television coverage, where there is some particular interest in intervention, and in which there is not likely to be dissent among powers or massive military opposition. In short, it may largely be confined to highly publicized situations of chaos and disintegration. . . .”¹ Accordingly, exit Kashmir, Kurdistan, Tibet.

Arguably, “it is better to uphold basic principles selectively than not at all” (Roberts, 1993: 12), but this in turn leads to the problem of the absence of a general doctrine of HI. “Security Council resolutions have moved the matter forward inch by inch, in a thoroughly pragmatic way. There are plenty of references to exceptional circumstances, but no general defense of humanitarian intervention” (Roberts, 1993: 12). This situation is a reflection of both the limited status of the Security Council and the state of international law. As long as one basically believes that “Non-intervention makes the world go round” (Roberts, 1993: 10) and adheres

to state sovereignty as the leading principle, one fails to recognize the full weight of human rights principles and the fact that HI itself marks a profound change in international coexistence. To be precise: non-intervention makes the world of *states* go round.

While much hinges on the principle of sovereignty, the limitation of most discussions is that sovereignty is not historicized. Sovereignty is talked about as if it were a fixed principle and the dynamics of sovereignty are not acknowledged. Actual state sovereignty has always been circumscribed by interstate power differentials and at present “has become even more of a fiction than it was in 1945” (Strange, 1995: 66). In part this is due to the tremendous increase in traffic across state borders taking place outside state control—financial, economic and of information and people. Also, there has always been a tension between sovereignty and the principle of self-determination of peoples, which implies the right to establish a state and to the free choice of government. Prominent in the era of decolonization, self-determination has received renewed emphasis with the rising tide of nationalism and ethnic consciousness (Lapidoth, 1992).

Another fundamental limitation is the predominance of the state-centred perspective in international relations, which is contested by a “global society” perspective (Shaw, 1994). Rosenau (1990) coined the term “post-international politics” to describe the complex reality of two interactive worlds with overlapping memberships: a state-centric world and a multi-centric world of actors such as corporations, transnational organizations, ethnic groups, churches. From the point of view of the latter, state sovereignty appears less sacrosanct. Transnational NGOs such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace and the Helsinki Citizens Assembly have long insisted on the right of interference across state borders (*droit d'ingérence*). They also claim the right to operate across state borders without government permission—witness the name, Médecins sans Frontières. The role of NGOs in international humanitarian assistance has grown tremendously over recent years and has been subject to extensive praise (e.g., Mawlawi, 1993). There is, however, another side to this, as African Rights (1994a: 6) observes: “The increase of donor-funded relief operations and western disengagement from poor countries are two sides of the same coin.”²

Perspectives on HI vary according to disciplinary regimes of discourse and conventional and postconventional interpretations. Conservative positions in international law reflect the statist discursive framework. Yet there is a growing recognition of the weight of human rights principles. To the extent that international relations follows (neo)realist premises it lags behind the realities of globalization in which states are no longer necessarily even the main actors. Still, the actual problems of HI lie beyond this level of discussion which is mainly concerned with the legitimacy and justifications of HI. Its most pressing problems concern its logic, methods of operation and aims in relation to the causes of conflict.

Causes of Conflict

The central question is whether HI can address the causes of political instability. The notion of “causes” takes us beyond the triggers of conflict. Here we must turn to the source of the problems in the salient cases of HI, former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Rwanda. Since this is not the occasion for a full-scale treatment the discussion will be limited to highlighting a number of similarities and differences in the etiology of conflict. Different dimensions of the causes of instability will be considered

under separate headings. This splits the complex genealogy of each conflict into separate dimensions but, on the other hand, makes comparison easier. Structural factors are not sufficient to explain political instability (Lemarchand, 1994). It is in the intricacies of conflicts that the differences among situations become apparent, taking us beyond general formulae; nevertheless we must cross the terrain of generalities as well.

With respect to postcolonial societies it has been argued that, generally, ethnic mobilization can turn into secessionism under the following conditions: if the ethnic groups have been treated differently within the same territory under colonial rule; if the postcolonial government imposes monocultural rule; and if there is support within the regional environment for the secessionists (Mayall and Simpson, 1992: 9). These conditions are all relevant to former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Rwanda, but during the cold war they were given a different inflection and the conflicts did not all take the form of secession. Secession played a part in former Yugoslavia and Somalia, but the conflict in Somalia, and in Rwanda, is better described as a war of political dominance.

End of the Cold War

The cold war era of strong, centralized states, girded by a national security doctrine and supported through the superpower satellite system, channelled domestic conflict. The tendency for domestic conflict to be framed along ideological lines contained the politics of regionalist and culturalist differentialism. There is a further correlation between the end of the cold war, waning support for authoritarian regimes and state collapse.³

Several theses are relevant. The deep freeze thesis holds that historical frictions were kept in abeyance during the cold war, only to resurface with the thaw. The cold war period itself also generated forms of friction that were made manifest upon the waning of state centralism. Both theses are relevant to former Yugoslavia and Somalia. Communist rule in Eastern Europe was a deep freezer in which older structures of thought survived intact, so that technical modernization accompanied a failure of cultural modernization (Arato and Benhabib, 1994: 325).

The cold war left behind a legacy of authoritarianism, the supremacy of security in politics, surplus armaments, and a tradition of politics of polarization—in many cases overlaid upon the earlier authoritarian legacy of colonialism. The pressures for government roll-back and democratization that came with the waning of the cold war have been a threat to entrenched authoritarian governments, for instance in Rwanda, where the cold war itself had little impact.

Economics and Scapegoating

Structural adjustment, privatization and deregulation have been corollaries of the retreat of centralist states in the economic sphere. This forms part of the background of the revival of nationalism. In Eastern Europe, “during economic transitions involving new austerity and deprivation, many governments were tempted to offer symbolic compensations where economic gains were unavailable” (Arato and Benhabib, 1994: 326).

In a broad sense there are similarities between the present period and two previous periods of transition: from feudalism to capitalism and the release of unfettered labour, and industrialization and the release of craft and agricultural labour.

Nowadays in many countries the size of the informal sector, the underground economy and the scope of crossborder traffic are such that they exceed the formal “national economy,” the regulation of which has been part of the *raison d’être* of the state. The growth of the informal sector, the trend towards flexibility, the rise of information technology, globalization and relocalization are part of the contemporary transition, and political structures, such as the nation-state, are adapting to a more decentralized and more globalized political economy.

