

Angola: Empire of the Humanitarians

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"I am a businessman and am coming here to do humanitarian business."

---South African head of The Angola Refugee Charity, Kuito.¹

Introduction

Humanitarianism is one of the central ideologies defining contemporary international politics that is surprisingly underemphasised as an organising pillar of the iniquitous world order. Michael Mandelbaum, a hegemonic realist, claims that peace, democracy and free markets are the three central ideas that pervade relations among states and new power realities since 1991.² By virtue of its colossal impact on the lives and destinies of millions of humans and dozens of states, humanitarianism is up there with this pantheon. In the words of B.S. Chimni, it "occupies a central place in the strategy of Northern states", a facade whose defining characteristics are selectivity and racism. In the name of amelioration of painful conditions under the banner of human solidarity, it mobilises a range of meanings and practices to establish and sustain global relations of domination. As "the ideology of hegemonic states in the era of globalisation marked by the end of the Cold War and a growing North-South divide", it is a silent weapon whose 'collateral damage' deserves to be unmasked.³

This essay purports to focus on Angola as a case study that transcends the diseased nature of bureaucratic humanitarianism- undesirable and ritualised behaviour in which rules obscure social goals and perpetuation instincts dehumanise Africans such that genocide could get rephrased as "civil war".⁴ It carries the analysis beyond constructivist understandings of 'pathological' or dysfunctional behaviour and situates the humanitarian enterprise in the framework of neo-colonial impulses of the United States that were filtered through the faceless UN and international NGO bureaucracies operating on the ground during Angola's post-Cold War conflict (1992-2002). Bureaucracies are not only desensitised and robotic performers of 'rational' tasks, but also exemplars of the unquestioning Man Friday culture of taking orders or guidelines from political bosses, which in Angola's case turned out to be the US government.

Humanitarianism, for the purpose of my exegesis, is underlined as a complement to great power strategies rather than as a de-contextualised impulse to help humans whose

¹ Cited in Kukuk, Leon. 2005. *Letters to Gabriella: Angola's Last War for Peace, What the UN Did and Why*. Herndon: Florida Literary Foundation. p.347

² 2002. *The Ideas That Conquered the World. Peace, Democracy and Free Markets in the Twenty First Century*. New York: Public Affairs.

³ Chimni, B.S. 2000. 'Globalisation, Humanitarianism and the Erosion of Refugee Protection', Oxford: *Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper*. p.3

⁴ Barnett, Michael & Martha Finnemore. 2004. *Rules for the World. International Organisations in Global Politics*. Cornell: Cornell University Press

existential needs are in threat. The anodyne characterisation of humanitarianism which I challenge here has been well stated by Alan Munro:

“A force from outside the framework of government intervention in the shape of charitable institutions, acting as an expression of public sympathy for the suffering and hardship of those caught up in the backwash of hostilities.”⁵

The reason why such an innocuous notion of humanitarianism still reigns among practitioners has to do with the fact that staff members of UN agencies and international NGOs cynically nurture a flattering self-image. As Kurt Mills points out, they think “they are the good guys, the do-gooders, and thus whatever they do must be good. All too often organisations take this for granted and do not consider the consequences of their actions.”⁶

In this essay, we follow David Rieff’s definition of humanitarianism as “the official ideology of the West” that is incapable of stopping wars or promoting social justice.⁷ Further, to use Devon Curtis’ perspective, it is the “reassertion of metropolitan Western authority over borderland countries of the developing world...a way for the West to govern in a new form.”⁸

David Kennedy dares humanitarians to accept that their initiatives entail a human price, create losers and hurt people. He demonstrates how professional expatriate elites with “knowledge” of rights alienate ordinary people “from themselves and from the vocabulary of their own governance.”⁹ Following in this vein, I re-conceptualise humanitarians as not only activists but policymakers; not only outsiders ‘looking in’, but also rulers who wield power and abuse it in environments where accountability breaks down. As epitomes of corruption, they hurt marginalised Angolans, the *deslocados*, the most and nipped grassroots peace initiatives in the bud. International humanitarian intervention not only disempowered the Angolan people, especially its women, but also prolonged the deadly war that consumed more than 1 million lives and left a trail of severe destruction. The self-proclaimed alleviators of misery were actually integral to the political economy of war in Angola. While a similar conclusion is found in the review about the culpability of humanitarian organisations in fuelling warfare in Sudan¹⁰, the complicity of the international aid system in fanning the Angolan war and failing to protect citizens until 1995 has been documented by Horace Campbell.¹¹ My effort extends this investigative tradition up to and after 2002.

⁵ 1999. ‘Humanitarianism and Conflict in a Post-Cold War World.’ *International Review of the Red Cross* Vol. 81 No. 835. pp. 463-475

⁶ 2005. ‘Neo-Humanitarianism: The Role of International Humanitarian Norms and Organisations in Contemporary Conflict.’ *Global Governance*, Volume 11, Issue 2, pp.161-184

⁷ 2002. *A Bed for the Night. Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster).

⁸ 2001. *Politics and Humanitarian Aid: Debates, Dilemmas and Dissension*. London: Overseas Development Institute

⁹ 2004. *The Dark Sides of Virtue. Reassessing International Humanitarianism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p.22

¹⁰ Karim, Ataul, Mark Duffield et al. 1996. *Operation Lifeline Sudan: A Review* Geneva: UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

¹¹ 1996. *Humanitarianism, War and the Recolonisation of Angola*. Harare: SAPES Books.

I. How Food Aid Kills: The ‘Medicins Sans Frontiere Syndrome’

Food aid played an insidious role in the continuation of war in Angola after the Cold War ended. This can be understood through two analytical scenarios- one, where humanitarians got trapped in their own convoluted rationales and oiled the machinery of warfare; and two, where humanitarians deliberately took sides under international political duress and supplied relief to combatants. This section will look at the former.

The international community spent more than a billion dollars through UN operations, INGOs, multilateral and bilateral aid packages from 1992 to 2002, but failed to bring lasting peace to Angola. Michael Turner invented the phrase ‘Medecins Sans Frontiere Syndrome’ to describe the cycle of local manipulation of aid and external humanitarian gullibility or/and ignorance about the consequences of their actions. “The willingness of the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to the numerous civilian victims of unceasing power plays encouraged continuation of the Angolan conflict.” The “liberal and humane reaction” of humanitarianism “now has assumed an almost sinister face and posture”, with warring parties “all too willing to have their population seen internationally as victims, to be cared for and attended by humanitarian organisations.”¹²

The all-too-eager humanitarian readiness to pump in food and other relief items for civilians freed the hands and pockets of the two antagonists- UNITA (National Union for Total Independence of Angola) and the FAA (Armed Forces of Angola) - to concentrate on fighting. It also gave an assurance that brutal tactics can be employed in the military campaigns without having to worry about violating international humanitarian law, because the humanitarian NGOs and UN agencies could clean up the mess after a spell of wanton killings. Although an oxymoron, operational humanitarians were unwittingly assisting in the flagrant abandonment of the conduct of humane warfare as laid out in the Geneva Conventions.

The curious phenomenon of “pre-humanitarian surveillance” that occurred in Angola’s final phase of war (1998-2002) illustrates the MSF Syndrome’s militaristic implications and intertwining with war. By 2000, western support for the FAA against UNITA was in full swing, a reversal of the two decade-long American and South African backing of Jonas Savimbi. By the late nineties, the US did an about turn in its long-lasting patronage of Savimbi because of realisation that the Angolan state run by MPLA had become a regional power through military interventions in the Great Lakes region. Moreover, Angola’s profile as an important exporter of oil to the US was continuously appreciating.

It is in this changed environment of stakes that US air surveillance companies like AirScan and BAT-Systems were described as assisting the FAA in the following manner:

¹² 2002. ‘The Perpetual Civil War in Angola: The Failure of Peacekeeping and Democratisation’, in Laremont, Ricardo (ed.) *The Causes of War and the Consequences of Peacekeeping in Africa*, Portsmouth: Heinemann. p.226

“Doing pre-humanitarian surveillance: they provide aerial surveys for the Angolan airforce and so have a comprehensive picture of where casualties and displaced people are going to be- even before the battle starts. A US official says AirScan now wants an extended licence for ‘humanitarian’ work in the interior.”¹³

Armed with this information, the government would then contact the UN agencies and INGOs to give them ‘hints’ about where their next aid projects can be launched to succour the upcoming *deslocados*. Save the Children UK, one of the leading humanitarian INGOs in Angola, saw through the game but played along with slight demurrals. One of their reports during the final stages of the war is worth citing:

“The authorities have informed the humanitarian community to expect further large-scale displacements into Kuito and Camacupa as a result of forthcoming military operations to the north of Kuito (Andulo) and around Cuemba. There is little to suggest that these same authorities will be any more prepared than before for the extra pressure that these movements will provoke. There is a presumption made that the international humanitarian community will take on this extra burden...There are some indications that the government plans to supply some food to the displaced in Cuemba itself, although no details of quantities or timeframe are available. However, the prioritisation of humanitarian needs has yet to be demonstrated.”¹⁴

Further elaborating the role of humanitarians as surrogate welfare providers who saved costs for the warring sides, Andrea Ostheimer compares Angola to Rwanda and asks whether humanitarian assistance was “a de facto fuel to the war economy of Angola, as was the case with the former Rwandan regime.” Angola in the 1990s was not a failed state but a “weak state” with institutional weaknesses and erosion of public services. In its eagerness to raise funds and offer services, the INGO sector in Angola tried to replace the state’s functions instead of complementing them. Therefore, humanitarianism “contributed to the fragmentation of the public sector” and state divestiture of its social responsibilities.¹⁵ Likewise, Inge Tvedten notes that the international humanitarian supply line offered the contending sides a convenient opportunity to disengage from their fundamental duties towards affected populations.¹⁶

The MSF Syndrome’s deleterious effects on peace were not unknown to the humanitarian community, but they were largely rendered invisible by harping about the emergency situation and the mission of “saving lives.” Philip Winslow spent time in some provinces and recorded views of aid workers on this issue. They were very much aware that UNITA and government officials saw them as “a free roaming cash cow” that could be exploited. One humanitarian confessed, “They’re going to milk the NGOs for whatever they can.” Unhappy that humanitarian organisations were regularly bringing in large sums of cash and paying local workers directly, the government wanted to corral these “pockets of

¹³ 2000. ‘Angola. Not Yet Endgame’, *Africa Confidential*, Volume 41, Number 2. p.3

¹⁴ 2001. ‘Food Security Assessment. Kuito, Bie Province, Angola’. August 13. London: Save the Children UK.

¹⁵ 2000. ‘Aid Agencies. Providers of Essential Resources?’, in Cilliers & Dietrich (eds.) *Angola’s War Economy. The Role of Oil and Diamonds*, Pretoria: ISS Publications. p.117, 122

¹⁶ 1997. *Angola. Struggle for Peace and Reconstruction*. Boulder: Westview Press.

prosperity” under its control. In Moxico and Uige, officials deliberately exaggerated the figure of aid-dependents. “As long as the cargo planes keep landing, local government officials have plenty of supplies that can generate profits in various ways.” Some provincial governors ordered soldiers to destroy crops. “As long as civilians remained unable to feed themselves, the UN would maintain the flow of donated food, part of which would be handed over to soldiers, on whom the governor depends for personal security.”¹⁷

Karl Maier’s journeys through war-torn Angola evoked wonder about how sustainable the war would have been after 1994 if the humanitarians had “not provided just enough food to keep the country alive, to let the authorities avoid responsibility for their own citizens, to fatten up the young boys living in the refugee camps so that they could be dragooned by one of the warring parties.”¹⁸ The role of UN agencies and INGOs in buttressing what Kevin Cahill calls “economics of neglect”¹⁹ is paramount in Angola.

The mechanism by which the MSF Syndrome abetted the prolongation of the war requires adumbration. No matter how barbaric a fighting unit is, it cannot afford to irretrievably antagonise its civilian constituents in whose name the war is being waged. While UNITA or FAA enjoyed minimal legitimacy in many rural areas, they would be suicidal not to worry about total non-cooperation of the civilians under their respective territories. Incidents of serious violence against suspected “traitors” abound in Angola and bear testimony to the simple fact that wars cannot be waged by armed actors if they ill-treat and harass civilians to the point of extinction. Humanitarians were useful salves that could be made to apply onto the wounds of the Angolan people. By giving advance notice and access, warring parties could block outbreaks of mass resistance or revolt against themselves. Humanitarianism was an ointment to pacify Angolan society and keep it quiescent.

