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NGOs as National Political Actors During the Cold War: A Comparison of Médecins Sans Frontières and Oxfam's Humanitarian Programmes in the Global South, 1979-1988

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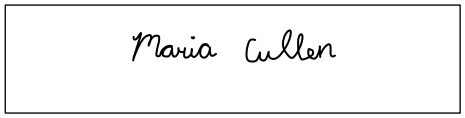
Declaration

I, Maria Cullen, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the completion of a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Galway, and is wholly my own work, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. This thesis has not obtained a degree at the National University of Ireland, Galway or at any other academic institution.



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Summary of the Contents

This thesis examines the operations of two NGOs, Oxfam and MSF, as examples of European (Northern) humanitarian action in the Global South during the 1980s. By the end of the decade, these organisations were the most influential humanitarian NGOs in their respective countries. It uses the Cambodian crisis, the Salvadoran refugee crisis in Honduras, and the Ethiopian famine as case studies through which to examine the impact of these organisations' interventions on the ground. In so doing, the thesis brings in the voices of the South and examines how the messy realities of Oxfam and MSF's universalising projects interacted with the goals of local actors. The 1980s was a decade characterised by soaring international inequalities and the acceleration of bipolar confrontation through proxy conflicts. The Salvadoran and Cambodian crises represented two of the largest and most protracted refugee and internal displacement crises, and the Ethiopian famine represented the deadliest sub-Saharan African famine of the decade. These three cases were also significant because of how they shaped the development of the humanitarian sector and helped craft a set of norms of humanitarian practice that were institutionalised in the 1990s. In dissecting the political, personal and economic considerations that lay behind Oxfam and MSF's opposing visions of ethical action in these diverse contexts, the thesis asks broader questions about the nature of nongovernmental humanitarian aid, and how its practice evolved over the course of the 1980s. The national comparative approach employed here focuses on national particularities and highlights their importance in shaping Western understandings of suffering and ethical intervention in the Global South. Finally, the thesis also situates itself within the flourishing field of new Cold War history writing that seeks to move beyond the state to illuminate the experiences of civilians as social and political actors in this era.

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It was not always easy doing a PhD during a pandemic, separated from campus and colleagues for so much of the write-up time, but I am grateful to have so many great friends at the University of Galway with whom I shared this experience. Some of us even formed an online writing community so that we could work from home together – I honestly don't know what I would have done without this 'pomodoro' group, but I must admit I am also looking forward to taking a break from measuring everything in 25 minute segments for a while now! Thank you to Heidi Kingston, Barbara Mirkovic, Ashley Cahillane, Emily O'Dowd, Siobhan Morrissey, Sebastiaan Bierema, Yaheli Hernandez and Sarah Carter. Thank you also to my Dublin-based friends, Lia O'Broin, Laura Mahon, Matthew Doncel and Jamie McLoughlin, for keeping me sane and distracting me from the work when necessary.

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List of Abbreviations

ASESAH: Asociación Salvadoreña Ecuménica de Solidaridad y Ayuda Humanitaria

ATV: Associated Television

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

BRAC: Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (later the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee)

BRCS/ BRC: British Red Cross Society / British Red Cross

CARE: Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe/ Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (name after 1953)

CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CEDEN: Comité Evangélico de Emergencia Nacional, subsequently Comité Evangélico de Desarrollo Nacional ([Honduran] Evangelical National Emergency Committee, then Evangelical National Development Committee)

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CIAS: El Centro de Investigacion y Accion Social (Centre for Research and Social Action)

CODE: Comission de Desarollo y Emergencia (Development and Emergency Committee)

CRS: Catholic Relief Services

DEC: Disasters Emergency Committee

DK: Democratic Kampuchea

DIES: Departamento de Investigaciones Especiales (Department of Special Investigations)

DNI: División de Investigaciones (Division of National Investigation)

EEC: European Economic Community

ENA: École Nationale d'Administration (National School of Administration)

FASE: Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional (Federation of Organisations for Social and Educational Assistance)

FDR: Frente Democrático Revolucionario (Revolutionary Democratic Front)

FFHC: Freedom from Hunger Campaign

FMLN: Frente Farabundo Martí para Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front)

FUNCINPEC: Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia)

FUSEP: Fuerza de Seguridad Pública (Public Security Force)

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

ICVA: International Council of Voluntary Agencies

IFRC: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

IGO: Intergovernmental Organisation

IHL: International Humanitarian Law

IHRL: International Human Rights Law

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IO: International Organisation

IRC: International Rescue Committee

KPLNF: Khmer People's National Liberation Front

LSF: Liberté Sans Frontières (Freedom Without Borders)

MCF: Movement for Colonial Freedom

MSF: Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)

MUAC: Mid-upper Arm Circumference Tape

NGO: Nongovernmental organisation

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

ORDEN: Organización Democrática Nacionalista (Nationalist Democratic Organisation)

Oxfam GB: Oxfam Great Britain

PCF: Parti Communiste Français (French Communist Party)

PRK: People's Republic of Kampuchea

R2P: Responsibility to Protect

REST: Relief Society of Tigray

RRC: Relief and Rehabilitation Committee

RUTF: Ready to Use Therapeutic Food

SCF: Save the Children Fund

SRC: Salvadoran Red Cross

TB: Tuberculosis

UN: United Nations

UNAH: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (National Autonomous University of Honduras)

UNBRO: United Nations Border Relief Operation

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNTAC: United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

VSO: Voluntary Service Overseas

WFP: World Food Programme

Introduction

On 25 September 1986, twenty-six representatives of sixteen NGOs, drawn from ten different countries, gathered in the opulent surroundings of the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam for a one-day conference on humanitarian aid to Cambodia.[1] The conference had been organised by the British NGO Oxfam (Oxfam GB) [2] with help from its Dutch sister-organisation Novib.[3] Among those in attendance were representatives from Amnesty International, Caritas, Christian Aid, Oxfam Belgium and the World Council of Churches. The number of external representatives was not large-scale; ten of the twenty-six people present were members of Oxfam and Novib.[4] Nevertheless, the range of organisations there indicated the platform Oxfam had cultivated for itself as a leading European voice on Cambodia. Since 1979, when the Vietnamese Army overthrew the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime, Oxfam had been a passionate advocate for Western aid in Phnom Penh, spearheading the formation of a Consortium of thirty-one European NGOs to deliver emergency relief to the country in the face of immense human need and a delayed response from UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).[5] Seven years later, it encouraged the NGOs in attendance in Amsterdam to draft a 'joint statement' condemning the diplomatic isolation of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime that held power in Phnom Penh.[6] The PRK's claim to statehood in Cambodia was rejected in the West due to the ongoing presence of Vietnamese troops on Cambodian soil, yet Oxfam claimed that the denial of bilateral and UN development aid that this non-recognition entailed had

[1] 'NGO Meeting on Kampuchea. September 25, 1986 at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam.', 'Cambodge 1980: Marche Pour la Survie (comptes) et courriers, 80-92 fiche pays', MSF Archive.
[2] 'Oxfam' refers to 'Oxfam GB' throughout the thesis.
[3] Oxfam Novib, often referred to simply as Novib, was founded in 1956. See https://www.oxfamnovib.nl.
[4] 'NGO Meeting on Kampuchea. September 25, 1986 at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam.', 'Cambodge 1980: Marche Pour la Survie (comptes) et courriers, 80-92 fiche pays', MSF Archive.
[5] Up to 35 NGOs participated in the Consortium over the course of its existence from October 1979 to mid-1981. See Charlotte Benson, 'The Changing Role of NGOs in the Provision of Relief and Rehabilitation Assistance: Case Study 2 – Cambodia/ Thailand', *Overseas Development Institute Working Paper 75* (November 1993), pp. 71-72, and Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 225-228 and 234-235.
[6] 'NGO Meeting on Kampuchea. September 25, 1986 at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam.', 'Cambodge 1980: Marche Pour la Survie (comptes) et courriers, 80-92 fiche pays', MSF Archive.

played a large part in causing the 'continuing suffering' of the Cambodian people.[7] To advance its campaign for 'proper and credible representation' for Cambodia at the United Nations, Oxfam asked the representatives at the conference to help fund the writing of a book on conditions within the country by Oxfam-America member Eva Mysliwiec.[8]

One NGO notably absent from Oxfam's conference was the French organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which had emerged from the ideologically charged social milieu of the French left in the 1970s. Tellingly, however, MSF not only knew about the event but it kept a copy of the programme in its archives. Next to Mysliwiec's name, someone added the designation 'would-be member of the American Communist Party'.[9] As this comment reminds us, one cannot truly understand the debates that took place over ethical humanitarian action in the 1980s without reference to the global Cold War context, and the national political environments within which NGOs operated.[10] Oxfam was not an outwardly left-wing NGO, unlike its fellow British organisation War on Want.[11] However, it was its respectable image, combined with the relatively low levels of ideological polarisation in Britain, that allowed it to articulate a primarily moral, non-political objection to Western foreign policy in Southeast Asia.

What made the diplomatic isolation of Cambodia so heinous in Oxfam's eyes was the fact that the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) coalition, led by the exiled Khmer Rouge, held legal legitimacy (and Western support) as the rightful government of Cambodia. Pushed back to the Thai-Cambodian border, the civilian population that lived under DK control resided in a network of refugee camps, from which the Khmer Rouge and its unlikely anticommunist allies (the royalist FUNCINPEC and the conservative Khmer Serei KPLNF coalition)[12] fought an insurgency to regain control of Cambodia from the Vietnamese. It was here, at the Thai-Cambodian border, that MSF was based. From this vantage point, MSF articulated a very different vision of what ethical humanitarian action in the Cambodian crisis should look like.

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2007).
[11] War on Want was founded in 1951. See https://waronwant.org.
[12] See Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca; London: 2002), p. 124.

In 1984, it had formed Liberté Sans Frontières, a think-tank which promoted an anti-communist outlook on the causes of suffering in the Global South.[13] In 1979, while Oxfam made the moral case for its goal to 'break the Cold War impasse' in Phnom Penh,[14] MSF launched a protest march (*La Marche Pour la Survie du Cambodge*) against the PRK's closure of the DK-dominated land border to international aid.[15] Unsurprisingly, MSF was uninterested in Oxfam's efforts to create a united advocacy platform for European NGOs on Cambodia in 1986. As its comment on the programme indicated, MSF interpreted Oxfam's initiative primarily through the prism of its relevance to the global struggle against communism. It is remarkable, therefore, that a mere three years later, both Oxfam and MSF worked together in an expanded version of Oxfam's NGO Consortium to campaign against the ascendancy of the Khmer Rouge in the UN-led peace process that followed the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia.[16]

In 1989, this new joint advocacy effort solidified Oxfam and MSF's visions of themselves as 'guardians of human rights' in Cambodian reconstruction. [17] However, the path towards this outcome was far from smooth, which is why it is fruitful to examine the moments of contention that preceded it. As was made clear at the Amsterdam conference in 1986, talking about human rights in relation to the Cambodian crisis could be polarising. Oxfam utilised rights discourse when it criticised the West's isolation of Cambodia, and when it denounced the rightlessness that prevailed in the DK-controlled closed camps at the Thai-Cambodian border.[18] Nevertheless, a discussion led by Novib's Wim Monasso on the PRK regime's record of repression revealed that Oxfam wavered in its enthusiasm for the

[13] 'Liberté Sans Frontières - Information on Human Rights and Development,' Introductory Materials, January 1985, quoted in Laurence Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia 1984-1986', *Médecins Sans Frontières: Speaking Out Case Studies* (Paris, 2013), pp.23-24; Eleanor Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954-1988* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 215-247.
[14] Brian Walker, 'NGOs break the Cold War impasse in Cambodia' in Larry Minear and Hazel Smith (eds.), *Humanitarian diplomacy : Practitioners and Their Craft* (Tokyo; New York, 2007), pp.133-153.
[15] Valerie Gorin, 'Advocacy Strategies of Western Humanitarian NGOs from the 1960s to the 1990s' in Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media: 1900 to the Present* (New York/ London, 2018), pp. 209-222, see pp. 209-211.
[16] Bertrand Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place: Negotiating Protection and Humanitarian Aid after the Genocide in Cambodia, 1979- 1991' in Michael N. Barnett (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Human Rights: A World of Differences?* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 219-235. See p. 230.
[17] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', p. 231; Taithe, 'The Cradle of the New Humanitarian System? International Work and European Volunteers at the Cambodian Border Camps, 1979–1993', *Contemporary European History*, 25:2 (2016), pp. 335–358. See pp. 354-355.
[18] Tony Jackson, *Just Waiting to Die: Cambodian refugees in Thailand* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 14-17.

relevance of human rights to humanitarianism in this area. Oxfam believed it was not its job to criticise the PRK because this would jeopardise its ability to work in Cambodia; surprisingly, an Amnesty International representative that was also present at the conference agreed that there would be little value in Oxfam speaking out in Phnom Penh.[19] Clearly, there was confusion on how humanitarians could reconcile the imperatives of humanitarian relief – predicated on gaining access to suffering populations – with the naming and shaming tactics of human rights activism.[20] What can we learn about the gradual development of shared norms of humanitarian action from looking more closely at moments like these? Cold War geopolitical tensions were at the forefront of the discussions in Amsterdam. Over the following years, however, bipolar confrontation rapidly lost its relevance in international politics – after the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989 and the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, the impact of the East-West power struggle ceased to dominate the lives of millions in the Global South. As a result, NGOs with previously opposing worldviews began to cooperate more closely in institutionalising sectoral standards of ethical humanitarian action.[21] But when did humanitarian NGOs come to view themselves as important voices of conscience in Western debates about international diplomacy, and why did the language of human rights become a rhetorical tool for them in this role? What factors shaped the opposing interpretations of ethical action espoused by Oxfam and MSF for most of the 1980s, and why, if they possessed such distinct approaches to humanitarianism, did their disagreements seem to melt away so quickly as the Cold War came to an end?

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[19] 'NGO Meeting on Kampuchea. September 25, 1986 at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam.', 'Cambodge 1980: Marche Pour la Survie (comptes) et courriers, 80-92 fiche pays', MSF Archive.

[20] Bronwyn Leebaw, 'The Politics of Impartial Activism: Humanitarianism and Human Rights', *Perspectives on politics*, 5:2 (2007), pp. 223–239. See pp. 225-226. Also see Michael N. Barnett (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Human Rights: A World of Differences?* (Cambridge, 2020).

[21] The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) collaborated with leading NGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to develop the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief in 1994. See https://www.ifrc.org/our-promise/do-good/code-conduct-movement-ngos#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20Code%20of,principled%20and%20effective%20humanitarian%20action. In addition, the first Sphere handbook (which represented an attempt by a coalition of NGOs to enforce minimum standards in international humanitarian relief) was published in 2000. See Joël Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs* (Abingdon, 2020), pp. 122-153

This thesis interrogates the motivations that lay behind Oxfam and MSF's clashes in the 1980s. The Cambodian crisis provides fertile ground in which to launch such an analysis, but the thesis also gives equal weight to explorations of how the two NGOs responded to the Salvadoran refugee crisis in Honduras (1980-1989) and the Ethiopian famine (1984-1985). In both these settings, sharp disagreements also occurred over how NGOs should relate to leftist actors in the Global South, and how they should reflect the values of human rights in their work. In dissecting the political, personal and economic considerations that lay behind Oxfam and MSF's opposing decisions in these diverse contexts, the thesis asks broader questions about the nature of nongovernmental humanitarian aid, and how its practice evolved over the course of the 1980s. For example, the brief story told about Oxfam's NGO conference on Cambodia speaks to three core themes that drive the investigation. For one, the views articulated by Oxfam and MSF in 1986 reflected the wider Cold War tensions, which forced humanitarian organisations to develop distinct moral interpretations of their roles as in the Global South. While both organisations viewed themselves as agents of Northern compassion in the 'Third World', Oxfam and MSF's differing conceptions of moral action were strongly informed by the national political cultures of the countries from which they emerged.[22] Second, the tensions revealed in Amsterdam spoke to the lack of a common understanding of the relevance of human rights to humanitarian action in the 1980s. Oxfam and MSF criticised each other for silence on human rights abuses that occurred in Phnom Penh and at the Thai-Cambodian border, yet neither organisation reflected deeply on how this was relevant to their own interventions. In light of the fact that human rights became so central to the idea of a 'new humanitarianism' and the UN's policy of rights-based military intervention in the 1990s, these points of contention are significant.[23] Finally, the journey of Oxfam and MSF in the late 1980s from opponents to partners in humanitarian advocacy on Cambodia speaks to the growth of a coordinated, global NGO sector. In that period, the implicit understanding emerged among European NGOs that, despite their differences, they could work together in pursuit of common goals.

[22] See Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders,* pp. 1-3 for an overview of the meaning of the 'Third World' and 'Third Worldism' in the post-war era, with particular attention paid to the French context.
[23] Leebaw, 'The Politics of Impartial Activism'.

This thesis is primarily concerned with the moral framework that animated the practice of humanitarian action for Oxfam and MSF in the 1980s, but it also traces the evolution of the NGOs from relatively minor players in the world of international humanitarian aid in 1979 to organisations which were poised to take up major roles in setting the terms of engagement for emergency relief and development in the 1990s. In the post-Cold War era, NGOs displayed heightened awareness of their importance in the international system – they did this by standardising quantitative indicators of basic needs to be observed in humanitarian relief settings through the inter-agency Sphere project, and by influencing both international peace negotiations and the UN's Right to Protect (R2P) ideology.[24] By taking account of these significant developments, this thesis seeks to deepen our understanding of how they came about by comparatively examining the activities, internal debates and controversies that characterised humanitarian action for two influential NGOs, Oxfam and MSF, in the preceding decade. In so doing, the thesis highlights the fundamental role played by non-state and Global South actors in shaping the negotiation of international norms surrounding refugee protection and emergency relief, which sometimes had consequential effects on how Cold War conflicts played out. And in interrogating the relevance of the case study analyses for larger questions about the role of humanitarian NGOs in the international system, the thesis illuminates how the ideology and practice of humanitarian aid evolved in the 1980s. As such, it emphasises the importance of this decade as a crucial period of flux that crystallised specific sectoral norms of humanitarian practice and rights-based action after the end of the Cold War.

Literature Review

A broad and interdisciplinary field of research on humanitarianism and human rights has emerged in the last three decades.[25] The historiography on human rights specifically has often been concerned with debates over periodisation, which can also be seen as debates

[24] See Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', pp. 231-235 on the role played by NGOs in post-Cold War Cambodian reconstruction. See David Chandler, 'The Road to Military Humanitarianism: How the Human Rights NGOs Shaped a New Humanitarian Agenda', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23:3 (2001), pp.678-700 on how the promotion by NGOs of the idea of a rights-based humanitarianism contributed to the UN's formulation of an interventionist ideology.

[25] See Michael N. Barnett, 'Introduction: Worlds of Difference' in Barnett (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Human Rights: A World of Differences?* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 1-33.

over the morality of human rights discourse in contemporary politics.[26] In parallel, the field of enquiry on humanitarianism was energised in 2011 by political scientist Michael Barnett's overview of Western humanitarian action in the modern era, along with Akira Iriye's positioning of international organisations as part of a new 'global community' which crystallised in the twentieth century.[27] Grand narratives of humanitarianism have also benefited from more historical depth with the publication of Silvia Salvatici's monograph in 2019, which examined the period between 1755 and 1989.[28] In general though, the pioneering works that have set the research agenda on humanitarian action have combined case studies of intervention in the Global South with complex, evidence-based theories about the role played by NGOs in the international system. In tracing the rise of NGOs and volunteering organisations as vectors of Western compassion in the Global South, Kevin O'Sullivan and Agnieszka Sobocinska have each added nuanced historical perspectives to understandings of the evolution of humanitarian action from the colonial period into the Cold War 'NGO moment'.[29] Earlier, James Ferguson viewed NGOs in 1970s Lesotho as participants in an 'anti-politics machine' that depoliticised the penetration of bureaucratic state power into new physical and social spaces.[30] Similarly, Michael Jennings used a case study of Oxfam's development programme in 1960s Tanzania to illuminate the capacity of NGOs to act as 'surrogates of the state' that can be instrumentalised in the top-down political projects of authoritarian governments.[31] These perspectives designated NGOs as the objects of state power, yet Mark Duffield's much wider, theoretical approach painted NGOs, alongside Western states, as agents of a system of 'global governance' that has

[26] See Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York, 2007), Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, 2010), and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman (ed.), *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2010). Also see the debate between these three authors in *Past & Present*. Hoffman, 'Human Rights and History', *Past & Present*, (232:232, 2016), pp. 279-310; Hunt, 'The Long and the Short of the History of Human Rights', *Past & Present* (233: 233, 2016), pp. 323-31; Moyn, 'The End of Human Rights History' *Past & Present* (233: 233, 2016), pp. 307-22.
[27] Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity: a History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, 2011); Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, 2002).
[28] Silvia Salvatici, *A history of humanitarianism, 1755-1989 : In the name of others* (Manchester, 2019).
[29] Kevin O'Sullivan, *The NGO Moment: the Globalisation of Compassion from Biafra to Live Aid* (Cambridge; New York, 2021); Agnieszka Sobocinska, *Saving the World? Western Volunteers and the Rise of the Humanitarian-Development Complex* (Cambridge, 2021).
[30] James Ferguson, *The anti-politics machine "development," depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho* (Cambridge, 1990 & Minneapolis, 1994).
[31] Michael Jennings, *Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development, and Ujamaa in Tanzania* (Bloomfield, Conn., 2007).

disproportionately located power in the Global North.[32] More recently, Joel Glasman used a historically grounded analysis to demonstrate that NGOs have been active participants in a hierarchical process of 'globalisation' through their role in entrenching a quantitative, realist vision of human needs and 'impartiality' in humanitarian action.[33]

The list does not end there. Theorists of the function and global impact of humanitarianism have described NGOs as media actors in a distinct humanitarian-media regime that dictates how Western publics consume news about distant suffering.[34] Other research has added depth to claims that Western humanitarian organisations perpetuate colonial dynamics of external intervention and control in the Global South. Through critical approaches to institutional histories and *longue-durée* global frameworks, historians have developed nuanced understandings of NGOs as inheritors of imperial practices and as agents of neo-colonialism in the postcolonial era.[35] On the issue of what has been called the 'humanitarian-military nexus', for example, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo has explored the centrality of humanitarian practices and ideas to the 'repressive developmentalism' implemented by European authorities against colonial insurgencies. However, a consciousness of these colonial entanglements can sometimes be absent from the literature on the post-Cold War era instrumentalisation of humanitarianism and rights discourse in the service of international military interventions.[36] Clearly, depending on when and where you

[32] Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars : the Merging of Development and Security* (London, 2014), 2nd edn.; Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge, 2007); Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann, 'Governance to Governmentality: Analyzing NGOs, States, and Power', *International Studies Quarterly*, 50:3 (2006), pp. 651-672.
[33] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs*.
[34] Rachel Tavernor and Michael Lawrence (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture* (Manchester, 2019); Gorin, 'Advocacy Strategies of Western Humanitarian NGOs' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media.*
[35] Tehila Sasson and James Vernon, 'Practising the British Way of Famine: Technologies of Relief, 1770-1985', *European Review of History,* 22:6 (2015), pp. 860-72; Emily Baughan, 'Rehabilitating an Empire: Humanitarian Collusion with the Colonial State during the Kenyan Emergency ca. 1954-1960' in *Journal of British Studies* (59), 2020, pp.57-79; Baughan, *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire* (Oakland, California, 2021); See Johannes Paulmann, 'Conjunctures in the History of International Humanitarian Aid during the Twentieth Century', *Humanity* (4:2, 2013), pp. 215-38; Kevin O'Sullivan, Matthew Hilton, and Juliano Fiori, 'Humanitarianisms in Context', *European Review of History* (23: 1-2, 2016), pp. 1-15; Matthew Hilton, 'Charity and the End of Empire: British Non-Governmental Organizations, Africa, and International Development in the 1960s', *The American Historical Review*, 123:2 (2018), pp. 493-517; Hilton, 'Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film: Humanitarianism, Imperialism, and the Changing Role of Charity in Postwar Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 87:2 (2015), pp. 357-94; Firoze Manji and Carl O'Coill, 'The missionary position: NGOs and development in Africa', *International affairs*, 78:3 (2002), pp. 567–583.
[36] Chandler, 'The Road to Military Humanitarianism'.

look, and according to what level of analysis you adopt, NGOs can possess all or none of these sometimes-contradictory characteristics. Adding to this complex field, this thesis contends that reorienting our attention towards the national contexts from which NGOs emerged will increase our understanding of exactly how and why NGOs behaved as they have. By bringing together theoretical perspectives and new research on institutional histories, this will add greater clarity to discussions of how NGOs collaborate with other actors in distinct ways, both to ensure their own organisational survival and to reproduce the existing system of North-South hierarchy that dominates international relations.[37]

To date, there has been little engagement with the idea of a national comparative approach to studying NGOs in humanitarian history. Comprehensive narrative histories have been written of MSF and Oxfam, which told the story of the organisations' evolutions from their own perspectives.[38] In MSF's case, this has been complemented by several important ethnographic studies, which sometimes paint a heroic picture of the organisation's medical programme.[39] There have also been more reflective and critical approaches from historians. For instance, Eleanor Davey placed MSF's rise to prominence within the tumultuous currents of the rapidly evolving post-war French Left.[40] Similarly, Bertrand Taithe contextualised the ethical mission of the colloquially termed 'French doctors' (encompassing *Médecins Sans Frontières* and its smaller rival, *Médecins du Monde*) within a broader story of French colonialism, missionary medicine and national aspirations to 'universalism'. [41] On the British side, Emily Baughan used an organisational history of Save the Children Fund (SCF) to connect the centrality of children in Western humanitarian advocacy to imperial objectives to create 'civilised' and productive subjects for the global economy.[42] In wider sectoral studies too, the influence of colonial history, NGO-state

[37] On how NGOs acted in an entrepreneurial manner to ensure their own survival and growth in a competitive sector, see Heike Wieters, *The NGO care and food aid from America, 1945-80: 'showered with kindness'?* (Manchester, 2017), and Wieters, 'Reinventing the firm: from post-war relief to international humanitarian agency', *European review of history*, 23:1-2 (2016), pp. 116–135.
[38] Anne Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières: la biographie* (Paris, 2004); Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years* (Oxford, 1992).
[39] Peter Redfield, *Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors Without Borders* (Berkeley, 2013).
[40] Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders.*
[41] Taithe, 'Reinventing (French) Universalism: Religion, Humanitarianism and the 'French Doctors'." *Modern & Contemporary France,* 12: 2 (2004), pp. 147-58.
[42] Baughan, *Saving the Children.*

relations, and civil society have been linked to the kinds of NGOs that have emerged in Britain and France.[43]

From a different perspective, there have also been transnational studies that have analysed humanitarian NGOs and volunteering organisations from different Anglophone countries alongside each other in order to make wider claims about the nature of Western nongovernmental aid and North-South interactions in the twentieth century.[44] However, conversation between historians of Francophone and Anglophone sectors has been minimal, as was recently highlighted by Damiano Matasci and Marie-Luce Desgrandchamps.[45] In addition, while the transnational approach to humanitarian history seeks to emphasise the similarities between Western NGOs from different countries, the national comparative approach employed here focuses on national particularities and highlights their importance in shaping Western understandings of suffering and ethical humanitarian intervention in the Global South. At the same time, the thesis also responds to the urgent need to take international research on humanitarian history out of cultural and language-driven silos so that our conclusions about the essential nature of Western non-governmental action can be drawn from a more diverse evidence base.

By applying the insights gained from a national comparative approach to a case study analysis of humanitarian relief programmes, the thesis also uncovers some of the deeper influences on the practice of ethical humanitarian action on the ground. In so doing, the investigation builds on the work of philosophers, anthropologists and historians who have already published path-breaking research in this area. Hugo Slim's study of how to apply the Red Cross humanitarian principles (humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence) in complex field circumstances is a very good starting point for that process. In Chapter 3, I use

[43] Hilton, 'Politics Is Ordinary: Non-governmental Organizations and Political Participation in Contemporary Britain', *20th Century British History*, 22: 2 (2011), pp. 230-68; Edith Archambault, 'The Evolution of Public Service Provision by the Third Sector in France', *The Political Quarterly,* 88:3 (2017), pp. 465-72; Archambault, 'France: A Late-Comer to Government-Nonprofit Partnership', *IDEAS Working Paper Series from RePEc*, 26:6 (2015), pp. 2283-310; Archambault, 'Historical Roots of the Nonprofit Sector in France', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30:2 (2001), pp. 204-20; Gordon Cummings, 'French NGOs and the State: Paving the Way for a New Partnership?', *French Politics*, 7:2 (2009), pp. 145-66; Cummings, 'French NGOs in the Global Era: Professionalization "Without Borders"?', *Voluntas*, 19:4 (2008), pp. 372-94.

[44] O'Sullivan, *The NGO Moment*; Sobocinska, *Saving the World?*

[45] Damiano Matasci and Marie-Luce Desgrandchamps, '«Civiliser, développer, aider » : croiser l'histoire du colonialisme, du développement et de l'humanitaire', *Histoire@Politique*, 41 (2020), pp. 1-12.