An element that is relevant to Somalia is the political economy of warlordism. The conflicts in various regions are post-cold war conflicts also in the sense that arms distributed in the context of regional cold war strife are recycled and put to use for other aims. Local wars over resources are fought out with cold war weaponry. If the cold war was an era of war economies orchestrated by the superpowers, presently, according to Duffield and Prendergast (1994: 21), “global restructuring is promoting the emergence of proactive, survivalist war economies.” In this interpretation we have entered an era of “unstable war economies,” prompted by the restructuring of the global economy into regional blocs.

In the more marginal areas of the global economy, with the emergence of war economies, autonomous structures have found ways of existing outside of conventional nation-based economic relations. In south Sudan, militia groups support themselves by stripping the assets of other groups—capital, grazing land, water. These elemental resources become important—as the formal economy collapses—in ways that reinforce ethnic identity. Somalia has always been subject to periodic conflict; a closer look shows that each bout relates to a reorganization of the asset base (Duffield and Prendergast, 1994: 21).

The contemporary conflicts, then, are a manifestation of an ongoing process of diffusion of authority and increasing informality of political and economic relations.

Most analyses of the breakdown of Yugoslavia focus on political processes, but it may be argued that economic disintegration preceded and precipitated political breakdown. “Yugoslavia fell apart economically long before it did politically” (Henricson-Cullberg et al., 1991: 18). “In former Yugoslavia, the growing economic crisis of the 1970s forced up the value of land, reinforced regional ties and promoted regional competition and economic fragmentation—preceding the political fragmentation” (Duffield and Prendergast, 1994: 21). Sergej Flere draws a comparison with the situation in Germany in the 1930s.

Economic troubles during the past decade are similar: the middle strata have been hardest hit by economic crisis; moreover, three and four digit inflation has its own logic in delegitimizing institutions, bringing about generalized uncertainty and unreliability of behaviour and institutions. Yugoslavia did not lose a war but ideologically similar phenomena have been at work: “scapegoating” for the “unjust” position of one’s ethnic group, i.e., accusations against other groups (and “traitors” within one’s own) with regard to present political boundaries, historical events and the general unfavourable state of one’s ethnic group (Flere, 1992: 259).

While economic exploitation of one region or group by another has been part of political talk in former Yugoslavia, economists caution that computing a balance sheet that would demonstrate that would be impossible (Flere, 1992: 254). What is recognized are the authoritarian features of Yugoslavian modernization: the lack of an accountable bureaucracy, the absence of a market, the rigid model of self-management socialism, and the absence of democratic institutions. What is also

widely acknowledged is a *Mezzogiorno effect* of a more developed north, comprising Slovenia, Croatia and the autonomous region of Vojvodina, and a less developed south, including Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia (Flere, 1992; Denitch, 1994; Bose, 1995). The odd element in this configuration is that the “backward south” had de facto control of the federation’s military might through Serbian hegemony in the Yugoslav armed forces—Europe’s second largest army (supplied by the United States under the cold war dispensation). This pattern was reproduced within the regions, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Krajina, through urban–rural disparities with Serb peasants less prosperous than the Muslim and Catholic town dwellers. The Serbs in Krajina had traditionally been soldier-peasants, guardians of the old frontier between the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Ottoman domains.

Rather than economic determination or fatality in the process of breakdown, what is at issue is the way economic dynamics have been interspersed in and mediated by political and institutional processes. Zagorka Golubovic’s (1992: 135) interpretation of the Yugoslavian breakdown runs as follows: “The Yugoslav communist party was first broken down into national parties, then the never fully integrated Yugoslav market was broken down into regional markets, and, finally, the prerogatives of the federal government were increasingly transferred to the republican centers of power. This goes to show that Yugoslavia responded to the ‘revolution’ in Eastern Europe by continuing the process of reorganizing state power in favor of the strong republican (national) centers.”

In analyzing the conflict in Rwanda, African Rights notes that “ethnic violence could be seen as a response to economic crisis” (the drop in coffee prices, the effects of structural adjustment). But, in their view, this is “a superficial analysis—and one that suits the perpetrators of the genocide very well” (1994b: 14). They continue, after detailing several failures in government development policy: “The true target of the economic frustrations of Rwandese should have been the government. . . . Instead the government used its well-established technique of scapegoating. The grievances of the rural Hutu population were re-directed to the Tutsi minority” (1994b: 22)—on issues of land, Tutsi businesses and jobs. Again, as in former Yugoslavia, what is at issue is not economics but the politics of economics, not economics but the combination of economics and scapegoating.

Ethnic Politics?

Since cold war legacies and economic transition have been part of the experience of many countries *without* leading to war, civil war or genocide, presumably the politics of ethnicity must be a decisive, crucially distinguishing factor. The common thesis is that the end of the cold war and economic transition have led to the eruption of ethnic and ethnonationalist politics; but this is also the point where the story becomes circular: the explanation and that which is to be explained become mixed up in a marriage of clichés. The problem with this perspective is that the language of propaganda also serves as the language of description and analysis. It is the partisans in the conflicts who claim that they are fighting ethnic (or national, or “racial”) struggles. How can the language of political mobilization simultaneously serve as the language of analysis?

The discourse of “ethnicity” conceals the political, ideological and economic character of the actual alignments. For example, the standard account of the conflict in Rwanda is of a struggle between Hutus and Tutsis, which overlooks the

opposition among Hutus, the Hutus aligned with the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), and the absence of clear lines of demarcation between Hutus and Tutsis since these were actually status and occupational categories and moreover rates of intermarriage have long been high. Besides, for a number of years prior to the 1994 genocide of Tutsis the main axis of political conflict in the country ran between Hutus of the northwest and Hutus of south and central Rwanda (see African Rights, 1994b; Braeckman, 1994).

Standard political and media accounts of Bosnia only recognize Muslims, Serbs and Croats. "No provisions are made for the more than 26 percent of the population that is intermarried, for the substantial numbers of urban dwellers who refused to describe themselves as either Serbs, Muslims, or Croats in the last census; or for the Serbs and Croats who support and have fought for the Bosnian government against their ethnic fellow nations that are trying to destroy Bosnia. All of that has been buried under the assumption that the *only* civic links that remain in Bosnia are those of the ethnic community" (Denitch, 1994: 7).