A caveat needs to be added to simplified readings of the MSF Syndrome. It is inaccurate to hold that UN agencies and INGOs were overflowing with compassion for the Angolan people and therefore had to make difficult choices that freed the government from its welfare functions. The rise of international aid organisations as substitutes to the Angolan state in supplying food, water, shelter and education is intimately tied to the pressure the government in Luanda faced from the International Monetary Fund to downsize its social expenditures in order to secure loans. The fiscal conservatism conditionalities imposed on the Angolan state by international financial institutions (IFIs) paved the way for the UN agencies and INGOs to virtually take over service delivery functions.

Humanitarianism has to be seen as complementary to the neo-liberal domination of IFIs that insist on Angola adopting “prudent wage policies” and “keeping overall public

¹⁷ 1997. *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth. Land Mines and the Global Legacy of War*. Boston: Beacon Press. p.61, 62

¹⁸ 1996. *Angola: Promises and Lies*. London: Serif Books. p.203

¹⁹ 1999. *A Framework for Survival: Health, Human Rights and Humanitarian Assistance in Conflicts and Disasters*. New York: Routledge.

spending in check.”²⁰ Despite widespread popular protests by Angolan workers and teachers against reduction of minimum wages in January and August 2001, the government was helpless to reject the demands of the IFIs. The MSF Syndrome could naively be interpreted as UN agencies and INGOs being taken for a ride by the government and UNITA, but it is noteworthy that the Angolan state was forced to concede ground in the sphere of public utilities to humanitarians due to its dependence on IFI subventions. So, the MSF Syndrome could well be restated with humanitarians and IFIs as joint manipulators and the Angolan government as the aggrieved party.

II. How Food Aid Kills: Humanitarians as Partisans

Neutrality is the much-prized unique selling proposition of humanitarians. It is also the most contravened principle in field operations. As Mary Anderson pointed out in the bible of humanitarian evaluations, international assistance given in the context of a violent conflict has political impacts and therefore cannot be considered “neutral.” Aid involves “relative resource transfers” and has implicit ethical connotations.²¹ Angola was a quintessential case of unethical leanings of humanitarians dictated by donors with strategic intentions.

Before we enter into empirical details of humanitarian bias towards Jonas Savimbi’s UNITA, it merits recalling that in Angola, over the course of the peace process, the divide between the UN’s political and humanitarian arms was blurred. UCAH (United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Unit) was involved in the highly political demobilisation process and MONUA (United Nations Mission of Observers in Angola) in humanitarian de-mining. Human rights monitoring fell under the auspices of MONUA though it properly belonged under the umbrella of humanitarian or development agencies. Rony Brauman of MSF comments that Angola was a case where the UN was the principal player on both humanitarian and political fronts, resulting in “certain inherent contradictions. The problem was the mixture of humanitarianism and politics. The UN is a political player and, at the same time, a humanitarian player.”²²

How the UN was a ‘political player’ begs close attention. Commonly understood, it implies that the UN was trying to balance its role as a peace negotiator between UNITA and the government and its agencies which were keen on distributing relief materials ‘neutrally’. On deeper inspection, Boutros Boutros Ghali, the UN Secretary General from 1992 to 1996, is on public record that Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA and the man denounced by the Southern African Development Community as a war criminal, was “my dear old friend.” The two studied together in Switzerland and the warmth of this old relationship was more than evident when Ghali paid Savimbi a personal visit at his headquarters in Huambo in 1995.

²⁰ Ellis-Jones, Mark. 2002. *States of Unrest II. Resistance to IMF and World Bank Policies in Poor Countries*, London: World Development Movement.

²¹ 1999. *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace- Or War*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

²² 2004. ‘Politics and Humanitarianism’, Washington D.C: Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs.

Michael Ignatieff accompanied Ghali on that legitimising trip which made Savimbi look more respectable than his deeds would qualify. When he asked the Secretary General why he made a public gesture of support for the man who was responsible for plunging Angola back to war after 1992, Ghali “gives me a mocking glance, as if to say that my scruples are beside the point: the family of nations is run largely by men with blood on their hands. Besides, the peace process in Angola is behind schedule. One massacre at a crossroads could start the madness up again.... [So] Savimbi must be stroked.”²³

Savimbi had a history of being ‘stroked’ by humanitarian organisations during the Cold War years, when UNITA skilfully utilised humanitarian relief for propaganda and diversion. In 1989, Savimbi convinced the USAID, the US government’s donor arm to declare regions under UNITA control as a “disaster area” and to channel aid directly to the rebels, bypassing the Angolan government. He also proposed delivery of humanitarian relief through “peace corridors” that the Angolan government feared to be conduits for the CIA to continue supplying military aid to UNITA (circumventing rising Congressional objections). The US allocated \$2.7 million to provide UNITA through CIA-associated NGOs like the International Rescue Committee and the International Medical Corps. The money was meant to meet emergency needs of ‘displaced persons’, a euphemism for civilians forcibly abducted and relocated by UNITA. Refusal of the Angolan government to permit Savimbi to directly negotiate with foreign governments on humanitarian relief led to UNITA ambushing food convoys destined for drought victims in government controlled areas. Elaine Windrich documents how UNITA had perfected the art of using displacement, starvation and food deprivation as war tactics to attract humanitarian attention from the late 1980s to the signing of the Bicesse Accords in 1991.²⁴

The story of humanitarian bias toward Savimbi after he repudiated the elections of 1992 is incomplete without unveiling the triangular game between the UN, UNITA and the US government. Victoria Brittain reported that during the ‘war of the cities’ (1992-‘94), as part of a policy of placating the killers, UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali was in frequent contact with his friend, Savimbi, who was supplied with a satellite phone by the Americans.²⁵ This act symbolically represents the troika that dashed the hopes of Angolans for lasting peace.

George Wright discovered that in the puzzling pro-Savimbi or ‘blame both sides’ attitude of the Clinton administration lay vested interests carried over from the Cold War. Clinton promoted the ‘power-sharing solution’ of his predecessor George H. Bush since, “as long as Western business interests made profits, the instability wrought by Savimbi was acceptable to the hegemonic interests of the United States.” Between 1993 and 2000, the Clinton Administration provided Angola \$500,000,000 of humanitarian assistance, routed by USAID to INGOs and UN agencies. Wright states that one of the aims of this aid was “to circumvent the government and promote the expansion of a private-sector-led

²³ 1998. *The Warrior’s Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*. Toronto: Penguin Books. p.82

²⁴ 1992. *The Cold War Guerrilla. Jonas Savimbi, the US Media and the Angolan War*, New York: Greenwood Press.

²⁵ 1998. *Death of Dignity. Angola’s Civil War*. Trenton: Africa World Press.

civil society.” In other words, the MSF Syndrome that was laid out in the preceding section was a US-blessed undertaking. Paralleling humanitarian aid was massive American corporate investment in Angola, which reached the position of second highest in sub-Saharan Africa. UNITA was able to conduct violence in the 1990s because of the US’ continued consideration of the two protagonists as political equals. “The US persisted in casting Savimbi’s aggression and the government’s response as a ‘civil war’, rather than terrorism on the part of Savimbi.” The CIA’s commitment for Savimbi to gain power “was so deep that the Clinton administration could not reframe the crisis” until 1998. Not coincidentally, it is from this year that the US was proactive in pushing the UN to implement long-rusting sanctions against Savimbi. Wright concludes that with international arms dealers targeting both UNITA and the government as markets, the US preferred ‘chaos’ in Angola long after the Cold War.²⁶

An examination of the UN Consolidated Appeals from 1994 to 2001 displays the total mastery of the US government on Angola’s humanitarian enterprise. The following table illustrates the domination of the US in funding humanitarian operations in Angola, particularly in food items. Every year, the US was the single largest donor, ranging between a high of 46% in 1998 and a low of 20.73% in 2000. The nearest competitors to the US varied from year to year between the EU’s ECHO, Germany, Sweden and Italy- all of whom were distant a second to Washington. While it might be argued that the larger size of the American economy accounts for this gap and that the comparative aid

Year	US Non-Food & Food Aid to Angola (\$)	US Aid in Total Non-Food & Food Aid to Angola (%)
1994	4081985 + 69618205 = 73700190	(73700190 + 38749347) / (158144592 + 98613215) = 43.8%*
1995	89,178773	32.15%*
1996	100,301,767	35.47*
1997	65,268,189	36.75%*

²⁶ 2001. ‘The Clinton Administration’s Policy Toward Angola: An Assessment’ *Review of African Political Economy*, Volume 28, Issue 90, pp.563-576.

* Refers to final figures wherein additional humanitarian assistance outside the Consolidated Appeals rubric is included in the calculation.

1998	46,388,471	46.23%*
1999	36,434,290	28.55%*
2000	32,963,746	20.73%*
2001	42,152, 287	40.90%

Source: UN Consolidated Appeals for Angola, 1994-2001. UNOCHA.

statistics should be not absolute figures but percentage of GDPs of donor states, the fact is that as a percentage of total Angolan humanitarian aid, the US was the kingpin throughout the post-Cold War era.

Humanitarian organisations are primarily donor-driven. If the buck stops anywhere in terms of accountability and answerability in the humanitarian world, it is with the magic word ‘donor’. Politics in all its form is an essential part of the process of humanitarian missions and many studies show that politics of both donor governments and recipients are fundamental and cannot be wished away.²⁷ Scholars are increasingly of the opinion that INGOs are getting closer to donors and governments, and more distant from the poor and disempowered whom they seek to assist. Giant NGOs like CARE are funded by the US government to do its bidding.²⁸ As one volume sponsored by the not-so-chaste MSF stresses, the pretence of providing assistance to donor governments disguises their support for local political powers. The book states that “millions in North Korea, Sudan and Angola have starved to death because of the diversion and unequal distribution of huge quantities of food aid.” By drawing an artificial distinction between “the humanitarian idea proper” and the humanitarian motives of pretensions of governments, the authors, hailing from this highly politicised INGO, attempt to claim a moral high ground that is risible.²⁹ However, publicising the donor-UN Agency/INGO relationship

²⁷ Cf. Belgrad, Eric et al. 1997. *The Politics of International Humanitarian Aid Operations*, London: Praeger Publishers

²⁸ Hulme, David and Michael Edwards, eds. 1997. *NGOs, States, and Donors: Too Close for Comfort?* New York: St. Martin's Press.

²⁹ Weissman, Fabrice ed. 2004. *In the Shadow of “Just Wars”: Violence, Politics and Humanitarian Action*. Cornell: Cornell University Press

as a principal-client one serves the useful purpose of giving a global context to the blatant diversion of food relief to UNITA at critical junctures in Angola's prolonged war.