Slim's reflection on emotion and reason as opposing drivers of ethical action to examine the nature of fear in conditioning solidarity with the besieged Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras.[46] Similarly, recent works that have traced the evolution of modern malnutrition response practices and applied the theory of 'moral economy' to the Ethiopian famine response in the 1980s pave the way for the comparison of Oxfam and MSF's supplementary feeding programmes in Ethiopia between 1984 and 1985.[47] The thesis also examines the distinct ideologies of professional practice adhered to by Oxfam and MSF, and interrogates how these backgrounds informed action for the NGOs in different settings. The theory of medicalisation is particularly relevant to MSF – on this subject, Miriam Ticktin has outlined an ethnographic perspective to analysing how this manifested in MSF's work.[48] In Oxfam's case, the less easily defined global project of development has been highly influential on its work – recent literature has provided a broad and multifaceted picture of how this ideology has evolved (and how it has meant different things to NGOs and states) over the course of the twentieth century.[49] Nevertheless, there is room for more historical case study analyses of development interventions. Arturo Escobar's seminal work on 'Encountering Development' blazed a trail with its anthropological dissection of agricultural development as an ideology of capitalist control in Colombia.[50] However, the role of NGOs as possible agents of an alternative, empowering form of development has received little attention so far.[51] This is explored alongside other questions in Chapter 4, which analyses how intellectual formations and professional backgrounds impacted visions of rights-based action in the Salvadoran refugee crisis. In bringing the threads of existing research on

[46] Hugo Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics: A Guide to the Morality of Aid in War and Disaster* (New York, 2015), pp. 128-130.
[47] Steffen Werther, Georgina Brewis, and Norbert Gotz, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World: The Moral Economy of Famine Relief* (Cambridge, 2020); Tom Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach: Two Hundred Years of Hunger Relief* (Ithaca, New York, 2020).
[48] See Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of care: immigration and the politics of humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley, 2011) and Ticktin, 'The Gendered Human of Humanitarianism: Medicalising and Politicising Sexual Violence', *Gender & History*, 23:2 (2011), pp. 250-265.
[49] Stephen J. Macekura and Erez Manela, *The Development Century: A Global history* (Cambridge, 2018); Corinna R. Unger, Iris Borowy, and Corinne Antezana-Pernet (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development* (New York, 2022); Corinna R. Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History* (London, 2018); Sarah Foss, "Community Development in Cold War Guatemala- Not a Revolution but an Evolution", in Thomas Field, Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà (ed.) *Latin America and the Global Cold War*, (Chapel Hill, 2020), pp. 123-148.
[50] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development : The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, 2011).
[51] See Paul Adler, 'Creating "The NGO International": The Rise of Advocacy for Alternative Development, 1974-1994' in Macekura and Manela (ed.), *The Development Century,* pp. 305-325.

medicalisation and development together, this thesis thus offers the first comprehensive, comparative analysis of how these two ideologies functioned in practice in Oxfam and MSF's interventions.

Finally, the thesis also situates itself within the flourishing field of new Cold War history writing that seeks to move beyond the state to illuminate the experiences of civilians as social and political actors in this era.[52] Throughout the three case studies, a recurring theme emerges of the prominent role played by NGO personnel and Global South actors as active participants in international political processes.[53] Placed within Odd Arne Westad's framework, which described the Cold War as an East-West competition for control of the Global South, this evidence holds significance for how we think about its lived experience in the regions where it was played out as hot conflict.[54] Several recent publications have spotlighted the often-overlooked part played by Global South actors. In particular, the thesis draws on the work of Molly Todd, Hector Perla Jr, Kevin O'Sullivan and others who have demonstrated how Central American refugees and activists integrated sympathetic NGOs into a complex international solidarity network which conditioned wider debates about the relevance of human rights to humanitarian action.[55] However, as these examples

[52] See Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Mark Atwood Lawrence, and Julio E. Moreno, 'Introduction' in Garrard-Burnett, Atwood Lawrence and Moreno (ed.), *Beyond the Eagle's Shadow: New Histories of Latin America's Cold War* (Albuquerque, 2013), pp. 7-13 for an overview of how new scholarship since the end of the Cold War has integrated cultural history approaches, and centralised both state and non-state actors from beyond the superpower nations to their narratives of how the Cold War played out in Latin America. Also see Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Sergey Radchenko, 'Introduction: The end of the Cold War in the Third World' in Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Sergey Radchenko (ed.), *The End of the Cold War and the Third World : New Perspectives on Regional Conflict.* (Abingdon, 2011), pp. 1-21.

[53] This aligns with Margot Tudor's findings on the role of mid-level UN Peacekeepers in shaping the meaning of sovereignty in the second half of the twentieth century. See Margot Tudor, 'Gatekeepers to Decolonisation: Recentring the UN Peacekeepers on the Frontline of West Papua's Re-colonisation 1962–3', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 57:2 (2022), pp. 293-316; Tudor, 'Reputation on the (green) Line: Revisiting the 'Plaza Moment' in United Nations Peacekeeping Practice, 1964–1966', *Journal of Global History*, 16:2 (2021), pp. 227-45.

[54] Westad, *The Global Cold War*; Kalinovsky, and Radchenko (ed.), *The End of the Cold War and the Third World*; Garrard-Burnett, Atwood Lawrence and Moreno (ed.), *Beyond the Eagle's Shadow*.

[55] Molly Todd, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War* (Madison, 2010); O'Sullivan, 'Civil War in El Salvador and the origins of rights-based humanitarianism', *Journal of Global History*, 16:2 (2021), pp.246-265; Hector Perla Jr, 'Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.: Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement', *Latin American Research Review*, 43:2 (2008), pp. 136-158; Eline Van Ommen, 'The Nicaraguan Revolution's Challenge to the Monroe Doctrine: Sandinistas and Western Europe, 1979–1990', *The Americas*, 78:4 (2021), pp.639-666; Kim Christiaens, 'Between diplomacy and solidarity: Western European support networks for Sandinista Nicaragua', *European Review of History,* 21:4 (2014), pp. 617-634.

demonstrate, most of the influential work that has emerged on the agency of the Global South seems to have been confined to studies of Latin America; historians still have a long way to go if we are to truly appreciate the importance of Southern voices in shaping international relations. In endeavouring to change this, this thesis examines examples of resistance to humanitarian relief programmes on the ground and the strategic instrumentalisation of humanitarian organisations by political actors in the Global South. In so doing, it responds to the call made by Christy Thornton to analyse the exercise of Northern power over the Global South 'from the outside in'.[56]

Objectives

This thesis examines the operations of two NGOs, Oxfam and MSF, as examples of European (Northern) humanitarian action in the Global South. It uses the Cambodian crisis, the Salvadoran refugee crisis in Honduras, and the Ethiopian famine as case studies through which to examine the impact of these organisations' interventions on the ground during the 1980s. The European humanitarian sector has long been a crowded field, characterised by a proliferation of small organisations, but in the 1980s it was dominated in financial terms by a relatively small number of large NGOs, which dwarfed the rest of the sector in terms of their global reach and practical impact.[57] If we are to understand the functionality of international nongovernmental aid, therefore, it makes sense to look closely at the largest Western NGOs. But the question remains: why Oxfam and MSF? First, by the end of the 1980s, these organisations were the most influential humanitarian NGOs in their respective countries. A 1988 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report described Oxfam (founded in 1942) as the 'largest British developmental NGO today'.[58] MSF (founded in 1972) grew over the course of the 1980s to become 'the largest private organisation of emergency medical aid in the world'.[59] In the post-Cold War years, their

[56] Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the governance of the global economy* (Oakland, 2021). Also see Stella Krepp, 'Fighting an Illiberal World Order: The Latin American Road to UNCTAD, 1948–1964' *Humanity,* 13: 1 (2022), pp. 86-103.
[57] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Voluntary Aid for Development: The role of Non-Governmental Organisation* (Paris, 1988), pp. 16-17.
[58] Ibid, p.18.
[59] Philippe Ryfman, *La Question Humanitaire: Histoire, Problématiques, Acteurs et Enjeux de l'Aide Humanitaire Internationale* (Paris, 1999), p. 97.

incomes only continued to grow; according to Oxfam and MSF's most recent financial reports for 2021 and 2022, they retain their positions as leading actors in the international humanitarian sector. In 2021, MSF recorded an operating income of €1.936 billion for the year, claimed to have 63,000 members, and ran programmes in over 73 countries.[60] Oxfam's Annual Report for the financial year 2021-2022 recorded a total income of £373 million, and the existence of programmes in over eighty countries, run by the international community of independent Oxfam organisations known as the 'Oxfam Confederation'.[61]

Second, although Oxfam and MSF often occupy the same spaces as international humanitarian NGOs, they both represent very different professional styles. A glance at the kinds of activities that dominate the organisations' work gives an indication of this. As an emergency medical relief NGO, MSF describes its operational programmes in terms of how many patients it sees and how many procedures it undertakes. In 2021, for example, it carried out 12,592,800 outpatient consultations, admitted 1,044,000 patients to hospital, and performed 111,800 surgical interventions.[62] By contrast, Oxfam possesses a broader mandate, which includes emergency relief yet also encompasses its less easily defined programmes of poverty alleviation and community engagement. In 2022, it claimed it had supported eight million people globally as part of its expansive mission 'to fight poverty and build a radically better world'.[63] The difference in styles is further highlighted by Oxfam's preference for working through local partner organisations (on trend with contemporary sectoral calls for 'localisation' yet a feature of Oxfam's work dating back to its links with colonial missionaries in the 1950s).[64] MSF, by contrast, focused solely on direct operational

[60] *Médecins Sans Frontières International Financial Report 2021*, accessed at https://www.msf.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/MSF_Financial_Report_2021_FINAL.pdf on 25 May 2023, pp. 2-3

[61] *Oxfam Annual Report 2021/22*, accessed at https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search?p_p_id=uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=2&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&p_p_resource_id=%2Faccounts-resource&p_p_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_objectiveId=A12923496&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_mvcRenderCommandName=%2Faccounts-and-annual-returns&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_organisationNumber=202918 on 25 May 2023, p. 24.

[62] *Médecins Sans Frontières International Activity Report 2021*, accessed at https://www.msf.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/MSF_IAR_2021_web_version.pdf on 25 May 2023, p. 13.

[63] *Oxfam Annual Report 2021/22.*

[64] On the centrality of working through local intermediaries (initially often missionaries or colonial philanthropists) to Oxfam's sense of global mission since the late 1940s, see Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp.

activities.[65] As these figures demonstrate, Oxfam and MSF have made a large impact on the lives of millions through their work, and have undoubtedly played leading roles in shaping how the Western public understands what it means to respond to global inequality and acute human distress in the last few decades. When we read Oxfam's invocation to 'fight poverty' and MSF's commitment to 'alleviate suffering' in the twenty-first century, it is more likely that we think of community development projects, fundraising ads, and white doctors in white coats treating non-white patients. [66] Equally, we tend not to think of political protest, violent revolution or rioting. However, the ubiquity of NGOs as practitioners of poverty alleviation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries should not be taken for granted. Oxfam and MSF may have spread their visions of universal humanitarian values across the world by virtue of their immense financial reach, but we should not accept without criticism their claims to universalism in the Global South.

For this reason, this thesis uses case studies of humanitarian relief programmes to bring in the voices of the South and examine how the messy realities of these universalising projects manifested on the ground. The 1980s was a decade characterised by soaring international inequality, the International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programmes, and the acceleration of bipolar confrontation through proxy conflicts in the 'Second Cold War'.[67] This thesis examines three particular cases from that period, which go some way towards capturing the geographic diversity and range of activities that were experienced by Oxfam and MSF. But why the Cambodian and Salvadoran refugee crises, and why the Ethiopian famine? Apart from the fact that the Salvadoran and Cambodian crises represented two of

36-38. For an introduction to the ongoing debates about localisation within the humanitarian sector, see Vandra Harris and Swornima Tuladhar, 'Humanitarian Localisation: Can We Put Values into Practice?' in Vandra Harris (ed.), *Ethics in a Crowded World* (Bingley, 2019), pp. 33–55. For a relatively recent statement of MSF's different approach to localisation, see Ed Schenkenberg, 'The challenges of localised humanitarian aid in armed conflict', *Médecins Sans Frontières Emergency Gap Series 03* (November 2016), accessed at https://arhp.msf.es/sites/default/files/MSF_EGS03_The%20challenges%20of%20localised%20humanitarian%20aid%20in%20armed%20conflict_november%202016_0_0.pdf on 25 May 2023.

[65] *Oxfam Annual Report 2021/22*, pp. 4-6.

[66] Oxfam Annual Report 2021/22, p. 4; *Médecins Sans Frontières International Financial Report 2021*, p. 4.

[67] On the negative social effects of Structural Adjustment Programmes, see Timon Forster et al., 'How structural adjustment programs affect inequality: A disaggregated analysis of IMF conditionality, 1980–2014', *Social science research*, 80 (2019), pp. 83–113, and Ilias Bantekas, and Cephas Lumina (eds), *Sovereign Debt and Human Rights* (Oxford, 2018). On the 'Second Cold War', see Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War* (London, 1983), Brian D'Haeseleer, *The Salvadoran Crucible: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency in El Salvador, 1979-1992* (Kansas, 2017), and Kalinovsky and Radchenko, 'Introduction: The end of the Cold War in the Third World' in Kalinovsky, and Radchenko (ed.), *The End of the Cold War and the Third World.*

the largest and most protracted refugee and internal displacement crises, and the Ethiopian famine represented the deadliest sub-Saharan African famine of the decade,[68] these three cases were also significant because of how they shaped the development of the humanitarian sector and helped craft a set of norms of humanitarian practice that were institutionalised in the 1990s.[69] Following the fall of the Khmer Rouge, the 'sovereignty deficits' that were left in its wake, combined with the reluctance of usually dominant international organisations to take control of delivering humanitarian aid to the Cambodian people, meant that the Cambodian crisis had a massive impact on the growth in influence and incomes of NGOs within the humanitarian sector.[70] In addition, the media campaigns launched by Oxfam and MSF in service of their Cambodian programmes were key in raising their international profile in this regard. As such, by examining their opposing narrative constructions of the crisis as products of national political culture, we can appreciate the complexity of how NGOs acted as mediators of suffering in the Global South for Western audiences.[71]

The experiences in the refugee camps that developed in Honduras as a result of the civil war in El Salvador were similarly formative for the humanitarian sector, yet for very different reasons. In a context characterised by US interventionism, regional anti-communist repression and constant violent incursions to refugee camps by Honduran and Salvadoran Army personnel, Oxfam and MSF were forced to grapple with what it meant to embrace the values of solidarity and human rights in humanitarian work.[72] In keeping with their approach to the Cambodian crisis, the two NGOs' opposing political perspectives manifested in very different interpretations of ethical action. The confrontations that occurred (with both

[68] See Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca; London: 2002), pp.114-155, 83-114; William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience* (London, 1984); Linda Mason and Roger Brown, *Rice, Rivalry and Politics: Managing Cambodian Relief* (Notre Dame, 1983); Todd, *Beyond Displacement;* Alex De Waal, *Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 63-65.

[69] On Sphere, see Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs,* pp. 122-153; Chandler, 'The Road to Military Humanitarianism'.

[70] On sovereignty deficits, see Davide Rodogno, 'Non-state actors' humanitarian operations in the aftermath of the First World War', in Fabian Klose (ed.), *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas and Practice from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 185-207. On the impact of the Cambodian crisis on NGOs, see Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[71] See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[72] See Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

refugees and other humanitarian agencies) over protection issues held important consequences for how they engaged with rights discourse. Finally, the experiences of delivering aid in the Ethiopian famine were particularly important for the long-term evolution of malnutrition response practices. Indeed, several trends, encompassing ever more technical and individualised approaches to the relief of mass starvation and increasingly quantified needs assessments, converged in the Horn of Africa, which became a laboratory for new products and the negotiation of new norms. But this is not the only reason why the Ethiopian famine must be included in this study: the famine was also largely a political creation and the controversy caused by the Marxist Derg regime's forced resettlement policy tells us much about how and why NGOs like Oxfam and MSF interacted differently with military authorities in humanitarian action.

The choice to confine the case studies to a single decade was also a conscious one. The 1980s was a crucial era for the process of norm negotiation and the creation of 'epistemic communities' of aid workers and officials. This directly fostered the growth of NGOs, conditioned the integration of human rights to humanitarian action, and foreshadowed the deepening relationship between NGOs and military actors in the post-Cold War era.[73] Between 1980 and 1989, the combined income of British charities rose from GB£ 20.9 billion to 27. 4 billion. After a brief drop following the end of the Cold War, the sector then entered a period of exponential financial growth in the 1990s and early 2000s to reach a combined income of GB£ 51.7 billion in 2008.[74] MSF's trajectory surpassed this. Its budget increased by a factor of thirteen from 1978 to 1980, and by a factor of eight between 1981 and 1985, and continued to rise in the 1990s.[75] As such, it is clear that the gains of the 1980s paved the way for the consolidation of the power and influence of NGOs as important global actors in the 1990s. The value of this study, therefore, lies in its close analysis of humanitarian relief operations in a decade when so many of the practices that became consolidated features of international humanitarian action in the 1990s were experimented with in the field.

[73] Taithe, 'The Cradle of the New Humanitarian System?'.
[74] Hilton, *A Historical Guide to NGOs in Britain: Charities, Civil Society and the Voluntary Sector since 1945* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, 2012), p. 29.
[75] Ryfman, *La Question Humanitaire*, p. 60, 97.

The different outlooks that can be observed in Oxfam and MSF's actions in the three case-studies were borne of the distinct French and British national contexts from which the NGOs emerged. In Britain, continuity characterised the development of the humanitarian sector throughout the twentieth century and into the postcolonial period. This is clearly represented by the positions of Christian Aid, Save the Children Fund (SCF), and Oxfam, founded in 1945, 1919, and 1942, respectively, as the three most prominent British humanitarian organisations in the twenty-first century.[76] In France, by contrast, the difficulty of establishing partnerships with the state made growth and longevity more difficult for NGOs.[77] In addition, MSF's foundation in 1973 (in reaction to the ICRC's decision not to speak out about atrocities its staff witnessed in Biafra) was symbolic of the radical rejection of established humanitarian practice by a new, post-war generation that had taken part in the 1968 student protests.[78] Initially, the radical energies of this generation were channelled into Third-Worldist (or *tiers-mondiste*) visions of global socialist revolution. Yet as revelations of the authoritarian nature of Maoist China and Pol Potist Cambodia grew in the 1970s, many former communist militants reoriented their vision of moral citizenship towards the decidedly non-political projects of humanitarianism and human rights.[79] MSF's name symbolised the idealism of this new movement, which has been dubbed *'sans-frontiérisme'* for its self-professed universalist goals.[80] Oxfam was a much older organisation, founded as the 'Oxford Committee for Famine Relief' in protest at the Allied blockade of German-occupied Greece during the Second World War.[81] By the 1970s, Oxfam had become an establishment organisation in Britain – hardly surprising, since its most influential founding members had been Christian clerics and Quakers.[82] In the postcolonial era, Oxfam catered to a wide audience of middle-class supporters and educated youth, who increasingly invested the organisation with radical potential as a forum for the criticism of global economic inequality. In the late 1960s, tensions over Oxfam's identity resulted in its

[76] Hilton, 'Charity and the End of Empire', p. 494.
[77] Archambault, 'France: A Late-Comer to Government-Nonprofit Partnership'; Cummings, 'French NGOs and the State'.
[78] Ryfman, *La Question Humanitaire,* pp. 58-60. Also see Davey, *Idealism Beyond Border,* pp. 28-49, and Vallaeys, pp. 53-81.
[79] Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders*, pp. 112-144.
[80] Ryfman, *La Question Humanitaire,* pp. 58-60.
[81] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 1-21.
[82] Ibid, pp. 1-21.

deputy director, Nicholas Stacey, effectively being ousted for seeking to divert funds from operational programmes to domestic political advocacy.[83] However, in the 1970s, a younger generation successfully remade Oxfam into a site of activism. [84] All the same, Oxfam continued to walk a tightrope in seeking to maintain a certain kind of respectable image in British society.

Methodology

To tell the story of Oxfam and MSF's rise to prominence, this thesis draws on a combination of archival sources, published memoirs, contemporary accounts, newspaper sources and oral history interviews. This broad methodological approach allows for the motivations and actions of humanitarian personnel in Oxfam and MSF to be analysed from multiple angles. At the heart of this analysis are the institutional archives of both Oxfam and MSF. The minutes of internal meetings, correspondence between field staff and headquarters, and detailed situation reports on humanitarian interventions helped to build a picture of the discussions (and disagreements) that lay behind many important decisions taken in the field. In seeking to uncover to the voices of Global South actors from these sources, however, it was necessary to think creatively, and consider the broader implications of off-hand remarks about clinical consultations or medic training (for MSF) and meetings with host-state politicians (for Oxfam). In this way, while the institutional archives tell the story of humanitarian encounters from the perspective of Western humanitarians, these sources were analysed with the conscious goal to search for instances when humanitarian recipients influenced programmes in ways not directly alluded to by Oxfam or MSF staff in the documents.

Adding another layer, memoirs and oral history interviews conducted for this project helped to provide a more personal perspective that acted as a counterweight to the purely professional dynamics revealed by institutional evidence alone. Throughout the thesis, the

[83] See ibid, pp.155-162 on the internal tensions of the 1960s over domestic advocacy. Also see pp.177-202 on the radical evolutions that occurred in the 1970s.
[84] Ibid, pp.177-202.

importance of individual personalities in shaping ethical approaches and field-based decision-making is highlighted. Indeed, a core contention, developed in Chapter 5, is on the value of viewing international humanitarian action as an expression of personal political values, which have been shaped by distinct upbringings and socialisations. Finally, newspaper sources were also used to contextualise Oxfam and MSF's operations in the French and British socio-political contexts in which they worked, while government archives also allowed for the NGOs' actions to be analysed alongside the diplomatic considerations of officials in each country at the time.

Structure

The analysis that follows is organised thematically around each case-study. As two of the case-studies examined – the Cambodian crisis and Salvadoran refugee programme – constituted protracted emergencies that lasted for most of the decade, a straightforwardly chronological narrative was not possible. However, the chapters are built around a series of deepening explorations of French and British political culture that are used to make broader conclusions about the nature of Western humanitarian aid in the 1980s. Chapter 1 looks at the influence of national myths of the Second World War on Oxfam and MSF's media narratives on the Cambodian crisis from 1979 to 1980. In Chapter 2, this is followed by a more expansive exploration of the influence of NGO-state relations in Britain and France on how the NGOs interacted with different forms of sovereignty – encompassing international organisations, political authorities and civilians – in the Cambodian crisis between 1980 and 1988. The next two chapters look at the Salvadoran refugee programme that Oxfam and MSF supported in Honduras. In Chapter 3, the specific threats to humanitarian neutrality posed by the violent repression of refugees in this context are established, along with the influence of emotions on different interpretations of solidarity and ethical action. Chapter 4 builds on this by examining the intellectual formations of Oxfam's Bill Yates and MSF's Rony Brauman to make broader points about the influence of personal socialisation, national environment and professional practice on attitudes towards the Salvadoran refugees. The final two chapters then complete the narrative by looking at the Ethiopian famine, which reached its height in 1984 and 1985. Chapter 5 contextualises Oxfam and MSF's practice of supplementary feeding programmes within the evolution of a sectoral expertise on

malnutrition response, which was shaped by both British and French colonial knowledge. By way of conclusion, Chapter 6 critically examines responses to the Ethiopian government's forced resettlement programme, and reflects on how the experience of French and British decolonisation influenced how Oxfam and MSF thought differently about the moral role of humanitarianism in counterinsurgency operations. In this way, the thesis demonstrates the centrality of the nation to understanding the complexity of the transnational humanitarian project.

Author's Note

Unless otherwise stated, all translations from French are by the author. All references to Oxfam and MSF refer to Oxfam-GB and MSF-France respectively

Chapter 1

The Narrative Construction of an Emergency: Oxfam and MSF as National Mediators of Cambodian suffering, 1979-1980

In 1979, Cambodia was reeling from the effects of totalitarian social engineering policies. According to Ben Kiernan, approximately 1.7 million Cambodians, ethnic minorities, and people from neighbouring countries had died since the Khmer Rouge took power in 1975.[1] Following the Vietnamese invasion that ended Cambodia's international isolation in January almost four years later, the humanitarian needs in the country were immense. Both the genocidal Khmer Rouge collectivisation policies and the Vietnamese invasion had resulted in massive displacement, along with the destruction of industry and agricultural systems.[2] Those who managed to flee the Khmer Rouge during its rule had already sought refuge in camps at the Thai-Cambodian border but in October 1979, the numbers crossing into Thailand swelled to create a large-scale crisis.[3] Fears of national famine in Cambodia filled the pages of Western newspapers due to the extreme malnutrition exhibited by these newly arrived refugees. [4] However, despite the acute needs, humanitarian access to the country remained difficult because the ongoing presence of Vietnamese troops meant the UN would not recognise the so-called 'puppet regime' in Phnom Penh. [5]

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[1] Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge*, 1975-79 (3rd ed.) (New Haven, 2008), ix.

[2] See David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution Since 1945* (New Haven, 1991), and Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime* for comprehensive histories of the Khmer Rouge period. Also see Michael Vickery, *Cambodia, 1975-1982* (Boston, 1984), and William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience* (London, 1984) for opposing contemporary accounts of both the Khmer Rouge period and its immediate aftermath. Vickery rejects the classification of the Khmer Rouge policies as genocide, while Shawcross explicitly tackles Cambodian suffering as the 'Holocaust' of its era.

[3] MSF's Rony Brauman was a direct witness of the arrival of thirty thousand refugees, who were close to death, in the middle of the night on 28 October 1979. See Anne Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières: la biographie* (Paris, 1992), pp. 324-325.

[4] See Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy,* pp. 95-112 and pp. 207-225 for a detailed description of the media's widespread fears of famine in comparison with the reality on the ground. Also see Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, pp. 323-324 on the genocide fears in the French press.

[5] Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 224-228, and 234-235. Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy,* pp. 70-77.