The opportunistic and political character of the markers of "ethnicity" is also apparent in Bosnia: "Each side will alternately emphasize their common roots when it indeed suits its purposes. Before the war, for example, when the Serbs still hoped to keep Bosnia in Yugoslavia, the media frequently highlighted similarities with the Muslims, while Croats often stressed that Bosnia had been part of historical Croatia and that most Bosnian Muslims were originally of Croatian descent" (Bell-Fialkoff, 1993: 121).

"Ethnic conflict" easily becomes a heading of convenience under which very different sentiments find shelter. Thus, "In Sarajevo and some other cities, the Muslims were an elite more sophisticated and more affluent than their rural Serbian neighbors. The class antagonism of the Serbian peasants in Bosnia was easily converted into ethnic hostility by anti-Muslim propaganda from Belgrade" (Laber, 1993: 6). This element comes across in Muslim women's testimonies of their rape by Serbs: "They kept pigs, they came down from the mountains, they stank. . . and now they are treating us this way!" (Laber, 1993: 3). Considering that the majority of Muslims live in towns, the war in Bosnia has been interpreted as *urbicide*, a campaign of rural peasants laying siege to, bringing destruction to and taking revenge on cities and their inhabitants (Humphrey, 1994). The enclaves which UNPROFOR was supposed to be protecting in Bosnia were invariably urban sites.

While the standard account of war in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda is ethnic conflict, ancient hatred, tribal violence, in both instances the story on the ground is unequivocally that *hatred had to be created*:

Yugoslavia was not destroyed by vast pressures of discontent from below. It was killed by policies initiated by the political leadership of the various republics. Some did this deliberately, wanting to destroy any possibility of a democratic and decentralized Yugoslavia. Rather than being caused by a popular upsurge of national hate from below, the civil war was the result of policy decisions from the top combined with an all-too effective use of the mass media, especially television (Denitch, 1994: 63, 62).

Indeed, hatred was not created out of thin air: "clearly, stirring a pot presupposes a pot that can be stirred" (Bose, 1995: 91). True, there were memories of Croat Ushtase massacres of Serbs and of Serbian Chetnik massacres of Muslims and Croats, rivalries between the Orthodox and Catholic churches, and various other intergroup tensions, yet these had not kept the groups from tolerably

coexisting and mixing for centuries, to the point that during the years before the war people often did not even know whether their friends or neighbours were Croats, Serbs or Muslims, or if they did it did not matter. These distinctions, although historically relevant, did not count on the ground but were *made to count* through interventions and manipulations by the political leadership. “The hate had to be systematically *created* and maintained if necessary by horrible atrocities and massacres against Croats, Serbs, and Muslims. These were often deliberately carried out by outsiders and designed to compromise innocent villagers of the other national group” (Denitch, 1994: 63).

The same processes and techniques that we are familiar with from war propaganda—the creation of enemy images, the psychology of enmity, demonization (e.g., Keen, 1986)—are applied in civil war and interethnic propaganda. An example is the Bosnian Serb claim that “live Serb babies were being fed to animals at the Sarajevo zoo” (Rieff, 1995: 99). If ethnic identities, ethnic boundaries and ethnic tensions are not there, they have to be invented. It follows that there is something profoundly deceptive and incongruous about calling these situations “ethnic conflict.” By implication it lets those who whipped up hatred off the hook and ignores the political responsibility of those who manipulated emotions, reactivated traumas and practised the politics of polarization. This responsibility belongs with strategic elites who, in both former Yugoslavia and Rwanda were concentrated within the state apparatus. That entire government apparatuses were deployed in extremist mobilization and, in Rwanda, in genocide, was essential to the efficacy of the operations.

In Somalia the standard account is of the conflict among clans, but notions such as “clans” and “kinship” have been changing meaning over time and are interwoven with elements of class. The clan-based militias made up of *Mooryaan* or urban lumpen and street urchins, were motivated by class grudges (Ahmed, 1995: x). Mohamoud, rather than following the terminology of clans, subclans, kinship or ethnicity, opts for the term “interest groups.” In his view these are driven not only by class interests but also by “group survival, recognition, access to political power, territory, settling old scores and most importantly niche overlaps” (Mohamoud, 1995: 19).

It is difficult to avoid the terminology of ethnicity in describing situations such as these, also in this account, and it presents a problem if the discourse of politics and the discourse of analysis echo the same refrain. In the process of reporting, propaganda, which can easily be adopted as fact, shapes interpretation, enters the decision-making process and thus turns into self-fulfilling prophecy. The logic of polarization is to eliminate the middle ground (literally, to ignore the in-between, to kill the moderates). If the language of analysis leaves no middle ground either, because it accepts the fundamental categorization of ethnicity, there is little alternative but to accept the politics of polarization—except to quarrel about the means chosen. Accordingly, in description and analysis neutral terminology such as “interest groups” and “interest politics” is preferable and should be adopted as much as possible.

War and Media War

The media are a not a cause of conflict proper but a terrain of conflict and instruments of enmity and mobilization, which are, however, significant enough to be discussed in this context. In former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Somalia, the media

have been major channels of political mobilization and part of the theatre of war. The above analysis of the manufacture of ethnic enmity places the responsibility with strategic elites, primarily within the state apparatus, but the crucial role of the media shows that this is not sufficient; for a political class in government positions to be able to operate, various intermediaries are necessary. What has been shocking in both former Yugoslavia and Rwanda is the active involvement of intellectuals and artists, of church people, doctors and nurses in the politics of hatred and often in the violence itself.

Destroying the radio transmitter of General Aideed's faction was one of the targets of US forces in Somalia; as a consequence they shifted to smaller but still powerful radio transmitters. The work of radio stations such as Radio Rwanda, RTLM, Radio Mille Collines in inciting the Interahamwe militia and orchestrating the genocide is well documented (African Rights, 1994b: chap. 6).