Devon Curtis has brought attention to new political objectives of donor countries since the end of the Cold War and the associated liberal doctrine of global governance which the Clinton administration championed. Humanitarianism today is the "reassertion of metropolitan Western authority over borderland countries of the developing world. It is a way for the West to govern in a new form." Promoting or protecting a state system of integrated capitalism has been "the hallmark of international humanitarian action from Somalia to Sierra Leone", i.e. the entire breadth of Africa.³⁰

In 1998, a US Army War College faculty member recommended an overhaul of American policies toward Africa, listing "access to key institutions, facilities, economic opportunity" and freedom from "sponsors or safe havens for transnational threats" as the key national interests involved. The policy options he placed before the US government included creation of "conflict resolution capabilities" to bring regional stability in Africa; "environmental security missions" to preserve African biodiversity; training of African military schools and "medical care initiatives because it is difficult to find any hidden agenda in them and difficult to criticise motives."³¹

US Ambassador Princeton Lyman recently co-authored a revealing policy report for the quasi-governmental Council on Foreign Relations, arguing for a renewed politicisation of humanitarian aid in the context of rising US competition with China in Africa.³² Lyman explained in an interview:

"There's a tendency to say that our primary interest in Africa is humanitarian when one looks at the poverty issues, which are real, but what that does is not give enough attention to the other areas in which Africa is becoming important. We talk a lot about that in the report. It covers things like energy and terrorism, competition for resources, etc. We argue that that should give us a different focus even on the humanitarian interests."³³

Angola was a laboratory where this "different focus" was tested in the 1990s by the US through its humanitarian agents. While Sino-American strategic rivalry in Africa is an emerging trend, there is also Franco-American competition in southern Africa ever since Rwanda came under the control of the 'Anglo-Saxon' RPF. The two critical US motivations in Angola that were reflected through the humanitarian prism were rising US oil imports from Angola (a factor that caused the volte-face by 1998 as the US switched into backing the MPLA) and the battle between Francophone and Anglo-Saxon spheres of influence. Ostheimer concurs that "considering the Franco-American rivalry in the

³⁰ 2001. *Politics and Humanitarian Aid: Debates, Dilemmas and Dissension*. London: Overseas Development Institute

³¹ D Henk. 1998. 'Uncharted Paths, Uncertain Vision: US Military Involvements in Sub-Saharan Africa in the Wake of the Cold War.' *INSS Occasional Paper*, Colorado: US Air Force Academy. p.35

³² 2006. *More Than Humanitarianism: A Strategic US Approach Toward Africa*. Washington D.C: Council on Foreign Relations.

³³ Princeton Lyman Interview. *Conversations with History*. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies. p.1

region, humanitarian aid seems to have become an instrument to enhance a favourable climate for investments by national companies.”³⁴

Nicholas leader has offered a theoretical lead by proposing that the “political economy of the humanitarian system” should be discussed in light of donor government motivations. “Where there is room for manoeuvre without transparency, there is also room for the suspicion that humanitarian aid is subject to foreign policy, not humanitarian considerations.”³⁵ Angola’s humanitarian universe was characterised by extreme opacity and skulduggery that facilitated several controversial diversions of food aid to UNITA to swing the military balance of power against the FAA.

To begin with, the 1990-’91 Special Relief Programme (SRP) was implemented by the humanitarian community with the UN lacking staff on the ground and relying on information provided by the warring parties, both of whom exaggerated their needs in order to secure as much free food as possible. Anna Richardson blames a “laissez-faire attitude, coupled with the ulterior motives of the UN agencies to get a glimpse of previously inaccessible areas of the country, and their populations” for the manipulation of aid. “Because the programme was viewed (by humanitarians) as much as a chance to see the country as to deliver aid, no particular effort was made to insist upon the application of humanitarian principles.”³⁶

Serious questioning of the UN’s impartiality dogged the organisation’s credibility throughout the election year of 1992. The demobilisation camps that the UN oversaw served UNITA troops well. According to Victoria Brittain, a British journalist, they were “fed, clothed and given medical attention by international aid agencies while remaining as intact military units. Those who had surrendered weapons knew that they were stored in the camp and, with a change in the wind, could be reclaimed.”³⁷

Maier adds that on the eve of the 1992 elections, the WFP was aware that UNITA forces were “demanding far more food than they need” for demobilisation in Cuando Cubango. Despite evidence that UNITA was stockpiling food for any eventuality after the elections, WFP felt that that there is no choice but to continue the food distribution. Maier quotes the WFP’s director of operations: “If we stop feeding these soldiers, they will be lost. Then they could become “hunger guerrillas”, using their guns to take what they need from nearby civilians.”³⁸ This comment highlights the self-image of humanitarians as players that can ‘buy off’ violence against civilians. Aid, by this deduction, is a bribe to soften guerrillas, a commodity that was dangled out to appease UNITA. Ghali was ‘stroking’ Savimbi at level I and the UN agencies and INGOs were doing it at level II.

³⁴ *Aid Agencies*. op cit.

³⁵ 2000. *The Politics of Principle: The Principles of Humanitarian Action in Practice*. London: Overseas Development Institute. p.22

³⁶ 2001. ‘Negotiating Humanitarian Access in Angola: 1990-2000’, *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*. September 15.

³⁷ *Death of Dignity*. op cit. p.59

³⁸ *Promises and Lies* op cit. p.59

The same mistakes of Bicesse were repeated after the Lusaka Protocol. In 1996-'97, disarmament and demobilisation was as fraught with humanitarian complicity as it was in 1992. Aid agencies which were running health and food distribution projects were aware that "somewhere between 50 and 80 percent in the camps were not in fact soldiers, but peasants who had been recently kidnapped and driven into the quartering areas by UNITA to swell the numbers." Despite UN civil education projects in the quartering areas, "UNITA discipline in the camps was harsh, with casual brutality, corporal punishment and summary executions. Child soldiers changed ages between interviews and often would simply disappear."³⁹ Absolutely no learning was internalised by humanitarians who continued to mollicoddle UNITA after Lusaka.

It is not unfair to view the failed demobilisation of 1996-'97 as a case of UNITA faking that it disarmed and the UN faking that it observed. Humanitarians from the UN agencies and INGOs were part of the Technical Working Group along with UNAVEM III peacekeepers to supervise and advise on the disarmament scheme. Each assembly area contained a representative from UCAH responsible for coordination of camp management, registration of UNITA soldiers and issuance of demobilisation documentation. Barry Munslow throws light on the stereotypical humanitarian mindsets which reckoned that when UNITA dithered on sending its troops to quartering areas after 1994, political pressure and humanitarian aid (stick and carrot) could be "used to endeavour to encourage UNITA to open up its areas to allow freedom of movement and communication."⁴⁰ In other words, the reward for non-cooperation and hoodwinking the world was more humanitarian aid.

João Gomes Porto and Imogen Parsons take stock this disastrous political-humanitarian venture:

"Despite the knowledge that inefficient quartering and demobilisation under Bicesse had been a factor in the resumption of war, the process was scarcely better handled this time. The operation only started in earnest in February 1996. It was incomplete and involved few key UNITA troops; conversely many in camps were civilians. The timeframe did indeed allow increased flexibility, but it has been argued by some that this was taken advantage of by UNITA in particular, allowing them to regroup and rearm, and in fact contributed to the resumption of war in 1998."⁴¹

During the Emergency Relief Plan (ERP) of 1993-'94, Brittain had the chance of eye-witnessing humanitarian partisanship in Luanda, Bie and Benguela provinces after UNITA's resumption of the war. The World Food Programme's (WFP) mapping and counting of populations as 'war affected' was highly partisan. It refused to provide relief to thousands of urban poor on the grounds that "had we done so, we would of course have added many hundreds of thousands of persons to our estimated caseloads in the Government of Angola (GOA) controlled areas. In the end, however, it was the opinion of the mission that this

³⁹ *Death of Dignity*. op cit. p.90

⁴⁰ 1998. 'Angola: The Search for Peace and Reconstruction', in Furley, Oliver and Roy May (eds.) *Peacekeeping in Africa*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. p.183

⁴¹ 2003. *Sustaining the Peace in Angola. An Overview of Current Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration*. Tshwane: Institute of Security Studies. pp.24-25

problem was in fact of a structural and GOA policy nature, and not one that donors would consider an appropriate or fundable part of an emergency programme.”

Brittain contrasts this to the people of Jamba, who did receive UN supplies despite being a "structural and policy" problem for UNITA. The world's most powerful country was throwing around its weight to good effect to succour its old ally- Jonas Savimbi. “With the US dominating the UN operation, no one enters this political minefield publicly.” The WFP was deliberately leaving out populations that fell within its terms of reference due to “the UN’s highly political, pro-UNITA, post-election strategy.” UNITA was the main beneficiary of UN food and fuel aid in Kuito in 1994. The biased humanitarian approach was paralleled by appeasement on the political front, with the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative calling Savimbi "a man of honour, a man whose word is his honour.” In Brittain’s telling remark: “US policy has over the last year become even more clearly UN policy.”⁴²

Humanitarian access talks conducted with the warring parties by the UN in 1993-‘94 involved multiple compromises of neutrality. The UN’s own internal report on those crucial events admits that “negotiations occurred largely behind the scenes through incredibly time-consuming personal contact, chasing one or another commander around late at night, through private exhortations.” Further, the import of the backdoor parleys on the fate of the war was not lost upon UN top brass. “In negotiating access and promotion of humanitarian space in Angola, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator (Manuel Aranda Da Silva) made difficult decisions on an almost daily basis which affected the lives of beneficiaries and relief workers, and perhaps even the course of the war.”⁴³

How “the course of the war” was affected by humanitarian negotiations is revealed a little later in the report. When Kuito was under siege by UNITA, Savimbi’s forces demanded a 50-50 division of food aid between the sparsely populated UNITA part of the town and the heavily populated FAA side. The WFP complied knowing fully well that UNITA soldiers would be the beneficiaries of much-needed food. Though there was some UN supervision of the handover of food, it was a foregone conclusion that the main beneficiaries of the aid were rebel soldiers. The UN claims that Da Silva “feared that if he did not accept (UNITA’s conditions), the UN would lose this window of opportunity and the international community would be denied future access to civilians on the government side of the line who were desperately in need of assistance.” This was a Faustian bargain that lengthened the siege of Kuito and killed many of the very same civilians on the government side for whose sake, apparently, the WFP sent humanitarian aid. An estimated 20-30,000 people were casualties in UNITA’s 21-month-long cordoning of Kuito, which went on until August 1994.

The UN report covers up the impact of this biased decision-making by asserting that Da Silva “hoped to redress the situation, and eventually did so by slowly decreasing the food

⁴² 1994. ‘Getting Away With It: Who’s Backing Savimbi?’, *Southern Africa Report*, Volume 9, Number 4. p.18

⁴³ Ball, Nicole & Kathleen Campbell. 1998. ‘Complex Crisis and Complex Peace: Humanitarian Coordination in Angola’. UNOCHA.

deliveries (to UNITA) and increasing provision of non-food items.”⁴⁴ Military fortunes are time-contingent and cannot be redressed or made up for by later humanitarian balancing acts. A bigger charade of self-exoneration by twisting the facts comes from the WFP’s internal review of what happened. According to this document, constraints on access by WFP assessment teams to UNITA-controlled areas in 1993-‘94 resulted in a greater percentage of food aid being delivered to government-controlled areas, where WFP had more access. WFP subsequently faced accusations of partial delivery of assistance in favour of the government-controlled areas. UNITA asserted that these areas were better able to withstand UNITA advances due to the food aid, and that WFP supposedly worked against Savimbi’s interests. This resulted in tensions between UNITA and WFP, which at times manifested itself in blockage of road convoys and incidents of shooting at aid aircraft.⁴⁵

The reality was quite contrary to the WFP’s portrayal. Using the rhetoric of humanitarian bias, UNITA was attempting to deny the delivery of food aid to isolated government towns in order to capture them. There is no factual basis to the allegation that WFP was assisting the government forces. The reverse was true. UNITA claimed in this period “irrefutable proof” that in Bie and Kuito, WFP planes transported “MPLA propaganda material, military communications radios and codes hidden in bags containing food.” Similar allegations against WFP were repeated by Savimbi in 1999, threatening that if the former did not publicly admit its collusion with the Angolan Air Force, “UNITA reserves the absolute right to publish all proof it has which is based on vocation, statute and mandate of PAM (Portuguese acronym for WFP).”⁴⁶ No ‘proof’ whatsoever was published by UNITA, demonstrating that this was a spin doctoring exercise. Such charges were entirely unfounded and meant to confound the world and hide the reality of the US-UN-UNITA troika.

Karl Maier sums up the ghastly impact of the entire Kuito episode and fallout from an independent standpoint:

“UNITA profits even more than the government by the arrangement as there are no civilians at all on its side of the city. A warehouse a few miles from a major UNITA logistics base is the destination for its portion, which can feed most of Savimbi’s army.”⁴⁷

Da Silva’s humanitarian access negotiations in 1993-‘94 were aided by seven UN ‘Field Advisers’ in sensitive locations who were meant to send detailed feedback on ground-level conditions. The UN report lists as a ‘lesson learnt’ that these advisers “have the potential to consolidate peace or to undermine it if actions are taken in pursuit of immediate humanitarian objectives without thought to their consequence for peace-

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ 2000. *Review of WFP Experience in Securing Humanitarian Access: Compilation of Past Practice*. Rome: World Food Programme

⁴⁶ 1999. ‘Year of Generalised Popular Resistance’. Bailundo: UNITA Standing Committee of the Political Commission. October 4.