Against this backdrop, a recently formed French NGO ('le comité d'aide médicale et sanitaire a la population cambodgienne'), which had strong links to the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), chartered a plane to fly to Phnom Penh with medicine, medical equipment and milk in August 1979. The Comité had effectively been given gatekeeper status by the PCF and Vietnamese authorities in determining which NGOs could enter the country. Both Oxfam and MSF recognised this and strategically drew on personal contacts to utilise the opportunity presented by the relief plane as a result. [6] One of these contacts was Dr. Jean-Yves Follezou, a committee member and leading figure in the PCF, who was also head of the *Pitié-Salpêtrière* clinic in Paris, and an old friend of MSF's Claude Malhuret and Francis Charhon from their time together as medical interns.[7] Malhuret and Charhon had long since disavowed the communist sympathies of their student days yet they managed to convince Follezou to vouch for them. As a result, MSF's Jean-Luc Lubrano travelled on the plane to Phnom Penh accompanied by one other volunteer and forty tonnes of medicine and medical equipment.[8] Oxfam was also put in touch with the communist doctors thanks to the persistent efforts of French Oxford resident Madame Videau de Plaud. Following a meeting with two French doctors in Oxford on 15 June 1979, Oxfam decided to help to fill the plane with relief supplies, in effect buying a ticket for its member Jim Howard to accompany the plane to Phnom Penh. [9]

Up to this point, Oxfam and MSF had operated on parallel lines, each organisation displaying similar imperatives in their desperation to gain access to Cambodia. Yet their paths diverged sharply after this was achieved. Lubrano returned to France complaining that the authorities had only permitted accompanied visits to orphanages and hospitals. He had spent a mere three days in Phnom Penh, unable to independently assess needs, before he concluded that the authorities could not be trusted to deliver aid to the people.[10] Lubrano also returned to France bearing a written request from the Cambodian Vice-Minister of Health for urgent

[6] 'Cambodge', *Le Monde,* 28 August 1979; 'How Oxfam Became Involved' in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[7] Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, p. 317.
[8] Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, pp. 317-319.
[9] 'How Oxfam Became Involved' in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive; Oral history interview with Marcus Thompson, conducted on 27 June 2019.
[10] Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, p.318.

medical aid.[11] This was dutifully responded to with a programme proposal. However, MSF's vision of autonomous action ultimately conflicted with the terms set by the new regime. [12] Incapable of hiding its views, MSF was refused all subsequent visa requests, and remained confined to its work in the refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border, where it had cultivated a small yet steadily growing presence since 1976.[13] Oxfam's Jim Howard, by contrast, drew the opposite conclusion from his experience over ten days in Phnom Penh.[14] Indeed, he was so shocked by the destruction and human need he witnessed on his short trip that he immediately set about building relationships with Cambodian ministers to ensure Oxfam could intervene on whatever terms necessary.[15] Howard quickly agreed that Oxfam would not work at the Thai-Cambodian border, which the Phnom Penh authorities forbade due to the presence of regrouping Khmer Rouge forces there. This decision, in turn, allowed the regime to play Oxfam off against the UNICEF-ICRC Joint Programme, whose representatives were simultaneously negotiating access yet were unwilling to compromise on the principal of global impartiality that compelled them to be present both within the country and in the contested border territory.[16]

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MSF's and Oxfam's trajectories continued to diverge over the following months. Once Oxfam had gained access to Cambodia, its representatives negotiated with the authorities to be the first Western organisation to deliver an aid shipment to a Cambodian port in October 1979. At a time when all aid was still being flown into Phnom Penh in relatively small quantities, this represented a significant media coup. Put simply, the shipment allowed Oxfam to promote nothing less than a heroic image of itself.[17] To support its growing humanitarian programme, which it ran from a hotel in Phnom Penh, Oxfam took out several newspaper ads that contained photographs of malnourished Cambodian

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid, p.318, and pp. 322-323.
[13] Ibid, pp.322-323, and 234-237.
[14] 'How Oxfam Became Involved' in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[15] Oral history interview with Marcus Thompson, conducted on 27 June 2019; 'How Oxfam Became Involved' in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[16] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 225-228, and 234-235; Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy,* pp. 139-152.
[17] Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, p.222.

children accompanied by captions describing a catastrophic, Holocaust-like famine.[18] As such, Oxfam opted for a depoliticised portrayal of Cambodian suffering that relied on images of children to evoke pity. It also focused on children as donors by using BBC children's television programme Blue Peter as a platform from which to launch an appeal. This simplified narrative was highly successful; Oxfam experienced an unprecedented spike in its income as a direct result of the crisis that propelled it 'into the big league' as a key player in the international humanitarian sector on a level it had not achieved before.[19]

MSF took a different approach. In February 1980, it collaborated with the American NGO the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to launch a protest march at the Thai-Cambodian border which it dubbed a March for the Survival of Cambodia ('*Marche Pour la Survie du Cambodge'*). In response to the Phnom Penh authorities' closure of the border, MSF had demanded it be opened to aid trucks. Like Oxfam, MSF believed a large-scale famine was occurring in the country. While Oxfam claimed this was an after-effect of the Khmer Rouge's genocidal destruction of the country's social fabric and agricultural capacity, however, MSF attributed the situation to a deliberate denial of food aid by the Vietnamese occupiers that amounted to a new genocide. Prevented from gaining access to Cambodia itself, MSF chose to build a media campaign around its position as an activist humanitarian organisation rather than a heroic first responder. Within this, the iconography of political protest featured heavily. It was a consciously designed media strategy, yet MSF was not successful in forcing the Phnom Penh authorities to allow it into Cambodia or in gaining much positive coverage from the French journalists it invited to cover the march. Nonetheless, the march was a clear representation of the kind of media platform, based on bearing witness (*témoignage*) and speaking out, that MSF cultivated as a core tenet of its organisational identity in the 1980s. Based on the unique image it perfected of its members as both expert responders and human rights activists, MSF later became a leading actor in the international humanitarian sector. As Valérie Gorin has shown, the *Marche Pour la Survie* was one of the

[18] 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive; Oxfam ad depicting Cambodian children featured in *The Times* on 19, 28 and 29 November 1979.
[19] Dan van der Vat, 'How Oxfam Got Into the Big League', *The Times*, 17 November 1979.

crucial first steps that MSF took towards the development of a highly impactful professional advocacy strategy.[20]

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Much has been written about the Cambodian crisis and the humanitarian response to it, although it has often been a contentious subject. [21] The moral contradictions, human rights abuses and diversions of aid into war economies that occurred both within Cambodia and at the Thai-Cambodian border, in particular, have been discussed extensively.[22] This chapter takes a different focus, analysing Oxfam and MSF's media campaigns on Cambodia as distinct narrative constructions that reflected each organisation's embeddedness within the media logics and political cultures of their home societies. This comparative approach holds important insights for how we understand humanitarian-media relations. In the most basic sense, it adds complexity to understandings of international NGOs as key mediators of distant crises for western publics. [23] Rather than viewing NGOs as victims of a process of 'mediatisation' that has seen humanitarianism become increasingly assimilated to a media logic since the 1960s,[24] the chapter turns the spotlight on NGOs as media actors and co-creators of a 'Western humanitarian imaginary' in their own right.[25] It shows that

[20] Valerie Gorin, 'Advocacy Strategies of Western Humanitarian NGOs from the 1960s to the 1990s' in Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media: 1900 to the Present* (New York/ London, 2018), pp. 201-222.
[21] Michael Vickery, *Cambodia, 1975-1982*; Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History;* Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime.*
[22] See Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY, 2002), pp. 114-155; Norah Niland, *The Politics of Suffering: the Thai-Cambodian Border, a Case Study on the Use and Abuse of Humanitarian Assistance* (M.Phil dissertation, Trinity College Dublin, 1991); Courtland Robinson, 'Refugee Warriors at the Thai-Cambodian border', *Refugee Studies Quarterly* (19:1, 2000), pp. 23-37; Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy;* Linda Mason and Roger Brown, *Rice, Rivalry and Politics: Managing Cambodian Relief* (Notre Dame, 1983); Bertrand Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place: Negotiating Protection and Humanitarian Aid after the Genocide in Cambodia, 1979-1999' in Michael N. Barnett (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Human Rights: A World of Differences?* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. pp. 219-235.
[23] See Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media: 1900 to the Present* (New York/ London, 2018), and Michael Lawrence and Rachel Tavernor (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture* (Manchester, 2019) for two edited volumes that represent the recent flourishing of research in this area.
[24] Jonathon Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London, 1993); Andrew Jones, '*The Unknown Famine*: Television and the Politics of British Humanitarianism' in Lawrence and Tavernor (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture*, pp. 122-143.
[25] Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media: Introduction to an Entangled History' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media: 1900 to the Present* (New York/ London, 2018), p. 21; Katharina Stornig, 'Promoting Distant Children in Need: Christian Imagery in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media,* pp. 41-67.

humanitarian actors were not simply subjects of 'mediatisation' but sometimes even functioned as 'embedded journalists' who set the terms of engagement with distant crises by holding press conferences and arranging for access and transport to scenes of suffering for journalists.[26] However, it also moves beyond the 'embedded journalist' designation, which fails to account for the complex ways in which both humanitarians and traditional journalists were constantly influenced by each other in a symbiotic 'entangled history' within which neither one was truly being governed by the other.[27] In deepening understandings of how the relationship between humanitarian action and the media functioned in practice, the chapter argues that we should look to national political cultures. As will be shown, specific characteristics of French and British societies both conditioned audience reactions to humanitarian campaigns and influenced how humanitarian organisations and traditional journalists related to each other and constructed distinct narratives in the first place. [28]

To develop this argument, the chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines how the media landscapes that existed in Britain and France in the 1970s informed how Oxfam and MSF cultivated specific relationship patterns with traditional media actors that later shaped the narratives they publicised on Cambodia. From this starting point, the second section analyses the advocacy styles and uses of imagery that were evident in the NGOs' campaigns, contending that domestic political culture and North-South relations were crucial in informing how Oxfam and MSF went about cultivating trust with the British and French publics. A key question raised by the campaigns is why both NGOs were so committed to the use of Holocaust analogies despite their opposing political interpretations of what was happening in Cambodia. To answer this, the third section builds on the literature on post-colonial genocide, Holocaust memory and temporality. It shows how distinctive national war memories produced an uneven development of Holocaust

[26] Lutz Mukke, *'Journalisten der Finsternis': Akteure, Strukturen und Potenziale deutscher AfrikaBerichterstattung* (Cologne, 2009), quoted in Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media: Introduction to an Entangled History' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 9-10.
[27] Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 1-3, and pp. 21-24.
[28] See Maria Kyriakidou, 'The Audience of Distant Suffering and the Question of (In)Action' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 281-299, for an argument that Greek political culture has determined audience reactions to humanitarian campaigns in Greece.

consciousness in Britain and France, which ultimately determined how Oxfam and MSF engaged with the idea of genocide in Cambodia.[29] Finally, in probing the impact of humanitarian media campaigns, the fourth section reflects on the ethics of humanitarian organisations as mediators of suffering.[30] What was revealed by Oxfam and MSF's narratives of the Cambodian crisis, and what remained hidden? Indeed, what were the broader effects of humanitarian narratives on how Western civil societies thought about events in the Global South? Drawing on Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality, which describes how power is exercised on and through societies in a process of internalised discipline, the chapter argues that by mediating narratives to the public, NGOs not only set the terms of understanding for crises in the Global South but also shaped the forms of engagement with distant suffering that predominated in Western civil societies. In turn, NGOs acted as agents of (non-) governmentality in perpetuating an international system that was built on hierarchies. [31]

Production of media narratives

When investigating humanitarian-media relations, historians should not confine themselves to a definition of the media as the material forms used to present information to the public. Beyond newspaper articles, images or audio-visual sources, the media exists as the diverse organisations, including humanitarian NGOs, that create content and work together within an 'institutionalised system' of production that possesses its own internal logic.[32] With this in mind, this section compares how Oxfam and MSF developed specific relationship patterns

[29] Lasse Heerten, 'Biafras of the Mind: French Postcolonial Humanitarianism In Global Conceptual History', *The American Historical Review*, 126: 4 (2022), pp. 1448-1484; Tom Lawson and Andy Pearce (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust* (Cham, 2020); Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome : History and Memory in France since 1944*, (Cambridge, Mass, 1991), translated by Arthur Goldhammer from *Le Syndrome de Vichy: De 1944 a nos jours* (Paris, 1987 & 1990); Matthew S. Champion, 'The History of Temporalities: An Introduction', *Past & Present,* 243: 1 (2019), pp. 247-54.

[30] This was partly informed by Paulmann's discussion of Lilie Chouliaraki's evolving views on the ethics of mediation in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 5-7; See Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (New York, 2006) and *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism* (Cambridge, 2012).

[31] See Matthew Hilton, 'Politics Is Ordinary: Non-governmental Organizations and Political Participation in Contemporary Britain', *20th Century British History*, 22: 2 (2011), pp. 230-68; Gregory Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel : The Road to Nongovernmentality* (Cambridge, 2015); Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann, 'Governance to Governmentality: Analyzing NGOs, States, and Power', *International Studies Quarterly*, 50:3 (2006), pp. 651-72.

[32] Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 2-3.

with other media actors, and analyses how this informed the construction of narratives on Cambodia. As will be shown, the unique media landscapes within which the NGOs developed in Britain and France conditioned how they perceived their roles as media actors. Specifically, the domestic reporting styles visible in print media, and carried through to visual mass media from the 1960s, encouraged the performance of different functions by the organisations. MSF members more often acted as 'embedded journalists'[33] in seeking to unilaterally dictate media narratives, while Oxfam tended to work alongside traditional journalists in co-producing shared interpretations of humanitarian crises.

The national media landscapes in which Oxfam and MSF operated differed in several key ways. In France, the press had been recently reshaped by the Second World War, during which time most newspapers had collaborated with the German occupation. The reintroduction of a free press in 1944 thus saw the establishment of several new publications that either had their roots in the clandestine resistance movement or – like *Le Monde* – took over dissolved collaborationist publishing houses. The presence of influential socialist and communist newspapers was also a feature of the French press, represented by the official organ of the PCF, *L'Humanité*, and by *Libération*, founded by Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Clavel in 1973. A distinct phenomenon of 'philosopher journalists' crystallised in the post-war years to produce a more literary style in some French newspapers that prioritised analysis of events over the exhaustive presentation of facts. This tendency, which was exacerbated by the escalation of the Cold War, made public discourse at times resemble 'adversarial theatre', especially as the PCF encouraged communist journalists to attack all opponents.[34] As increasingly prominent figures on the French left themselves, MSF members routinely used left-wing newspapers as forums through which to air their opinions on both distant crises and on the role of French civil society in the 1970s and 1980s.[35] The British press, by contrast, was mostly populated by established publications which, lacking the recent French experience of rupture and renewal, had a less elemental connection to

[33] Mukke, *'Journalisten der Finsternis'*, quoted in Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media: Introduction to an Entangled History' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 9-10.
[34] Agnès Poirier, *Left Bank: Art, Passion and the Rebirth of Paris 1940–1950* (London, 2018), pp. 85-86 and p. 212.
[35] See Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, pp. 275-306, and pp. 307- 360, and Eleanor Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1965-1988* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 215-248.

their editorial independence as a hard-won freedom.[36] The British press was characterised by the dominance of centre-right (*The Times*) and centre-left (*The Guardian*) publications, coupled with tabloids that provided both left and right-wing readers with a more direct, sensationalist style of reporting (*The Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Mail*). This meant that it did not represent a forum for permanent ideological debate in the same way as the press did in France. Oxfam used both *The Times* and *The Guardian* as regular forums for the printing of fundraising ads and the occasional writing of letters from the charity's Directors, yet avoided the more personalised, political tone of MSF's articles. MSF, on the other hand, consciously avoided advertising from the mid-1980s, preferring to use the media to amplify its narratives differently. As Bertrand Taithe has observed, writing about humanitarianism was a key part of this; 'intellectual credentials remain attached to literary writing' in France.[37]

Oxfam and MSF's attitudes to the press were also reflected in their cooperative and unilateral narrative construction styles, which had been amplified by the rise of a visual mass media from the 1960s. Both NGOs were conscious of the importance of mass communication for their professional development; MSF placed journalists on its board when it was founded in 1972 and Oxfam created Public Affairs and Campaigns units from the mid- 1970s.[38] MSF also mythologised its origins in founding member Bernard Kouchner's independent media interventions on the famine in Biafra in 1968. In 1978, for example, Kouchner's *Bateau Pour le Vietnam* initiative represented an important precursor of the following year's Cambodia campaign. By sailing a hospital ship into the South China Sea to rescue refugees, Kouchner gained extensive coverage for what was a consciously manufactured media event. When this was criticised by a newer contingent of MSF members for being purely performative and without sufficient practical value, Kouchner departed from MSF to found the rival *Médecins du Monde*. However, this split was as much about Kouchner's unilateral leadership style as his effective media strategies, of which much

[36] *The Guardian* was founded in 1821. See Guardian (formerly Manchester Guardian) Archive 1821- 1970s, University of Manchester Library; *The Times* was founded in 1785. See The Times Digital Archive, 1785-2014.
[37] Taithe, 'Reinventing (French) Universalism: Religion, Humanitarianism and the 'French Doctors'." *Modern & Contemporary France*, 12: 2 (2004), pp. 147-58, see pp. 153-154.
[38] Taithe, 'Reinventing (French) Universalism', see pp. 151-152; Gorin, 'Advocacy Strategies' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, p. 206.

continuity can be found in the Cambodia campaign, which also created a media-friendly event to capture public attention. [39]

In Oxfam's case, precursors to the Cambodia campaign can be found in the professionalisation of its relationship with television networks. The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), formed in 1963 to coordinate joint fundraising appeals and prevent competition for coverage between leading NGOs, provided a fertile institutional environment for humanitarian NGOs to capitalise on the rise of television in the UK. The documentary report, *The Unknown Famine*, on Ethiopia which was first broadcast in 1973 demonstrated that a single programme could dramatically alter the level of public engagement with previously under-reported crises through the use of prolonged footage of human distress. [40] The sharp spike in donations to the DEC appeal that followed led to the deepening of formal ties between British NGOs and television networks, ensuring those organisations were informed in advance of documentaries related to humanitarian disasters.[41] Oxfam similarly benefited from the impact of a single documentary when John Pilger's *Year Zero* aired on ATV on 31 October 1979. Because of the diplomatic isolation of Cambodia, however, no DEC appeal was launched afterwards, and Oxfam was promoted as the sole British NGO on the ground that the public should donate to.[42] When Oxfam benefited from Pilger's favourable coverage, this formed part of a pattern of cooperative relations with media actors that the organisation had cultivated over the previous decade.[43]

MSF's unilateral media intervention style culminated in the professionalisation of an 'embedded journalist' approach. [44] In January 1980, MSF sought advice from *'mc conseil communication'*, a communications consultancy firm, on how best to promote its advocacy on Cambodia in the West. This shaped the carefully orchestrated campaign it ran.

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[39] Taithe, 'Reinventing (French) Universalism, see pp. 149-152, and Gorin, 'Advocacy Strategies' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 201-222.
[40] Jones, 'The Unknown Famine' in Lawrence and Tavernor (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture*, pp. 122-143.
[41]Jones, 'The Unknown Famine' in Lawrence and Tavernor (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture*, pp. 122-143.
[42] 'How Oxfam Became Involved' section in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Mukke, *'Journalisten der Finsternis'*, quoted in Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media: Introduction to an Entangled History' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 9-10.

Journalists were directly courted to ensure the *Marche Pour la Survie* protest was heavily documented, and MSF held three press conferences – one to launch the campaign on 14 January 1980, another upon the departure of march participants from Paris to Bangkok at the airport on 28 January, and a third upon their return on 10 February.[45] At the launch, journalists were informed in advance of the trip so that they could plan to travel to Thailand, and each attendee was given a press dossier explaining the march's objectives and its (highly unrealistic) desired route from Bangkok into Cambodia.[46] MSF also contacted several influential public figures, including journalist Jean Lacouture and novelist John Le Carré, to request their presence on the march, although the contentious nature of conversations about Cambodia meant it did not always receive a warm response.[47] Undeterred, on 22 January 1980, MSF's Rony Brauman wrote to the editor of *l'Humanité*, René Andrieu, whose coverage of Cambodia was resolutely pro-Vietnamese. Brauman lamented the fact that Andrieu had not attended the launch, and enclosed a copy of MSF's press dossier in the hopes that the newspaper's foreign affairs department might still send a representative to the Thai-Cambodian border.[48] Despite the political distance between them, newspapers like *l'Humanité* were clearly still seen as natural and desirable outlets for MSF to solicit coverage from. Indeed, the organisation had set itself an ambitious goal to construct a singular narrative that would influence 'global public opinion' and dominate in media coverage.[49] To achieve this, it was advised by *'mc conseil communication'* to avoid political language and speak 'only with the language of the heart', while also emphasising professional medical language ('…diagnosis, … assistance to people in danger') in public statements to legitimise MSF's position.[50] In this way, MSF consciously tailored its message in an attempt to unilaterally influence a diverse set of media outlets.

[45] mc conseil communication information- 49-51 rue d'alleray… Médecins Sans Frontières- Cambodge Marche Pour la Survie, 7 janvier 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[46] 'Extrait du dossier de presse', 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[47] Letter from Jean Lacouture 'Paris le 1.2.80'; 21 January 1980 letter from Gondar Gardens in London addressed to Rony Brauman; telegram from John le Carre in London to Xavier Emmanuelli in MSF office in Paris, all in 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive; See obituary of Jean Lacouture for more information on his journalistic career and public stature. Luc Cedelle, 'Mort de Jean Lacouture, journaliste et biographe, vorace et humaniste', *Le Monde*, 17 July 2015.
[48] 'Lettre de Rony Brauman à Monsieur Rene Andrieu, Rédacteur en Chef de *l'Humanité* Paris, le 22 janvier 1980', 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[49] Mc conseil communication information- 49-51 rue d'alleray… Médecins Sans Frontières- Cambodge Marche Pour la Survie, 7 janvier 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[50] Ibid.

Oxfam's approach to Cambodia was quite different. In the early 1970s, the organisation had been on the receiving end of 'mediatisation', when *The Unknown Famine* documentary in 1973 perpetuated the use of 'shock images', just at the moment when Oxfam was beginning to reject them as unethical.[51] That experience was put to good use at the end of the decade. In Cambodia, Oxfam positioned itself as a *co-producer* of a media narrative rather than a humanitarian actor which was governed *by* a media agenda. Its officials possessed a clear understanding of the Cambodian crisis as the result of Khmer Rouge atrocities and ongoing international isolation, and in Phnom Penh Jim Howard encountered a sympathetic journalist who shared this interpretation in the aforementioned John Pilger. Pilger wrote for *The Daily Mirror* and arrived in Phnom Penh in August 1979 with an ATV crew to film the devastation for a British audience. [52] Once there, a strong social clustering effect among the small number of international visitors to Cambodia ensured Oxfam was given pride of place in Pilger's reporting. The Hotel Samaki was the 'the only "hotel" then in existence in Phnom Penh', and all international journalists and humanitarians were placed there by the government, including the French PCF doctors and some Russian personnel.[53] Pilger interviewed Howard as a representative of Oxfam for his documentary, and even though Oxfam was only minimally involved in Cambodian relief at this time, it was one of the few Western agencies (and only British organisation) on the ground, so Pilger amplified its importance in his early reflections on the international response.[54] On his return to the UK, Pilger wrote two front-page articles on Cambodia for *The Daily Mirror* – published on 11 and 12 September 1979 – which, according to Oxfam's Tigger Stack, 'not only put Jim Howard and Oxfam in the centre of the action' but at the same time built up British consciousness of the gravity of the crisis.[55] Crucially, Pilger's narrative mirrored Oxfam's : he passionately defended the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia for overthrowing the Khmer Rouge, and condemned Western states for diplomatically isolating the new regime. He also criticised

[51] Jones, 'The Unknown Famine' in Lawrence and Tavernor (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture*, pp. 122-143.
[52] 'How Oxfam Became Involved' section in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Evidence of interview contained in 'Kampuchea Diary of Events 1979' in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[55] 'How Oxfam Became Involved' section in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.

ICRC and UNICEF for failing to make a deal with the authorities, and praised Oxfam as the only NGO willing to put people above politics and accept any conditions necessary to gain access to the country.[56] Here, then, were the fruits of the personal contact between Howard and Pilger in Phnom Penh : a powerful media narrative, which simultaneously informed the British public of Cambodian suffering and boosted Oxfam's reputation as a heroic first responder.

What can the contrasting approaches of Oxfam and MSF tell us about NGO-media relations? In France, the more adversarial media culture helped to mould the unilateral style exhibited by MSF in its direct courting of journalists and deliberate construction of media events to be recorded by western newspapers, as demonstrated by the *Marche Pour la Survie du Cambodge*. Conversely, the less explicitly ideological reporting style and more cooperative media environment that dominated in the UK led to the institutionalisation of partnerships between TV networks, documentarians and humanitarian NGOs, who co-produced visually emotive fundraising campaigns through DEC appeals. In some ways, *Year Zero* was a deviation from this trend due to Pilger's passionate adversarial style and the lack of a related DEC appeal. However, Pilger's alliance with Oxfam still reflected the patterns of humanitarian-media relations in the UK and, as we shall see, his reporting relied heavily on non-political humanitarian imagery and discourse to narrate the Cambodian crisis for the British public. The next section will delve deeper into the advocacy styles exhibited in Oxfam and MSF's campaigns for what they reveal about the salience of specific kinds of iconography in Britain and France.

Humanitarian advocacy and imagery

The visual and discursive content of Oxfam and MSF's campaigns reflected specific understandings of how to most effectively present humanitarian causes in Britain and France. This was closely connected to the need to cultivate trust from donors and civil society in the role played by humanitarian NGOs as vectors of Western compassion in the Global South. The rise of a technocratic society in the West in the twentieth century

[56] 'Year Zero- The Silent Death of Cambodia' (1979), accessed at https://watchdocumentaries.com/year-zero-the-silent-death-of-cambodia/ on 24 March 2023.

coincided with declining levels of trust in elected politicians and a parallel rise in trust for NGOs, who were practitioners of a more 'ordinary' type of politics, closer to people's everyday concerns and thus trusted to bring their specific expertise to bear on issues of national and international concern.[57] Oxfam and MSF both actively went about cultivating trust in British and French societies in different ways. In the broadest sense, MSF possessed a 'political' advocacy style, which can be contrasted with Oxfam's 'educational' advocacy, reflected in its preference for building long-term relationships with schools and universities in support of a development education programme in the UK.[58] In the Cambodia campaign, this translated into a focus on children as donors in the Blue Peter fundraising appeal, which drew on a tradition of youth voluntarism as imperial benevolence and utilised the iconography of childhood in campaigning images. In France, MSF's *Marche Pour la Survie* made use of the strong cultural value placed on public intellectuals, and also mobilised the symbolism of political protest and left-right rapprochement to cultivate trust in humanitarianism as the platform for a new global role for France.

The Blue Peter campaign began in October 1979, when Oxfam officials contacted the BBC's flagship children's television programme to pitch the idea of a national appeal on Cambodia.[59] In so doing, they revealed their consciousness of the centrality of youth voluntarism to conceptions of Britain's global role. Oxfam was not the first British organisation to recognise this. In the inter-war years, Save the Children Fund (SCF) had pioneered partnerships with festivals like 'Empire Day', and cultivated ties with scouting societies and schools in fundraising.[60] SCF's idealistic vision of children as future 'internationalist' citizens grew from a discourse of peace activism during the First World War yet it soon came to be heavily connected to ideas of British exceptionalism.[61] After the Second World War, the emergence of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in 1958 cemented

[57] Matthew Hilton, 'Politics Is Ordinary: Non-governmental Organizations and Political Participation in Contemporary Britain', *20th Century British History*, 22: 2 (2011), pp. 230-68.
[58] Valérie Gorin, 'Advocacy Strategies of Western Humanitarian NGOs from the 1960s to the 1990s' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 201-222.
[59] 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[60] Emily Baughan, ' "Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!" Empire, Internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in Inter-war Britain', *Historical Research: The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 86: 231 (2013), pp. 116-37. See pp. 124-126.
[61] Ibid.

the importance of a 'personalised' response to global inequalities, and smoothed the transition from explicitly colonial discourses of North-South interventions to the exercise of control through the language of 'development' and 'underdevelopment' in British society.[62] Later, in the 1960s, the UN Freedom from Hunger campaign, which Oxfam was heavily involved in, also helped to reformulate the idea of a benevolent global role for youth volunteers in the postcolonial era.[63] This imperative was also evident in Oxfam's development education advocacy, which placed great value on the classroom as a site of social change. Generally, emergency campaigns were treated as separate to development education, which aimed to foster domestic conversations about global issues rather than raise funds for specific emergencies.[64] The Blue Peter appeal, however, was different. In fact, it is no exaggeration to suggest that it represented an evolution of the development education function in response to the rise of a mass media. As television ownership became more common, Oxfam found it could use that medium to communicate with British children across the country in a kind of national classroom setting. Blue Peter offered the perfect vehicle for its message. By centring its fundraising around the programme, Oxfam was able to capitalise on the BBC's long-held emphasis on charity as a British value – illustrated by the success of Blue Peter's annual Christmas appeals, which were launched in service of a different charity each year – to cultivate a reliable child donor base.[65] In this way, the figure of the youth volunteer became central to Oxfam's domestic advocacy and international emergency campaigns through the Cambodia appeal.

By contrast, MSF's Cambodia campaign reflected the centrality of the figure of the public intellectual or '*philosophe*' in French political culture. Dating back to the Enlightenment, the

[62] Agnieszka Sobocinska, *Saving the World? Western Volunteers and the Rise of the Humanitarian-Development Complex* (Cambridge, 2021), see p. 7; Sobocinska, 'How to win friends and influence nations: the international history of Development Volunteering', *Journal of Global History*, 12:1 (2017), pp. 49–73.
[63] Anna Bocking-Welch, 'Youth against Hunger: Service, Activism and the Mobilisation of Young Humanitarians in 1960s Britain.', *European Review of History*, 23:1-2 (2016), pp.154-70.
[64] Exceptions to this include lobbying on the Khmer Rouge's holding of a UN seat during the 1980s, along with lobbying on Central America, Israel and South Africa in the late 1980s. See Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 272-273.
[65] Suzanne Franks, ' '"Please Send Us Your Money": The BBC's Evolving Relationship With Charitable Causes, Fundraising and Humanitarian Appeals', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 38:4 (2017), pp. 863-879. See p. 864; See also Steve Westlake, 'Building the BBC-branded NGO: Overseas Development, the World Service, and the Marshall Plan of the Mind, C. 1965–99.', *20th Century British History*, 33:1 (2022), pp. 29-51, on the symbiotic relationship between the BBC and humanitarian organisations in Britain, and the BBC's active participation in global humanitarian governance.

endurance of the *'philosophe'* in public discourse was evident in the platforms afforded to thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Raymond Aron in the twentieth century.[66] In the *Marche Pour la Survie,* MSF built on this tradition by enlisting a kaleidoscopic sample of artists, writers and academics from across French and European civil society to participate alongside the humanitarians, politicians, medical professionals and small number of Cambodian expats that were also present.[67] The willingness of writers to lend their support to MSF was helped by the fact that the 1970s had marked the beginning of a period of intellectual crisis in France.[68] Following the publication of 'The Gulag Archipelago' by Soviet writer and dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in 1974, revelations about the authoritarianism of anticolonial Third World regimes, which had been idealised as the new bearers of world revolution, spelled the end of the '*Existentialo-marxisme'* of which Sartre was a figurehead.[69] This precipitated a shift away from theoretical idealism towards post-structuralism, leading a new generation of '*nouveaux philosophes*', including Bernard-Henri Levy and André Glucksmann, to proclaim the death of universalist ideologies as a result.[70] In 1978, Bernard Kouchner had skilfully demonstrated how this context could be used to MSF's advantage by orchestrating the highly publicised cooperation of life-long ideological adversaries Sartre and Aron in the the *Bateau pour le Vietnam* campaign. Following Kouchner's departure, MSF continued this approach, believing it offered a way to engage with global suffering that contrasted with the left's 'increasingly tired internationalist ideals.'[71] Indeed, the capacity of humanitarianism to revitalise French political culture was clearly referenced by Spanish anarchist Fernando Arrabal, who praised the *Marche Pour la Survie* for giving him the opportunity to be on the ground, as opposed to signing 'over two whiskeys in Paris, another one of those eternal intellectual's petitions which have no practical value'.[72] Levy's reflections in a confrontational interview in *Le Matin de Paris* in February 1980 also illustrated how the march was received in France as a psycho-

[66] Poirier, *Left Bank*.
[67] Liste de participants dans la Marche pour la Survie du Cambodge, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[68] See Jeremy Jennings, 'Introduction: Mandarins and Samurais: The Intellectual in Modern France' in Jennings (ed.), *Intellectuals in Twentieth Century France* (London, 1993), pp.1-5.
[69] Ibid, p.3.
[70] Ibid, p. 2.
[71] Taithe, 'Reinventing (French) Universalism', p. 149.
[72] R-P Paringaux, '« La marche pour la survie du Cambodge » Pour que nul ne dise « je ne savais pas »', *Le Monde*, 8 fevrier 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.

social performance of intellectual crisis and renewal. When asked whether a political writer who had recently committed suicide had done so because there was no longer any purpose to his life as a publicly engaged intellectual, Levy countered that 'the real impasse is not ours but that of the Cambodians'. However, the journalist's intense interest in the relevance of the Cambodian campaign for domestic debate suggested otherwise.[73]

From these starting points, Oxfam and MSF also used specific images to appeal to their supporters and to cultivate trust in their campaigns. In Britain, Oxfam's focus on children was carried though to its reliance on the iconography of childhood in its portrayals of Cambodian suffering. This was exemplified by an advertisement it took out in *The Times* in November 1979 that showed two Cambodian children staring sorrowfully into the camera accompanied by the caption 'Two small reasons why we must go on caring'.[74] Representations of children in humanitarian campaigns had been pioneered by missionaries in the nineteenth century, and were used to create trust because they played on cultural associations of children with innocence and dependency to induce emotional reactions and donations to charity.[75] Images of children were also known to be effective because they signified abstraction from politics and thus neutrality on the part of humanitarian NGOs.[76] SCF's child images in the 1920s had impact precisely because they constructed children as 'extra-national figures'.[77] This process was repeated in successive crises : from the plight of refugee children in the 1940s to the coverage of starving Biafrans two decades later. In Cambodia, the use of recognisable images that depicted the 'universal child of developing nations' became particularly important in creating emotional engagement due to a striking lack of familiarity with Cambodia among the British public. Photographs of emaciated children also helped to bypass any controversy about sending aid a country occupied by the

[73] ' « Ou le 'star system' trouverait-il mieux de s'employer qua la défense des opprimes? » nous déclare Bernard-Henri Levy', *Le Matin de Paris*, 12 février 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[74] This ad was featured in *The Times* on 19, 28 and 29 November 1979.
[75] Stornig, 'Promoting Distant Children in Need' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*.
[76] Kate Manzo, 'Imaging Humanitarianism: NGO Identity and the Iconography of Childhood', *Antipode* (40: 4, 2008), pp. 632-57.
[77] Baughan, "Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!", pp. 123-124.