The efficacy of media propaganda in Somalia and Rwanda has been attributed to mass illiteracy (Mohamoud, 1994a: 1584), but in highly literate former Yugoslavia, the media have been just as effective in spreading a climate of political polarization. "Homogenization was efficiently realized with the help of mass media and by closing off the media space within the federal units to all other media sources. The media bolstered to extremes the feelings of fear, danger, and hate of the other" (Vejvoda, 1994: 348). While illiteracy no doubt contributes to susceptibility to propaganda and misinformation, the historical breeding ground of a climate of intercultural mistrust and enclosed media spaces are at least as important.

The international media are not outside and above, nor insulated from, the syndrome of intergroup polarization that prevails within the theatres of media war. They are not neutral monitors but themselves follow discursive models in which conflicts are framed according to Western conventional wisdom: African mayhem-as-usual, Balkan violence; ancient strife and hatred, tribal violence. "The international media, with its automatic tendency to blame violence in Africa on age-old ethnic enmities, must examine its record closely" (African Rights, 1994b: xiv). Besides, the media report from the ramparts of the prized institutions of the Western system and tend to defend the same narrow, conventional and conservative interpretation of these institutions that the extremists also uphold and manipulate.

The implications of the portrayal of "ethnic violence" by international media are that (1) the perpetrators are mad, (2) the West and other onlookers are sane, and (3) HI under these crazy circumstances, although messy, is simply the best we can do. The international media's portrayal of political crises around the world appears as a projection screen of Western hopes and fears. I do not share the conspiratorial interpretation of the media but rather see a media circus of clichés which privileges whatever notions come floating up that are consistent with conventional wisdom, which are then endlessly and uncritically repeated. There is an astonishing lack of interest in the actual situation itself, which is viewed solely through the "soundbite" lens, as another platform for recycling clichés. What "experts" are invited to pronounce on the situation speak almost invariably from a "state" perspective, not a "society" perspective. In this sense we still inhabit a cold-war, security-driven world.

International media have engaged in war journalism rather than conflict journalism: "news programmes have covered the wars but not the underlying conflict. . . politicians have not always responded to real events but to media events and to

campaigns for constructed ‘truths’ created by marketing and public relations firms in the US. . . . Who[m] do the media misuse and fool? And who misuses and fools the media?” (Øberg, 1994). One of the features of international media coverage is the obsession with individuals, leaders—General Aideed, Slobodan Milosevic, Radovan Karadzic, General Ratko Mladic, Franjo Tudjman. “It is as if internal and external structures, social and economic problems, constitutions, history, the present world order and general human relations were of little or no importance—and as if when the guilty, the scoundrel has been pointed out, then punishment equals solution to the conflict” (Øberg, 1994). Accordingly, not only specific local media but also the international media are part of the problem.

External Influences

One of the reasons why the statist paradigm is superficial as an analytical framework and unworkable as a policy framework is that it underrates or ignores the *existing* pattern of interstate influence and interpenetration. The *form* of the state, the form of sovereignty in former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Rwanda, had already been shaped by external forces, which had historically always been implicated in framing the units that are now contested, either directly through colonialism or regional power politics, or indirectly through discursive models.

The sources of conflict in Somalia and Rwanda go back to the colonial period. In 1960 the former British Somaliland was merged with the former Italian-ruled Somalia. Somaliland is sparsely populated by a majority (90 percent) pastoralist population, with few towns and no agriculture. The British had introduced little school education and institutionally Somaliland was much less prepared for independence than Italian-ruled Somalia, which was dominated by an urban bureaucratic salariat and traders in the towns. Soon after independence the south began to dominate the north, and in 1963 open rebellion broke out in the north. Siad Barre’s military regime had the northern towns bombed. In spring 1991 upon the overthrow of the Siad Barre regime the northerners declared their independence.

What was at issue in the conflict was not just regional rivalry and uneven development but the very nature of the state. The state, introduced under colonial rule, was adopted unchanged by the Somali nationalist movement, along with a number of alien elements: “The unitary and highly centralized system of rule, the western model of representative government, the bureaucratic mode of administration, a western code of law and justice. . . the assumption that a minuscule western educated class would rule Somalia, since they alone could administer a modern state” (Doornbos and Markakis, 1994: 14). The transfer of power from various pastoral groups to urban-based administrative and political centres meant a process of political marginalization of the majority pastoralist population: “there was a mismatch between a society whose traditional mode of political practice was. . . ‘democratic to the point of anarchy,’ and the highly centralized, authoritarian, militarized and violent post-colonial state run by a tiny, westernized elite class. This mismatch is the essence of the Somali problem” (Doornbos and Markakis, 1994: 16). This “pastoralist” line of analysis does not necessarily reflect a Somali consensus. Others dismiss “pastoral democracy” as another Somali myth (Ahmed, 1995). Not only the country but also the anthropology of Somalia is divided.

The cold war political game left Somalia “rich in armaments but poor in everything else.” Since the end of the cold war, various external forces have been involved in backing Somali political factions: Iran in backing Islamic organizations, Sudan in

support of General Aideed's faction, Egypt in backing his rival Ali Mahdi, and Ethiopia in order to preempt a return of the Ogaden problem by backing the Hawije clan in the south (Mohamoud, 1993a, b, c).

In Rwanda, differences between Hutus and Tutsis had been fluid and fuzzy—at one stage they amounted to no more than the number of cattle in a family's possession. But they were frozen into a "tribal matrix" during the period of German colonialism and particularly during the Belgian mandate period from 1916 to 1960. Identities were fixed, and fuzzy communities transformed into sharply delineated communities, through the issue of tribal identity cards, a practice continued after independence. The difference was interpreted and coded in racial terms: Nilotic "Hamites" (affiliated with Aryan stock, in the European imagery); "pastoral Europeans" lording it over "Bantus" ("real Africans"). This thesis, first advanced by the British explorer Hanning Speke, was later elaborated by the Belgian anthropologist Maquet,⁴ and ultimately reversed by Hutus into a narrative of Hutu oppression, according to which the Tutsis were alien invaders from the north who should therefore be exterminated or sent home.