⁴⁷ Maier op cit. p.185

building.”⁴⁸ Reading behind the lines, one presumes that this is a typical bureaucratic way of buck passing by top brass who wanted to rid themselves of the question of the Angolan people as to why the UN sided with UNITA and enabled the war to be stretched. Alternatively, it is quite possible that Da Silva was the victim of the tunnel vision of his Field Advisers. Toby Lanzer, the Adviser for Huambo, was a key informant because he was the conduit for all communications with UNITA. Sadly, his own personal account of what happened in the field at the time is devoid of any self-critical honesty. It is a quintessential humanitarian insider’s story that throws little light on the partisan politics running high in the UN.⁴⁹

Ostheimer observes that in the food aid sector of Angola, “proportional divisions of relief aid between the conflicting parties (regardless of existing needs) became a much more integral part of the conflict dynamics than a constructive support for the peace process.” She describes how Caritas and MSF-F were UNITA’s favourites for distributing aid in its territories, and how these same INGOs came under the Angolan government’s suspicion.⁵⁰ Overall, the ‘leakage’ of food aid as of 1994 was, in David Sogge’s estimate, 5-15%.⁵¹ As a subsequent section of this essay demonstrates, the humanitarian bureaucracy’s accountability was next to zero in Angola and it would take a genuine Angolan or African investigation to unearth the true figures for aid diverted to Savimbi’s cause for the entire 1992-2002 period.

David Simon has raised the general question of how much food aid was channelled into the granaries of combatants in Angola:

“Ultimately, it is important to know whether and to what extent interests associated with the protagonists or their backers have benefited from relief operations. What proportion of relief supplies reached the intended recipients as opposed to being bartered with, given to or stolen by protagonists en route? Have the relief operations in any way facilitated prolongation of the war, and have they been carried out as efficiently and effectively as possible in such admittedly difficult circumstances?”⁵²

Anecdotally, there is no shortage of reports of food aid being misdirected throughout the 1992-2002 period, and particularly in Savimbi’s favour until 1998. In Huambo, UNITA’s headquarters from March 1993, “foreign aid agencies who worked there found they were completely under the orders of UNITA and had to accept any conditions UNITA chose to impose, such as where they could work, and even ‘invitations’ to events where Savimbi would be present.”⁵³ Kukkuk, who lived in Huambo during the last phase of the war, offers glimpses of humanitarian collusion with UNITA by exposing MSF, the INGO that “started working in Angola in UNITA-controlled areas, making use of Savimbi’s

⁴⁸ Ball op cit.

⁴⁹ 1996. *The UN Department for Humanitarian Affairs in Angola: A Model for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance?*, Uppsala: Nordic African Institute

⁵⁰ *Aid Agencies*. op cit. p.128

⁵¹ 1994. ‘Angola: Surviving Against Rollback and Petrodollars’, in Macrae, Joanna and Anthony Zwi (eds.) *War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies* London: Zed Books. p.106

⁵² 2001. ‘The Bitter Harvest of War: Continuing Social and Humanitarian Dislocation in Angola’ *Review of African Political Economy*, Volume 28, Issue 90. pp.503-520.

⁵³ *Death of Dignity*. op cit. p.78

logistics and support in order to work. Whilst they were supporting UNITA, they also made a lot of noise about their neutrality.”⁵⁴

Interestingly, for all the brouhaha of MSF against the UN’s bureaucratic ineptness and callousness towards human rights⁵⁵, the former remained in the field in 1994 when other UN agencies and NGOs felt compelled to jointly withdraw from some UNITA-controlled areas feeling that field staff security was at risk. The UN’s access negotiation report condemned MSF for “diluting the common message and potentially endangering security for all others.”⁵⁶ The smooth give-and-take MSF had with UNITA must certainly have been the decisive issue that prompted them to stay put, although MSF would advance its less stringent field security regulations as the motivation for not closing shop.

In the mid-90s, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was engaged in a turf war with fellow international organisations and conducted its own separate negotiations with UNITA bigwigs like General Antonio Dembo in Uige. Accused by the rest of the humanitarians as “not a team player”, it added to the layers of closed-door, in camera mysteries involving humanitarians and UNITA.

As the war dragged on intermittently, more and more incidents of aid trucks and convoys being waylaid by both warring parties came to public knowledge. From 1994, combatants hijacked vehicles and plundered feeding centres run by humanitarians in many parts of the country. When UNITA withdrew from Huambo in November 1994, its commanders removed food, cars, generators, air conditioners, cutlery and plates belonging to a dozen humanitarian organisations, including the ICRC, Save the Children and UN agencies. Winslow cites an American de-miner in the enclave of Cazombo in Moxico province after the Lusaka Accords were signed, “UNITA soldiers were helping themselves to about half of WFP corn, beans and vegetable oil.”⁵⁷

Francis Deng, the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) visited Angola in 2000 and expressed concern that “systematic theft of food and non-food items by UNITA, government armed forces and the national police” were impairing the humanitarian effort.⁵⁸ Two MSF aid workers who lived in Angola in 2000-’01 wrote that in Kuito, a “vast humanitarian citadel”, soldiers often threatened humanitarian organisations and looted their storehouses. “Pillaging was a big business.”⁵⁹ In 1999, when Malanje was intensely bombarded by UNITA, despite an influx of humanitarian relief, malnutrition was growing. The WFP admitted that “some of its stocks were being diverted away from the most needy, subtly implying that the local

⁵⁴ *Letters to Gabriella* op cit. p.484

⁵⁵ 2002. ‘Thousands of Angolans Left to Starve. Response of Angolan Government and United Nations Shockingly Insufficient’, 11 June. New York: MSF USA.

⁵⁶ ‘Complex Crisis’ op cit.

⁵⁷ *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*. op cit. p.81

⁵⁸ 2000. ‘Report by the Representative of the Secretary General on IDPs, Submitted Pursuant to Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2000/53. Geneva: United Nations.

⁵⁹ Moorhouse, Karin & Wei Cheng. 2005. *No One Can Stop the Rain: The Chronicles of Two Volunteers During Angola’s Civil War*. Ontario: Insomniac Press. p.211

WFP staff could be responsible for this.” WFP sent food regularly, “trusting government controlled institutions to distribute it. But the food was not arriving.”⁶⁰

By the time Savimbi was marshalling his forces for a renewed assault in 1998, he had lost the US-UN-INGO troika’s backing as well as Mobutu’s Zairean cushion that had oiled his war machinery for so long. Yet, he had a way with exploiting humanitarians. He was caught on videotape assuring his generals: “With the funds that we have, we are buying arms. Food we will get from the MPLA and the international community.”⁶¹ The government, likewise, did not spend to feed its army, knowing very well that many soldiers could garner food via the community which was being supported by international aid. Deng’s report on Angolan IDPs mentions that “theft of food and non-food items reportedly occurs *after* the distribution of such items by the United Nations agencies and NGOs.”⁶² Sogge’s 5-15% aid leakage estimate needs substantial upward reworking by for the 8 extra years of intermittent war after 1994 and the indirect looting policy of the warring sides.

In 1999, Savimbi was trying to take humanitarians up the garden path yet again by holding residents of Jamba hostage but refusing access to them. “Jamba was not important to UNITA and (he wanted) that UCAH should visit more strategic areas like Bie or Moxico instead”, where the government was shelling UNITA positions.⁶³ Such cunning moves indicate how important food aid was to UNITA soldiers defending territory against the advancing FAA. UNITA was waging guerrilla warfare from fast-emptying village bases in the ‘last war for peace’ (1998-2002), with the bulk of civilian *deslocados* concentrating in government-held urban centres. Yet, Savimbi was still hoping for humanitarian corridors in the garb of equitable distribution between the two sides. In one official press release of June 1999, he proclaimed an “open-door policy” to humanitarians and asked them to negotiate with him again. “Given the difficult and complex military situation on the ground, relief operation **can not** be conducted successfully without some form of coordination with the leadership of UNITA in Bailundo.”⁶⁴ (Emphasis original).

Angola watchers like Ostheimer remain convinced that “although humanitarian aid was instrumentalised, to speak of it as an essential resource of the Angolan conflict would be stretching the point”, because UNITA and the government had access to diamond and oil revenues that were far more crucial for greasing their war machines.⁶⁵ Tony Hodges’ figure of \$2 billion earned by UNITA from diamond smuggling until 1998⁶⁶ could be held up as a much bigger fortune that financed the war, compared to the value of humanitarian aid that Savimbi’s troops were gifted or that they commandeered. Yet, if

⁶⁰ 1999. ‘WFP Warns of Growing Hunger’. *Angola Peace Monitor*, Issue 9, Volume 5. May 28.

⁶¹ *Letters to Gabriella*. op cit. p. 174

⁶² 2001. ‘Profiles in Displacement: Angola’ Geneva: United Nations. p.26

⁶³ Richardson op cit.

⁶⁴ 1999. ‘The Current Situation in Angola: From My Vantage Point’, June 3. Bailundo: Kwacha UNITA Press.

⁶⁵ Ostheimer op cit. p.134

⁶⁶ 2001. *Angola: From Afro-Stalinism to Petro-Diamond Capitalism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

one scrutinises the supply routes and the territorial control of UNITA in the 1990s, especially after Mobutu's fall in 1997, procuring food by paying for it was logistically not easy. No matter how rich UNITA's coffers were from 'conflict diamonds', the outfit depended on consumable food and non-food items that were in the hands of humanitarians in order to wage war on a day-to-day basis.

III. See Evil, Hear Evil, Speak No Evil: Unconscious Humanitarians

Humanitarians in Angola imitated the Rwandan 'business as usual' model, narrowing their focus on delivery of relief and ignoring the crimes against humanity that were being perpetrated by both the antagonists. Philippe Le Billon studied the attitudes of the humanitarian fraternity toward civilian protection and advocacy and found a bureaucratic culture that blinded UN agencies and INGOs to the violent and punitive atmosphere in which they were operating. CONGA and FONGA, the international and local NGO forums, "rarely engage in advocacy." When they did, a clear distinction was often drawn between governance issues that affect livelihoods and more 'political' issues (which many aid organisations refrained from explicitly addressing). As competing entities in the aid business, they were more concerned about access and protecting their projects and less about speaking up against impunity. "Outspoken criticism of local authorities may result in expulsion from the country and loss of access to vulnerable populations; a risk that is unacceptable to most operational humanitarian agencies."⁶⁷

Le Billon praises MSF for denouncing abuse of civilians by armed actors in 2000 for "accepting the risk of expulsion" by going public with the data it collected from its field staff. However, he fails to ask why this outspokenness of MSF came at a belated stage in the war and not earlier, when its personnel saw from close quarters how UNITA was rearming and intimidating civilians during ceasefires. CONGA, the forum of INGOs waited until 2001 to publish a comprehensive overview of abuses of the Angolan people by UNITA and the FLA. In a shocking case of absolving themselves of any blame, the authors of this paper claim, "a major weakness in the Lusaka peace process was the failure to make public information about the violations of the agreement, including human rights violations." They then take the "international community" to task for not demanding more respect of Angolan human rights from both warring parties.⁶⁸ The reference here could be to donor states that held back humanitarians from speaking up when Savimbi was violating accord after accord and viciously victimising civilians.