Vietnamese Army.[78] As Oxfam's Bill Yates put it, the Cambodia campaign had to 'cut through the red tape' and 'put human compassion before diplomacy'.[79]

The response to Year Zero underlined the impact of this messaging. Although Oxfam did not create the documentary, it directly benefited from its relentless use of shock imagery.[80] These images were accompanied by narration from Pilger that consistently recalled colonial paternalism and bluntly described Cambodia as 'a nation of mostly children', and a 'passive' and 'docile people' to downplay the politically contentious nature of the crisis.[81] One of the most striking closing shots of Pilger's documentary showed a small child walking entirely alone in a deserted, bombed-out street. The camera panned out until the child seemed increasingly small and the lack of other human presence became more stark. Thus, the documentary's editorial choices also echoed missionary constructions of non-European children as lone subjects, with the implication that western intervention was needed as local adults were unable to meet children's needs.[82] The extended video footage of suffering, emaciated and often naked children was likely so extreme that Oxfam would not have used such images itself, yet it resulted in a jump in donations to the NGO all the same.[83] Seen alongside Year Zero, Oxfam's own fundraising ads were rendered more effective because they were perceived by the British public to be in dialogue with the prolonged visual depiction of distress in Pilger's documentary. The symbiotic relationship between humanitarianism and the media was exemplified by this complementary dynamic, within

[78] Sue Ruddick (2003), quoted in Manzo, 'Imaging Humanitarianism', p. 642; Marcus Thompson and Bill Yates referenced a level of ignorance about Cambodia in oral history interviews conducted on 27 June 2019 and 21 July 2020 respectively; Bernard Llewellyn, Asia Field Director in 1979, was also recorded in 1983 as having the view 'that Oxfam should not attempt to get involved in areas about which it knows next to nothing' in the 'How Oxfam Became Involved' section in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.

[79] September 21st entry in 'Kampuchea Diary of Events 1979', 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.

[80] See Jones, '*The Unknown Famine*' in Lawrence and Tavernor (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture*, pp. 122-143.

[81] 'Year Zero – The Silent Death of Cambodia' (1979), accessed at https://watchdocumentaries.com/year-zero-the-silent-death-of-cambodia/ on 24 March 2023.

[82] See Stornig, 'Promoting Distant Children in Need' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, for an exploration of the history of 'child-saving' imagery in the West.

[83] See Jones, '*The Unknown Famine:*' in Lawrence and Tavernor (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture*, pp. 122-143.

which shock imagery continued to be relied upon in the 1980s despite calls for its elimination in the previous decade.[84]

MSF's campaigning, by contrast, spoke less of victims and more directly to the idea of the French 'helper' or 'rescuer' – and thus focused on the humanitarians themselves.[85] Unlike Oxfam's promotional pictures, which rarely featured its staff, the photographs used by the media to report on the *Marche Pour la Survie* were almost all of MSF aid workers and officials, as well as march participants. When the photos did feature victims, they were included only as secondary subjects to celebrities – best exemplified by the widely printed photograph of American folk singer and marcher Joan Baez holding a Cambodian refugee child in Sakeo camp.[86] These depictions served two functions for MSF. First, foregrounding the personal involvements of its staff helped to create trust in the organisation's commitment to embodying a moral form of humanitarian action. Second, in keeping with the historic use of 'rescuer' images by humanitarian organisations when they sought to create or consolidate distinct professional identities, MSF's new management viewed such images as a route to organisational survival in a moment of heightened precarity following the split with Kouchner.[87] Put simply, in response to Kouchner's accusation that MSF had become a servant to its own agenda, MSF aimed to show that it could both cultivate a professionalised operational role *and* retain an activist identity in the humanitarian sector.[88]

As MSF was pursuing trust from a distinctly politically engaged donor audience, it also drew on the iconography of social movements and the symbolism of left-right rapprochement to set itself apart from other NGOs. The images captured of MSF leading a protest, holding up a large banner proclaiming that they were marching 'for the survival of Cambodia', and

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[84] Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, p. 21.
Jones, '*The Unknown Famine*' in Lawrence and Tavernor (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture*.
[85] Daniel Palmieri, 'Humanitarianism on the Screen: The ICRC Films, 1921-65', in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism & Media*, pp. 90-107. See p.100.
[86] See Remi Favret, 'MSF persiste et signe- Les « marcheurs » veulent poursuivre leur action au Cambodge malgre les attaques', *Libération*, 12 février 1980, and other examples of articles that feature this photograph in 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[87] Palmieri, 'Humanitarianism on the Screen: The ICRC Films, 1921-65', in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism & Media*, pp. 90-107; Rony Brauman has said 'MSF still seemed very fragile to us' in the 1980s. Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.
[88] See Taithe, 'Reinventing (French) Universalism', p. 150 for details of Kouchner's point of view; Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.

making impassioned speeches through megaphones at the border, all recalled the action repertoire of protest that had been so influential on the 1968 generation.[89] This use of political symbolism was particularly salient in France, where Taithe has credited humanitarianism with bringing about a rebirth of universalism in French political culture. [90] By the same token, the *Marche Pour la Survie* could also be said to have revived the values of Radicalism, a political movement with deep roots.[91] Radicalism rose to prominence in the 1840s, and was characterised by ideological diversity accompanied by a shared commitment to republicanism as a system of government. Although the persistence of monarchist and imperialist regimes allowed it to exist as a broad-based rebuke of authoritarian rule for several decades, the consolidation of the French Republic after 1870 meant that its ideals eventually became less relevant than the Left-Right divide in the twentieth century.[92] Nevertheless, its diminished position as a stand-alone movement did not mean that its symbolic value disappeared. On the contrary, echoes of Radicalism re-emerged in public discourse whenever a threat was posed to the Republic, as, for example, in the conscious mythologising of wartime unity between communists and Gaullists in the resistance against Nazi occupation in the 1940s.[93] In 1980, the *Marche Pour la Survie* effectively revitalised the tradition again by transplanting it to the Global South, where, following the death of the 1968 generation's domestic revolutionary fantasies, it was believed an ideologically diverse opposition to authoritarianism was truly needed. The fact that humanitarian action was understood as a cause both of the Left and the Right was openly on display in the backgrounds of the march participants that MSF invited to Thailand. Along with twelve local government representatives and trade unionists, there was an almost even split between the five politicians from left-wing parties (the Parti Socialiste, Parti Radical Italien and

[89] See literature on social movements and action repertoires of protest. Doug McAdam, 'Recruitment to high-risk activism: the case of freedom summer', *American Journal of Sociology*, (92:1, 1986), pp. 64–90; Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow & Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, 2001); Charles Tilly, 'Social movements and national politics', in Charles Bright and Susan Harding (eds.), *Statemaking and Social Movements: Essays in History and Theory*, pp. 297–317; Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder, 2004); Verta Taylor & Nella Van Dyke, '"Get up, stand up": tactical repertoires of social movements', in David Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Malden, 2004), pp. 262–292.

[90] See Taithe, 'Reinventing (French) Universalism'.

[91] Jacques Kayser, *Les grandes batailles du radicalisme: des origins aux portes de pouvoir 1820-1901* (Paris, 1962).

[92] Kayser, *Les grandes batailles du radicalisme.*

[93] Emile Chabal, *France* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 24-27.

Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche) and six representatives from centrist and right-wing parties (Union pour la Democratie francaise, Centre national des indépendants et paysans and Mouvement des "Democrates 66" among others).[94] The extent to which the march was experienced as an expression of French – rather than ideological – pride was noticeable in the desire of some parliamentarians to adorn themselves with tricolour ribbons at the border.[95]

The distinct advocacy styles and uses of imagery displayed in Oxfam and MSF's campaigns were thus in many ways the products of national political cultures. In Britain, the cultural value placed on the tradition of youth voluntarism meant that Oxfam was recognised as a trustworthy humanitarian NGO when it engaged with this constituency. In France, the historic trust placed in public intellectuals as representatives of a principled political opposition to state power meant that MSF consciously bolstered its legitimacy by including intellectuals as participants in its campaigns. Furthermore, the use of child images supported perceptions of Oxfam's neutrality and reinforced its reputation as a dependable NGO to intervene in politically contentious settings. Conversely, the 'action repertoire' of protest held particular resonance for the French public, with whom it consolidated MSF's reputation as an activist organisation. The next section explores another way in which the specificity of the French and British social contexts determined the Cambodian campaigns : how Oxfam and MSF mobilised the trope of genocide in service of contrasting political interpretations of the Cambodian crisis.

Temporality and the salience of genocide

The construction of the Cambodian crisis as genocide was central for both NGOs. MSF's communications strategy amplified Holocaust analogies to dramatise Cambodian suffering in shocking and familiar terms for European audiences, to minimise the complexities, and to eclipse media coverage about the 1979 oil crisis, as well as unfolding Cold War conflicts in

[94] Liste de participants dans la marche pour la survie du Cambodge, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[95] R-P Paringaux, ' « La marche pour la survie du Cambodge » Pour que nul ne dise « je ne savais pas »', *Le Monde*, 8 February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.

Iran and Afghanistan.[96] A similar framing emerged in Britain. In late October 1979, Bill Yates issued the Blue Peter appeal with posters captioned 'Must they die by Christmas?' and 'Auschwitz-Belsen-Cambodia', while Pilger's *Year Zero* explicitly referred to an ex-torture centre as an 'Asian Auschwitz' and to Pol Pot as an 'Asian Hitler'.[97] Yet the relationship between these Holocaust narratives and the political interpretations of the Cambodian crisis they buttressed in Britain and France could not have been more different. Oxfam emphasised the ongoing effects of the genocide committed by the ousted Khmer Rouge, while MSF proclaimed a second genocide was being presided over by the Vietnamese. Each of these constructions necessitated viewing the other side as complicit. They proved remarkably enduring. Both organisations clung to the use of Holocaust analogies even after they had access to information that complicated their applicability. For Oxfam, this occurred on 30 October 1979, the same day that *Year Zero* aired and the organisation sent out an appeal letter on 'the spectre of starvation'. Oxfam nutritionist Dr. Tim Lusty reported simultaneously that, apart from two villages where the situation was severe, the nutritional status of the Cambodian population 'in all areas visited was fair to good'.[98] Having received this information, Oxfam could have defended its support of the Phnom Penh regime by refuting allegations of orchestrated famine, yet it did not do so. In MSF's case, the holes in its narrative were pointed out by a journalist covering the *Marche Pour la Survie* in February 1980, who highlighted that the Phnom Penh authorities had lifted taxation on the wet season harvest and encouraged peasants to conserve or sell their stocks in response to food shortages.[99] Evidently, the new regime was not exerting a totalitarian control over food production. Indeed, this was openly acknowledged by the international organisations operating in the country. On 6 February 1980, the French Ambassador in Thailand told a

[96] 'mc conseil communication information- 49-51 rue d'alleray… Médecins Sans Frontières- Cambodge Marche Pour la Survie, 7 janvier 1980', 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[97] October 17th entry: 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive; 'Year Zero- The Silent Death of Cambodia' (1979), accessed at https://watchdocumentaries.com/year-zero-the-silent-death-of-cambodia/ on 24 March 2023.
[98] 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[99] René Backmann, 'Cambodge: la Marche pour la Survie', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 11 February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.

colleague in Paris that the Director of UNICEF believed the marchers were acting 'on the basis of false information'.[100]

Why did Oxfam and MSF perceive it as essential to characterise the Cambodian crisis as genocide? The massive growth in fundraising that followed Oxfam's media campaign was one important reason why it was reluctant to part with its alarmist tone, yet this does not fully account for the particular salience of the genocide trope. Similarly, MSF created a separate association to fundraise for the march so its attachment to the genocide narrative cannot be attributed to organisational income growth alone.[101] The answer instead lies in the significance of representations of genocide for how European societies were processing the traumatic memories of the Holocaust. As Alan Mintz has explored, Western societies transitioned from a relative lack of interest in Holocaust atrocities in the immediate post-war years towards a perception of the Holocaust as a unique event of universal significance by the 1990s. Within this journey from 'silence to salience', the 1960s were seen as a turning point when much higher levels of interest in the Holocaust began to be reflected in popular culture.[102] Engagements with suffering in the Global South played an important role in this process. Laase Heerten has shown how images of famine in Biafra created 'multidirectional memories' in 1968 that rendered both the Holocaust and the Biafran crisis legible to the French public in new ways.[103] Biafra was thus an important forerunner of Cambodia as a postcolonial genocide which resulted in high levels of Western public engagement on the basis of Holocaust analogies.

[100] Bangkok, le 6 février, Jean-M Soulier, Ambassadeur de France en Thaïlande à Son Excellence Monsieur Jean François-Poncet, Ministre des Affaires étrangères, Direction d'Asie-Océanie, 453-INVA/2061, French Diplomatic Archives.

[101] See Black, *A Cause For Our Times*, pp. 229-235 for details on the scale of the Cambodia campaign and the massive jump in income that it occasioned; Récépissé de Déclaration d'Association (République Française, Loi du 1er juillet 1901- Art. 5); See also '1 février 1980 lettre de Rony Brauman à Monsieur François Henri de Virieu, Rédacteur en Chef, *Le Matin',* for Brauman's reference to the existence of a separate association in response to accusations of the march's use of MSF operational funds.
Both documents in 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.

[102] Alan Mintz, quoted in Tom Lawson and Andy Pierce, 'Britain and the Holocaust: An Introduction' in Lawson and Pearce (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust*, pp. 1-37, especially p. 5.

[103] Matthew Champion, 'The History of Temporalities: An Introduction', *Past & Present*, 243:1 (2019), pp. 247-54; Heerten, 'Biafras of the Mind'.

The Cambodian crisis, nevertheless, represented more than just a second mobilisation of the postcolonial genocide narrative for Oxfam and MSF. Holocaust analogies in media campaigns on Cambodia had salience for different reasons in the French and British contexts. To understand why, it is necessary to take account of national divergences from the generalised 'silence to salience' theory. Mintz' chronology relies largely on evidence from the United States, and while Heerten's evidence on France accords with the view of the 1960s as pivotal, Tony Kushner has asserted that the 1980s were far more important in the British context, where the 'dominance of self-congratulatory Second World War memories' resulted in Britain being 'someway behind the curve'.[104] European societies developed collective memories of the Holocaust at different rates, which is why representations of postcolonial genocide were salient in specific ways in Britain and France. In 1979 and 1980, MSF's media campaign on Cambodia built on an existing well of public Holocaust consciousness in France. If we accept Tony Kushner's chronology, however, representations of Cambodian suffering assume greater significance in the development of a British Holocaust memory. Distinct colonial pasts were also important in in shaping how humanitarian crises in the Global South were perceived, and the extent to which they could be related to Holocaust analogies in each country. While Biafra certainly animated British public opinion, Nigeria's status as an ex-colony complicated the depiction of the crisis in Britain. According to Oxfam's official historian Maggie Black, Oxfam naively 'accepted British complicity in an act of mass criminality', something she clearly regrets.[105] In contrast, French President Charles De Gaulle's support for Biafra was tied up with ideas of French exceptionalism and criticisms of the British colonial creation of Nigeria. As a result, the myth of Biafran genocide persisted in French civil society for several months longer than in the UK, even leading to Bernard Kouchner's formation of Le Comité International de Lutte Contre le Génocide, a precursor to MSF.[106]

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[104] Lawson and Pierce, 'Britain and the Holocaust: An Introduction' in Lawson and Pearce (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust*, p. 18.

[105] See Black, *A Cause For Our Times*, p. 121, and p. 117-121 for full description of the Biafra crisis and Oxfam's role in it.

[106] See Heerten, 'Biafras of the Mind'; Marie-Luce Desgrandchamps, 'Soutien Militaire Et Aide Humanitaire. Les Ambiguïtés De La France Au Biafra/Military Support and Humanitarian Aid. French Ambiguity in Biafra', *Relations Internationales*, 1:165 (2016), pp. 81-96, and Yves Lavoinne, 'Médecins En Guerre: Du Témoignage Au « Tapage Médiatique » (1968-1970)', *Le Temps Des Médias*, 4:1 (2005), pp. 114-26 for analyses of the engagement with the Biafra crisis in France, along with its specific importance for the roots of MSF.

The social and emotional connotations of French and British war memories informed the nationally specific engagements with the Holocaust that were evident in Oxfam and MSF's campaigns. In France, feelings of shame that manifested in social division shaped the construction of a national Holocaust memory culture. The fact that the Vichy regime collaborated with the Nazis resulted in a pervasive sense of trauma that meant French people had difficulty in reconciling themselves to their history.[107] In examining how the symptoms of this 'Vichy syndrome' evolved over the post-war decades, Henry Rousso sees the years between 1971 and 1974 as pivotal for the shattering of precarious national myths of large-scale participation in the French Resistance. After this time, France entered an enduring phase of 'obsession' with Vichy complicity that penetrated public discourse with 'astonishing presentness'.[108] In the late 1970s, 'the corpse was still warm' and representations of Cambodian genocide interacted with multidirectional memories of Vichy collaboration in new ways that Biafra had not.[109] Claude Malhuret's assertion that he and Rony Brauman perceived their activism on Cambodia as a direct continuation of their parents' fight against Nazism was revealing : 'our task was the same even if this communist totalitarianism had a different name'. [110] The manner in which France came to terms with its national war experience therefore resulted in an *evolving* Holocaust consciousness within which the Cambodian crisis prompted a new generation of Jewish citizens to publicly express their personal trauma for the first time. In addition, the repression and resistance that occurred during and immediately after the Second World War, which amounted to a civil war in all but name, was important for what it revealed about the perennial *'guerre franco-française'* in French political culture.[111] This took on new meaning in the late 1970s in the backlash within the French left against the *tiers-mondistes*, who had initially supported the Khmer Rouge ascendancy as an anticolonial victory in 1975.[112] The *Marche Pour la Survie* was a direct accusation of complicity aimed at *tiers-mondiste* communists who later refused to denounce the Vietnamese regime as genocidal, and retained an anti-imperialist

[107] Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome,* pp. 9-10.
[108] Ibid, pp. 10-11.
[109] Ibid, p. 1.
[110] Claude Malhuret, quoted in Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, p.322.
[111] Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, pp. 5-6.
[112] Eleanor Davey has already shown the specific importance of the war and Holocaust memories for the development of MSF in *Idealism Beyond Borders,* pp. 144-18.

worldview that determined their stance on all global events.[113] On 12 February 1980, *Libération* published an article that claimed the march had gone ahead 'despite the attacks', in which Maluret angrily asserted : 'We do not want to employ the terms of Holocaust or genocide by starvation without proof. What we do condemn are those obnoxious bastards ['*infâmes salauds*'] who pretend that all is well because things are not quite so bad … we will not shut our mouths just because we have transitioned from a disaster to a calamity'.[114]

In Britain, by contrast, the story of the state's participation in the Second World War was a source of pride, and lacked the same divisive potential as existed in France. As Tony Kushner and David Cesarani have shown, a 'popular mythology' emerged, which asserted that 'Britain had actually fought the war to end Nazi atrocities and even to save the Jews'.[115] Although evidence exists that the British government suppressed public knowledge of the Holocaust during the war, and decided not to attack concentration camps for strategic military reasons, this myth was strong enough to persist and to condition the 'cognitive framework' through which British people have processed the Holocaust. Even in the 1990s, representations of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen were received as proof of the righteousness of the British war effort. As such, the 'narrative frames that generated comforting mythologies' in Britain's war myth co-existed with a belated growth in Holocaust consciousness rather than being supplanted by this, as had been the case for the Resistencialist myth in France.[116] This heroic narrative of British intervention to save genocide victims was reflected in the heavily promoted media event surrounding the journey of a barge carrying Oxfam-supplied relief supplies to Kompong Som from Singapore on 14 October 1979. Oxfam was the first Western agency to deliver aid to the port since the fall of the Khmer Rouge, and in so doing enabled much larger consignments to enter the country. Guy Stringer, who led the expedition on Oxfam's behalf, fostered a narrative of British entrepreneurialism and action against the odds to describe the shipment. He was, in

[113] Coverage of *Marche Pour la Survie du Cambodge* in *Libération* and *l'Humanité,* February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[114] Claude Malhuret, quoted in Remi Favret, 'MSF persiste et signe- Les « marcheurs » veulent poursuivre leur action au Cambodge malgré les attaques', *Libération*, 12 February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[115] Lawson and Pierce, 'Britain and the Holocaust: An Introduction' in Lawson and Pearce (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust*, p. 19.
[116] Ibid, p. 20.

his own words, 'a man with a briefcase, $50,000 and an introduction to a shipping man'. He later pondered whether any other organisation in the world 'despatched its servants on enterprises like this with such an air of nonchalance'.[117] In a highly competitive sector, where the importance of being seen to be the first at the scene was crucial, Oxfam mythologised Stringer's heroic improvisation, which in turn reinforced a collective myth that evoked national pride. This was no coincidence. Stringer's awareness of the power of optics extended to an initial reluctance to take 200 tons of UNICEF-supplied goods as part of the shipment, in case doing so might dilute the narrative of the barge as a lone act of heroism by Oxfam.[118]

The images used by Oxfam and MSF to promote their interventions in Cambodia took on a particular functionality in the context of these national Holocaust memory constructions. To have impact, photographs need to have a 'before' and an 'after', and should also contain a 'punctum' : a point of intense emotional engagement that strongly affects viewers.[119] The photographs used by Oxfam in the early part of its campaign on Cambodia contained echoes of those used in Biafra a decade earlier. The punctum was the eyes of the Cambodian children, who connected with the viewer and forced them to engage with the photograph as a clear representation of time and human suffering.[120] The 'after' of the photograph was also clear to the British public : genocide would be the outcome for Cambodian children if they did not act. Yet the appeal for donations that accompanied the photo also told British viewers there was hope : they could stop this 'future past' by supporting Oxfam's intervention.[121] The later development of a British Holocaust consciousness gave these images added potency. In fact, photographs of Cambodian children in 1979 became central in shaping national understandings of genocide in Britain. For MSF, by contrast, the images that had the most resonance represented French civil society protesting a genocide while it was happening – through the *Marche Pour la Survie* – even though they were powerless to stop it. The French press openly criticised the impracticality of the march, but praised it as

[117] Black*, A Cause For Our Times*, p.222.
[118] Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy,* p.149.
[119] Reinhart Kosseleck and Rolande Barthes, referenced in Heerten, 'Biafras of the Mind', pp. 1460-1462.
[120] Heerten, 'Biafras of the Mind'.
[121] Ibid, p. 1462; The ad containing this photograph of Cambodian children was featured in *The Times* on 19, 28 and 29 November 1979.

an act of principled resistance and a conscious correction of the past.[122] The Resistencialist myth that had been shattered in the 'broken mirror' phase was now being revived in a more reflective, self-aware manner in Cambodia. This manifested in how MSF presented its actions. While the Resistance movement had been small compared to the numbers of French people that had acceded to living under German occupation or actively collaborated with the Nazis, the knowledge of what was unfolding in Southeast Asia – in MSF's telling – would lead to action. Crucially for the organisation's branding, this resistance would be documented for the historical record in a consciously performed media event (the *Marche Pour la Survie*).

Despite their divergent interactions with the issue of genocide, it is clear that Oxfam and MSF shared a common origin point in their evocation of the Holocaust: film footage of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. These films shaped European perceptions of the Holocaust and universalised Jewish suffering at the same time that they were criticised in some quarters for dehumanising Holocaust victims.[123] In seeking to induce shame in the German population, this dehumanising narrative was a political act, yet it is less clear that the agency of genocide victims has been evident in the numerous postcolonial genocides, including Cambodia, which have subsequently been described in the same terms. Indeed, the consistent use of Holocaust analogies to describe diverse instances of political violence in the Global South has actually had the effect of reducing Western capacities to understand these crises, and has repeatedly dehumanised non-European peoples by fusing colonial and Holocaust tropes. As Heerten has observed, Holocaust analogies represent a 'double-edged rhetorical device'; their use always attracts attention yet also invites criticism on the basis of applicability.[124] This has not made the recourse to their use any less likely however. Unlike other terms which have experienced conceptual collapse and fallen out of use as they lose meaning, the genocide trope exists in a state of 'continuous conceptual collapse',

[122] 'Un pont trop loin. La marche du Tout-Paris dans la rizière ne sauvera pas le people khmer, mais nul ne pourra dire « Je ne savais pas »', *L'Express*, 15 February 1980. This and other examples of similar coverage of *Marche Pour la Survie du Cambodge* in French newspapers in February 1980 in 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[123] Ulrike Weckel, 'People Who Once were Human Beings Like You and Me': Why Allied Atrocity Films of Liverated Nazi Concentration Camps in 1944-46 Maximized the Horror and Universalized the Victims' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media: 1900 to the Present* (New York/ London, 2018), pp. 107-126.
[124] Heerten, 'Biafras of the Mind', p. 1474.

perpetually applied to events of mass violence that eventually are deemed not to be close enough to the kind of organised extermination in the Holocaust that we associate with the term.[125] The obsession with genocide trauma in the messaging that emerged from Cambodia in the late 1970s and 1980s – including among aid workers operating at the Thai-Cambodian border – underlines the potency of that message for the humanitarian sector.[126]

The impact of mediated narratives

Oxfam and MSF's campaigns on the Cambodian crisis were heavily mediated narratives of a complex and polarising series of events. By describing Cambodian suffering in a manner which accorded with their organisation's views and capacities for action, along with the existing frames of understanding that prevailed in French and British society, Oxfam and MSF took on the roles of ethical mediators. As media theorist Lilie Chouliaraki has pointed out, the media has a powerful role in determining how Western audiences react to scenes of distant suffering. It chooses when to link news stories of disasters or conflict with emotions of empathy and humanitarian concern in what she calls 'ecstatic news', and when to retain a detached reporting style that does not result in pity and identification in 'adventure' or 'emergency news'.[127] In pushing the media as a whole to adopt an 'ecstatic news' narrative, NGOs can play a powerful role in creating empathy where there might otherwise be apathy. However, the narratives crafted by NGOs are often simplifying and depoliticising, and can result in the perpetuation of hierarchical imaginings of the world through emotions of pity as opposed to true understandings of distant events accompanied by feelings of empathy and solidarity.[128] This section explores the incomplete nature of the narratives promoted by Oxfam and MSF, the reactions to their campaigns, and why this matters for how we understand the role of NGOs as agents of (non-) governmentality in an

[125] Ibid, pp. 1480-1481.
[126] Taithe, 'The Cradle of the New Humanitarian System? International Work and European Volunteers at the Cambodian Border Camps, 1979–1993', *Contemporary European History*, 25:2 (2016), pp. 335-58.
[127] Lilie Chouliaraki, quoted in Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media: Introduction to an Entangled History' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media: 1900 to the Present*, pp. 5-7.
[128] Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media: Introduction to an Entangled History' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media: 1900 to the Present*, pp. 5-7.

international system which discourages radical engagement with the causes of global inequality.[129]

The idea of the media acting as an ethical narrator of human suffering rests on the concept of 'theatre as a moral institution', which recalls eighteenth-century ideals of sensitising the bourgeois elite to the plight of the lower classes through spectacle.[130] Both Oxfam and MSF created theatre out of the suffering of Cambodians in a conscious attempt to induce empathy and either raise funds or gain access to those in need. MSF's focus on the 'second genocide' being committed by the Vietnamese occupiers led it to downplay the fact that the humanitarian relief programme it supported at the border harboured defeated Khmer Rouge soldiers and helped to cement their grip over civilian populations in camps.[131] Similarly, Oxfam's construction of the Khmer Rouge genocide of Cambodia as the ultimate evil, which necessitated cooperation with the Vietnamese-supported Phnom Penh authorities, papered over the fact that many of these government officials were themselves ex-Khmer Rouge, who had only defected from the genocidal regime in its final months to flee to Vietnam and return to overthrow their former comrades.[132]

Nor were both Oxfam and MSF entirely successful in their attempts to shape the media narrative. MSF's attempt to unilaterally dictate its preferred narrative to the French media ultimately backfired: the political familiarity of French commentators with Cambodia and Vietnam meant that it was perceived as an intervention into domestic political debate. There was an element of bad luck in this. The time it took for MSF to organise the protest and create a separate association for the *Marche Pour la Survie* meant that it occurred in February 1980, even though the urgency of the situation was at its highest before Christmas 1979.[133] Aware of the possibility of negative coverage, an MSF doctor implored journalists at the border 'to make an abstraction of this frustrating "mise-en-scène". Forget our

[129] Hilton, 'Politics Is Ordinary'; Mann, *From Empires to NGOs;* Sending and Neumann, 'Governance to Governmentality'.
[130] Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media: Introduction to an Entangled History' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media,* p. 6.
[131] Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, pp. 114-155.
[132] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place' in Barnett (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Human Rights.*
[133] Records show difficulties in setting up account and post box for the new association in December 1979, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.

clumsiness, our naivety, our flaws … what remains? A very simple disagreement, and a scandal that we are going to deliver to the world without commentary: on the morning of the 6 February 1980, when 500,000 Cambodians were dying of hunger a stone's throw away from here, politics prevented us from giving them rice.'[134] This was the story MSF wanted to be told. However, for the most part, the French media chose instead to widen the lens and examine the strategic search for publicity that lay behind the carefully staged picture.