In the Rwandan press, the Interahamwe militia have been referred to as "Rwandese 'tonton macoutes'" (African Rights, 1994b: 54). The Interahamwe were armed by the ministry of defence, trained by the Presidential Guard (who in turn had been trained by the French) and loyal to the MRND, the party founded by President Habyarimana. The major arms suppliers to the Rwandan government were France, Egypt and South Africa, and Belgium before the war with the RPF. French assistance also included military training, the provision of troops, and finance to obtain third-party arms supplies (African Rights 1994b: 62). French policy on Rwanda was dictated not by commercial or strategic interests but mainly by the politics of *francophonie*, a politics of prestige and international stature—perhaps best illustrated in the words of François Mitterrand: "Without Africa, France will have no history in the 21st century" (quoted in African Rights, 1994b: 667). The RPF and the Tutsis in exile in Uganda and Tanzania were regarded as anglophone, aligned with Museveni's Ugandan liberation movement, which was backed by British and possibly US interests. The shallowness of this interpretation was demonstrated during government and RPF negotiations in Belgium, when interpreters were provided but the negotiations were conducted by both parties in the common language of Banyarwanda (Braeckman, 1994).

African Rights further notes: "French and Egyptian policies throughout Africa are close, and it is not surprising to find the two countries in such close cooperation in Rwanda. After France, Egypt was Rwanda's most important arms supplier and strategic friend" (1994b: 63). At the same time the French–Egypt axis dictated the UN agenda vis-à-vis Rwanda (*ibid.*: 678). During the crucial days of April and May 1994, while the genocide in Rwanda was in progress, the view put forth by the interim government in Rwanda that it represented "uncontrollable tribal savagery, about which nothing could be done," predominated not only in most international media but also in the highest level of international policy, up to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Rwanda, and the Secretary General of the UN himself, who spoke of "Hutus killing Tutsis and Tutsis killing Hutus" and reported to the Security Council in this vein (documented and detailed in African Rights, 1994b: 202–204). The subsequent UN mandate provided for relief for the victims but did not include stopping the genocide.

In relation to former Yugoslavia, where colonial legacies refer back to the Austro–Hungarian and Ottoman empires, the dividing line makes up a Balkan

north-south boundary. In the lengthy and complex genealogy of conflict in former Yugoslavia, one of the recent decisive moments was Germany's recognition of the independence of Croatia and Slovenia, which overnight made the situation of minorities within their borders precarious and forced Bosnia-Herzegovina into an unwanted independence (Glenny, 1995). It follows that the war in former Yugoslavia must be placed within a wider framework which includes the European Union, Germany, and rivalry between Germany and France. In Germany, forces pressing for recognition of the republics included, besides a sizable Croat lobby, the CSU in Bavaria, the Catholic hierarchy, the SPD and media such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. With this act of recognition Germany re-emerged as a regional player, but the manner in which it was done was both premature and unwise because of its failure to impose any conditions (in particular, guarantees for minorities).

The role of external influences is opaque, its interpretation itself interwoven with the definition of the conflict and read differently by the various parties. Thus there are various readings of the role of Europe in the Balkans. One is that "Europe is dying in Sarajevo"—specifically what is under fire is the right for individuals to have rights (Arato and Benhabib, 1994). Another reading is that the Balkan crisis is itself an expression of a wider European crisis, which is made up of the rise of particularisms throughout Europe and the unresolved tension between state and nation in Europe (Melčić, 1993; Mestrovic, 1994). Clearly these two interpretations are incompatible: Europe cannot both be dying in Sarajevo and be in crisis generally. Besides these elements of "European crisis" are not specific to Europe: the rise of particularisms and the tension between state and nation, or between sovereignty and human rights, are worldwide problems.

The war theatres are also lucrative arms markets. Despite the UN embargo, billions of dollars' worth of arms have reached the republics of former Yugoslavia: "The international community has connived systematically with private arms dealers through some 20–30 countries" (Øberg, 1994). French interests in the conflict included arms sales to Rwanda (Smyth, 1994) and the DGSE flying in ammunition in Kigali during the genocide of the Tutsis. In 1995 France replaced the United States as the world's number one arms supplier to the Third World.

While partisans act in the name of the fatherland, not only their weapons but their legitimations, methods and imagings of violence borrow extensively from elsewhere. External influences shape the very forms of violence, the images and role models that are invoked. They affect the character of war as spectacle: in Sri Lanka, Clint Eastwood spaghetti westerns have been subtitled to play in Tamil Tiger training camps (de Silva, 1993); in former Yugoslavia, Bogdan Denitch (1994: 74) asks: "What movie has been the model for the particular armed group?" He adds:

There are the Serbian Chetniks, with greasy long beards and hair, traditional peasant caps (combined with the latest model of sneakers), and daggers. They dress like the villains of old Communist-era partisan films. Then there are volunteers, in the hundreds, organized by Belgrade gangsters (junkyard owners and black marketers). These are refugees from movies about Marseilles gangsters and the resistance; they dress in Ramboesque costumes and are clean shaven except for their moustaches. American movies on Vietnam and on special forces have had a heavy influence on Yugoslav military fashions, as have Ninja and Rambo movies.

He also observes "a cultural link between the German skinheads, French motorcyclist racists, and Yugoslav irregulars" (Denitch, 1994: 75).

Politics of Displacement

Displacements are both an effect and a cause of war, part of the chain-gang of violence. Part of the interest of the “international community” is to contain refugee flows. “It is no coincidence that sovereignty has become less sacrosanct at a time when increasing numbers of people have been affected by protracted, complex emergencies. The policy and resource implications of this trend have pitched the international relief system into turmoil” (Duffield and Prendergast, 1994: 14). Sovereignty becomes less sacrosanct if the way it is exercised threatens the wellbeing of other nations—and not only neighbouring nations—and leads to a chain-effect of displacements and emergencies. In this light, HI is an attempt at international risk management which, in view of the ramifications of refugee streams, is not necessarily purely humanitarian in inspiration.

Core Causes

If within this laundry list of causes of conflict one would have to settle on core or underlying causes, in my interpretation they would be authoritarianism and hard sovereignty, while external forces are an important contributing factor. Authoritarian political institutions and political culture are core causes because this condition is what makes it possible for strategic elites to translate a history of group friction into current political capital and to transform present political conflicts between interest groups into “ethnic conflict.” The standard theoretical explanation of ethnicity is that it is constructed by political and cultural elites. This elite theory has been criticized because it treats the recipients of elite manipulation as mere “dupes,” explaining the interests of leaders but not of followers (Nederveen Pieterse, 1996). However, if the relationship between elite and followers is placed within a context of an authoritarian political culture, then the capacity of elites to influence followers and take them on a path of ethnicization becomes intelligible.