Brittain wrote about the speak-no-evil avatars of MSF and other humanitarians in 1993-'94. The "obligatory silence about UNITA's character, methods and capacity from the agencies working in its control zone and anxious to safeguard their staff amounted to a complete abandonment of humanitarian principles. Evidence of UNITA's illegal arms smuggling in Uige, Jamba and Gove airstrips was known to humanitarian organisations

⁶⁷ 2005. 'Aid in the Midst of Plenty: Oil Wealth, Misery and Advocacy in Angola'. *Disasters*, Volume 29, Issue 1 p.2

⁶⁸ 2001. 'The Violation of Civilian Rights in Angola.' Luanda: Committee for NGOs Working in Angola (CONGA).p.5

but, in the words of a Western diplomat, “no one here likes to buck US policy.”⁶⁹ No one felt that there was a responsibility as humanitarians to not turn a blind eye to military build-ups that was jeopardising peace. CONGA’s 2001 paper concludes with a flourish that is aspirational, but substantively empty: “Peace must be the over-riding concern of all humanitarian organisations in Angola.”⁷⁰

In 2000, hundreds of UNITA rebels fled into Zambia to escape an FAA offensive. UNHCR set up a special camp for the “ex-combatants” away from the Angolan border to prevent them from rejoining the fighting. These “refugees” included members of UNITA’s hardliner nucleus and top generals. Within a few months, there were rising fears that “UNITA was using the refugee camps in Zambia as rear-bases from which to launch attacks on Angola.”⁷¹ UNHCR’s Kaoma refugee camp in western Zambia housed around 8000 UNITA soldiers and there were “allegations that senior UNITA military figures operated from within the camp.”⁷² UNITA fighters also mingled with genuine refugees in Namibia, and were operating in Kavango and Caprivi areas. It bears repetition that this was long after the infamous Zairean and Tanzanian refugee camps hosted Rwandan genocidaires and humanitarians mechanically fed the *interahamwe* between 1995 and 1997. After several ‘lessons learned’ from that ignoble case, UNHCR could do nothing unconventional about UNITA fighters taking refuge in Zambian and Namibian camps.

Oliver Bakewell’s research on UNHCR’s handling of Angolan refugees in Zambia discloses humanitarian perceptions of refugees as a ‘problem’ rather than a symptom of the much bigger issue of unending war. During temporary lulls in fighting in Angola, UNHCR and INGOs collaborated to forcibly repatriate Angolans back to Zambia.⁷³ Munslow adds that the fitful repatriations were faulty even from a technical angle. UNHCR was unable to provide necessary information over several years about returning refugees and where they wished to resettle after coming back to Angola. UNHCR Zaire’s communication with humanitarian organisations in Angola “barely existed.” This amounted to a “significant institutional failure.”⁷⁴

Categories like ‘beneficiaries’, ‘internally displaced’, ‘unaccompanied minors’, ‘demobilised soldiers’ etc. are impositions from outside by humanitarians that did not reflect local people’s outlooks in the Zambian-Angolan border villages. Humanitarians only worried about the ‘how’ of repatriation (logistics), not the ‘why’ (motivation and wishes of refugees). Bakewell comments: “The fact that refugees sign a voluntary repatriation form is not sufficient grounds to believe that people are exercising their free will in moving.” Interventions to repatriate refugees aimed to solve a non-existent refugee problem, rather than addressing problems for villages caused by over thirty years of war in Angola. By the mid-90s, Angolan refugees were treated by Zambians as “new

⁶⁹ ‘Getting Away With It’ op cit.

⁷⁰ ‘The Violation’ op cit. p.6

⁷¹ Kukkuk op cit. p.310

⁷² Ibid. p.328

⁷³ 2001. *Refugee Aid and Protection in Rural Africa: Working in Parallel or Cross-Purposes?* Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

⁷⁴ ‘Angola: The Search’. op cit.

villagers”, not as problematic refugees who needed ‘solutions’. However, the dominant discourse of international aid agencies submerged this local voice. Once the aid system is put in place, “it becomes more difficult to uncover the perspective of local people caught up in the emergency.”⁷⁵

The crushing weight of the aid bureaucracy on its beneficiaries and the unequal power relations between NGOs and refugees are unappreciated factors in forced displacement that Jeniffer Hyndman dug out of field trips to Somalia and Kenya. She compared the “structural violence in humanitarian practices” to apartheid.⁷⁶ Barnett and Finnemore’s characterisation of UNHCR as a bureaucracy showcases the “repatriation culture” that has robbed self-determination from displaced communities. In 1994, UNHCR facilitated forced repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar even though host state pressures were manageable.⁷⁷ Violation of refugee rights by humanitarian organisations is not always due to ‘hosting fatigue’ of states, but due to the hierarchical nature of aid administrations that pummel the displaced into supplicant status.⁷⁸

The staple humanitarian defence for divorcing themselves from civilian protection is that their ‘mandate’ does not permit advocacy. UNHCR’s reinterpretation of its own mandate— away from refugee protection, towards “humanitarian assistance”— is a betrayal of the whole purpose of the international refugee regime. The new jargon of ‘rights-based programming’ among humanitarians made no worthwhile difference in Angola’s darkest war years. Allan Cain notes that it simply led to labelling the displaced and vulnerable communities as “essentially powerless victims or potential victims of the crisis rather than actors.”⁷⁹ Many studies are exposing humanitarian organisations that are in charge of looking after refugees but responsible for extensive and avoidable violations of the rights of those dependent upon them. One edited volume details how UNHCR imposes unpaid work on refugees in camps, a practice that constitutes forced labour or quasi-slavery. It also supports dispute resolution mechanisms that systematically discriminate against women, illegally imprisons people for adultery and allows genital mutilation and other violence against women.⁸⁰ In Angola, UNHCR faced a wave of protests from refugees of four different countries in August 2002, accusing the organisation of “depriving them of all decent living conditions, drinking water and shelter”, i.e. laying the groundwork for another coerced repatriation.⁸¹

Humanitarian unconsciousness toward crimes against humanity in Angola was intermeshed with the UN’s peacekeeping blindness. Alex Vines of Human Rights Watch

⁷⁵ Bakewell, Oliver. 2000. ‘Uncovering Local Perspectives on Humanitarian Assistance and its Outcomes’. *Disasters*, Volume 24, Issue 2. pp.103-116.

⁷⁶ 2000. *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

⁷⁷ *Rule for the World* op cit.

⁷⁸ Harrell-Bond, Barbara. 1986. *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁷⁹ 2001. ‘Humanitarian and Development Actors as Peace Builders? *Review of African Political Economy*, Volume 28, Issue 90. pp. 577-586.

⁸⁰ Harrell-Bond et al. 2005. *Rights in Exile. Janus-Faced Humanitarianism*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

⁸¹ Kukuk op cit. p.485

excoriates UN peacekeepers for merely shrugging shoulders when UNITA made a mockery of demobilisation and demilitarisation after the Lusaka Accord. Like the humanitarian agencies, the UN's Human Rights Unit in Angola was deliberately kept ineffective so as not to upset the so-called 'peace process'. All it did was hold seminars that were public relations exercises. The UN system's lack of backbone worsened the pervasive climate of disrespect for basic civil rights and widespread culture of impunity. Despite local and international calls stressing the need for the UN to deal with the continuous cycle of human rights abuses, these warnings remained largely ignored, as the UN instead concentrated on obtaining a cease-fire agreement with Savimbi. Because past abuses were not acknowledged and no efforts were taken to improve and legitimise the mechanisms for protecting human rights, both parties freely, without fear of consequence, continued to commit grave violations. The failure of UNAVEM II, UNAVEM III and MONUA to demand a high standard against atrocities gave the warring parties a blank cheque.⁸²

Turner opines that, compared to Mozambique, UN peacekeeping in Angola was "poorly planned." The blue berets, not to mention humanitarians, did not denounce or even make a public appeal to stop the escalating arms traffic between 1994 and 1998, "a serious indictment that history will judge eventually." Likewise, the UN Special Representative, Alouin Blondin Beye, believed "he was assisting a difficult process by not speaking about the many violations of human rights (after the Lusaka Protocol), a serious error in tactics and judgement." Turner labels UN peacekeeping an "income-generating experience." Delays and stoppages in negotiations between belligerents result in "longer missions with increased financial benefits to mission members", inducements to go along with dilatory ways. Angola's war was for acquisition of wealth and resources, but oil and diamonds are not the entire story. The UN's "peacekeeping mentality" was part and parcel of it.⁸³

IV. Eroding Local Peacemaking: Humanitarians as Spoilers

When Ignatieff visited Angola and was stupefied by the lords of poverty that had practically colonised the country and its people in the name of humanitarianism, he reflected on its gravity in larger theoretical terms:

"There is an imperial premise at work here: Wealthy strangers are taking upon themselves the right to rule over those too poor, too conflict-ridden, to rule themselves. If it is an imperialism, is it benign?"⁸⁴

The question of humanitarian neo-colonialism segues into the attitudes of the merchants of morality towards Angolan people and society. Kukuk writes that "Often, people would come to Africa, with the best of intentions, but through lack of experience or preconceived notions, do little other than offend the locals." A Dutchman working for the

⁸² 1998. *Peace Postponed. Angola Since the Lusaka Protocol*, London: Catholic Institute for International Relations.

⁸³ "The Perpetual Civil War" op cit. p.231

⁸⁴ *The Warrior's Honour*. op cit. p.82

International Labour Organisation in Angola expressed the humanitarian mindset in a nutshell, “Of course we have to be here. The locals don’t know how to run their affairs, so we have to do it for them.”⁸⁵

The humanitarian presumption that Angolans were unequipped to cope with the war and determine their own destinies caused irreparable damage to local civil society’s capacity for peace. For Africa as a whole, local genius that did exist has been overwhelmed by the international aid presence. Local norms to regulate war and assist victims, as well as socially-accepted forms of coping with disaster, are the important forms of local capacity being endangered by humanitarianism. Case studies from Kenya, Tanzania, northern Uganda and Somalia aver that the humanitarian system is structured in ways that inhibit the building and nurturing of sustainable local capacity. Expatriates with paternalistic assumptions who are employed by international agencies, NGOs, or foreign governments have done little to explore local action or ideas. When attempts are made to build local relief capacity, they are based on false premises and unrealistic Western models that ignore local knowledge and experience. Aid, by reducing local capacity, results in a vicious circle of vulnerability, which justifies the entrenchment of international relief agencies and “explains, in part, the inability of ‘perennial’ disasters to recover to normalcy.”⁸⁶

In the humanitarian imagination, which parallels that of European colonisers of Africa, locals are painted as overwhelmingly corrupt, lazy, venal and foolish. Ian Christopolos describes the expatriate-local staff dynamics within humanitarian organisations in Angola. The foreigners have dismal views of local field staff as “rent-seekers” and slackers. They continuously attempt to curtail the discretionary freedom of their local subordinates, thereby losing the chance of harnessing their knowledge and creativity. The human resources of Angolans are routinely trampled upon in a high-handed manner. Since local aid workers have no exit option like expatriates, they are bound to act on moralistic grounds and need to be encouraged to further social capital. The former are “a group of moral individuals with an *esquema* (Angolan ingeniousness and creativity in hardships) for peace” to which humanitarians are oblivious.⁸⁷

An extrapolation can be made here from the American hegemony over Angola’s humanitarian process. According to the United Institute of Peace, a realist conflict resolution organisation, “what can be termed civil society hardly exists in Angola.” In the same vein, it champions tribalism by averring that “ethnic hostility” is the “most perplexing and important puzzle” in Angola’s war.⁸⁸ Tvedten attributes the predominant position that INGOs have attained in Angola to donor state choices. USAID “had an

⁸⁵ *Letters to Gabriella*. op cit. p.49

⁸⁶ Cf. Juma, Monia & Astri Suhrke (eds.). 2002. *Eroding Local Capacity. International Humanitarian Action in Africa*. Uppsala: Nordic African Institute.

⁸⁷ 1998. ‘Humanitarianism and Local Service Institutions in Angola’. *Disasters*, Volume 22, Issue 1, pp.2-20

⁸⁸ Prendergast, John & Smock, David. 1996. ‘NGOs and the Peace Process in Angola.’ Washington: United States Institute of Peace.

explicit policy of not supporting national capacity building”⁸⁹, redirecting us to the basic premise of this essay that the US bankrolled humanitarians as a means of retaining informal control over Angola.