Some journalists focused on the march's theatricality. Even the broadly supportive *Le Monde*, for example, felt compelled to address criticisms of MSF's activities as a 'show' and a 'publicity farce'.[135] Several publications employed cinematic metaphors to denounce the 'spectacle'. [136] *Le Nouvel Observateur* scathingly derided the lack of practical utility in the 'symbolic face to face' confrontation at the border, of which 'nothing could have happened and nothing did happen'. As the marchers made their stand, the heavily armed Thai soldiers nearby continued to calmly drink their cans of beer, and when the aid trucks were eventually handed over to the Thai Red Cross, the author remarked that this was a dignified end for an initiative that had veered into 'the odious and the grotesque' in previous days.[137] In *L'Express*, it was reported that some MSF members voiced concerns about the 'political distortion of their movement', and the indecency of its interest in 'show business'. A visit to Sakeo camp the day after the march was described as 'verging on madness', with celebrity participants Liv Ullman and Joan Baez seemingly unsure whether they were 'at an Oscars ceremony or on a journey into hell'. [138] Only *Ouest France* conceded that when it reached the border, 'Médecins Sans Frontières had succeeded in returning the march to its true path, outside of show-business and endless political debate'.[139] As such, the very same

[134] 'En dépit de leurs appels- Les Marcheurs du Cambodge ont dû faire demi-tour', *Le Républicain Lorrain*, 7 February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[135] R-P Paringaux, '« La marche pour la survie du Cambodge » Pour que nul ne dise « je ne savais pas »', Le Monde, 8 fevrier 1980, , 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[136] 'La « Marche pour la survie » du Cambodge : le pont-frontière d'Aranyaprathet est resté interdit à l'espoir', *Le Progrès*, 7 February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[137] René Backmann, 'Cambodge: la Marche pour la Survie', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 11 February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[138] 'Un pont trop loin. La marche du Tout-Paris dans la rizière ne sauvera pas le people khmer, mais nul ne pourra dire « Je ne savais pas »', *L'Express*, 15 February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[139] 'Cambodge: La « marche pour la survie » a bute sur une frontière muette', *Ouest France*, 7 February 1980 and 'Cambodge: Entrée Interdite, La 'marche pour la survie' est demeurée symbolique', *La Voix du Nord*, 7 February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.

arguments that had been launched against Kouchner's *Bateau Pour le Vietnam* by MSF leaders were soon after hurled at them by a hostile French press. MSF members had misjudged the media environment and overestimated their abilities to act as embedded journalists and dictate a narrative to the rest of the media.

Oxfam's close collaboration with Pilger was influential in setting the tone for wider coverage of Cambodia in the British press. Low levels of public familiarity with events in Southeast Asia meant that it was easier for a simplified, unitary narrative of the crisis to dominate and shape popular perceptions.[140] Put simply, Pilger's exaggerated characterisation of Oxfam as a lead actor became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Unlike MSF, Oxfam also enjoyed considerable amounts of good luck. The airing of Pilger's documentary on ATV had been delayed by two months due to an industry strike, and by chance ended up going out on 31 October, the night before the start of the appeal on *Blue Peter*. In addition, both networks broke their own rules by giving special publicity to one organisation in these broadcasts.[141] As a result, and without any planned coordination, a broad section of the British public was reached over two consecutive days with independent publicity for Oxfam. The outcome was beyond anything the NGO could have imagined, and was only brought to a close by its request on 8 December 1979 when the exhaustion of Oxfam 'shop ladies' demonstrated that the response had exceeded what the organisation could absorb.[142] In 1979 alone, over £3.5 million was raised for Cambodia – a sum that was over twenty percent of Oxfam's total annual income in that period.[143]

These mixed fortunes aside, the media coverage of the Cambodian crisis proved vitally important for Oxfam and MSF's long-term visibility. Both organisations traded on the idea that they were representative of the morality of individuals standing up against state power. The majority of press coverage in Britain and France implicitly accepted this

[140] Oral history interview with Marcus Thompson, conducted on 27 June 2019, and oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020. Both Oxfam employees, subsequently heavily involved in Cambodia programme, claim they had relatively little knowledge of the country before 1979, which indicates a poor understanding of the country's politics in the general population too.
[141] 'How Oxfam Became Involved' section in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[142] 'How Oxfam Became Involved' section and December 8th entry: 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[143] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* p. 229; Shawcross, *The Qualilty of Mercy,* p. 165.

characterisation. In November 1979, for example, *The Times* built a story around Guy Stringer's portrayals of 'little Oxfam' fighting against the odds to gain access to Cambodia and to those in need. Oxfam, the article concluded, had 'got into the big league'.[144] In France, the left-wing *Libération* broke with this tendency to argue that MSF was more implicated in the dynamics of realpolitik and state power that was creating so much instability in Cambodia than it cared to admit. Internal tensions had existed in MSF about the origins of the march in talks with the right-wing political party UDF, along with the involvement of the American NGO IRC, who some claimed was a front for the CIA.[145] *Libération* echoed these suppositions, alleging that 'MSF may not be so small with regards to the interests at play'.[146] In a perfect example of how a minority of media outlets turned MSF's communications strategy on its head, some articles prominently featured the photograph of Joan Baez holding a Cambodian child in Sakeo camp, yet went on to quote the Phnom Penh news agency SPK, which criticised her as having comforted and sung for 'the Khmer Rouge murderers of millions of Cambodians'. The actress Liv Ullman's donation of blood in the camp was also said to 'run through the veins of executioners'.[147] These searching critiques spoke of the chequered reception MSF received for the *Marche Pour la Survie* in the French press. Despite this, the Cambodian campaign has since been recognised as a key step on MSF's journey towards developing, through trial and error, a highly successful international advocacy strategy.[148]

This leads us to a final question: what impact did these heavily mediated narratives have on Western understandings of suffering in the Global South? Foucault's theory of governmentality as the exercise of power through society, within which individuals exert

[144] Dan van der Vat, 'How Oxfam got into the big league', *The Times,* 17 November 1979.
[145] Vallaeys, Médecins Sans Frontières, pp.354-355.
[146] Remi Favret, 'MSF persiste et signe- Les « marcheurs » veulent poursuivre leur action au Cambodge malgre les attaques', Remi Favret, *Libération*, 12 February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[147] 'Cambodge: frontière fermée pour "les marcheurs", 7 February 1980 (name of publication unclear), 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive; See printing of photograph in *Le Nouvel Observateur, L'Express, Le Provençal* and two articles in unnamed publications in 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.
[148] See Gorin, 'Advocacy Strategies of Western Humanitarian NGOs' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 201-222.

discipline over themselves to maintain the status quo, is relevant here.[149] Oxfam and MSF became important mediators of distant suffering and cultivated trust in different ways by appealing to the most effective constituencies of youth volunteers and activist intellectuals. However, in doing so they not only increased trust in themselves as representatives of 'normal' expertise in a rapidly evolving political landscape, they also acted as agents of governmentality in reproducing and reconstituting the roles of volunteer, intellectual and (humanitarian) activist as accepted forms of engagement with the Third World.[150] Oxfam collaborated with the BBC through Blue Peter in creating the next generation of international volunteers who channelled their concerns at global suffering into charity. MSF revitalised the figure of the public intellectual and activist by helping to change its meaning and investing it with governmental capacity. Even though the response to the *Marche Pour la Survie* was largely critical, MSF's political advocacy strategy was undeniably successful in the long-run.[151] It became one of the most influential NGOs in the world and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 for its rights-based humanitarian activism. Thus, we can appreciate the broader significance of its use of the iconography of political protest in 1980. Some see the evolution of political protest in France in the second half of the twentieth century as a story of domestication, wherein the act of protest gradually took on the role of ritual socialisation – valued symbolically, yet less connected to the possibility of radical change.[152] Transplanting this to the global arena, MSF can be seen as a crucial part of this process, eventually consolidating the transition from guerrilla activist to humanitarian worker as the primary role occupied by French progressives seeking to express compassion in the Global South.[153] MSF also helped to consolidate a new role for public intellectuals, who had been the principled opposition of the status quo, yet with the arrival of the *'nouveaux philosophes'* now became its important supporters.[154] In effect, MSF's use of the action repertoire of political protest performed the values of liberal French republicanism abroad,

[149] See Michel Foucault and Michel Senellart, *The Birth of Biopolitics : Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79* (Basingstoke; New York, 2008); Mann, *From Empires to NGOs*; Sending, and Neumann, 'Governance to Governmentality'.
[150] Matthew Hilton makes this point when he concludes NGOs have 'participated in the construction of the subject for whom and for which they speak'. See Hilton, 'Politics Is Ordinary', pp. 256-257.
[151] See Gorin, 'Advocacy Strategies of Western Humanitarian NGOs' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 201-222.
[152] Philip Cerny, 'Introduction: The Politics of Protest in Contemporary French Society' in Cerny (ed.), *Social Movements and Protest in France* (London, 1982), pp. vii-xxiv.
[153] Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders.*
[154] Jennings, 'Introduction' in Jennings (ed.), *Intellectuals in Twentieth Century France*, pp. 1-2.

anticipating Socialist President François Mitterrand's discourse in the 1980s, which consolidated Republican values as inviolable, and neutered his previous attachment to socialist goals that sought to move beyond the Republic to a social state.[155]

To bring the threads back together, it is worth returning to Chouliaraki's thoughts on mediated portrayals of suffering. In 2006, Chouliaraki claimed that a 'thoroughly mediated' experience of reality was 'out of pace' with desires for solidarity. However, in 2013, she despaired at the disillusionment that resulted from constant bombardment by news agencies with disaster stories and claimed that there was a need for an ethical 'theatricality of humanitarian communication'.[156] Is there such a thing as an ethical mediation of suffering, and what would this look like? There is cause for reflection on this question to be found in the reporting on MSF's march. *Le Républicain Lorrain* was the only newspaper in MSF's record of the press response to reference the few Cambodian participants; it described how an oddly celebratory mood among Westerners after the march contrasted with the mood of mourning among Cambodians. Among them were Madame Kas, who had left Cambodia for an internship in France in 1974 and had not seen her husband or two children since. Madame Kas read the march's declaration at the border in Khmer and described afterwards how her legs had trembled, such had been the extent of emotion she felt at being so close to her homeland and having to turn back. Similarly, Dr Tran, President of the Association of Cambodian Doctors in France, 'looked at the ground without seeing anybody' and described the nightmares he had been having, along with the 'people, smells, houses and food' of Cambodia he had recalled viscerally for days.[157] For these Cambodian participants, the march was not a symbolic act but instead a visceral, emotionally charged reliving of recent personal tragedies. The sensory quality of the Cambodians' accounts directly contrasted with the theatricality of the march, illustrating the key difference between *témoignage*, enacted as speaking for others, and actually giving voice to those affected. Therefore, in analysing humanitarian mediations of distress, we should think

[155] John Gaffney, 'From the République Sociale to the République Française' in Gino Raymond (ed.), *France During the Socialist Years* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 3-30.
[156] Lilie Chouliaraki, quoted in Paulmann, 'Humanitarianism and Media: Introduction to an Entangled History' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp. 5-7.
[157] 'En dépit de leurs appels- Les Marcheurs du Cambodge ont dû faire demi-tour', *Le républicain Lorrain*, 7 February 1980, 'Cambodge 1980 Marche Pour la Survie & Vietnam 1975', MSF Archive.

critically about who exactly mediates the narratives we consume. The Cambodian articulation of Cambodian suffering was erased from the overwhelming majority of French reporting on the march, and was of little importance in Oxfam's media interventions. Both Oxfam and MSF certainly perceived themselves as ethical mediators in forcing an 'ecstatic news' narrative on Cambodia and thus combating apathy. However, as we have seen, both NGOs also created distinct narratives that left out as much as they kept in, and resulted in less understanding of the Cambodian crisis overall. They succeeded in creating emotions of pity but no true sense of solidarity was evident.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that NGOs were not victims of an external media governance or process of 'mediatisation' between 1979 and 1980. Instead, both Oxfam and MSF emerge as important media actors who helped to produce narratives of Cambodian suffering for Western audiences. These narratives clearly functioned to support the NGOs' specific humanitarian programmes in the region, and each used distinct advocacy strategies and campaign imagery to build coherent professional identities for their organisations. However, they were not uniformly successful in eliciting positive receptions for their campaigns. If we understand the humanitarian mediation of global suffering as a transnational phenomenon, this chapter has shown the importance of national context in determining the specific narratives crafted by humanitarian NGOs. Oxfam and MSF's campaigns both accorded with existing frames of understanding and Holocaust memory cultures in Britain and France. These mediated narratives were processed by British and French audiences within existing social and emotional patterns produced by national political cultures. Shifting perspective to the global context, it is possible to see both Oxfam and MSF as distinct national variants of a broader North-South dynamic of humanitarian governance by which NGOs assist each other in presenting Eurocentric or 'orientalised' representations of suffering in the rest of the world to societies in the west.[158]

[158] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

The comparison of Oxfam and MSF's Cambodia campaigns also poses some questions worth further reflection which are outside the scope of this chapter. Specifically, it is worth thinking more about the significance of how and why distinct types of images were used by NGOs in a long-term history of humanitarian imagery. In the 1970s, critical debate was growing in the humanitarian sector about the historic use of shock images that dehumanised non-European peoples. Oxfam may have been on the verge of rejecting such images as a result, but the success (in fundraising terms) of television as a narrative format perpetuated their use.[159] Recent developments suggest that MSF is now finally having to engage with these debates. In the context of the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement and calls for a decolonisation of the humanitarian sector, the organisation's carefully constructed activist image is now coming under intense scrutiny. MSF International President Dr. Christos Christou was forced to issue a public apology in 2022 after facing criticism for the ongoing use of extremely dehumanising images of black bodies. [160] In light of this, historians should look more closely at the specific evolutions of shock imagery use, and why some NGOs are still being called out for the same kinds of racist depictions that were being employed in the nineteenth century. The findings of this chapter suggest that MSF's activist rescuer identity may have led to comforting self-conceptions that discouraged successive MSF leaders from engaging in self-scrutiny on this issue

[159] Jones, '*The Unknown Famine*' in Lawrence and Tavernor (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture*, pp. 122-143.
[160] David Batty, 'Médecins Sans Frontières apologises for using images of child rape survivor', 26 May 2022, *The Guardian.*

Chapter 2

Sovereignty Deficits and the Practical Exercise of Power: Oxfam and MSF's encounters with local agency in Phnom Penh and at the Thai-Cambodian border, 1980-1988

The treatment of tuberculosis (TB) in the refugee camps at the Thai-Cambodian border was an immensely difficult process. The disease was highly infectious, and an extremely high rate of compliance with treatment programmes was needed for them to be effective. These treatments were relentless: a punishing schedule of daily clinic visits and a course of medications with harsh side effects over a period of several months. It was no surprise that patients found the programmes difficult to follow. In 1983, MSF reduced treatment times from twelve to six months,[1] but in May 1984, the patient compliance rate dropped to 92 percent in Dong Ruk. [2] As a result, MSF decided that it was unlikely it would restart the programme. [3] It tried nonetheless to make the best of the difficult situation in which it operated. 'Non-compliance' was combatted with education sessions during clinic visits, the creation of refugee TB committees, and the signing of cooperation agreements by all patients.[4] However, the camps aided by the UN Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) were situated in an active war-zone under periodic attack from Vietnamese forces, which made the mobile refugee population fundamentally difficult to monitor.[5] By October 1984, MSF successfully raised the treatment compliance rate in Dong Ruk to 99.66 percent. [6] Nevertheless, the prevalence of TB continued to be higher in UNBRO border camps than in

[1] Dong Ruk Monthly Report February 1984, 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.
[2] 'Dong Ruk Monthly Report May 1984', 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.
[3] Ibid.
[4] 'Agreement between the Vietnamese Administration and the Committee for Tuberculosis Control', Dong Ruk March 1984, and Dong Ruk monthly reports February to May 1984, 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.
[5] Between 1975 and the forced repatriation of Cambodians in 1992 and 1993, a total of 72 temporary border camps were established. See Bertrand Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place: Negotiating Protection and Humanitarian Aid after the Genocide in Cambodia, 1979- 1991' in Michael N. Barnett (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Human Rights: A World of Differences?* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 219-235, see p. 221 in particular.
[6] 'Dong Ruk Monthly Report, October 1984', 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.

the few closed UNHCR 'holding centres' situated within Thailand.[7] Here lay bare the complex power dynamics that conditioned the aid effort in the region. Not for want of trying, MSF's attempts to extend its authority in the delivery of relief in the border camps were consistently thwarted by the security situation.

While MSF remained frustrated by the politics of delivering aid on the border, a very different kind of interaction took place between Oxfam's Country Director Jill Arace and Cambodian political authorities in Phnom Penh. Between 1985 and 1986, Arace expended considerable effort trying to convince the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) Foreign Minister Kim An to make a diplomatic visit to the UK. Oxfam intended to facilitate this and had planned discussions with British government representatives and the public as part of the trip.[8] After much back and forth, however, the proposal fell through.[9] Kim An's enthusiasm for the visit apparently didn't match that of Oxfam's representative. This interaction was revealing of the political context in which Oxfam operated in Phnom Penh. Lacking a similarly operational role to that held by MSF in the border camps, Oxfam's activities in Phnom Penh were often confined to negotiations with government representatives over the authorisation of aid projects and other proposals like this.[10] These exchanges demonstrated the unequal nature of Oxfam's relationship with the Cambodian authorities. Despite Oxfam's courting of the government, the Cambodian officials it dealt with rarely gave the NGO the privileged access and prestige it desired.

Relationships of power were at once highly consequential and highly complex in the aid programmes of Oxfam in Phnom Penh and MSF at the Thai-Cambodian border. As the above examples show, Cambodians became subjects of a partial humanitarian governance at the border, yet nothing of the kind was possible in Phnom Penh, where it would be more

[7] 'MSF Tuberculous programme Khao I Dang 1 April 1984- 31 December 1984', Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.
[8] 'Notes from meeting of Indo China working group of 24 September' 1986, and 3 June 1986 letter from Jill Arace to Kong Korm, First Vice Minister of Foreign Aiffairs (PRK), inviting PRK representatives to Oxford, PRG/2/3/2/8, Oxfam Archive.
[9] 1 July 1986 letter from Baronness Young, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Frank Judd, Director at Oxfam, 'Meeting with Mr. Ouch Kim An, Director, Department of Relations with International Organisations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 October 1986', PRG/2/3/2/8, Oxfam Archive.
[10] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.

accurate to describe Oxfam as an object of the regime's governance of the country.[11] Local political agency was strong in both locations, neither of which permitted international organisations to retain full control over the aid inputs they brought into the region. Indeed, the diversion of relief materials into war economies was a feature of both settings, which resulted in aid being channelled into opposing sides in a civil war.[12] This occasioned soul-searching about the purpose and effects of humanitarian interventions. MSF highlighted the human rights abuses committed by the Vietnamese puppet-regime in Phnom Penh, while Oxfam emphasised the presence of Khmer Rouge leaders in positions of authority in the border camps. However, neither NGO seriously contemplated pulling out or altering the parameters of their own aid programmes.[13] Why was this the case? Beyond the funding opportunities and professional visibility that Cambodian relief offered, were there some deeper tendencies within Oxfam and MSF's organisational histories that made them more likely to be comfortable with specific kinds of governmental power?[14] How did NGO-state relations in Britain and France shape how these organisations conceived of the ethics and practicalities of establishing partnerships with states and international organisations?[15] How

[11] On the relations between NGOs and states within theories of modern government, see Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann, 'Governance to Governmentality: Analyzing NGOs, States, and Power' in *International Studies Quarterly*, 50:3 (2006), pp. 651-672; On NGOs and humanitarian governance, see Rodogno, 'Non-state actors' humanitarian operations' in Klose, (ed.), *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention;* On medicalisation, see Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley, 2011) and 'The Gendered Human of Humanitarianism: Medicalising and Politicising Sexual Violence', *Gender & History*, 23:2 (2011), pp. 250-265. On development, see Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, 2011).

[12] For contemporary accounts of aid diversion, see William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience* (London, 1984), and Linda Mason and Roger Brown, *Rice, Rivalry and Politics: Managing Cambodian Relief* (Notre Dame, 1983). For more recent analyses of the role of aid in Cambodian war economies, see Fiona Terry, 'The Cambodian Refugee Camps in Thailand' in *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca; London: 2002), pp.114-155, and Courtland Robinson, 'Refugee Warriors at the Thai-Cambodian border', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 19:1 (2000), pp. 23- 37.

[13] Oxfam's publications that criticised the aid operation at the Thai-Cambodian border included David Bull, *The Poverty of Diplomacy: Kampuchea and the Outside World* (Oxford, 1983), Tony Jackson, *Just Waiting to Die: Cambodian refugees in Thailand* (Oxford, 1987), and Eva Mysliwiec, *Punishing the Poor: the international isolation of Kampuchea* (Oxford, 1988). On MSF's criticism of the Phnom Penh-based aid programme, see Esmeralda Luciolli, *Le Mur de bambou: le Cambodge après Pol Pot* (Paris, 1988).

[14] On the use of media campaigns to exploit the opportunities for funding and public visibility in the Cambodian crisis, see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[15] On the history of NGO-state relations in France, see Edith Archambault, 'The Evolution of Public Service Provision by the Third Sector in France', *The Political Quarterly,* 88:3 (2017), pp. 465-72, 'France: A Late-Comer to Government-Nonprofit Partnership', *IDEAS Working Paper Series from RePEc*, 26:6 (2015), pp. 2283-310, and 'Historical Roots of the Nonprofit Sector in France', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30:2 (2001), pp. 204-20; See also Gordon Cummings, 'French NGOs and the State: Paving the Way for a New Partnership?', *French Politics*, 7:2 (2009), pp. 145-66, and Cummings, 'French NGOs in the Global Era: Professionalization "Without Borders"?', *Voluntas*, 19:4 (2008), pp. 372-94; On the history of NGO-state relations in Britain, see Matthew Hilton, 'Politics Is Ordinary: Non-governmental Organizations and Political Participation in

did these considerations dovetail with economic factors?[16] In a broader sense, what was the impact of Oxfam and MSF's aid programmes on the exercise of political power, both in the regions where they worked and at the international level? [17]

These questions guide the analysis of this chapter, which examines the functionality of Oxfam and MSF's aid programmes in the protracted Cambodian crisis from 1979 to 1988. As described in Chapter 1, MSF's attitude was highly critical of Vietnamese intervention. Oxfam, on the other hand, became one of the few NGOs to base itself in Phnom Penh and agree to work with the new (PRK) Cambodian authorities there. Because the toppling of the Khmer Rouge regime by the Vietnamese Army was regarded by many states as an illegal (and ongoing) violation of Cambodian territorial sovereignty, the PRK was not recognised by the UN, meaning it had no entitlement to UN development aid and was diplomatically isolated from the Western world. Pushed back to the Thai-Cambodian border, the ousted Khmer Rouge forces – later amalgamated into the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (DK) with non-communist Khmer Serei and Sihanoukist parties in 1982 – was instead bestowed de jure sovereignty as the UN-recognised government of Cambodia. The DK's possession of virtually no Cambodian territory and its confinement of its civilian population to refugee camps was not deemed to disqualify it from its status as the rightful 'government' of Cambodia.[18]

Sovereignty, and its contestation, thus became a defining feature of the humanitarian interventions of Oxfam and MSF. The politically contentious nature of the Cambodian crisis

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Contemporary Britain', *20th Century British History*, 22:2 (2011), pp. 230-68, 'Charity and the End of Empire: British Non-Governmental Organizations, Africa, and International Development in the 1960s', *The American Historical Review*, 123:2 (2018), pp. 493-517, and 'Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film: Humanitarianism, Imperialism, and the Changing Role of Charity in Postwar Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 87:2 (2015), pp. 357-94.

[16] See Heike Wieters, 'Reinventing the firm: from post-war relief to international humanitarian agency', *European Review of History*, 23:1-2 (2016), pp. 116-135.

[17] This aspect of the analysis will draw on James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development", Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge, 1990 & Minneapolis, 1994), Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge, 2007), and Sending and Neumann, 'Governance to Governmentality'.

[18] The Royalist (Sihanoukist) party was FUNCINPEC and the anti-communist Khmer Serei party was the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF). Both of these parties were overshadowed by the Khmer Rouge politically and militarily. See Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?,* p. 117, Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place' in Barnett (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Human Rights*, p. 221, and Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford, 2001), p. 221.

led large international organisations like the ICRC, UNICEF and UNHCR to retreat from their usually dominant positions in the provision of relief and protection of refugees. This resulted in an opening for NGOs to assume more prominent roles and develop both their professional capacities and international reputations. At the border, a distinction emerged between UNBRO camps, largely run by DK political authorities and NGOs, and the UNHCR-controlled refugee camps or 'holding centres' within Thailand.[19] In Phnom Penh, the ICRC and UNICEF struggled to come to an agreement with PRK authorities about the terms of an international aid programme due to the regime's demand that no relief should be channelled to the border. Both Oxfam and MSF exploited these opportunities to their advantage. MSF stepped in as lead health care provider in several border camps where the ICRC stepped back; Oxfam undercut the ICRC-UNICEF Joint Programme negotiations with the PRK. Once in place, both NGOs experienced a sharp learning curve in adjusting to their enhanced roles, managing large amounts of institutional funding (MSF) and running development-style projects through a Consortium of thirty-one European NGOs (Oxfam).[20] Despite ethical contradictions they faced in those roles, Oxfam and MSF framed their interventions in highly moralistic terms. They saw clear roles for themselves as independent non-governmental actors that had the freedom to act according to the needs of people rather than states in a context beset by Cold War confrontation. For Oxfam's members, this meant using aid as a moral corrector to the excesses of Western realpolitik; for MSF, this informed the belief that humanitarianism could be a tool in the fight against communist authoritarianism.[21] These roles, once conceived, encouraged a reluctance to deviate from preferred narratives, lest ammunition be given to the other side.[22]

As this chapter shows, we can understand more about how NGOs behave in such complex circumstances by adopting a comparative analysis of Oxfam and MSF's programmes. Both organisations attempted to operate as rational market and national political actors, with

[19] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place' in Barnett (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Human Rights,* p. 221., and Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics,* pp.209-213.
[20] For details on Oxfam's founding of an NGO Consortium, see Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 225-228 and 234-235.
[21] Brian Walker, 'NGOs break the Cold War impasse in Cambodia' in Larry Minear and Hazel Smith (eds.), *Humanitarian diplomacy : Practitioners and Their Craft* (Tokyo; New York, 2007), pp.133-153; Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.
[22] Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?,* pp.147-152.

their own methods of interacting with political power in the Global South. Because of the relationship between NGOs and the state in the domestic sectors from which they emerged, however, Oxfam and MSF developed different ethical blind spots (or preferences) in dealing with political power. In developing these claims, the chapter is divided into four sections. The first section explores the history of NGO-state relations in Britain and France. From that starting point, the second section examines the nature of the 'sovereignty deficits' that existed both at the border and in Phnom Penh.[23] It argues that Oxfam and MSF exploited these shortfalls in an entrepreneurial manner to ensure they gained footholds and retained positions in the relief operations. The third section delves deeper into the functionality of power in the different settings for aid delivery by scrutinising how Oxfam and MSF's aid depoliticised the strengthening of political control over populations. Specifically, it examines how confrontations over aid diversion forced staff to come to terms with the unintended consequences of humanitarian aid. For Oxfam, this moment of reckoning came in May 1980 with the publication of a report by Dr. Nick Maurice on the nutrition situation in Cambodia; for MSF it resulted from a Cambodian medic strike that followed an attempt to rationalise its pharmaceutical system in Dong Ruk in 1984. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the relevance of these findings for our understanding of the role of NGOs in 'global governance' – what was the relationship between the organisations' advocacy programmes throughout the decade and the foreign policies of Western states during the Cold War?[24] How did the NGOs participate in peacebuilding alongside the United Nations after Vietnamese troops withdrew from Cambodia in 1989? This chapter explores the complex story of how Oxfam and MSF engaged with political power at various levels throughout the 1980s.