Part of the underpinning of political authoritarianism are hard notions of sovereignty. Hard sovereignty is the pot of gold at the end of the road of extremism: total control. The notion of hard sovereignty refers to the billiard ball metaphor of the state: the fiction of the state that is impenetrable by outside influences. That unyielding adherence to a hard notion of sovereignty has been a major cause of conflict is apparent, for instance, in Sumantra Bose’s comparative analysis of Sri Lanka and former Yugoslavia. “The Sri Lankan and Yugoslav states have either collapsed or been severely undermined because they viewed sovereignty as nonnegotiable, something to be monopolized by those at the apex of the apparatuses of power, control, and domination” (Bose, 1995: 111–112).⁵

External forces have in various ways been so profoundly and intricately implicated in the making of conflicts, that the conflicts cannot be treated as simply endogenous: these forces have usually created the conditions that enable inside forces to polarize it. French political and military assistance to Hutu extremists in the former Rwanda government is a case in point. If these are the core problems—authoritarian political cultures, hard sovereignty, external influences—it follows that in evaluating HI, the key questions are whether it contributes to or counteracts political authoritarianism and hard sovereignty, and whether those external forces which have participated in making the conflict now claim precedence in settling it. On these scores, the contribution of HI in *humanitarian* terms must be measured.

“Humanitarian Intervention” Revisited: Causes and Remedies

In all the recent cases involving humanitarian intervention, the repeated emphasis on the word “humanitarian” has been a natural corollary of the complete absence of a serious long-term policy in respect of the target country. It reflects the natural desire to do *something* in the face of disaster, and a tendency to forget that in all these cases the disaster has been man-made and requires changes in institutions, even sometimes in the structure of states and their boundaries (Roberts, 1993: 13).

The first UN peacekeeping operations took place in 1946 in the Balkans. When the principles of UN peacekeeping took shape in 1956 and later, it was viewed as “essentially a means of consensual conflict resolution” (Bothe, 1994: 3). Blue Helmets were merely to serve as a buffer, keeping warring parties apart to make political problem solving possible, but they were never intended to provide a *solution* to the conflict. In HI this has been taken further in an uncertain direction. It is indicative of growing global aspirations, and a measure of globalization itself, that nowadays HI is virtually expected to solve political problems.

The paradox of HI is that it reproduces several of the problems that have caused political instability and conflict in the first place. The image of a society stricken by temporary madness (Parekh, 1993) within what is by implication a sane international environment, is an international media fiction. It exaggerates the stability of the present world order and insulates the conflict, underrates the involvement of foreign actors in precipitating the conflict, and overrates the capacity of the international environment to act as arbiter.

The key problem of HI is that it provides no remedy for structural problems. In the words of Kimberly Stanton (1993: 14), “the problem lies in the capacity of foreign forces to produce institutions that are sustainable at the local level.” She discusses this in terms of the relationship between HI and democracy and argues that there is a tension between undermining sovereignty and sovereignty as “the mechanism through which it becomes possible to implement international human rights guarantees.” “Secondly, the very nature of democratic governance casts doubt on the likelihood that international actors can construct sustainable democratic institutions,” for what is critical is “the process by which people learn to be ‘democrats’” and this involves “the relationship between political struggle and the formation of norms of political behavior” (1993: 15). She advocates that “strategies take into account both the pivotal mediating role of sovereignty and the nature of the democratic learning process. The road to change is not through force, but by encouraging practices consistent with democracy and respectful of human rights” (1993: 16). To this end she pleads first for depoliticizing the decision to undertake humanitarian intervention through “consistent practice,” by responding in like manner to like situations; second, for preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping services; and, third, for paying greater attention to the conditions that affect the viability of states. Among the examples she gives are the US embargo against Cuba and the effect of neoliberal policies in exacerbating poverty.

Stanton’s argument is well taken except for the emphasis on sovereignty. Sovereignty in many instances has been the umbrella under which infringements of international human rights have been going on and on unchecked. Indonesia is a case in point, in relation to East Timor, West Irian and Aceh, and in relation to civil rights and the treatment of political prisoners and ex-political prisoners. Other

instances are Zaire, China and Myanmar with respect to civil rights and dissidents, Sudan with respect to the south and Nuba Mountains, and Turkey with respect to the Kurds. Israel's role in the Occupied Territories has come under serious international scrutiny only since the Oslo Accord and the Washington agreement between Israel and the PLO. Haiti is a counter-example where US intervention ultimately served to guarantee the outcome of presidential elections. These examples bring us back to the question of selectivity and show that what is at issue is not sovereignty *per se* but the *form* of sovereignty, the way it is exercised, and the way in which international actors react to that exercise.

Rather than the classic notion of sovereignty, contemporary globalization calls for a more flexible notion of sovereignty. In multinational states what is required is a "recognition of partial, functional, divided or shared sovereignty" (Lapidoth, 1992: 325). This relates to the deeper problem of HI, that in the present global circumstance the very form and architecture of political formations is in flux. This concerns old problems which have never been adequately settled, such as the tension between state and nation; the time bombs planted by colonialism and its "lines drawn in the sand"; the aftermath of the cold war, such as the abundance of arms in the hands of warlords and militias; and new problems created by the novel dynamics of globalization, on account of which the units and architecture of social cooperation are being refigured. This also takes the form of regionalization—the drive to "join Europe" has been one of the dynamics propelling instability in the Balkans.

The general uncertainty and deeper instability of the units of political formation make it extremely difficult for intervening parties to decide upon policy goals. Prominent among the litany of problems in HI literature is the perennial vagueness of policy objectives.

In northern Iraq, there has been ambiguity about the extent to which Kurdish autonomy is or is not supported. In former Yugoslavia, the aims of UNPROFOR have varied from place to place and from time to time but have been widely viewed by the inhabitants as inadequate. In Somalia, the mandates of the forces intervening under UN auspices have never been clear on the key matters of who is supposed to be in charge in Somalia, and what is supposed to be done about the weapons and warfare of the clans and warlords (Roberts, 1993: 13).