An informed evaluation of the history of civil society organisations working for peace in Angola states that international peace brokers largely ignored the potential role of national non-state institutions such as churches and community-based organisations during and after the Lusaka Accord. The UN did not encourage human rights training and protection between 1994 and 1998. International efforts in support of conflict resolution “have done nothing to find out what local communities want.” A number of INGOs started Angola programmes “because funds were easily available. A feature of these efforts has been a concentration on urban areas and the holding of conferences, seminars, and workshops.” The author talks of instances of conflict between local and international NGOs, the latter being highly suspicious of local civil society because of feared penetration by MPLA elites. Ordinary Angolans had the impression that INGOs “spent a lot of money during the week enjoying and they pay less to the local staff.” “The UN and the International Community do not seem to see Angola as a people but as primarily a country of great riches. The policy of both parties of waging a war to foster the peace process was simply a grim joke, but it was accepted by and large by the international community as necessary, even though civil society exposed it repeatedly.”⁹⁰

Paul Robson and Andre Zinga Nkula performed a generic appraisal of the degree of local community participation in humanitarian operations and came up with a depressing picture. Humanitarians revelled in ‘top-down nature of action’ during big crises and were repelled by the discourse of participation and consultation, which they felt “would have hindered quick action without adding any value.” The WFP’s Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM), the blueprint around which much of the humanitarian work in Angola revolved, was based on impressions and opinions of NGOs and government officials, and has little place for survival strategies and perceived needs of affected populations. Projects designed for short-term crises were dragged over more than ten years. Humanitarians “tended to classify Angola as an acute emergency even though this was not the case in many parts of the country.” There was an “emergency delivery culture” and a “panic mode” in certain agencies, blocking efforts at local participation. Humanitarians encouraged dependency and damaged coping mechanisms and community institutions. A local NGO, ADRA is cited in the report as maintaining that perpetuation of forms of action such as food-aid and emergency health programmes were dehumanising. They ‘take the human out of humanitarian’, remove the normal day-to-day participation and consultation and control over people’s own lives, and encourage passivity.” Some humanitarians designed premeditated interventions that may have worked in other parts of the world but were unsuitable to Angola.

⁸⁹ 2001. ‘Angola 2000/2001. Key Development Issues and the Role of the NGOs.’ Fantoft: Chr. Michelsen Institute.

⁹⁰ Faria, Simao Cacumba Morais. 2003. ‘Civil Society and Human Rights in Angola’. Cape Town: Institute for Justice Reconciliation.

The authors advise humanitarians to “sit on the ground and listen”, i.e. understand better Angola’s organised civil society, informal civil society and social structures. Instead of blaming lack of funding for involving local civil society, humanitarians need to consider advocacy towards donor organisations who set the agenda and who, for various reasons, tend to prefer pure emergency relief programmes. The record thus far has been that “Aid in Angola has been a large industry. It has had few points of contact and dialogue with Angolan society.” The report contains examples of humanitarian organisations imposing solutions that undid the priorities of war-affected people.⁹¹

Tvedten’s research conveys that most of the ninety five INGOs present in Angola “isolate themselves and carry out activities largely on their own or with other foreign partners.” Some of this attitude is explained by the difficult political context but “it also reflects the way many of them work globally.” Their limited transparency has contributed to “widespread perceptions in Angolan society of INGOs being rich islands in an ocean of poverty, and of large parts of their funding going to salaries and expensive cars.” INGO cooperation with local organisations is “weaker in Angola than in most other countries in the region”, a lacuna the INGOs justify as the result of poor competence of Angolan organisations and the priority for immediate relief mandates. The author’s own survey, however, reveals “a sufficient number of national NGOs with potential competence and capacity.”⁹² The humanitarian universe is not prone to seeing what is obvious.

One hurdle to incorporating local views and preferences into humanitarian plans is the arrogant assumption that Angolans are primitive. Fernando Pacheco, the head of ADRA, has written how humanitarians in Huambo viewed concentration of powers in the hands of one leader of the community, usually the *soba* or the coordinator, as an autocracy derived from the fact that rural Angolans belong to “traditional, iron-age societies.”⁹³ Pacheco wants humanitarians to recognise that Angolans have high self-esteem despite decades of war, but expect to be helped by the international community. This is because the latter bears a huge responsibility for the failures of the peace process, as it dictated the approaches to conflict resolution and peace-keeping. The recurring warfare could not be blamed only on the Angolan Government and UNITA, and much less on the Angolan people as a whole. Pacheco criticises how “donors, NGOs and other international organisations that implement field level assistance meddle in the life of local organisations and have attitudes of disrespect or paternalism that are shocking and intolerable.” The reasons invoked by the INGOs for not working with NGOs are “unacceptable.” Further, “There are many instances of INGOs which criticise the Government for not supporting the populations of the rural areas and then adopt the same behaviour (focussing solely on emergency aid, until the conflict is over), justifying it on security related grounds that are not fair, or belittling the participatory capacity of the

⁹¹ 2003. ‘Global Study on Participation by Affected Populations in Humanitarian Aid. The Case of Angola’. London: Overseas Development Institute. pp. 13, 14, 61, 67.

⁹² ‘Angola 2000/2001’ op cit. p.44

⁹³ 2001. ‘Rural Communities in Huambo.’, in Robson, Paul (ed.) *Communities and Reconstruction in Angola. The Prospects for Reconstruction in Angola from the Community Perspective*. Guelph: Development Workshop Occasional Paper.

local communities.” The conclusion is that “the international community needs to change its attitude and be made accountable.”⁹⁴

Two specific examples of international squelching of local initiatives will illustrate clearly the qualitative harm humanitarians caused to peace. Zoe Wilson’s careful study of UNDP in Angola unfolds the partnership this organisation had with the neo-liberal International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The former wrote all the government policies on poverty reduction in Angola that were then passed on to the World Bank for approving monetary disbursements. The UNDP was in one sense “just the development arm of the World Bank.” The author also examines a Human Rights Committee run by UNHCR in Uige province since 2000. Despite fanfare, it “failed to engage with local landscapes and indigenous ways of being and knowing, and did not attempt to include the perspectives of the local communities.” This disempowering and highly centralised forum undervalued the contribution of local and indigenous political forms. It “used thin description of local peoples and human rights in order to create an alien space where the claims of local people could be neutralised and squeezed through liberal moral discourses.” The liberal model “substitutes distinctive social relations and different modes of livelihood for universalistic and atomistic liberal rational actors. Lip service is paid to culture and traditions, but in reality local people are emptied of history and cultural specificity and reinterpreted as caricatures from liberal mythology.” Humanitarians invoked Hobbes’ Leviathan and viewed IDPs in Uige as residents of a “state of nature” who could be transformed into “liberal citizens.” The poor rural small holders of Uige, living on some of the richest agricultural lands in Africa, were facing threats of appropriation from business and political elites in the name of “development”, but the UNHCR’s HRC, “for all its talk of rights, does nothing to challenge these architectures of power.” In fact, it strengthened expropriating elites who were largely unaccountable.⁹⁵

UNDP was the main culprit in the total bungling of the Community Rehabilitation Programme (1995-’98), which dealt a setback to grassroots peace initiatives and paved one way for the return to war. Cain points that UNDP was reluctant to invest in community-based projects, as envisaged in the CRP. Local organisations saw the bureaucratic UNDP as the “owner” of the CRP that was too stovepiped to support genuine peace methodologies in the villages.⁹⁶ A conference in Canada on Angola’s peace-building had the following statements about UNDP and the lost window of opportunity for peace through the CRP:

“UNDP is one of the weakest structures in terms of administering programmes. After almost five years, none of the rehabilitation had taken place. Proposals received in late 1995 from communities had still not been processed four years later. If implemented early and effectively, this programme could have assisted in the consolidation of peace. Lack of transparency of reporting systems hid the fact that only a small proportion of the

⁹⁴ Tvedten, Inge et al. 2002. ‘Angola 2001/2002. Key Development Issues and Aid in a Context of Peace’. Fantoft: Chr. Michelsen Institute. pp.64-65

⁹⁵ 2004. *Wishful Thinking, Wilful Blindness and Artful Amnesia. The UN and the Promotion of Good Governance, Democracy and Human Rights in Africa*. Halifax: Dalhousie University. pp.204,209,214.

⁹⁶ ‘Humanitarian and Development Actors’ op cit.

UN Trust Funds money was invested in community-based projects. If implemented early and effectively, this programme (CRP) could have assisted in the consolidation of peace.
„⁹⁷

Where did the UN Trust Funds money go, if not to local communities of Angola? Kukuk's remarkable testimony of corruption, deceit and lies in the UNDP bears elaboration. RUTEC, a South African company with dubious links to diamond dealers, started a 'micro enterprise development project' in Huambo in 1998 with \$1.5 million of funding from UNDP and UNOPS (UN Office for Project Services). The author, who was selected as the Project Director, found to his shock that only a pitifully small amount of money actually reached him on the ground in Huambo. "This contract seemed to neatly sidestep the usually strict procurement rules in place within the UN system." RUTEC was chosen as sub-contractor by UNDP although this company was spurious, lacking local roots and planning for what kinds of training would benefit the war-affected economy. The author's higher-ups in RUTEC instructed him, "We do not have to tell anybody what we are doing in Huambo and what we are spending on this project." (p.217). Progress reports submitted to UNOPS contained no financial statements. There was no competitive bidding or justification shown by UNDP for choosing RUTEC as the sub-contractor. Under the CRP, projects had to be reviewed and authorised by a local appraisal committee. RUTEC never received one. UNDP "got involved, planned and gave money to a project that none of its staff understood or made an effort to learn to understand." RUTEC was "yet another typical UNDP mess, a fiasco that usually accompanies UNDP projects." For RUTEC to get vehicle documents, imported equipment or even work visas, well-paid UNDP staff requested "missing documents" (euphemism for \$100 bills). RUTEC in Johannesburg was, on its part, harnessing this "sweetheart deal with UNOPS", further increasing its profits by over-invoicing and manipulating equipment transfers to Angola.

Kukuk recalls the irony of UNDP coining catchy slogans like 'Project Management, Good Governance and Anti-Corruption' before putting its own house in order. It employed bureaucratic blockades to cover up scandals like RUTEC and provided excuses for inaction. The author found to his frustration that UNDP staffers "have a tendency to close ranks against criticism, turning these into confrontations instead of dealing with it openly and honestly. Neither justice nor transparency appeared to mean much to them." Anyone disagreeing with their views was "considered an enemy." They were obsessed with salaries, R & R (rest and recreation) perks and "various schemes to pilfer money from the organisation for all sorts of benefits." Kukuk found from Tony Hodges, then a UNDP consultant, that "fraud had been committed in contracting RUTEC and that they had paid somebody at UNDP in order to obtain the contract." For the Huambo project's local employees who were cheated of their salaries by UNDP, "those who lose are always us, due to the fact that it is foreigners that drive the train of deceit." They repeatedly requested UNDP to "be more human". When it was to no avail, they accused UNDP of being "the main violator of human rights whilst presenting yourself as the protector of these same rights."

⁹⁷ 1999. 'The Struggle for Peace, Peace-Building and Canadian Policy. Roundtable on Angola' Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development.

According to the UNDP Angola Country Review in 2001, its “impact on communities has by and large been negative. Local level leaders and NGO partners (associated with UNDP) have lost credibility with their constituencies.” By 2002, donors were tired of UNDP’s ways and gave only 5.29% of what it requested from the UN Consolidated Appeal for Angola. It got “into the vicious circle of claiming that there are no results because they have no funds and then not getting funds because they have no results.” In effect, “there was not much difference between the way of thinking at UNDP and the thinking of some people that we today classify as criminals.” The head of a governmental commission investigating the role of UNDP in Angola told Kukkuk that this agency was “definitely one of the main vultures in the country.” It not only condoned fraud, but also went to extraordinary lengths to hide it.