NGO-state relations and the governance of the post-colonial world

What led Oxfam and MSF to adopt such opposing attitudes towards humanitarian intervention in Southeast Asia? As described in Chapter 1, Oxfam's Jim Howard returned from his first visit to Phnom Penh in August 1979 so shocked by the suffering he had

[23] Rodogno, 'Non-state actors' humanitarian operations', in Klose (ed.), *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention*, pp. 185-207.
[24] Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War,* and Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (eds.); *Contemporary states of emergency: the politics of military and humanitarian interventions* (New York, 2010).

witnessed that he believed Oxfam should do everything in its power to gain access by cultivating a positive relationship with the new administration.[25] When unprecedented levels of donations to the organisation's Cambodia appeal later led to a sharp spike in Oxfam's income, the retention of access was valued all the more.[26] In France, by contrast, the PRK authorities' desire to tightly control all external aid coming into Cambodia led MSF's Jean-Luc Lubrano to conclude that there was no scope for the organisation to operate independently in the country.[27] MSF instead turned to the rapidly growing refugee crisis at the Thai-Cambodian border, where it availed of financial support from UNHCR, the UN Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) and the European Economic Community (EEC) to grow its operational presence. MSF, in other words, was considerably more comfortable establishing close partnerships with international organisations and intergovernmental funding bodies than it was in accepting direction from the regime in Phnom Penh.[28] Ideology, of course, played a central part in the anti-communist MSF leaders' unease in dealing with the PRK, yet this alone does not account for the contrast between the instinctive distrust MSF officials felt for state partnership and the equally reflexive confidence expressed within Oxfam about its ability to do good as part of the same kind of arrangement.[29] Instead, these ways of thinking were driven by much deeper tendencies borne of the histories of NGO-state relations and colonial policies in Britain and France.

Unique conceptions of the role of civil society and the state crystallised in each nation over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In France, complex attitudes to freedom of association in the post-revolutionary era meant that there was little scope for partnership between the state and civil society in the provision of social services –

[25] Oral history interview with Marcus Thompson, conducted 27 June 2019; 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[26] Dan van der Vat, 'How Oxfam Got Into the Big League', 17 November 1979, *The Times*; See also Black, *A Cause For Our Times*, pp. 229-235 for details on the scale of the Cambodia campaign and jump in income that it represented for Oxfam.
[27] Anne Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières: la biographie* (Paris, 1992), p.318.
[28] Accounting reports and correspondence with EEC in Brussels, 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive.
[29] On MSF and anti-communism, see Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières,* pp. 307- 360, and Eleanor Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1965-1988* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 215-248.

circumstances that continued until the 1980s.[30] In Britain, by contrast, a strong cultural value was placed on private philanthropy as the most appropriate means of responding to societal ills.[31] This British sensibility reached its apex in the Victorian era in charitable expressions of compassion for the urban poverty caused by industrialisation.[32] At the same time, French ideas of the 'social contract' were dominated by the views of Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued that the state should provide for citizens' needs directly without sectional 'intermediaries' intruding on the public interest.[33] This ideology influenced the Jacobin faction in the French Revolution, and while counter-revolutionary trends ensured that monarchies and imperial governments dominated French politics until the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870, each of these regimes helped to cultivate a strong centralised state that exerted restrictions on civil society. Indeed, it was only in 1901 that freedom of association was legalised for the first time. A political loyalty to Rousseau-inspired 'solidarism', however, remained evident in the high bar set for associations that could claim to have 'public utility' status and benefit from tax exemptions under these changed legal conditions.[34] Conversely, the established legal status of charities in Britain since 1601 meant that charitable organisations were often regarded as natural providers of social services that a more liberal and consistently democratic state was happy to outsource.[35] Because charities were entitled to tax exemption on this basis, however, their ability to engage in political speech was heavily curtailed, especially after the power of the Charity Commissioners was widened in the 1960s.[36] The 1901 Law on Associations in France set no equivalent restrictions on political rhetoric, although it produced an NGO sector in which the ability of charities to attain a professionalised partnership with the state in the provision of social services was much harder than in the UK.[37] As such, the opposing

[30] See Archambault, 'The Evolution of Public Service Provision', *The Political Quarterly*, 'France: A Late-Comer to Government-Nonprofit Partnership', *IDEAS Working Paper Series from RePEc*, and 'Historical Roots of the Nonprofit Sector in France', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*.
[31] See Matthew Hilton and James McKay, *The Ages of Voluntarism: How We Got to the Big Society* (Oxford; New York, 2011).
[32] Hilton and McKay, *The Ages of Voluntarism*; Hilton, *A Historical Guide to NGOs in Britain: Charities, Civil Society and the Voluntary Sector since 1945* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, 2012), pp. 14-15.
[33] Cumming, 'French NGOs and the State', pp. 148-149. Cumming, 'French NGOs in the Global Era', p. 378; Archambault, 'Historical Roots', pp. 204-208.
[34] Archambault, 'Historical Roots', pp. 207-208. Cumming, 'French NGOs and the State', pp. 148-149.
[35] Hilton, 'Ken Loach', pp. 381-382; Hilton, *A Historical Guide to NGOs,* pp. 1-2.
[36] Hilton, 'Ken Loach', pp. 381-382; Hilton, *A Historical Guide to NGOs*, pp. 1-2; Hilton, 'Politics is Ordinary', p. 256.
[37] Archambault, 'The Evolution of Public Service Provision', p. 468. Cumming, 'French NGOs in the Global Era'.

development of modern non-governmental sectors fostered the emergence of different kinds of NGOs in Britain and France.

These contrasts were carried through to the functionality of colonial governance. The French state showed no enthusiasm for trusting NGOs to carry out colonial development policy,[38] yet in Britain financial constraints and public pressure for more domestic spending from the inter-war period onwards encouraged the government to allow NGOs to fill gaps in the state's overseas obligations.[39] Oxfam became deeply embedded in the governance of the late colonial state once it expanded its field of operations from post-1945 European reconstruction to charitable intervention in the Third World.[40] Its first Field Director in Southern Africa, for example, was T.F. Betts, an ex-colonial official in Nigeria, and brother of Minister for Overseas Development Barbara Castle, who heavily drew on colonial surveys in compiling an Oxfam report on development in the region in 1962.[41] Thus, when NGOs took on an elevated status in UN development aid projects in the 1960s, colonial knowledge remained influential and Oxfam was highly optimistic about establishing partnerships with newly independent states. Oxfam's faith in its alliances with post-colonial regimes led it to believe – most prominently in Tanzania – that its vision of community development was inseparable from that of the local authorities.[42] In contrast, the failure of the state to act as a 'critical resource' in support of French international development NGOs meant these organisations were slower to expand and develop professionalised bureaucracies, or to partner with the French government abroad.[43] As a large *urgencier* (emergency relief NGO), which rapidly professionalised in the 1980s, MSF was in many ways an exception to these trends. [44] Even so, it possessed a strong distrust of state funding, and when it did professionalise, the impetus for this process came not from the French state but from international and intergovernmental funding agencies.[45] The field bureaucracy it

[38] Cumming, 'French NGOs in the Global Era', pp. 377-379.
[39] See Hilton, 'Charity and the End of Empire', pp. 498-500.
[40] Ibid, pp. 495- 496.
[41] Ibid, pp. 506- 507.
[42] Michael Jennings, ''Almost an Oxfam in Itself': Oxfam, Ujamaa and Development in Tanzania', *African Affairs*, 101:405 (2002), pp. 509-30; Michael Jennings, *Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development, and Ujamaa in Tanzania* (Bloomfield, Conn., 2007).
[43] Cumming, 'French NGOs in the Global Era', and 'French NGOs and the State'.
[44] Cumming, 'French NGOs and the State', pp. 147-148.
[45] Ibid, pp. 147-148.

constructed in Thailand, for example, included non-medical competencies such as accountancy and logistical management that were in direct response to the conditions imposed by UNBRO, UNHCR and EEC grants.[46]

On the surface then, there were strong differences between the political, personal and bureaucratic frameworks in which Oxfam and MSF operated. Beneath that façade, however, was a more complicated story of NGO-state relations. MSF's trust in establishing partnerships with international organisations as opposed to the French government masked the fact that these agencies were in reality only one step away from the interests of states. The end of the French empire brought about a shift in the location of power within a more diffuse international governmental bureaucracy, but the essence of relationships between Northern and Southern political actors was largely left intact.[47] Colonial continuities, in other words, were evident in MSF's activities just as they were for so many other Western NGOs in the twentieth century. MSF's closeness to UN agencies, made explicit when ex-MSF member Bernard Gauzere was appointed UNBRO's medical coordinator in 1983,[48] also spoke of an implicit faith in international organisations as a higher, more objective form of political authority in the global arena. This position brought with it the not inconsiderable baggage of Cold War geopolitics. This was very much in evidence in the Cambodian refugee relief programme, which was heavily influenced by the foreign policy of the US and its allies in helping to provide a military sanctuary for the Khmer Rouge-led resistance at the border.[49]

Oxfam had also worked alongside the UN system in the past. In the 1960s, the UN Freedom from Hunger Campaign (FFHC) acted as a key accelerator of its organisational growth. However, because FFHC was initiated and overseen by the British government, initiatives like this did not threaten the strength of Oxfam's partnership with the state or its faith in the value of working with states abroad.[50] International organisations were not a critical

[46] Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières,* pp. 307-360.
[47] See Véronique Dimier, *The Invention of a European Development Aid Bureaucracy: Recycling Empire* (Hampshire; New York, 2014).
[48] 'Mission Thaïlande Avril 1983', 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive.
[49] Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*, p. 114-125.
[50] Hilton, 'Charity and the End of Empire', pp. 502-503.

resource for Oxfam, and as a result, its members often felt comfortable voicing their concerns at the UN's role as an agent of US foreign policy in the 1980s.[51] In Cambodia, this manifested in Director Brian Walker's formation of a Consortium of European NGOs in October 1979 – a move that was intended to give form to the belief that NGOs had a special moral role to perform in working with states that international organisations would not. However, the Consortium's lofty ambition to take over the usual functions of the UN in providing development aid to the diplomatically isolated Cambodia was met with a rather more complicated context.[52] Again, Oxfam's naïve faith in state partnerships was in evidence – Walker had travelled to Hanoi in 1978 and hoped that the organisation could carve out a space for itself in the provision of social services in both Cambodia and Vietnam. Reflecting on his trip to Vietnam, Walker remarked that the state's development plans matched 'almost everything we are trying to bring about elsewhere in the world', echoing the sentiments expressed by his predecessors about Tanzania.[53]

Sovereignty deficits and the entrepreneurialism of NGOs

The Cambodian crisis was a catastrophic humanitarian disaster for the millions of peoples caught up in it. But it was also a moment of great opportunity for the growth of NGOs in the postcolonial era. It represented a key 'moment of acceleration' or 'conjuncture' in humanitarian history that spurred the rapid professionalisation and growth of several international NGOs that remain among the largest organisations in the sector to this day.[54] The income spike experienced by British NGOs after 1979 attests to the magnitude of the

[51] See Bull, *Poverty of Diplomacy*, Jackson, *Just Waiting to Die,* and Mysliwiec, *Punishing the Poor*; See also Oxfam's criticism of UNHCR's role in the Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras, which is explored in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.
[52] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 225-228, and 234-235.
[53] Ibid*,* pp.215-216.
[54] Johannes Paulmann identified the moment of postcolonial mobilization (1960s-1980s) and the global interventionist moment (1990s) as two conjunctures in humanitarian history in the second half of the twentieth century, but here I assert that the late Cold War conflicts of the 1980s, especially the Cambodian crisis from 1979, represented another key conjuncture. See Johannes Paulmann, 'Conjunctures in the History of International Humanitarian Aid during the Twentieth Century', *Humanity*, 4:2 (2013), pp. 215-38; On 'moments of acceleration', a theory which captures the continuity that coexisted with moments of growth, see Kevin O'Sullivan, Matthew Hilton, and Juliano Fiori, 'Humanitarianisms in Context', *European Review of History*, 23: 1-2 (2016), pp. 1-15, and O'Sullivan, *The NGO Moment: the Globalisation of Compassion from Biafra to Live Aid. Human Rights in History* (Cambridge; New York, 2021), pp. 1-15; See also Taithe, 'The Cradle of the New Humanitarian System? International Work and European Volunteers at the Cambodian Border Camps, 1979–1993', *Contemporary European History*, 25:2 (2016), pp. 335-58.

Cambodian crisis for sustaining the 'booming' growth for the NGO sector that began in the 1940s and reached its apex in the 1990s.[55] A key reason why this was the case lay in the global Cold War context and the sovereignty deficits this produced in Southeast Asia. As Davide Rodogno has noted, the reordering of the international system after the First World War provided opportunities for new NGOs to expand in former Ottoman territories where their ability to enforce their will was directly proportionate to the (in)ability of the states in which they intervened to assert their own sovereignty.[56] Decolonisation and civil wars later created similar sovereignty deficits in Southeast Asia, where superpower rivalries produced geopolitical tensions and prolonged regime instability in many countries. Because the battle between rival Cambodian regimes was a proxy for the bipolar confrontation that dominated international relations, large organisations that had global mandates and obligations to donor states wavered in their commitment to leading humanitarian relief programmes. As such, there was a deficit in the international governance of emergencies as well as a national sovereignty deficit in Cambodia. NGOs stepped into this gap.

As rational actors in the 'niche market' of international humanitarianism, NGOs continually sought to ensure survival and growth by making use of new opportunities that appeared in their external environment. This was certainly the case for how Oxfam and MSF approached the Cambodian crisis.[57] Precarity was a feature of internal discourse for both Oxfam and MSF around this time. Although Oxfam was an established player in Britain, it feared the demise that seemed to be befalling the more overtly political War on Want in the 1980s, and actively cultivated a reliable source of income in a socially and ideologically diverse donor base as a result.[58] MSF's precarity was also keenly felt by members, especially in the months following the departure of founding member Bernard Kouchner in 1978.[59] In this context, both Oxfam and MSF perceived sovereignty deficits as professional opportunities in Cambodia – they represented a chance to demonstrate the value of their organisations'

[55] Hilton, *A Historical Guide to NGOs,* p. 29; Heike Wieters, 'Reinventing the Firm: From Post-war Relief to International Humanitarian Agency', *European Review of History*, 23: 1-2 (2016), pp. 116-35. See p. 118.
[56] Rodogno, 'Non-state actors' humanitarian operations', in Klose (ed.), *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention,* pp. 190-191.
[57] Wieters, 'Reinventing the Firm', p. 118.
[58] Director General's Speech to Council- 22/21 April 1983 "The Next Ten Years in Oxfam", PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[59] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.

unique roles in a crisis which had captured Western attention. When Oxfam's Jim Howard travelled to Phnom Penh in 1979, his perception that there was a power vacuum was clear in his assertion that the ministries he met with were 'sometimes no more than two and a half people in a garage without a biro between them'. [60] His belief in the unlimited possibilities this context offered for international NGOs was also evident in his claim that 'clearly everything was needed'.[61] Indeed, the destruction of the previous years meant substantial aid was required to restart productive agriculture, rebuild urban infrastructure and revitalise Cambodia's industrial capacity. In spite of this, UN development aid was denied and the UNICEF-ICRC Joint Programme negotiators were reluctant to accept Phnom Penh's terms that they cease working at the Thai-Cambodian border to gain access.[62] Oxfam set out to grasp the opportunity this represented when its officials undercut the ICRC and UNICEF's stalemate negotiations by accepting the authorities' conditions.[63] Although Howard was puzzled that he had to work to convince the Cambodian ministers of Oxfam's usefulness, he correctly perceived that the summer of 1979 was a crucial time of relative openness before the structure of the new administration crystallised.[64] By the time Howard left Phnom Penh, he claimed 'We have made close and long lasting links, particularly with the Ministry of Health, The Ministry of Communications, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs', adding that 'They need our friendship badly, and we must give it sensitively, generously and humbly. It will be the most valuable aspect of our aid.'[65] In terms of gaining access to Cambodia, this was certainly true – it was Oxfam's willingness to be a friend to the Phnom Penh authorities, and to accept its conditions wholeheartedly, that allowed it to portray itself in Britain as a heroic lone actor in delivering aid to the country.

At the border, geopolitical tensions similarly made large international organisations reluctant to assume responsibility for aid. The Thai government was an ally of the West in the Cold War but was not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol

[60] Jim Howard, quoted in 'How Oxfam Got Involved' section in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 225-228, and 234-235.
[63] Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy,* pp. 139-152.
[64] Jim Howard, quoted in 'How Oxfam Got Involved' section in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[65] Ibid.

on Refugees and viewed Cambodians primarily as a security threat.[66] In February 1980, it ended a short-lived 'open door' policy that had, under international pressure, allowed Cambodians to enter the country since October 1979. Afterwards, the Army resumed forced repatriations, reflecting the government's wish to see Cambodians participate in the war effort as a tool of its own defence against Vietnam.[67] Apart from those who were permitted entry to Thailand on the premise that they would be swiftly resettled to the West and cared for by UNHCR in temporary holding centres, all other Cambodians that crossed into Thai territory were then reclassified as 'illegal immigrants'. Without even de facto refugee status, the majority of Cambodians who fled to the border were stuck on the Cambodian side and had no right to protection by UNHCR. Only their material assistance needs were met, first by the Joint Programme, and then by the World Food Programme and UN Border Relief Operation (WFP-UNBRO), which was formed in 1982 to deliver aid to civilian camps run by the political authorities of the DK resistance forces.[68] Initially, the ICRC had agreed to provide medical relief to the Khmer Serei and Sihanoukist border camps (the Khmer Rouge camps were closed to international personnel) but it was uncomfortable about aid diversion to military elements.[69] From May 1980, the ICRC began planning to disengage from the border camps, conscious of not upsetting the PRK authorities. [70] Like Oxfam had in Phnom Penh, MSF recognised the opportunity that this represented. Its officials expressed the desire to take over from the ICRC in Nong Chan, a camp run by two Khmer Serei factions that had been at the centre of the 'land border' relief convoy controversy. The ICRC agreed, and while the transfer process was delayed due to a Vietnamese attack on the camps on 23 June, MSF was finally put in charge of Nong Chan's Outpatient Department and public health programme on 14 November.[71] Its ascent from playing a supporting to a lead role in the border relief programme had begun.

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[66] See Robinson, 'Refugee Warriors', p. 23; Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy,* pp.306-310; and Terry, *Condemned to Repeat,* p.116-117.
[67] Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?,* p.119.
[68] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place' in Barnett (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Human Rights,* p. 221; See also Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics,* pp.209-213.
[69] Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*?, pp. 128-131.
[70] Ibid, p. 131.
[71] The ICRC continued to run the hospital, sanitation, evacuation and security services as well as the medical coordination of the camp. Undated document (information within indicates the report was written after 10 July 1981) that sets out MSF's candidature for taking over medical functions in Nong Chan refugee camp, 'Nong Chan Relevés Mensuels UNBRO' in 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive.

The ability of MSF and Oxfam to retain these positions came down to how well they could adapt their missions to constantly evolving environmental factors.[72] When the Joint Programme belatedly came to a de facto agreement with the PRK authorities in late September 1979, Oxfam's staff were forced to think in an entrepreneurial manner. [73] Marcus Thompson telexed from Phnom Penh on 21 October 1979 to 'express alarm' as the ICRC and UNICEF had just arrived on the ground with a £200 million programme, and there was now 'no scope for us to do the same'. [74] Undeterred, Oxfam quickly switched focus to a more modest agriculture and provision of trucks programme in an effort to redefine the Consortium's function and justify the organisation's ongoing public campaign in Britain. [75] As a result, Oxfam's income continued to grow, and the organisation soon began to plan for a switch from emergency to long-term development work in Cambodia.[76] MSF too had to adapt when a series of disagreements with the ICRC derailed plans for it to gradually take over all medical activities in Nong Chan from January 1981. MSF left the camp on 10 July 1981 amid tensions over its support for unofficial transfers of relief supplies and medical care to the interior of Cambodia through the 'land bridge' initiative. After this time, Nong Chan was again run entirely by the ICRC.[77] However, MSF was determined to regain a foothold in the camp, and compiled a report in mid-1981 setting out the reasons why it believed it was still best placed to take over in January 1982. [78] It emphasised that the disagreements with the ICRC had not been related to MSF's efficiency or medical competency.[79] Even so, it was clear that MSF had been forced to rethink its objectives to consolidate its position in Nong Chan – in the report, it claimed that it had learnt from past

[72] Heike Wieters demonstrates how this functioned for CARE. See Wieters, 'Reinventing the Firm', pp. 127-129 for a summary.
[73] Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy,* pp. 158-162.
[74] 'Formation of the Consortium' section and 23 October 1979 telex from Marcus Thompson to Oxford referenced in 'Kampuchea Diary of Events 1979' in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[75] 'Formation of the Consortium' section in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[76] 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[77] Sections beginning 'Nong Chan: historique' and 'La Situation Aujourd'hui' in in undated document (information within indicates report written after 10 July 1981) that sets out MSF's candidature for taking over medical functions in Nong Chan refugee camp, 'Nong Chan Relevés Mensuels UNBRO' in 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive.
[78] 'Sur le plan medical' section in undated document (information within indicates report written after 10 July 1981) that sets out MSF's candidature for taking over medical functions in Nong Chan refugee camp, 'Nong Chan Relevés Mensuels UNBRO' in 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive.
[79] Ibid.

mistakes and realised the need to both clearly define its medical objectives, and respect the will of previously uncooperative Khmer camp authorities. In the future, it would take care not to inadvertently back one political faction over another.[80] As a result of its persistence and modified attitude, MSF finally took over as lead agency in Nong Chan on 7 December 1981. Over the following years, the French NGO continued to expand the scope of its operational presence on the border, and eventually rose through the ranks in the large Khao I Dang holding centre to match the ICRC's responsibilities there.[81]

Oxfam and MSF displayed considerable entrepreneurialism in chasing and holding on to positions in aid programmes that made reliable sources of income available to them. First, they gained important footholds in Cambodian relief and distinguished themselves from the international organisations in their flexibility and self-professed ability to respond more efficiently to human needs. They then adapted to changing circumstances to ensure they retained their new positions. As such, we can appreciate how the rise of Oxfam and MSF was not inevitable. NGOs encountered extremely favourable circumstances in Cambodia, yet it was the agency of individual NGO leaders that determined which organisations took advantage of these circumstances and adapted to ensure organisational survival.

Practical power and fragile regime bureaucracies

The interventions of NGOs in Phnom Penh and at the border had particularly consequential effects in shoring up the fragile governmental bureaucracies of rival Cambodian regimes.[82] In this way, Oxfam and MSF's aid performed a function akin to what James Ferguson later described in Lesotho: an 'anti-politics machine' that failed in its goals of economic

[80] 'La situation aujourd'hui' section in undated document (information within indicates report written after 10 July 1981) that sets out MSF's candidature for taking over medical functions in Nong Chan refugee camp, 'Nong Chan Relevés Mensuels UNBRO' in 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive; Taithe describes how MSF eventually came to dominate the medical landscape in border relief. See Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', p. 224.

[81] MSF budget proposal for Nong Chan programme, 27 February 1982, 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive. MSF controlled virtually all aspects of Khao I Dang's health programme by 1984, apart from surgery, which was still run by the ICRC. See 'Medical Activities MSF Khao I Dang July August September 1984', Dr. Dalewijn, Thierry, 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.

[82] Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine;* Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*; Mason and Brown, *Rice, Rivalry and Politics*; Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*.

development but succeeded in expanding state power in new spaces.[83] The practical functionality of power differed markedly between the two settings for aid delivery in Southeast Asia. Yet in both instances, the relationships forged between international and Cambodian actors elevated NGOs to important roles in the extension of governmental power. This section demonstrates that each NGO faced a turning point when their embeddedness in ethically dubious systems of governance was starkly revealed to them. After this point, both organisations were forced to come to terms with the implications of their aid and lucidly accepted roles within an 'anti-politics machine' that helped to depoliticise the external maintenance in power of two fragile regimes.[84]

Power dynamics were far from straightforward in either location. At the border, the refugee camps created an institutional setting for aid delivery in which there was a clear demarcation of roles between humanitarian workers and humanitarian subjects. As aid recipients, Cambodian refugees lost the ability to autonomously practice customary 'Khru Khmer' forms of treatment without the presence of foreign aid workers in the camps.[85] More broadly, UNBRO's power was strong enough to draw whole villages of Thai citizens into 'Food for Work' programmes.[86] At the same time though, UNBRO's efforts to combat aid diversion by limiting food distributions to women and girls over 1.10 metres tall were offset by boys dressing in girls' clothing.[87] As this phenomenon illustrated, there were clear limits to the control UNBRO could assert over aid inputs. Hierarchies between humanitarians and aid recipients may have been highly visible at the border but in truth, the international organisations, DK forces and Thai government were each dependent on each other for the preservation of their roles there. In Phnom Penh, by way of contrast, the dynamic was flipped. The PRK regime jealously guarded its de facto control of Cambodia's

[83] Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine.*
[84] Military and bilateral state aid was important in both settings too, and humanitarian aid was not materially the most important of the external inputs that maintained fragile regimes. However, the crucial importance of NGOs was that their presence and provision of humanitarian aid served to downplay the political nature of the entire venture. See Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*
[85] 'La medicine traditionelle Khmere' in Mid-1981 MSF paper outlining its candidature to take over ICRC's role as lead health care provider in Nong Chan border camp, 'Thaïlande 1983'.
[86] WFP/ UNBRO Position Paper, annex to legal agreement on terms of UNBRO funding for MSF programme in Nong Chan in 1983, 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive.
[87] 'Administration et sécurité', 'Les camps de frontière' [undated report on camps that gives details of conditions following the dry season Vietnamese attacks in 1984-85], 'Cambodge 1980: Marche Pour la Survie (comptes) et courriers, 80-92 fiche pays', MSF Archive.

territory, and allowed Oxfam only a limited, subordinate role in the management of its aid once brought into the country. Oxfam staff members recall spending much time sitting outside minister's offices waiting for permission to implement projects, while the visits of the charming yet shadowy figure of 'Vietnamese James Bond' Mr. Nhan to the Samaki hotel provided cover for the close surveillance of Oxfam's activities.[88] In addition, Oxfam was prevented from interacting much with locals – its officials encountered difficulty in obtaining visas to leave the capital,[89] and the government placed a ban on engagement between Cambodians and foreigners in 1980.[90] However, the situation on the ground was more complex. Oxfam staff pushed the boundaries by interacting with locals after curfew time and making unannounced visits to orphanages in the city.[91] As such, the control over foreign aid workers was not absolute in Phnom Penh, mirroring the far from total external governance of Cambodians in the border camps. MSF was keenly aware of this fact; its staff were only granted permission by the Thai military to enter Khmer Serei camps between 8.30am and 5.00pm each day.[92] It also encountered difficulties in its efforts to influence Cambodians about their healthcare decisions. In 1983, for example, it ran a failed campaign to convince Cambodian women that hospital births were safer than 'home births' with trusted Khmer midwives in Khao I Dang. Despite MSF's warnings, indeed, infant mortality rates did not rise as a result of the women's autonomous healthcare choices. [93]

Power was thus not absolute, yet the effects of aid on recipient populations were real, and it was in disputes over resource control that both Oxfam and MSF were forced to confront these realities for the first time. Oxfam's position as a surrogate of the state in Cambodia, a variation on the role it had played in 1960s Tanzania,[94] was starkly revealed when

[88] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.
[89] Tightening restrictions and increasing difficulty in accessing government officials remarked upon in January and February 1980 in 'Relations with the Government of the Country of Operation' section in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', 27 April 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[90] 'Relations with the Government of the Country of Operation' section in 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', 27 April 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[91] Oral history interview with Marcus Thompson, conducted on 27 June 2019.
[92] 'Les besoins de MSF', Mid-1981 MSF paper (undated) outlining candidature to take over ICRC's role as lead health care provider in Nong Chan border camp, 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive. Details of Thai government control of security in UNHCR camps detailed in booklet 'UNHCR Assistance in Thailand', 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.
[93] Undated medical report on home and hospital births in Khao I Dang in 1983, 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.
[94] Jennings, *Surrogates of the State*.

nutritionist Dr. Nick Maurice published a report on aid distribution in May 1980. This report found evidence of rising malnutrition in rural areas, which Maurice attributed partly to the diversion of aid by the Phnom Penh authorities.[95] Allegations of orchestrated famine committed by the PRK ultimately went unproven.[96] However, the Maurice report still indicated that the distribution of Oxfam's aid was being driven by the political priorities of the PRK government rather than according to need. Rice was most likely to end up in the hands of Phnom Penh's urban civil servants, who were working to establish a stable bureaucracy for the new administration.[97] By helping to obtain material relief from the West at a time when the government could not access much bilateral aid itself, [98] Oxfam thus assisted the PRK in consolidating the political power of its regime. In addition, emergency relief was often indistinguishable from long-term development projects in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. Oxfam attempted to engage in large development-style projects such as repairing the capital's water supply and helping to restart industrial production soon after it arrived.[99] Many of these projects were poorly implemented, yet they still played a part in restoring a functioning economy for the PRK to govern. Indeed, tensions had been rising about the ineffectiveness of the Consortium's projects in 1980, and in this context Maurice's report was explosive. [100] The trustworthiness of the PRK authorities was central to Oxfam's credibility because it was channelling such large amounts of money into the country without an operational role. If even the most basic form of assistance – the distribution of food and seeds – was unreliable, as the report suggested, this called into question the very purpose of Oxfam's presence in Cambodia.