The intervening parties operate within a statist paradigm and demonstrate a fundamental incapacity to imagine anything but a state-centred solution, while in most cases of political conflict the nature and form of the state is precisely the biggest problem. Thus, from his comparison of Sri Lanka and Yugoslavia, Bose (1995: 112) concludes: "The core issue, then, is one of a fundamental democratization of the state and, by extension, a radical restructuring of state–society relations." *Democratization and restructuring state–society relations*: this is the refrain that runs through all the more serious analyses of HI.

Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, according to some, rather deserves the name "Operation Abandon Hope." While Chester Crocker (1995: 8) defends its achievements, he too raises the question "how intervention can translate into peacemaking so that something emerges to replace the temporary status quo created by intervention." It is widely acknowledged that the external imposition of Western-style state structure and development management have been precipitating factors in Somali state disintegration (Reimer, 1994). Part of the problem is that "its numerically dominant pastoral society and economy have endowed the country with

quite distinct and relatively unique social and political characteristics, for which any 'standard' institutional package is by definition inadequate" (Doornbos, 1994: 118). What is needed is a different institutional approach, "a different 'balance of power' between state and 'civil' institutions." "Above all, an approach is needed which assigns a greater role to the pastoralists themselves in developing the kind of institutions, codes and contractual arrangements they consider most appropriate in running their own affairs" (Doornbos and Markakis, 1994: 17). Clearly such an arrangement should be different in the north, where the great majority of the population are pastoralists, from that in the south.

Also, with regard to former Yugoslavia, conflict mitigation missions have long been advocating "a new type of states," states with "soft rather than hard borders," considering that ethnic heterogeneity "makes it impossible anywhere to create 'hard borders' and internal structures that will satisfy all parties" (Henricson-Cullberg et al., 1991: 10).

The dilemma of HI is reflected in the tendency of intervening forces to give priority to the protection of their own forces over the population of the safe areas whom, after disarming them, they are supposed to protect. The conduct of "Dutchbat" in Srebrenica is a case in point. Under pressure from the Bosnian Serbs, Dutchbat agreed to withdraw in mid-July 1995 before new UNPROFOR forces, a Ukrainian unit, would arrive. They also withdrew before the International Red Cross was able to come to the scene, thus leaving the "safe area" without any international presence whatsoever to hinder the ensuing massacre of thousands of Muslims by the Bosnian Serbs. This hasty retreat was prompted by fear that the imminent meeting of the Contact Group in London would announce measures which could elicit a Bosnian Serb backlash of taking Dutchbat troops hostage. The safety of 300 Dutch soldiers prevailed over the safety of the 27 000 Muslims whom they were supposed to protect. At least, this was the interpretation until it emerged that there had been an earlier secret agreement between the NATO commander in Sarajevo, Admiral Leighton Smith, and General Mladic to the effect that there would be no guarantees for the safety of the population of Srebrenica, except that the International Red Cross would be allowed in the day after Dutchbat left—a promise that was not kept.⁶

In this light, a different scenario emerges. Rather than accepting the feasibility of a multicultural state in Bosnia, along with the option of soft state borders, the UN itself has yielded to the logic of ethnic cleansing. It is striking that the military episodes of 1995—Croatia's blitzkrieg conquest of Krajina and the failure of UNPROFOR to protect the safe areas of Zepa and Srebrenica, in combination with, finally, the massive UNPROFOR and NATO defence of Sarajevo—have resulted in a process of ethnic homogenization which has made territories more culturally contiguous. In other words, the military operations of the forces under UN command, the Croats and the Bosnian Serbs have all converged to bring about precisely what people on the ground and in the international community have protested against and what UNPROFOR was supposed to counteract: the politics of ethnic cleansing. This means that, presumably in the name of facilitating an "orderly" state solution, that would be sustainable without indefinite foreign policing, the UN has been *de facto* complicit in genocide.

There are various ways in which HI as it is presently conducted militates against a fundamental settlement of conflicts.

- HI follows the state sovereignty model. Authorized by the Security Council, HI is subject to compromise among its most powerful members.

- Diplomacy and media reporting, emphasizing the role of leaders, reward the perpetrators of the actions which have called for HI by confirming them in their role of key players and placing them in the international limelight (cf. Boyd, 1995). By focusing exclusively on the apex of the power structure, HI militates against the process of democratization, the absence of which has been a major part of the problem.
- In adopting military means upon the failure of diplomacy, HI takes part in the militarization of the conflict, recycling war machinery and keeping military establishments occupied. Instead of strengthening civil society and social state functions, HI keeps the military in business, re-tasked and converted into peacekeeping forces, rather than being reduced in size.
- Operationally, HI can prolong conflicts. In humanitarian assistance, relief and war become interdependent (African Rights, 1994a; Duffield, 1996).⁷

In this light, a sinister option emerges: HI as the military corollary of neoliberal globalization. If we acknowledge that HI is informed by a *mélange* of motives—human rights concerns, recycling military apparatus, regional power politics, cold war dialectics—strategic power objectives predominate, in character with the nature of the key players. Globalization is presently at a crossroads, of which the main forks are neoliberal globalization, or free capital movement, resulting in growing inequality and therefore growing political instability; and what might loosely be termed “social democratic globalization” (Robinson, 1995). Presently the former trend predominates. This is a far cry from reformist notions of “global neighbourliness” voiced, for instance, in the Report of the Commission on Global Governance (1995). In the present scenario, HI can provide a humanitarian smoke-screen for a new politics of containment in peripheralized regions. Peace dividends are being converted into peacekeeping operations—a new military fashion—and unruly peripheries are being passed on to local gendarmes, such as Milosevic and Tudjman, for safe keeping.

Does this seem cynical? What is cynical, and what is disturbing about HI, is the stark discrepancy between moral pathos and actual engagement. This is obvious from the media circus and its daily barrage of one-sided, shallow reporting, unhindered by interest in what is actually transpiring. It is obvious from the actual nature of internationally hailed humanitarian relief operations.⁸ It is obvious from the actual conduct of HI forces under crisis, witness the Srebrenica episode. Accordingly, HI is at a crossroads, and this crossroads is part of the crossroads of globalization. That this crossroads does not translate either into easy moral and political choices is illustrated by the perplexities of neutrality and the difficulties of the politics of depolarization.