Kukkuk’s conclusions from this mess have implications for the neo-colonial nature of humanitarianism:

“The poor, IDPs, refugees, the vulnerable- all these words that (UNDP staffers) so glibly throws about are but words to them categories of people at best. They have no idea that these are not categories of people but ordinary human beings in special circumstances. It is not always easy for the people living in cesspits to deal with the problems that the UN (agencies) bring with them in addition to the problems that they already suffer. The underbelly of humanitarian aid is ugly, corrupt and inappropriate. Injecting billions of dollars into the UN bureaucracy for humanitarian assistance is frightening because the recipients have very weak internal controls and the degree of unaccountability in them is staggering. Corruption among humanitarians is not only a very serious moral problem but has even more negative impact on the lives of people than comparable corruption within governments or corporations. It is essentially to rob from the poorest of the poor, a sort of Robin Hood in reverse.”⁹⁸

Local civil society has an important stabilising role in peace and national reconciliation, a resource that was bypassed and stifled by humanitarians in Angola. In Anderson’s words, humanitarians tend to be “outsiders” who fail to realise the value of “connectors” in local civil society that are striving for non-violent solutions.⁹⁹ The need was not for mere consultation of Angolans in humanitarian programming, but to make them central to the process of rehabilitation, resettlement and rights. The ontology of humanitarianism never countenanced it.

V. De-mining Politics: Humanitarians as Militarists

Angola was one of the most mined countries in the 1990s, with an estimated 1:1 ratio of people to mines that imperilled IDP and refugee return, curtailed human mobility and permanently maimed thousands. Naturally, the country grew into a theatre for the multimillion dollar growth industry of ‘humanitarian de-mining’. There is a direct correlation between US government priorities for Africa and the rising graph of humanitarian de-mining in Angola. Henk writes that de-mining in Angola and elsewhere

⁹⁸ *Letters to Gabriella*. op cit. pp. 49-529

⁹⁹ *Do No Harm* op cit.

were favourites of the US Department of Defense that “attained increasing visibility since 1995.”¹⁰⁰ The Pentagon’s Office for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (OASD (SO/LIC)) funds, guides and oversees the US Humanitarian Demining, Research and Development Programme. While the ostensible objective of this Programme is to “share technologies” with humanitarians¹⁰¹, it is one element of the galloping militarisation of humanitarianism. In Angola, it was also embroiled in the US-UN-UNITA troika.

Mines Action Group (MAG), the leading INGO in Angola’s de-mining, was accused by the government of targeting mine removal only in its areas and leaving UNITA alone. Winslow mentions that UNITA was much more reluctant to give up its mines after Lusaka, threatening MAG of dire consequences. UNITA was glad to get old FAA mines cleared “but they are very cagey about their own mines.”¹⁰² MAG, Halo Trust and MgM were INGOs that received plenty of US government funding for Angola operations. The Angola Landmine Monitor’s comparison of donor contributions between 1995 and 1998 twins my own calculations in the food aid section of this essay:

“Australia, \$7,687,506; Belgium, \$1,126,959; Denmark, \$3,989,312; the EU, \$6,851,162; Finland, \$500,000; Ireland, \$252,791; Luxembourg, \$143,000; the Netherlands, \$3,883,531; Norway, \$1,425,000; Sweden, \$3,762,500; and the U.S., \$23,344,000. These contributions total \$50,943,011.”¹⁰³

Thus, the US funded 45.8% of the humanitarian de-mining operations in Angola during the Lusaka interlude. How this financial grip was leveraged into partisan preferences for Savimbi remains to be assessed when national security archives are opened. Ostheimer caught a whiff of the de-mining politics by commenting that donors and NGOs were aware of “being used to clear strategically important assets for both the government and the UNITA” and had to shift to mine-awareness trainings by the late 90s.¹⁰⁴

UN bureaucratic spanners and complete mismanagement of de-mining in Angola are easier to trace. Lack of coordination, spiralling costs, poorly educated donors with overblown expectations and inadequate standard operating procedures were the hallmarks. The UN was paralysed by inter-departmental struggles over control of resources and turf battles. UNAVEM III was little better than the fiasco in Mozambique. By March 1997, its de-mining programme had gone through five managers and its top six posts were all empty. Byzantine bureaucratic procedures and lack of professionalism within the UN slowed down and almost completely blocked mine action.¹⁰⁵ How many civilian lives were sacrificed to intra-UN turf battles is a moot question. A UNHCR (UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs) in-house scorecard admitted in 1996 that “at the

¹⁰⁰ ‘Uncharted Paths’ op cit.

¹⁰¹ 2003. ‘The US Department of Defense Humanitarian Demining Research and Development Program’. *Journal of Mine Action* Issue 7.1/

¹⁰² *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*. op cit. p.84

¹⁰³ 1999. *Angola Landmine Monitor*.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Aid Agencies’ op cit.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Boulden, Laurie & Martin Edmonds (ed.) 1999. *The Politics of De-Mining: Mine Clearance in Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs.

end of two and a half years, the clearance operation had achieved virtually nothing.”¹⁰⁶ There was a complete breakdown of communication between the UN’s Central Mines Action Office and the joint UNITA-MPLA Angolan Institute for the Removal of Explosive Obstacles (INAROE).

Although NGOs fared better than the UN, Kap Anamur (German) and Save the Children (SCF-US) committed serious mistakes resulting in human casualties. In 1995, five people, including one German, attached to the Kap Anamur project were killed by unidentified gunmen at Solo. The clearance team had received several indirect warnings about work in the area prior to the incident. Kap Anamur was also involved in controversy because one of its expatriate staff members was arrested in 1995 for his involvement in the illegal export of munitions to Namibia.¹⁰⁷ Several humanitarians in the in de-mining field had army or ex-service backgrounds. Kap brought Soviet-built T-55 tanks, decommissioned from the former East German army to Angola to use them for mine clearance on roads in the south. When Africa Watch enquired, no explanation was given as to why it made sense to ship unwanted European tanks to a country that already had a surfeit of tanks (including about 200 T-55s) when only the flails and other special equipment needed to be imported. Equator Bank, USA, attempted to “use” Angola to test experimental ground comparison survey equipment, at Angolan expense.¹⁰⁸

In 1996, SCF’s clearance operation was suspended, pending a review, following a serious accident. When an SCF team was clearing a pylon in Cunene province, a group of de-miners was at the site of a recently uncovered mine, when it exploded injuring several of them. The medical evacuation was described by one UN official as a “comedy of errors” with the vehicle carrying the injured crashing and no senior supervisory staff on location at the time of accident.¹⁰⁹ Thus, INGOs in humanitarian de-mining exhibited not only partiality, militarism and chicanery but also gross inefficiency.

At a deeper level, humanitarian de-miners in Angola operated on militaristic principles when they entered remote parts of the country. Nkula and Robson feel that ideas of consulting with villagers “do not as yet go very deep (among humanitarians) and there is still a long way to go.” Humanitarians have to “integrate de-mining with people’s own strategies” instead of creating militaristic “rapid-entry-rapid exit rules.”¹¹⁰ Humanitarian de-miners treated their jobs mechanically and technocratically, not humanly. In style and method, they were as flat-footed and impersonal as armies.

Janecke Wille’s field research in Kwanza Norte province notes that humanitarian organisations in Angola “began to think” about local communities and their social organisations by 2000, but there was still a considerable way to go. The agencies had meagre understanding of Angolan community structures and inadvertently strengthened their hierarchical and undemocratic aspects by empowering ‘gatekeepers’ rather than

¹⁰⁶ Munslow. op cit. p.201

¹⁰⁷ *Landmine Monitor* op cit.

¹⁰⁸ 1993. ‘Landmines in Angola’ New York: Human Rights Watch.

¹⁰⁹ *Landmine Monitor*. op cit.

¹¹⁰ ‘Global Study’ op cit.

whole groups. Community-based approaches that merely involved consultation with one leader, or a restricted group, reinforced their privileges as gatekeepers and the corollary “destructive vertical power relations.” As an external actor, “it will be impossible to avoid becoming a part of the already existing power network, but an awareness of the structures should make it possible to avoid strengthening it. In Cassua the de-mining operation contacted only the *soba* (village headman) to gain access to the population, and this might have strengthened his power position.” “Fateful errors” on the part of the demining NGO, Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), also created a potential community conflict in Cassua. Wilful ignorance of humanitarians leads to their ending up “doing more harm than good.” If an external agency only deals with the *soba*,

“he will get the influence to control this information and thereby creating a dependency relationship towards the population. Even in the smallest communities, there are power relations and a hierarchical structure with dependency relations. This is generally overlooked when giving aid today.”

When a demining organisation arrives in a community, it “will most likely contact the institutions that are the most obvious by virtue of being the traditional/historical institutions. This might be incorrect, because they do not take changes through time into account.”¹¹¹ Social relations of power change dramatically in war-affected communities and the reliance of humanitarians on outmoded notions of leadership are ruinous for communal harmony. This negative outcome reflects the larger malaise of humanitarianism- it distances itself from people at the margins of society as if they do not matter at all.

De-mining in Cassua brought out many other inherent flaws in the humanitarian modus operandi. Kristian Harpviken questions the efficacy of choosing this site for de-mining at the outset. “In the short term, the number of beneficiaries is relatively small, maybe in the range of 15-25 households. This apparent imbalance between resources spent and direct impact leads to a question about why priority was given to this particular task. NPA had for a while been working to encourage government bodies to forward priority areas for mine clearance, without much feedback, and when MINARS (Angolan Ministry of Assistance) played it by the rules, this in itself was seen as a success that required a positive response. In hindsight, it is easy to argue that NPA had insufficient information for taking a decision on whether to de-mine Cassua or not.” When it conducted a survey in 1996 for the Kwanza Norte province, “there appears to have been no direct contact between surveyors and locals at the time. The two key informers about the mine problem in Cassua were officers at the army base in Dange-ya Menha, who had earlier been stationed at Cassua. Much more thorough information gathering would have been appropriate. As things stand currently, mine action organisations have not built up such a capacity.”

Once the de-mining began, the absence of consultation with local people worsened. The original inhabitants of Cassua lived in two locations- one at the edge of the minefield and

¹¹¹ 2000. ‘Social Capital and Humanitarian Mine Action: De-Mining as Post-Conflict Assistance in Cassua, Angola’. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute. pp. 117, 108, 112, 116.

the other four kilometres away. Aid agencies maintained cordial ties at the informal level with the set immediately contiguous with the minefield, but did not inform the distantly located lot about the status of their operations. Gaining trust was a problem with both groups of locals, but was especially marked in the case of the group living at a distance. There was a “near universal lack of trust observed in the population that had no interaction with agency staff.”¹¹² Building trust among affected populations is neither resource demanding nor time consuming, but requires a degree of foresight and socialisation with locals. The aid business is so caged by prejudices and premeditated myths that this may be asking for the moon and the stars.

VI. Gendering Aid: Humanitarians as Chauvinists

Angolan women were the worst hit by the war and its horrors. They were also on the receiving end of humanitarian discrimination and oppression. Feminist literature offers important analyses on gender bias within the UN system. Angela Raven-Roberts says it is “a function of the myriad of identities and associated ‘baggage’ that staff personnel bring to their jobs, as well as flaws in the human resource management structures of the UN.” In the absence of “commitment from senior management at OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), providing a ‘gender perspective’ becomes nothing more than someone (usually a Junior Programme Officer) combing through any OCHA or CAP document and inserting the words ‘women’, ‘girls’ and ‘gender’ in as many places as possible so that the end product would read as gender sensitive. This practice is not limited to OCHA (but extended to) other focal points in the main UN agencies.” Both in UN agencies and in large INGOs, “jobs within emergency environments are seen as being ‘naturally male’. A disturbing feature of much UN recruitment is that there is increasing emphasis on bringing ex-military personnel into humanitarian policy and programme sectors. A military background is somehow considered more appropriate than expertise in conflict resolution, peace studies, community development, international relations or anthropology. Attempts to infuse gender into programming are at times dismissed as trivial, especially by some of the older military or ex-military staff of UN agencies.

In part, Raven-Roberts ascribes this chauvinism to “a pervasive sense among some staff of being above national or international laws. International civil servants are exempt from state jurisdictions.” Humanitarian staffers who feel gender analysis is irrelevant or inappropriate ignore guidelines or “may even go so far as to undermine others who are trying to implement them.” They suspect gender of being a “divisive” philosophy fostered by “Western feminists/radicals/lesbians who are out to cause problems for the organisation.” For every official trying to reform the system from within, “there is an army of others who will close ranks, veto documents, blacklist hired consultants and otherwise discredit studies.” Performing any nuanced analysis on gender discrimination in aid is considered “downright harmful to the ‘real work’ of saving lives.” Due to this

¹¹² 2000. *A Community Study of Landmines and Humanitarian Demining: Cassua, Kwanza Norte, Angola*. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute.

obstinacy, “many disasters and problems are created by agency personnel.”¹¹³ Julie Mertus’ case studies of humanitarian failures in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Kosovo include lack of basic products for women, forcing women to relive traumatic events in order to get relief assistance, and lack of sensitivity among aid workers to help sexually-abused women.