MSF too had to reckon with the unintended consequences of its aid at the Thai-Cambodian border. In 1984, its role in shoring up the control of Cambodians by DK camp authorities was highlighted in no uncertain terms in response to MSF's attempt to rationalise the

[95] Maurice's report and the controversy it caused is described in the 'Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983', 27 April 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[96] Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy,* pp. 212-213 and 362-379.
[97] Rice was a form of currency in the first few months of PRK rule, and was used to provide for urban civil servants. See Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy,* p. 209 and p. 258.
[98] The PRK obtained aid from Soviet bloc countries but never in sufficient quantities to support much upward economic development in the 1980s. See Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, p. 379.
[99] Oral history interview with Marcus Thompson, conducted on 27 July 2019; Correspondence on aid projects, PRG/2/3/2/8, Oxfam Archive; Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, pp. 379-384.
[100] A series of letters written in 1981 by former Oxfam staff member Tony Casey contain allegations of incompetency in the implementation of NGO Consortium development inputs, PRG/2/3/2/8, Oxfam Archive.

pharmaceutical system in the Khmer Serei camp of Dong Ruk. Following a fall in donor state pledges to UNBRO,[101] MSF conducted an audit of the use of medical inputs that found a wide gap between the amount of drugs and medical equipment entering the camp and actual usage.[102] In response, MSF sought advice from the American Refugee Committee (also in operation at the border) and introduced a new system that reduced expenditure and tightened external control over medical resources.[103] Crucially, the autonomy of Khmer medics in prescribing medicine and treatment plans for patients was also reduced dramatically. Under the new system, drugs were to be brought into the camp more frequently yet in smaller quantities. In addition, the Thai pharmacist who had previously prepared deliveries for the camp from a distance – in a nearby village – was now to come to the camp every day to run a dedicated pharmacy from which Cambodian medics could not take anything without permission. The new system also targeted the night shift in the camps, which MSF officials viewed as a dangerously unsupervised time when aid diversion likely took place. To combat this, all medics were required to record usage of medicines in notebooks which they were to present along with the corresponding empty bottles as proof the next morning. These checks could not be done by a Khmer pharmacist or even with a Khmer medic accompanying the Thai pharmacist – it had to be a non-Cambodian. Clearly, there had been a complete loss of trust between MSF and the Cambodian staff it worked alongside, which was also evident in the NGO's intention to enforce punishments for stealing that went up to the denial of supplementary food rations.[104]

Needless to say, MSF's proposals were not received well by the camp authorities. This was a dedicated 'refugee-warrior' community – in other words, a highly organised displaced population with a political governing authority that supported armed warfare in support of a

[101] 13 July letter from WFP/UNBRO to Voluntary Agency Directors, 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive.
[102] 'La situation en Mars 1984', Report compiled by 'Gilles Germain, Ta Phraya-Lyon, 15 Aout-15 Octobre 1984' (first page of report not visible), 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.
[103] 'Étude du système ARC à Nong-Samet', Report compiled by 'Gilles Germain, Ta Phraya-Lyon, 15 Aout-15 Octobre 1984' (first page of report not visible), 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.
[104] 'Troisième étape: Étude et mise en place d'un nouveau système de distribution des médicaments', Report compiled by 'Gilles Germain, Ta Phraya-Lyon, 15 Aout-15 Octobre 1984' (first page of report not visible), 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.

clear objective.[105] At the Thai-Cambodian border, humanitarian aid was crucial in the DK regime's war aims (to fight the Vietnamese and regain control of Cambodia), both in supplying materials for nearby military camps, and in maintaining a civilian population under DK's control.[106] Tighter regulation of pharmaceutical inputs was a direct threat to this system of power, and the camp authorities reacted accordingly. The new system was introduced on 11 June 1984 – four days later, all medics, most of whom had been politically appointed by the camp authorities, went on total strike in the hospital and outpatient department in Dong Ruk.[107] MSF staff expressed surprise at this.[108] They had tolerated low levels of aid diversion in border camps from the start,[109] but the strength of the medics' reaction in 1984 indicated the importance of MSF's aid in directly supplying the DK's war economy. Like Oxfam, MSF was playing the role of surrogate for a precarious Cambodian regime. In obtaining resources from the outside world and delivering them to an embattled and isolated government in exile, MSF helped to sustain the DK regime, which would have found it much more difficult to continue making its claims to nation-state status otherwise.[110]

Following these revelations about the uses of their aid, the distinct local power structures in Phnom Penh and at the border determined how far Oxfam and MSF were willing to go in contesting their instrumentalisation. Oxfam's dependency on the goodwill of the PRK authorities meant that, despite its shock at Maurice's nutrition report, its protests quickly stalled. Maurice had circulated the report to other agencies and sent a copy to Cambodian foreign minister Hun Sen. Eventually, it was publicised in UN and EEC forums, and was extensively referred to in the Asian and American press.[111] On 16 May 1980, Oxfam Director

[105] See Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (New York; Oxford, 1989) pp. 276, 277, quoted in Courtland Robinson, *Refugee Warriors,* p. 27.
[106] Courtland Robinson, *Refugee Warriors.*
[107] 'Troisième étape: Étude et mise en place d'un nouveau système de distribution des médicaments', Report compiled by 'Gilles Germain, Ta Phraya-Lyon, 15 Aout-15 Octobre 1984' (first page of report not visible), 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.
[108] Ibid.
[109] In 1981 in Nong Chan it was remarked that aid diversion was rare but noticeable and that medicines were known to have shown up in the black market. Mid-1981 MSF paper (undated) outlining its candidature to take over ICRC's role as lead health care provider in Nong Chan border camp, 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive.
[110] Robinson, *Refugee Warriors*; Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*
[111] 23 June 1980, 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983… April 1983', DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.

Brian Walker informed Jean-Pierre Hocke in the ICRC of his intention to telex Hun Sen that he was suspending the Consortium's aid programme with immediate effect for a three week evaluation of food and rice-seed distribution.[112] However, in a meeting with Mr. Borith, an official in the Department of Foreign Affairs, on 24 May 1980, the inflexibility of the PRK was made clear to Oxfam. Borith stated plainly that 'We know [the] situation [is] imperfect but this letter… is [an] infringement of Sovereignty. Friends who give without asking questions as to distribution etc. and those who do, we prefer the former.'[113] On 3 June 1980, Walker flew to Phnom Penh to speak with Hun Sen directly. Yet, instead of its suspension, Oxfam's aid programme was extended as a result of the visit. [114] Crucially, at the moment Walker arrived, the Consortium's funding projections for the next section of the year were due, and the plans were large-scale.[115] By this point, the size of the Consortium's programme acted as an argument in itself for its continuation.

There were also bureaucratic factors at play in these decisions. The short-term contracts on which Oxfam's Country Directors were appointed helped to imbue the programme with a regularly renewed sense of optimism, despite the accumulation of ethical concerns. On 29 May 1980, Hugh Belshaw had concluded that all government distribution figures were untrustworthy, and on 2 June 1980 he reported that the desired switch to development aid would be impossible due to the restrictive political climate.[116] However, his successor as Country Director was Bill Yates, whose tenure from June 1980 was key in renewing relations with ministers and refuting allegations of aid diversion.[117] Yates personally investigated a story about Oxfam aid trucks being used to drive aid into Vietnam, and found that the trucks were actually being driven over the border empty to collect aid for Cambodia. Yates also

[112] 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' and 'Relations with the Government of the Country of Operation' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[113] 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[114] 19 May 1980, 'Brian Walker telex's Grant of UNICEF New York "following events over weekend- have decided not to suspend our Kampuchea programme pending my visit to P.P. 3-6th June.', 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983, Oxfam Archive.
[115] 26 May 1980, 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[116] 2 June 1980, 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[117] 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.

obtained permission for an observation trip around Tonle Sap lake, from which he observed that aid *was* reaching rural communities.[118] As a result, Oxfam retreated from its nutritionist's findings which had claimed the opposite only weeks previously, and Yates' stories provided the moral justification for Oxfam remaining in Cambodia. When the NGO Consortium closed in December 1980, Oxfam stayed on in a long-term development capacity on terms that had been revealed to be distinctly unfavourable.[119] The publication of the Maurice report had demonstrated that shaming the PRK government had little effect. The message was clear – stay on PRK's terms or leave. In fact, Walker told Oxfam staff members not to publish reports without prior consultation with the organisation's Asia Field Committee in future.[120] For Oxfam, the publication of the Maurice report represented the end-point of its resistance to participation in an anti-politics machine in Phnom Penh.

By contrast, MSF's attempted pharmaceutical reform reflected its ability to go further in contesting aid diversion. Unlike Oxfam, it possessed direct control over the transport of aid into the camps, and considerable (yet still limited) power to exert oversight over its use in the clinics. MSF attempted to wrest back full control of medical inputs from the Khmer Serei authorities in 1984, but this was frustrated by the fact that the medics it worked alongside supported the war effort and fiercely resisted the reforms.[121] Conscious of the need to make the strike about more than just access to medicines, the striking medics spoke of MSF's cultural insensitivity towards them in the clinic. Ironically (given MSF's political stance), they also accused MSF staff of being both 'communists' and 'murderers'.[122]

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[118] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.

[119] The Consortium was closed on 31 December 1980 but some legacy structures continued into 1981. 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.

[120] 8 June 1980, Walker concluded that 'Dr. Maurice's report should not have been published (by us) and circulated where it was used for anti-K propaganda- but given privately to the Government for discussion.', 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.

[121] Political nature of medic appointments described in mid-1981 MSF paper (undated) outlining its candidature to take over ICRC's role as lead health care provider in Nong Chan border camp, 'Thaïlande 1983', MSF Archive; Details of Thai government control of security in UNHCR camps in booklet 'UNHCR Assistance in Thailand', 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses.

[122] 'Les problèmes psychologiques', 'Troisième étape: Étude et mise en place d'un nouveau système de distribution des médicaments', Report compiled by 'Gilles Germain, Ta Phraya-Lyon, 15 Aout-15 Octobre 1984' (first page of report not visible), 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive;
This was not the first time insults of this type had been launched at MSF. In April, when first attempts at medical input reduction were initiated, complaints and accusations of wanting to kill Khmer people were also noted. See 'Deuxième étape: La révision des caisses d'OPD', Report compiled by 'Gilles Germain, Ta Phraya-

It helps, therefore, to think of the relationship between NGOs and the local authorities in Southeast Asia as symbiotic. The Khmer Serei were dependent on MSF for the provision of vital medical resources needed for survival. However, MSF was also dependent on the goodwill of the Khmer Serei authorities, and the cooperation of the medics in providing their labour, for the functioning of their aid programme. Neither actor truly possessed the upper hand over the other and in the end, both had to compromise. After negotiations with camp authorities after the strike in 1984, a slightly increased quantity of medications was added to the night duty box, a concession which MSF felt compelled to make but remarked had no justification on a medical basis.[123] Equally, the medics recognised that they could only push MSF so far and accepted the concession rather than prolonging the strike and disrupting their access to resources altogether. This outcome was emblematic of the complex power dynamics that existed at the border: MSF asserted some authority over its aid yet ultimately accepted that it was entrenching the power of the DK regime. When the strike ended, apologies were made by the medics who had launched 'personal insults', although the whole experience was noted in a subsequent report as 'a black page in the short history of Dong Ruk [which] left the MSF team with a lot of questions on the real aims of the Khmer medical personnel and the wishfullness of voluntary aid'.[124]

Global governance

When the Cambodian civil war ended in 1991, many NGOs which had previously been based at the border, including MSF, flooded into Phnom Penh.[125] These NGOs joined together with Oxfam and others to actively campaign against the ascendancy of the Khmer Rouge in the Cambodian peace process, thus ensuring the effective continuity of PRK rule in the elections coordinated by the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1993.[126] This was a

Lyon, 15 Aout-15 Octobre 1984' (first page of report not visible), 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.

[123] 'Les problèmes psychologiques', 'Troisième étape: Étude et mise en place d'un nouveau systeme de distribution des médicaments', Report compiled by 'Gilles Germain, Ta Phraya-Lyon, 15 Aout-15 Octobre 1984' (first page of report not visible), 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.

[124] Dong Ruk Monthly Report [June? First page of report not visible] 1984, 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.

[125] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', p. 222.

[126] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', p. 228-230.

remarkable outcome considering the PRK had been so strongly vilified as a genocidal puppet of Vietnam by MSF throughout the 1980s. Without assuming the inevitability of this outcome, this section interrogates the parts played by Oxfam and MSF in the years preceding it. Although the NGOs had radically different conceptions of their roles during the Cold War, in the end it is possible to view them both as agents of Northern power that helped to integrate Cambodia into the global diplomatic and economic system on terms that were favourable to the West. By collaborating with states, international organisations and other non-state actors in influencing how power was exercised at an international level, NGOs like Oxfam and MSF can thus be viewed as participants in a 'networked' system of 'global governance' that has become increasingly visible since the end of the Cold War.[127] Mark Duffield uses the term 'governance state' to describe the integral role played by the international community in peacebuilding initiatives and the provision of social services in post-conflict societies since the 1990s. He asserts that NGOs became key actors in the establishment of these 'governance states' following international intervention; however, NGOs did even more than this in Cambodia, because NGO involvement preceded the intervention of Western diplomacy in Phnom Penh.[128]

During the Cold War, both Oxfam and MSF perceived clear moral roles for themselves as humanitarian actors and rationalised their participation in governance systems characterised by authoritarianism and human rights abuses accordingly. Rony Brauman has spoken of how he viewed humanitarian action as a form of anti-communist, liberal democratic activism.[129] This logic was pushed to its limits at the Thai-Cambodian border, where MSF's activities supported Western foreign policy goals in helping to maintain a Khmer Rouge-led counterweight to Vietnamese dominance in Southeast Asia. The prevention of Soviet-supported Vietnamese expansion was a core foreign policy goal for the US, which led it to covertly support the Chinese-backed DK government in the context of the Sino-Soviet split.[130] MSF confined its work to Khmer Serei camps, but its activities helped to maintain the Khmer Rouge's grip on the DK forces overall, and permitted Khmer Rouge

[127] Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (2nd edn.) (London, 2014), see p. 2.
[128] Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*, pp. 27-29.
[129] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.
[130] Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*, pp. 120-122.

control over civilian populations held captive by them in closed camps. Oppression was also present in the Khmer Serei camps in which MSF operated; there it recorded the violent punishment of unauthorised exits from camps by authorities, the conscription of children as soon as they were deemed old enough to fight, and the general hopelessness that resulted in a suicide attempt in Dong Ruk in December 1984.[131] As MSF had teams in both the UNBRO camps and the UNHCR-run 'holding centre' at Khao I Dang, it was also well placed to observe the stark differences in health outcomes between the legally recognised refugees and the undocumented border population. In UNBRO camps, malnutrition and infectious disease were more prevalent, resulting in higher mortality rates. [132] Despite this, the Thai Army were notoriously reluctant to authorise transfers for patients from border camps to the hospital in Khao I Dang, where better surgery facilities were available.[133] In addition, there was the phenomenon of so-called 'illegal' residents in Khao I Dang. In 1984, several MSF midwives were expelled from Khao I Dang because of their 'illegal' status.[134] At the same time, a shocking rise in acute malnutrition rates in the holding centre was put down to the mismatch between food allocations, based on the falling numbers of official refugees, and the rising numbers of undocumented residents. [135]

MSF was keenly aware of the effects of prolonged conflict and human rights abuses on civilians at the border, yet its anti-communist ethos meant that the ethics of providing aid in

[131] 'Dong Ruk Monthly Report December 1984', 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive. On punishment of unauthorised movement outside of camps, see mid-1981 MSF paper outlining its candidature to take over ICRC's role as lead health care provider in Nong Chan border camp, 'Thailande 1983'. 'Relations with the Khru Khmer' in Medical report on Dong Ruk, February 1984, 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive. On corporal punishment in Site 2 camp, and hopelessness among youth due to conscription, see 'Les camps de frontière' [undated report on border camps following 1984-85 Vietnamese attacks], 'Cambodge 1980: Marche Pour la Survie (comptes) et courriers, 80-92 fiche pays', MSF Archive.

[132] 'Monthly Report Dong Ruk March 1984', 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive; Mid-1981 MSF paper outlining its candidature to take over ICRC's role as lead health care provider in Nong Chan border camp, 'Thaïlande 1983'; 'Relations with the Khru Khmer' in Medical report on Dong Ruk, February 1984, 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive; 'Medical Activities MSF Khao I Dang July August September 1984', Dr. Dalewijn, Thierry, 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.

[133] 'Monthly Report Dong Ruk March 1984', 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive ; Mid-1981 MSF paper outlining its candidature to take over ICRC's role as lead health care provider in Nong Chan border camp, 'Thaïlande 1983'; 'Relations with the Khru Khmer' in Medical report on Dong Ruk, February 1984, 'Thailande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.

[134] 'Rapport d'Activités Janvier à Mai 1984 KID. Dr. Dallemagne, Georges,' 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.

[135] Ibid.

these circumstances were not questioned in the same way as they were in contemporaneous contexts like the Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras.[136] Instead, MSF focused its efforts on criticising the NGOs based in Phnom Penh, publishing MSF doctor Esmeralda Luciolli's book *Le Mur de Bambou : Le Cambodge après Pol Pot* ('The Wall of Bamboo: Cambodia after Pol Pot'), which was based on her experience working there with the ICRC. [137] Luciolli's book accused NGOs like Oxfam of complicity with an ongoing Vietnamese genocide of Cambodia, pointing to the mass injury, disease and death caused by the PRK's use of forced labour in the building of a border wall with Thailand in the mid-1980s.[138] Crucially, these accusations echoed the same arguments made by the *Marche Pour la Survie* in 1980, and allowed MSF to maintain its authority as a rights-based humanitarian NGO at the same time as it bore witness to suffering of a different kind at the border. It did not speak out about the circumstances it encountered there, which were much more difficult to explain within the organisation's Cold War-era moral framework.

Oxfam perceived an opposite role for itself as a critic of US realpolitik during the Cold War. Walker consciously set Oxfam apart from what he called the 'US-China axis',[139] and Oxfam campaigned throughout the 1980s for the British government to cease its recognition of DK at the UN, imploring it to vote for an empty seat if it felt it could not accept a PRK alternative. [140] Oxfam's relationship to Western foreign policy and the UN was thus much less straightforward than MSF's, but this did not mean its advocacy was any less consequential for Cambodia's eventual re-integration into the UN system after 1989. Indeed, its careful cultivation of a friendship with the PRK authorities made it uniquely situated to ensure a welcomeness to NGOs once Cambodia was opened up to Western development aid. Oxfam's goal to 'break the Cold War impasse'[141] was evident in both its social and professional interactions in Phnom Penh, where PRK ministers were invited on diplomatic visits to the UK, and a football league was set up between the humanitarian

[136] See Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.
[137] Luciolli, *Le Mur de bambou*.
[138] Ibid, pp. 105-137.
[139] 29 May 1980, 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive.
[140] Oral History Interview with Tony Jackson, conducted on 18 August 2020.
[141] Brian Walker, 'NGOs break the Cold War impasse in Cambodia' in Larry Minear and Hazel Smith (eds.), *Humanitarian diplomacy : Practitioners and Their Craft* (Tokyo; New York, 2007), pp.133-153.

expats, PRK authorities, and the Vietnamese Army.[142] NGOs can still act as agents of a complex system of 'global governance' even when they criticise aspects of their state's policies.[143] In Cambodia, we can thus appreciate how Oxfam's actions functioned as a form of soft power in the thawing of Cold War animosities in the 1980s. Increasingly, there was no longer a public appetite in Britain for aggressive policies that isolated regimes in the Global South. Oxfam's strong domestic advocacy on the UN seat, [144] coupled with its reformulation of its NGO Consortium as an anti-Khmer Rouge advocacy group in 1988, [145] represented a considerable influence over British public opinion in this regard.

However, like MSF, the clear moral role Oxfam saw for itself during the Cold War produced ethical blind spots. Oxfam read human rights reports that revealed accounts of torture and forced labour being committed by the PRK government,[146] and was implored by Novib, the Dutch branch of Oxfam, to take a stand on these issues.[147] In response, Oxfam representatives merely claimed that 'It would be better to protest with the US government' than with Phnom Penh. There was far from a shared understanding of what human rights in humanitarian action should mean, as demonstrated when an Amnesty representative that attended an NGO Consortium meeting in 1986 gave their 'personal opinion' that 'NGOs should continue to work in Kampuchea'.[148] Nevertheless, Oxfam's Tony Jackson released a damning report on the UNBRO-WFP programme entitled *Just Waiting to Die: Cambodian Refugees in Thailand* in 1987.[149] In it, he accused NGOs at the border of complicity with an amoral US foreign policy for not speaking out about how aid had created a no-man's land

[142] 'Notes from meeting of Indo China working group of 24 September' 1986, and 3 June 1986 letter from Jill Arace to Kong Korm, First Vice Minister of Foreign Aiffairs (PRK), inviting PRK representatives to Oxford, PRG/2/3/2/8, Oxfam Archive.
Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.
[143] Sending and Neumann, 'Governance to Governmentality', p. 666.
[144] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.
[145] MSF was among these NGOs, but it retained a critical attitude towards the Hun Sen government. See Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', pp. 230-231.
[146] September 1986 Amnesty International 'File on Torture' report on Kampuchea, PRG/2/3/2/8, Oxfam Archive. 'Lawyers Committee Report' on human rights not retained but referenced several times in correspondence, PRG/2/3/2/8, Oxfam Archive.
[147] 'Notes from the Meeting of the Indo China Working Group of 24 July 1986', PRG/2/3/2/8, Oxfam Archive. 'NGO Meeting on Kampuchea. September 25, 1986 at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam.', 'Cambodge 1980: Marche Pour la Survie (comptes) et courriers, 80-92 fiche pays', MSF Archive.
[148] 'NGO Meeting on Kampuchea. September 25, 1986 at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam.', 'Cambodge 1980: Marche Pour la Survie (comptes) et courriers, 80-92 fiche pays', MSF Archive.
[149] Jackson, *Just Waiting to Die.*

zone of rightlessness in DK camps. In this sense, both Oxfam and MSF strategically mobilised human rights discourse to justify their awareness of the ethical contradictions of their engagements. In constructing distinct moral roles for themselves in the Cold War, they implicitly argued that they tolerated rights abuses in their sphere of intervention because it was the correct sphere of intervention to be involved in.

How do we explain the striking symmetry between how Oxfam and MSF came to terms with the instrumentalisation of their aid in the Cambodian conflict? First of all, as rational market actors, the NGOs were following the professional opportunities that were available to them – UNBRO funding for MSF at the border, and public donations for Oxfam in Phnom Penh. Secondly, the discourse of human rights was confined to the realm of self-promotion rather than self-reflection for both organisations because it benefited them to ensure their survival and growth into leading NGOs in a highly competitive sector. Through Oxfam's work in Phnom Penh and MSF's at the border, both NGOs consolidated distinct roles for themselves in Cambodian reconstruction that they later capitalised on after Vietnamese troops left the country in 1989.[150] During the 1980s, NGOs had come to view themselves as uniquely situated experts on Cambodian trauma and rehabilitation.[151] Even though Oxfam and MSF intervened in different environments, they were both a part of this broad 'epistemic community' and finally collaborated in the late 1980s in campaigning against Khmer Rouge ascendency, facilitating the continuity of the Hun Sen government.[152] Despite their mutual animosity during the 1980s, the NGOs implicitly knew they had more in common than that which divided them. This was evident in Jackson's memory of visiting the border after the publication of *Just Waiting to Die.* He presented his highly critical report to a mostly warm reception and little disagreement on the basis of his findings from border relief NGOs.[153] Humanitarians at the border understood that their aid functioned within the strategic calculations of global geopolitical posturing during the Cold War, yet they also knew they could fashion a sustainable NGO sector from their embeddedness in the system. In the post-

[150] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', p. 228.
[151] Taithe, 'The Cradle of the New Humanitarian System? International Work and European Volunteers at the Cambodian Border Camps, 1979–1993', *Contemporary European History*, 25:2 (2016), pp. 335-58.
[152] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', pp. 230-234.
[153] Oral History Interview with Tony Jackson, conducted on 18 August 2020.

1991 Cambodian state, both Oxfam and MSF conceived of enlarged roles for NGOs as custodians of a flexible interpretation of human rights in a democratising Cambodia.[154]

What is the significance of this outcome for how we understand the nature of sovereignty in the modern international system? In the post-Cold War era, much scholarship has emerged critiquing a perceived radical change in the world order represented by the UN's Right to Protect (R2P) doctrine, which authorises international interventions in the case of crimes against humanity.[155] Now, it is said, sovereignty is contingent on the respect of human rights. However, this contingent sovereignty has only ever had consequences for states in the Global South, and it has inaugurated a new era of imperial logic underpinned by the idea of a hierarchy of civilisations as a result.[156] Relatedly, David Rieff has argued that humanitarianism has come to be used as a cover for politics in the post-Cold War era.[157] However, examination of the Cambodia crisis clearly shows that these dynamics existed during the Cold War too. Both Didier Fassin and Mark Duffield concur that emergencies are central to the perpetuation of an interventionary logic,[158] and this was certainly borne out by the Cambodian crisis. Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1979 was in some ways as much a 'humanitarian intervention' as any committed by Western powers in the post-1989 era, but it was undertaken by a communist Global South regime and was shunned on this basis. It was only when Vietnamese troops left in 1989 that Western diplomatic intervention occurred, but over the previous decade NGOs succeeded in using Cambodia's emergency to prise open a new 'governance space' there. [159] UN agencies played a pivotal role too, in shaping both the contestation of Cambodian sovereignty at the border, and then in facilitating the Cambodian state's consolidation after 1991. This is significant because the UN has always been a central actor in moulding the post-colonial world order and the practical meaning of sovereignty in the Global South. As Margot Tudor has shown, even

[154] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', pp. 230-234.
[155] Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (eds.), *Contemporary States of Emergency: The politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions* (New York, 2010).
[156] Fassin and Pandolfi (eds.), *Contemporary states of emergency.*
[157] David Rieff, 'The Humanitarian Trap', *World Policy Journal*, 12:4 (1995), pp. 1-11.
[158] Fassin and Pandolfi (eds.), *Contemporary states of emergency,* p. 10. Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*, pp. 27-29.
[159] Gregory Mann argues that NGOs used famine to prise open a new governance space in the Sahel. See Gregory Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality* (New York, 2015).

middle management figures in the UN have had remarkable influence on the functionality of Northern power over the Global South.[160] This case-study shows that we should also recognise the staff of international NGOs as important participants alongside states and international organisations in the complex networks of global governance.

Finally, we must recognise the agency of the Global South in complicating what can often amount to sweeping theories of global governance. The fact that we still have such an unequal international economic system shows that power remains concentrated within the North in the international system. [161] However, caution is needed in how we conceptualise how hierarchies are reproduced so that we do not adopt overly generalising theories that merely serve to replicate Eurocentric understandings of global history. In order to develop a sophisticated understanding of how global governance functions, we should pay closer attention to the agency of the Global South in interacting with international states and non-governmental actors. As this chapter has shown, MSF was not merely a tool of US foreign policy at the Thai-Cambodian border but also a tool of a highly organised proto-Cambodian government, which strategically allied itself with the West in its search for resources to fight against Vietnamese domination. These refugee-warriors were certainly not the dehistoricised 'speechless emissaries' of Liisa Malkki's case study on Burundian refugees in Tanzania.[162] Similarly, in Phnom Penh Oxfam may have claimed it had a clear moral role for itself but in reality its staff resented how they had to bow to the interests of the PRK and become a tool of a planned economy rather than being free to implement people-to-people development programmes. Jurgen Fager, a German development specialist who had experience working with communist regimes, had to be the one to exasperatedly tell Oxfam off in 1980 for behaving 'arrogantly' and seeking 'to dictate terms'.[163] The PRK certainly had

[160] Margot Tudor, 'Gatekeepers to Decolonisation: Recentring the UN Peacekeepers on the Frontline of West Papua's Re-colonisation 1962–3', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 57:2 (2022), pp. 293-316, and Margot Tudor, 'Reputation on the (green) Line: Revisiting the 'Plaza Moment' in United Nations Peacekeeping Practice, 1964–1966', *Journal of Global History*, 16:2 (2021), pp. 227-45.
[161] Ngaire Woods, 'Making the IMF and the World Bank more Accountable' *International Affairs*, 77:1 (2001), pp. 83–100; Tehila Sasson, 'Milking the Third World? Humanitarianism, Capitalism, and the Moral Economy of the Nestlé Boycott', *The American Historical Review*, 121:4 (2016), pp. 1196–1224.
[162] Liisa H. Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization', *Cultural Anthropology*, 11:3 (1996), pp. 377-404.
[163] 29 May Consortium Meeting in London, 'Kampuchea Diary of Events' in Report on the Kampuchea Emergency Programme by Tigger Stack, August 1983, DON/1/6, Oxfam Archive. 'Relations with the Government of the Country of Operation' section of report also records that on 29 May, Juergen Fager

the upper hand at this point in time, which begs the question (posed by Gregory Mann in his study of post-colonial Mali) : why do states mortgage their sovereignty to international non-governmental actors at the moment when they are at their strongest politically?[164] Matthew Hilton has also explored this, noting that it is often in the interests of national elites to outsource key responsibilities of the state like social care to NGOs.[165] This was especially true in 1980s Cambodia, when the PRK regime recognised its precarity by focusing state resources on counter-insurgency and the consolidation of its political rule over the Cambodian population. This dynamic was visible in the 1990s too, when both Oxfam and MSF helped to provide social services for a Cambodian state that was integrated into the international economic system and hailed as a developmental model by the World Bank.[166] Despite these accolades, there has been no large-scale poverty reduction or increase in the respect of human rights in the country. Instead, NGOs may have stunted the organic development of Cambodian civil society and helped to entrench the political rule of a regime which has become increasingly autocratic yet skilful in meeting the performance indicators of international norms.[167] Cambodia was no longer isolated from the West in the 1990s, yet it is debatable whether the participation of NGOs within the Cambodian 'governance state' has benefited Cambodians or the NGOs themselves more.[168]

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the distinct histories of NGO-state relations in Britain and France conditioned how Oxfam and MSF related to political power in the Global South. While Oxfam's embeddedness in colonial governance led it to be overly optimistic about the prospects of collaborating with the PRK regime in Phnom Penh, MSF's anti-communism and trust in international organisations produced stark blind spots in its failure to speak out

described the government as 'simply enforcing existing rules', and said Oxfam had a 'weaker negotiating position' after sending the letter on Dr. Nick Maurice's report.