Neutrality is both a fundamental resource and a constraint of HI. A resource because acceptance by the parties is an essential condition of conflict resolution (how else would an international presence be expected to contribute to developing a robust federalism?), a constraint because “‘neutral’ intervention avoids engagement with the political reality it confronts” (Duffield and Prendergast, 1994: 15). The problem of neutrality is familiar enough in relief assistance. As African Rights (1994a: 4, 24) observes: “The search for a completely neutral humanitarian space is ultimately futile” and “Neutrality of intention does not necessarily translate into neutrality of fact.”⁹

Neutrality implies a *parti pris* for the status quo and as such involves conceptual and political problems. Statism and hard sovereignty are part of the conceptual bias of HI under Security Council authorization. Thus in Rwanda, “An obsession with ‘neutrality’ actively impeded any attempts to address the crisis. Diplomatic

'neutrality' meant surrendering the weapons of moral and diplomatic condemnation of the interim government, foregoing such sanctions as diplomatically isolating it by expelling ambassadors, calling for sanctions, etc" (African Rights, 1994b: 682). The ultimate absurdity was that the same government that was perpetrating the genocide of the Tutsis was shaping UN policy as a member of the Security Council throughout the period of crisis. The political bias of neutrality also concerns the question of democracy. How is an undemocratic interstate order supposed to seek and enforce intrastate democracy?

All the histories and details that would make the conflicts discussed here intelligible cannot be taken up here, but nevertheless the politics of polarization are in the end not too difficult to fathom. They reflect not "madness" but mainly narrow-mindedness, covering the usual spectrum from the banality of evil to extremes of frenzy. What is much more trying and difficult than the politics of polarization is the politics of de-polarization, a long-term process that hinges on the political forces and culture on the ground. René Lemarchand (1994), in an insightful comparison of transitions in Burundi, Rwanda and South Africa, points out that what matters most in implementing transition bargains is the characteristics of government and opposition parties and their political leadership, social movements, and political culture and institutions. For HI to contribute to this process in a meaningful way requires a profound engagement with social forces.

Conclusion

A realistic assessment of HI is that it is humanitarian cosmetics for the New World Order—yet it would be facile to conclude that HI should be rejected and terminated. Ultimately HI is an expression of the irreversible trend of growing interdependence: a marker of globalization. By the same token it is also a verdict on the nature and quality of globalization. It would also be pointless to recommend more business as usual; a profound reorientation is required. First, the notion of HI as a quick fix, military or otherwise, needs to be abandoned. Second, a much more society-oriented perspective on conflict situations is required. Statist perspectives, forever percolating within the orbit of sovereignty, national interest and international security, cannot address society's political problems. Ethnonationalism, extreme nationalism, secessionism and irredentism all feed on statism. On the other hand, this is not a plea for a blank check for "civil society" either. NGOs, local and transnational, require scrutiny and accountability, as do government institutions. New, postconventional forms of public action and synergies are required, both local and transnational, between public action and social development efforts.

The usual problem that is mentioned ad infinitum by policy makers and by the military involved is the problem of capacity, in terms of resources and command and control functions, especially the disparity between UN resolutions and the resources made available by member countries to carry them out. This marks the gap between international aspiration and posturing, and international commitment. But the above analysis suggests that, crucial as the question of capacity is, the central problem of HI is political analysis—which, of course, cannot be divorced from the actual political balance of forces. In each of the situations examined above, the UN was present. In Rwanda, the early UN presence did not have the right mandate. There is no reason to assume that greater capacity without improved political analysis and appropriate mandates would make a difference, other than making matters proportionally worse.

HI, above all, should be viewed and discussed in a wider setting and should be accountable to people on the ground. If we agree that the key issue is the form of states and of sovereignty, then the solution is to rethink state forms and develop new forms of sovereignty; if we agree that the key problem is political authoritarianism (rather than “ethnicity”), then the solution is democratization; if we agree that cultural parochialism is a key problem, then what is required is fostering and rewarding cultural openness and pluralism; if we concede that economic insecurity is part of the problem, and aggravated by international policies, then HI must be considered along with development policies. Ultimately these considerations translate into a global agenda: an agenda of global democratization and global development, along with an admission: that the agenda of democratization is a long-haul operation. In the meantime “humanitarian intervention” serves as a mirror of global politics as they really exist.

Notes

1. Cf. “The difficulties of policing internal wars and the high cost of reconstruction are keeping the West out of all but the most unavoidable (or most expedient) emergencies, and even then to limit engagement to humanitarian relief, traditionally defined” (Duffield and Prendergast, 1994: 15).
2. See the incisive criticism of humanitarian assistance, “Humanitarianism Unbound?” (African Rights, 1994a).
3. In the Horn of Africa, “with the end of the Cold War rivalry, the military underpinning of authoritarian regimes in this region has been pulled away, accelerating their collapse” (Doornbos and Markakis, 1994: 13).
4. In a previous study I also adopted the characterizations of Maquet in an interpretation of Tutsi feudalism, mistaking Maquet’s ethnic stereotyping for an account of history. I was seeking to argue, on the one hand, that race is a political category and on the other that “racism has no colour” (Nederveen Pieterse, 1989: 237–240).
5. There are striking similarities, particularly in the ideological construction and articulation of ethnic, “racial” power, between Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism in Sri Lanka and Hutu extremism in Rwanda.
6. This episode has been covered in the Dutch press, e.g., *NRC Handelsblad*, 15 September, 1995. See also John Sweeney, “UN Cover-up of Massacre,” *Guardian Weekly*, 17 September, 1995.
7. “In the most violently contested areas, the UN presence means jobs, contracts and money. The UN rents houses, hires trucks and issues millions of dollars in contracts and sub-contracts to businessmen with close ties to the warlords” (Michael Maren, quoted in Mohamoud, 1994b: 1792).
8. For instance in Bosnia: “Rather than seeing the Bosnian people as the essential resource to be mobilized in pursuit of solutions to political and humanitarian problems, the international organizations have presented themselves as controlling authorities, for whom the Bosnians are either passive recipients of largesse, or troublesome obstacles to the smooth operation of the international effort. The skilled human resources of Bosnia have been neglected. As with Africans over many years, the Bosnians have found this surprising and humiliating” (African Rights, 1994a: 23).
9. In relief operations, “Neutrality is a food dumper’s charter and a diverter’s gray train” (African Rights, 1994a: 14).

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