In Angola, Elsie Alexander did an evaluation of WFP’s programmes in 1995 and revealed shameful humanitarian practices. “The data clearly show that there are no strategies developed or structures in place to facilitate the effective participation of women in relief programmes. Gender is not regarded as a key planning variable by most of the officials. Thus there is very little or no commitment to translating the WFP’s Gender Guidelines policy into actual plans and programmes.” Most of the implementing agencies “fail to ensure that women and men fully participate and benefit from relief operations and programmes.” Be it UNHCR, WFP or World Vision, “jobs are normally considered as male jobs; women are not regarded as capable people for various positions.” They are regarded as “beneficiaries and not necessarily as active participants.” Men control “decisions about targeting, registration, distribution of food and any other issues concerning the relief operations.” In Benguela and Cuando Cubango, involvement of the community in food distribution was non-existent, as “the agencies control the whole process.” Inefficient and confusing registration and targeting procedures marginalised both women and men. Male heads of polygamous families received all the rations on behalf of their wives. Planning of food-for-work projects in agriculture, craft and community services did not take into account the needs of women and men. In the IDP camps, “the food distribution process seem to be open to abuse and corruptive practices that negatively affect access to adequate food rations at the family level as a result of the organisational structure of the camps. The data have indicated that using intermediaries for distribution at the different levels increases the chances for men to use food for their own economic and political gains.” The author remarks, “it is not a case of no policy guidelines but a question of being committed and having the ability to devise strategies to incorporate gender concerns in disaster situations.”¹¹⁴

Although these patterns were raised as early as 1995, the same sexist patterns of humanitarianism persist in Angola up to the present. A 2005 Angola Portfolio Evaluation presented to WFP’s Executive Board noted, “Few of WFP’s implementing partners were familiar with the Enhanced Commitments to Women. Widespread gender imbalances in decision-making and participation and lack of attention to the needs of households headed by women required further analysis and action.” It goes on to counsel “additional gender training for WFP staff, partners and Government counterparts.”¹¹⁵ Such bureaucratic suggestions miss the core virility of humanitarianism that no number of trainings, workshops or modules can erase. When two MSF volunteers, including a

¹¹³ 2005. ‘Gender Mainstreaming in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Talking the Talk, Tripping Over the Walk’, in Mazurana, Dyan et al (ed.) *Gender, Conflict and Peacekeeping*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield. pp.44, 50, 56, 57, 58, 59.

¹¹⁴ 1995. ‘Gender and Emergency Issues. A Synthesis of Four Case Studies: Malawi, Mozambique, Angola and Zaire’. Rome: World Food Programme.

¹¹⁵ 2005. ‘Angola Portfolio Evaluation’. Rome: World Food Programme. pp.4, 12

woman, can be “awed” by the “level of organisation” of WFP’s grain distribution in Andulo IDP camp near Kuito¹¹⁶, and not notice the gender iniquity, humanitarianism renders itself irredeemable.

Ruth Jacobsen elaborates embedded constraints regarding gender sensitivity in Angola when “international humanitarian organisations can cite the ‘tyranny of the urgent’ as a justification for the gaps in their institutional learning.” Humanitarians in Angola had “ample time to learn about gender and armed conflict to integrate this into their policies. One might expect a willingness to build on the work of existing Angolan women’s organisations. Regrettably, the available evidence strongly suggests that this is not the case. There is a marked absence of learning on the part of international agencies.” Their evaluations and field staff “routinely stated that the urgency of humanitarian demands left no scope for attending to gender. Even when their organisations’ guidelines affirmed that the protection of displaced and refugee women from the risk of sexual assault or coercion was obligatory, high-level staff continued to state that they so no necessity to do this. Where gender did appear, it was elided with women (and women with mothers). This put an examination of men and masculinity out of bounds, making it difficult to grasp the structures of gendered power relationships and sidelining existing bodies of knowledge produced by Angolan women researchers.”

Jacobsen illustrates the case of external agencies funding micro-credit programmes for women. Their staff members were taken aback by patterns of indigenous inheritance practices that constrained women’s economic positions. “Agencies that were concerned with gender issues largely conceptualised the Angolan family as corresponding broadly with the Western monogamous model.” Humanitarians associated with religious groupings maintained long silences on publicly identifying men’s sexual conduct as a causal factor in family insecurity. Large-scale human rights abuses, including rape of female dependents of soldiers in quartering areas were shrouded. This “raises central questions for any future demobilisation process supervised by the international community.”¹¹⁷

Investigations into sexual abuse trends in wartime Angola showed how UNAVEM III’s peacekeepers were deeply mired in the inhuman practice of *Catorzinhas*, forcing girls aged as young as 11 into prostitution by proffering monetary rewards. It was found in 1996 that,

“Repeating a pattern seen in other parts of the world, United Nations forces were involved with young girls in Luanda and reports of the exploitation of minors in provincial capitals related almost exclusively to the United Nations.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *No One Can Stop the Rain*. op cit. p.172

¹¹⁷ Jacobson, Ruth. 2005. ‘Gender, War and Peace in Mozambique and Angola: Advances and Absences’ in Mazurana, Dyan et al (ed.) *Gender, Conflict and Peacekeeping*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield. pp. 134,143,144,145

¹¹⁸ 1996. *Recovering from 30 Years of War. Refugee Women and Children in Angola*. New York: Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

Men driving UN vehicles often stopped by international NGO-run feeding centres for street children to pick up street girls who were being rehabilitated. Inevitably, recommendations followed that the UN should “not only educate UNAVEM III forces about the rights of children but also prosecute individuals who commit the offence of having sex with a child or young person below the age of consent.”¹¹⁹ As was mentioned earlier, the overlap between political peacekeeping/mediation and humanitarian missions was pronounced in Angola. UNAVEM III was a peacekeeping force mandated to “coordinate, facilitate and support humanitarian activities directly linked to the peace process” after the Lusaka Accords. The UN troops that were meant to secure aid convoys thus abused the humanitarian component of their briefs by sexually subordinating Angolan women and girls.

Wilson has also vividly depicted the gendered humanitarian empire in Angola after the war ended in 2002. International peace-building accentuates Angolan women's misfortunes “because such efforts are undergirded by gender-biased assumptions.” INGOs and UN agencies exhibit a “marked lack of capacity to deal effectively with gender issues affecting their area of expertise.” The UNOA’s (United Nations Office in Angola) IDP strategy is “not gender mainstreamed, despite the fact that the majority of IDPs are women.” Staffers overwhelmingly treat Angolan women “as victims, devoid of agency and autonomy- a perspective that may account for unwillingness to test the boundaries claimed by men, who are overwhelmingly accepted as household heads.” Overall, the tendency to rely on blanket categories, expressed, for example, in the acceptance of patriarchy and chauvinism as intractable cultural forms, is rife, while international community participation in the construction and reproduction of gendered options remains invisible to participants in the process. “Self-awareness, not only as a humanitarian response, but also as a powerful participant in the process of social transformation is, to a large extent, crucially absent from intervention design.”

As a counter to the humanitarian defence that they wish to avoid imposing ‘Western values’ on traditional societies, Wilson offers the example of one INGO which began by accepting men’s entitlement to head water committees, but later refused to rehabilitate streams in villages that did not put forth a gender-mixed committee- ultimately finding the stipulation relatively unproblematic and, in fact, a significant improvement over all-male committees.¹²⁰ Humanitarians mentally programme themselves to take the dominant values of patriarchy as the ‘local culture’, thanks to their shunning of the Angolan women’s movements. Once the patriarchal image is imprinted in their consciousness, gender-sensitivity is ruled out as a diversion and an affront to ‘Angolan culture’. In Hyndman’s memorable language, the race-neutral, gender-blind concept of “universal man” inspires humanitarianism.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ 2005. ‘State Making, Peacemaking and the Inscription of Gendered Politics into Peace: Lessons from Angola’, in Mazurana, Dyan et al (ed.) *Gender, Conflict and Peacekeeping*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield. pp.242, 257

¹²¹ *Managing Displacement*. op cit.

Conclusion: Who Benefits From Humanitarianism?

Until now, the controversial term ‘humanitarian intervention’ has been bandied about in the sense of one state militarily interfering in another on the pretext of preventing human rights abuses. Walden Bello dissects American wars on Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq and posits that Western civil society organisations, including INGOs, must bear some responsibility for creating the “unrestrained hegemon” by going along with US humanitarian interventions and their destabilising consequences.¹²²

This essay has delineated the maladies of a different kind of humanitarian intervention in which UN agencies and INGOs were central, not peripheral, to the quest for unrestrained access Angola’s strategic minerals. That this type of intervention can be pernicious to peace needs underlining, because as far as the Angolan people are concerned, the UN and INGOs came uninvited and added to their troubles. Humanitarian shenanigans in food, de-mining, capacity building, advocacy and gender mainstreaming all weakened Angola’s chances of ending the war sooner than it did. In the end, it was not the international agencies or the UN mediators which brought peace. In 2002, Angolans rid themselves of Jonas Savimbi on their own and opened a new chapter in their battle-scarred history. However, the same old machinations of humanitarians continue in the new post-war era, with Angola supplying 14% of US oil imports and China shopping hard in Luanda for its own energy needs.¹²³

As is to be expected, humanitarians gave absolutely “no credence to the initiative and creativity” of Angolans after 2002. No effort was made to complement the survival strategies of people and to let them drive the process of recovery after the war.¹²⁴ The same old excuses for failures were also put in place. Erik De Mul, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Angola complained that “the resources available are almost never enough.” Making the outrageous claim that “the humanitarian operation in Angola is widely regarded as one of the most effectively coordinated in the world”, he outlined three neat steps: “At the strategic level, humanitarian partners discuss and agree overall priorities. At the operational level, partners collaborate to ensure the smooth and effective functioning of programmes on the ground. At the sectoral level, partners set goals and objectives and establish common approaches for specific sectors, including food, security, health, nutrition, water and sanitation. The results are impressive.” Cooperative action between UN and NGOs “saved lives and prevented deterioration of the already precarious situation.” Landmines and lack of funding- the usual suspects- were castigated as the main limitations, not the visceral illnesses pinpointed in this essay.

Responding to criticisms of slackness in the UN, De Mul added:

“Reform of the UN is important, and serious efforts at strengthening the system and making it more effective are needed. But we must avoid the cynicism of careless

¹²² 2006. ‘Humanitarian Intervention. Evolution of a Dangerous Doctrine’, *Focus on the Global South*, January 19

¹²³ 2005. ‘Sino-US Energy Competition in Africa’. *Power and Interest News Report*. October 7.

¹²⁴ *Letters to Gabriella*. op cit.

criticism and recognise that real concrete progress has been made in recent years. Humanitarian assistance has been improved and pragmatic coordination mechanisms have ensured that hundreds of aid workers are aiming for the same objective, saving the lives of people who would otherwise suffer or die. We must not mistake serious resource and political constraints for bureaucratic inertia.”¹²⁵

Humanitarians used the same self-defence of “saving lives” to repress Angolan women and civil society and to keep mum when crimes against humanity were dancing before their naked eyes. They benefited from the chaos in Angola, milked the mammaries of international pity and served the interests of the US - all in the name of “saving lives.”

The way out of the humanitarian morass is to pay heed to Kennedy’s warning that the hegemony of human rights and humanitarianism has come to dominate the “space of emancipation” so much that alternative religious, local and national energies have been de-legitimised.¹²⁶ If Angolans, Africans and all other peoples from the developing world are to rebuild their other-determined lives, they have to upend the de-legitimising empire of humanitarianism.

¹²⁵ 2002. ‘Coordination of Humanitarian Aid- A UN Perspective’. *The Lancet*. July 27. pp.335, 336

¹²⁶ *The Dark Side of Virtue*. op cit.