[164] Mann, *From Empires to NGOs*.

[165] Hilton, 'Charity and the End of Empire', pp. 509-510.

[166] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', p. 234.

[167] Ibid, p. 234. Taithe draws on Caroline Hughes' work in making this argument; See Caroline Hughes, 'Transnational Networks, International Organizations and Political Participation in Cambodia: Human Rights, Labour Rights and Common Rights', *Democratization*, 14:5 (2007), pp. 834-52.

[168] See Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*, pp. 27-29.

about the ethical outcomes of the border relief programme. What the NGOs had in common was their entrepreneurialism. Both recognised the professional opportunity that was represented by sovereignty deficits in Southeast Asia and used the Cold War context to advocate for the value of flexible, independent NGO-led relief as a counterpoint to the constrained global mandates of large international organisations. Once Oxfam and MSF deepened their involvement in Cambodian relief, they both encountered the strong agency of local actors, which led them to question initial assumptions about their ability to do good. However, both organisations ultimately accepted the contradictions that were inherent in their programmes and elected to retain their hard-won positions on the ground.

Oxfam and MSF undeniably relieved Cambodian suffering with their material assistance, but they also allowed their aid to be used to shore up the bureaucratic control of civilian populations by precarious Cambodian regimes that each paid no respect to human rights norms. In strategically mobilising human rights discourse to justify their involvement in ethically dubious spaces, the NGOs asserted clear moral roles for themselves during the Cold War at the same time as they failed to engage in an equivalent process of self-reflection. Finally, they collaborated in the late 1980s in campaigning against Khmer Rouge re-ascendancy, yet also ensured the sustainability of an expansive NGO system in Cambodian reconstruction once Phnom Penh became open to border NGOs. As such, Oxfam and MSF participated in distinct yet complementary ways in a global governance that saw Cambodia evolve from a rogue security threat to a governance state in the 1990s.

Chapter 3

'The neutrality void': the challenges of providing aid and expressing solidarity in Cold War Central America

On 14 May 1980, hundreds of Salvadoran civilians attempted to cross the Sumpul River into Honduras. Tensions had reached breaking point between poor rural communities, left-wing organisations and the right-wing oligarchy in El Salvador over the previous months. At the same time as the first phase of a high-profile 'land reform' programme was implemented in March 1980, the Salvadoran junta had declared a state of national siege, which provided the pretext for the Army to invade and brutally pacify rural areas, causing thousands to flee in an organised mass mobility popularly referred to as 'la guinda'.[1] At the Sumpul River, one such group of refugees suffered aerial bombardment and shooting by the Salvadoran Army, who also raped and stabbed civilians with the help of the paramilitary death squad 'Orden'.[2] Across the river, the refugees were met with a line of Honduran soldiers 'who grabbed them and pushed them back to the Salvadorans who then machine gunned them'.[3] This shocking collaboration of the two armies, traditional foes, in the violent mass murder of Salvadoran *campesinos* (rural farmers or peasants) made starkly visible the unfolding of a new era of late Cold War conflict in Central America. Following the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in 1979, the US-allied Honduras had become a regional base for anti-communist counterinsurgency operations.[4] In neighbouring countries, deep-rooted tensions between small oligarchies and large classes of landless labourers, often indigenous, were exacerbated by ideological polarisation, superpower posturing and heightened US interventionism. For aid organisations, this meant that traditional understandings of the humanitarian principle

[1] Jeff Schuhrke, 'Agrarian Reform and the AFL-CIO's Cold War in El Salvador', *Diplomatic History*, 44:4 (2020), pp. 527-53. See pp. 545-546; Molly Todd, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War* (Wisconsin, 2010), pp. 50-81.
[2] Todd, *Beyond Displacement,* pp. 82-83.
[3] Mercedes Bonorino, 'Project Reports from Latin America: Salvadoran Refugees in Honduras, Oxfam-Canada, No. 20 September 1981', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[4] Patrice J. McSherry, *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America* (Lanham, 2005), pp. 182-207. See p. 197 on the background to the Rio Sumpul massacre.

of neutrality to 'not take sides in hostilities', and to 'reckon with politics without becoming a part of it', became difficult if not impossible to uphold.[5] This chapter explores how Oxfam and MSF were challenged by this complex context for aid delivery, and how each organisation responded differently to the existential questions that it posed about the true meaning and purpose of international humanitarian aid in conflicts.

Oxfam and MSF had previous experience in responding to crises in Central America, although Oxfam also possessed an established network of regional development programmes.[6] These distinct professional backgrounds informed their actions when UNHCR began coordinating a humanitarian relief programme for Salvadoran refugees in June 1980. Two months later, MSF sent out an exploratory team to Honduras, which reported that over 15,000 Salvadorans were in the area, a figure which was growing each day.[7] Accordingly, the organisation dispatched two doctors and two nurses to the La Virtud region, where refugees were either living in the homes of Honduran *campesinos*, or scattered between a camp and several makeshift settlements in the surrounding area. In April 1981, MSF also became involved in another camp which had been set up at Colomoncagua.[8] In contrast with MSF's early and direct operational intervention in the relief programme, Oxfam preferred to continue channelling money through local branches of Caritas and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) that were already active in the camps. Pauline Alvarez (née Martin), Oxfam's Regional Representative for Mexico and Central America from 1983 to 1992, confirmed that Oxfam sent volunteers to the camps throughout the decade, although no stand-alone operational programme was established there.[9]

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[5] Jean Pictet, quoted in Hugo Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics : A Guide to the Morality of Aid in War and Disaster* (New York, 2015), pp. 66-67.

[6] Maggie Black, *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam- The first 50 years* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 183-192 and pp. 197-202; 'MSF au Salvador. Les moyens d'une aide humanitaire aux réfugiés salvadoriens', 'Aout 80 à fév. 81', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.

[7] 'Rapport Mission MSF Salvador Honduras 29 Aout- 18 Septembre 1981', signed 'Paris, ce 24/09/80, Vincent Jeannerod, Antoine Crouan', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive; See also the undated 'Plan General du Rapport d'Activité de MSF au Honduras', (written note: '1e Bilan MSF- historique + La Virtud') on the first year of MSF's involvement in the relief programme, 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive; See also Todd, *Beyond Displacement,* p. 3.

[8] 'Plan General du Rapport d'Activité de MSF au Honduras'- '1e Bilan MSF- historique + La Virtud', undated, 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.
'Rapport Mission MSF Salvador Honduras 29 Aout- 18 Septembre 1981', signed 'Paris, ce 24/09/80, Vincent Jeannerod, Antoine Crouan', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.

[9] Oral history interview with Pauline Alvarez, conducted on 27 June 2019.

Despite their different forms of engagement with the refugee crisis, the complex nature of providing humanitarian aid in Honduras soon became clear to both NGOs. By July 1981, 30,000 Salvadorans were living either in the refugee camp at Colomoncagua or in La Virtud.[10] The majority of refugees were reported to be women and children and to have originated from the Northern Salvadoran regions of Chalatenango, Cabañas and Morazan.[11] This was a large-scale international displacement crisis, but because Honduras, like Thailand, was not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention or 1967 Protocol, UNHCR had less independence and ability to control the terms of refugee relief than it usually did.[12] Honduran officials viewed Salvadorans as 'a special, national group that posed multiple threats to the Honduran nation' and effectively criminalised the refugees for their perceived support of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrillas that had launched an armed resistance against the government in El Salvador.[13] Honduran authorities made recognition of the Salvadorans' refugee status contingent on their confinement to designated zones controlled by the Army, and pushed for their transfer into closed camps from which they could not leave without official authorisation.[14] As a result, the refugees mostly lived in prison-like conditions, and UNHCR's weak leverage over the Honduran government meant that it found it very difficult to perform its protection duties.[15] Humanitarian organisations that arrived to provide aid in the camps heard first-hand the refugees' stories of the extreme repression they had fled from, of which an MSF report remarked 'the violence is daily and its horror is beyond imagination'.[16] In addition, both Oxfam and MSF encountered the oppressive nature of daily life in the camps, which was characterised by frequent incursions by Honduran and Salvadoran soldiers, who conducted routine searches, intimidated refugees, and even kidnapped those suspected of aiding the

[10] Undated 'Plan General du Rapport d'Activité de MSF au Honduras', (written note: '1e Bilan MSF- historique + La Virtud') on the first year of MSF's involvement in the relief programme., 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.
[11] Undated 'Plan General du Rapport d'Activité de MSF au Honduras', (written note: '1e Bilan MSF- historique + La Virtud') on the first year of MSF's involvement in the relief programme, 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.
[12] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, p. 90.
[13] Honduran government document, quoted in Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, p. 87.
[14] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, p. 90.
[15] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, pp. 90-98.
[16] 'Rapport Mission MSF Salvador Honduras 29 Aout- 18 Septembre 1981', signed 'Paris, ce 24/09/80, Vincent Jeannerod, Antoine Crouan', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.

FMLN. Highly vulnerable to military repression, refugees often became the victims of torture and brutal murder at the hands of the soldiers or their plain-clothed accomplices in Orden.[17]

This chapter analyses how NGOs operated in these difficult conditions. As Fiona Terry has shown, virtually all humanitarian organisations operating in Honduras faced serious challenges in to their understanding of humanitarian neutrality.[18] This included UNHCR, which was compromised in its independence due to its heavy reliance on funding from the US and other powerful Western donor states.[19] Studies of the Salvadoran refugee community have explored how Salvadorans interacted with international humanitarian organisations, narrating their suffering for external audiences and integrating *'los internacionales'* into a sophisticated global solidarity network.[20] Recognising the value of these contributions, this chapter identifies gaps that remain in our knowledge of the Salvadoran refugee crisis. Terry's analysis was path-breaking but it was also somewhat constrained in its conclusions by an over-reliance on sources within MSF for information on camp conditions and the refugee community.[21] Molly Todd complicated the picture by centring the voices of refugees as political actors, yet the international organisations in the camps necessarily became secondary characters in her account.[22] Taking this a step further, Kevin O'Sullivan examined the influence of the refugees' political activism on the engagement with solidarity and human rights discourse by a number of anglophone international NGOs.[23] This chapter develops these threads a step further. It shows that NGOs in Central America were simultaneously driven to speak out about the extreme repression they witnessed and compelled to remain silent and 'neutral' for fear of reprisals. By combining insights on the nature of covert warfare in Cold War Central America with a perspective informed by the history of emotions, the chapter also argues that the bodily

[17] 16 October 1981 Report (attached to 6 November 1981 letter from Robert T Quinlan- Director, International Office, CRS- to Richard, Smyser -Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, Geneva), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; See also Laurence Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *Médecins Sans Frontières: Speaking Out Case Studies* (Paris, 2013), pp. 11-12 and Todd, *Beyond Displacement,* pp. 96-98.
[18] Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? the Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca; London, 2002), pp. 83-114.
[19] Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher, *The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): The Politics and Practice of Refugee Protection* (Florence, 2012), pp. 18-49.
[20] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, pp. 112-136; Kevin O'Sullivan, 'Civil War in El Salvador and the Origins of Rights-based Humanitarianism', *Journal of Global History*, 16:2 (2021), pp. 246-65.
[21] Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*
[22] Todd, *Beyond Displacement.*
[23] O'Sullivan, 'Civil War in El Salvador and the Origins of Rights-based Humanitarianism'.

experience of fear for refugees and NGO workers on the ground affected Oxfam and MSF in different ways. [24] Competing interpretations of neutrality illustrated that for both NGOs the line between emotion and reason, as opposing branches of ethical thought, was not easily drawn in this crisis. [25] These tensions, in turn, had concrete effects on how humanitarians perceived and practically responded to Salvadoran suffering. Terry identified and implicitly condemned the 'neutrality void' in Honduras.[26] This chapter demonstrates that the very meaning of humanitarianism itself was stretched to its limits in Honduras between 1980 and 1982.

To show that humanitarian principles were fundamentally challenged by the political and security environment that NGOs encountered in Honduras, the chapter proceeds in four parts. The first section places the Salvadoran refugee crisis within the late or 'Second Cold War' escalation of superpower tensions.[27] It also begins to probe how Oxfam and MSF dealt with competing interpretations of neutrality and solidarity in this era of global geopolitical confrontation. The second section examines the specific experience of the Cold War in Latin America, along with the influence of US hegemony on the nature of Central America's conflicts in the 1980s.[28] In a situation where suspicion of covert action was everywhere, and humanitarianism became a vehicle for intelligence gathering and anti-communist repression, security considerations were a primary concern in conditioning how Oxfam and MSF understood neutrality as a practical imperative in their work. Applying this contention to a case-study analysis, the third section presents two examples of times when members of Oxfam and MSF were forced to decide what kind of humanitarian action they wanted to pursue in Honduras. For MSF field staff who had close emotional ties to refugees in La Virtud, the experience of the forced relocation of Salvadorans to a new camp in Mesa Grande in 1981 and early 1982 triggered participation in an anti-relocation campaign that contested UNHCR policy. However, this was opposed by MSF's management in Paris, who

[24] McSherry, *Predatory States*; Joanna Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History', *History Workshop Journal*, 55: 1 (2003), pp. 111-33; Bourke, 'The Emotions in War: Fear and the British and American Military, 1914-45', *Historical Research: The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 74:185 (2001), pp. 314-30.
[25] Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics,* pp. 125-133.
[26] Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?,* pp. 106-113.
[27] Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War* (London, 1983).
[28] McSherry, *Predatory States*.

pushed for what they viewed as a more reasoned approach in not taking a public position on relocation. In parallel, Oxfam experienced a period of internal tension when it was asked by UNHCR to become coordinator of the Salvadoran refugee programme in March 1982. The debate that followed centred around the moral risks of assuming operational involvement for Oxfam's carefully cultivated reputation as an ally of the Salvadorans and oppressed groups across Central America. The chapter concludes by contemplating what the case-study's findings tell us about the relevance of emotion to humanitarian history. It also delves deeper into the implications of the Salvadoran refugee crisis for how we conceptualise both neutrality and humanitarianism as practical ideological tools.

Solidarity in the Second Cold War

By the 1980s, the period of détente that had existed between the United States and the Soviet Union since the late 1960s came to a close. American political elites watched in dismay as victories for socialist forces multiplied in the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, and the invasion of Cambodia by Soviet-backed Vietnam in 1979. When Ronald Reagan assumed the American presidency in 1981, he responded to these losses by adopting a more confrontational attitude towards the USSR. Breaking with the progressive human rights rhetoric briefly espoused by his predecessor Jimmy Carter, Reagan re-prioritised the foreign policy goal of reversing the advance of Russian influence in the Third World by any means possible.[29] Meanwhile, Soviet leaders continued to strategically support allies around the world.[30] However, Russian interference was not the primary driver of Third World conflicts that US foreign policy analysts believed it to be.[31] The USSR remained committed to the pursuit of gradualist ideological strategies of overthrowing capitalism beyond its borders, which it combined with

[29] Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Sergey Radchenko, 'Introduction: The end of the Cold War in the Third World' in Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Sergey Radchenko (ed.), *The End of the Cold War and the Third World : New Perspectives on Regional Conflict.* (Abingdon, 2011), pp. 1-21; McSherry, *Predatory States*, pp. 184-185; Jan Eckel, *The Ambivalence of Good: Human rights in International Politics since the 1940s* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 207-210.

[30] On post-1985 Soviet foreign policy, see Svetlana Savranskaya, 'Gorbachev and the Third World' in Kalinovsky, and Radchenko (ed.), *The End of the Cold War and the Third World: New Perspectives on Regional Conflict.* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 21-46.

[31] Victor Figueroa Clark, 'Nicaragua, Chile and the end of the Cold War in Latin America' in Kalinovsky and Radchenko (ed.), *The End of the Cold War and the Third World,* pp. 192-208.

the professed goal of maintaining 'peaceful coexistence' with the West where possible. In Latin America, communist parties connected to the Soviets were much less enthusiastic about supporting armed revolution than domestic leftist groups that were inspired by the examples of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro.[32] Nevertheless, the Soviet-allied Cuba represented a powerful source of ideological, and to a lesser extent material, support for leftist guerrillas.[33] In a broader sense, shifts in the international balance of power in the late 1970s re-energised displays of open hostility in all of the theatres of hot conflict in the Third World where the bipolar competition for dominance played out.[34] The watershed moment in Central America was the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979, which gave confidence to other leftist movements at the same time as it increased the defensiveness of regional oligarchies.[35] Reagan's government retaliated by focusing on military aid to right-wing governments and channeling covert support to the contra guerrillas that sought to reverse Nicaragua's revolution.[36] By 1983, this new phase of superpower tensions was referred to as a 'Second Cold War' by commentator Fred Halliday.[37]

Amid this heightened global geopolitical confrontation, the situation in Central America rapidly came to resemble a total war, in which civilians were treated as legitimate targets of mass murder in military counterinsurgency campaigns.[38] In El Salvador, a hollow attempt to contain the social grievances of poor *campesinos* with land reform merely gave the Salvadoran Army the pretext in 1979 for launching military sweeps against the insurgency of the newly formed FMLN.[39] Oxfam grappled with the difficulty of providing aid while staying out of politics in this context. In early 1980, the ICRC and the Salvadoran Red Cross (SRC)

[32] Figueroa Clark, 'Nicaragua, Chile and the end of the Cold War in Latin America' in Kalinovsky and Radchenko (ed.), *The End of the Cold War and the Third World,* pp. 192-208; Doug Stokes, 'Countering the Soviet Threat? An Analysis of the Justifications for US Military Assistance to El Salvador, 1979-92', *Cold War History*, 3:3 (2003), pp. 79-102.
[33] Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*, pp. 91-92.
[34] Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), pp. 3-5; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge; New York, 2007).
[35] Brands, *Latin America's Cold War*, pp. 5-7; McSherry, *Predatory States*, p. 185.
[36] Kalinovsky and Radchenko, 'Introduction: The end of the Cold War in the Third World' in Kalinovsky, and Radchenko (ed.), *The End of the Cold War and the Third World.*
[37] Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War*.
[38] For a definition of total war, see Richard Holmes, *The Oxford Companion to Military History* (Oxford, 2003). On the mass murder committed by the military against civilians in Guatemala's civil war, see Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, 2004).
[39] Schuhrke, 'Agrarian Reform and the AFL-CIO's Cold War in El Salvador'.

appealed to Oxfam for financial support as violence intensified and their capacity to provide emergency medical treatment outweighed needs.[40] However, Oxfam staff were wary of supporting their operations, for they did not trust either organisation's claim to neutrality. The absence of neutrality was most obvious in the case of the SRC, whose ambulances Oxfam heard from leftist Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) politician Luis de Sebastian were being used to transport the police.[41] Furthermore, the ICRC's blood-bank programme was denounced in 1981 because it solely benefited hospitals in government-controlled areas, from which people suspect of political subversion were known to have been abducted or 'disappeared' by security forces and death squads.[42] Oxfam's Peter Sollis was also sceptical about the value of the ICRC's prison-visits as it was unclear 'whether those detainees who were visited were in fact "saved" from any far worse fate'.[43] On efforts to promote International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in education sessions with Salvadoran officers, he remarked that the soldiers were said to be already so 'blood crazy' as to make the idea of preaching IHL to them 'a complete waste of time'.[44]

Central to Oxfam's position was the fact that sieges of isolated rural areas had cut whole communities off from international humanitarian assistance. As such, Oxfam concluded that the most moral form of intervention it could make would not be to fund the ICRC or SRC,[45] but instead to support local ecumenical organisations like ASESAH (Asociación Salvadoreña Ecuménica de Solidaridad y Ayuda Humanitaria) that were already operating in the regions that were under attack. [46] In this way, Oxfam staff reclaimed the value of neutrality from the ICRC and SRC, which they deemed not functionally neutral.[47] However, Oxfam's

[40] 28 January 1980 telex and 17 April 1980 appeal received from League of Red Cross Societies, along with 20 Jan 1981 letter from Terry Palmer (BRC) to Michael Harris (Oxfam) requesting contribution towards ICRC programme in El Salvador, PRG/5/3/3/2, Oxfam Archive.
[41] Undated letter 'From CW to RMW' on 'Salvador-International Red Cross', PRG/5/3/3/2, Oxfam Archive.
[42] 30 January 1981 letter sent from Peter [Sollis] to Christine [Whitehead] and Bridget [Wooding] on 'El Salvador refugees- ICRC request' (second names do not appear in original document but frequent mentions of Sollis, Whithead and Wooding in related documents), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[43] 30 January 1981 letter sent from Peter [Sollis] to Christine [Whitehead] and Bridget [Wooding] on 'El Salvador refugees- ICRC request', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[44] 30 January 1981 letter sent from Peter [Sollis] to Christine [Whitehead] and Bridget [Wooding] on 'El Salvador refugees- ICRC request', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Undated letter 'From CW to RMW' on 'Salvador-International Red Cross', PRG/1/5/6, Oxfam Archive.
[47] 30 January 1981 letter sent from Peter [Sollis] to Christine [Whitehead] and Bridget [Wooding] on 'El Salvador refugees- ICRC request', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

interpretation of neutrality was also open to accusations of political partiality. Indeed, it was publicly denounced by the US State Department in June 1981 as being among several international NGOs whose funds were unintentionally being used to support the guerrilla left through ASESAH, which US officials claimed was a front organization for the FMLN.[48] Oxfam strongly refuted these allegations,[49] the accuracy of which remained contested for years,[50] yet this incident clearly demonstrated that responding to human suffering in the extremely polarised context of Cold War Central America had blurred the lines between neutrality and solidarity.

On the Honduran-Salvadoran border, where MSF assumed an operational role, the distinction between ethical humanitarian action and political solidarity was also difficult to delineate in practice. MSF held meetings with the FMLN, occasionally crossing into El Salvador so as to ascertain needs and conditions for access to areas under guerrilla control. The nature of these interactions varied, as was evident in a February 1981 report that contrasted the warm welcome MSF received in Chupamiel, a relatively easy to access area with lots of families, with the 'very cold' temperament of the guerrilla leader MSF met with in Cañada. The guerrillas in Cañada requested a surgeon and anaesthesiologist to work in a field hospital there, yet this area was seen as being particularly dangerous, and the leader required that any medical teams sent to their aid would disassociate completely from the MSF team in La Virtud.[51] MSF ultimately decided to focus solely on the Salvadoran refugee programme in Honduras, but the fact that it held negotiations with the guerrillas at all was significant. It is telling that information on conditions for access to guerrilla areas was included in an MSF report, suggesting that the authors knew that individual medical personnel would be interested in working in El Salvador in this unofficial capacity. Indeed, several volunteers joined MSF and travelled to Honduras with the plane tickets provided to

[48] David Blundy, 'Oxfam charged with 'funding' guerrilla Left', 14 June 1981, *The Times*, OD 28/451, UK National Archive; 15 June 1981 1828 telex from Washington to FCO, OD 28/451, UK National Archive.
[49] Details of press releases, comments in the print media and a radio interview given by Director Brian Walker refuting the allegations described in the Agenda for the Meeting of the Latin American Field Committee 9-10 July 1981, PRG/1/5/6, Oxfam Archive; 15 June 1981 'Note on El Salvador and Sunday Times Article' from Oxfam Information Department, PRG/5/3/3/2, Oxfam Archive.
[50] For a contemporary refutation by a former CIA employee, see Ralph McGehee, 'The C.I.A. and the White Paper on El Salvador', 11 April 1981, *The Nation,* 232 (1981): 423. For a later defence of the claims, see Robert P. Hager, 'Soviet Bloc Involvement in the Salvadoran Civil War: The US State Department's 1981 "White Paper" Reconsidered', *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, 28:4 (1995), pp. 437-70.
[51] 'Contact avec les guerilleros… Aout 80 à fev. 81', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.

them purely to defect from the organisation and work directly for the guerrillas.[52] This was a high-risk decision for which the consequences could be severe, as was evident in the fate of one Spanish doctor that left MSF to cross the border and reappeared in Honduras several months later, only to be shot and killed by the Honduran Army before she reached her former colleagues.[53] As MSF France President and Director of Central America Programmes at the time, Rony Brauman reflected that this phenomenon was less a case of political 'infiltration than a certain idea people had about MSF' as being broadly 'on the side of the forces of progress'.[54] Brauman held much more distinct ideas about the relevance of neutrality to the organisation's duties in this context, but the fact that MSF was perceived in this way shows that, for many Europeans, humanitarianism was understood as a conduit to political solidarity in Central America.

Neutrality was also extremely difficult to maintain in the Salvadoran refugee camps due to the extent of military repression that international NGO workers witnessed there. According to Vincent Jeannerod, MSF France Coordinator in Honduras in 1981 and 1982, 'Salvadoran military helicopters flew over the region several times and Salvadoran army contingents, accompanied by paramilitary groups, conducted searches' under the 'complicit' watch of Honduran soldiers.[55] Following an announcement in October 1981 that the population in Colomoncagua was soon to be moved to another location, small groups of soldiers conducted searches of the camp up to three times a day. The soldiers entered dwellings and health centres with 'machine guns drawn', asking for names and birth-places and 'sometimes doing body searches on the refugees'.[56] Moreover, a new rule was introduced which prevented refugees from going more than fifty metres from the camp, where latrines and water taps were located, without written permission from CEDEN, the Honduran evangelical charity that coordinated the relief programme. It was obviously an impractical

[52] Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 14
[53] Oral history interview with Bernard Pécoul, conducted on 31 August 2020; Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 14.
[54] Rony Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 14
[55] Vincent Jeannerod, 'Action in the field and lack of political commitment', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 1985, English translation from French quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 11.
[56] 16 October 1981 Report attached to 6 November 1981 letter from Robert T Quinlan (Director, International Office, CRS) to Richard, Smyser (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, Geneva), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

and inhumane policy, the primary purpose of which was to terrorise the refugees, who were subject to a shoot to kill policy if perceived to be in breach of the rule.[57] Despite this, NGO personnel quickly realised that UNHCR was unable to prevent violence being committed regularly against refugees and, as a result, both Oxfam and MSF members took on the role of human rights activists, consciously utilising their presence as international witnesses to deter the Army.[58] The extreme nature of the security conditions in the camps reflected the broader difficulties of practicing neutral humanitarian assistance in El Salvador and Honduras during the Salvadoran civil war. Civilians were vulnerable to attack in spaces traditionally perceived as safe havens like hospitals, ambulances and refugee camps, which prompted international organisations to expand their conception of ethical action. In some cases, this resulted in staff pursuing political solidarity.

Latin America, US hegemony and covert operations

In addition to the global geopolitical context, there were specific features of the Cold War experience in Latin America that added to its complexity and enhanced the distinctiveness of the security environment that humanitarian organisations encountered in Honduras.[59] The presence of the United States as regional hegemon was a crucial component of this. Historians have long debated the level of US influence on the trajectory of political conflicts in Latin America, with opposing arguments on this issue often taken as normative assessments of US foreign policy during the Cold War.[60] Recently, however, some scholars have called for new research to 'look beyond the eagle's shadow' in recognising the tangible effects of US hegemony without discounting the consequential actions of Latin American actors in conditioning the experience and outcomes of domestic conflicts. [61] In Central America, this task is particularly delicate. The eagle's shadow loomed large, not least because the region had essentially been integrated into the US political economy since the

[57] Ibid; Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?,* pp. 93-94.
[58] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, pp. 114-116; Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 11; O'Sullivan, 'Civil War in El Salvador and the Origins of Rights-based Humanitarianism'.
[59] Brands, *Latin America's Cold War*, p. 7.
[60] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Mark Atwood Lawrence, and Julio E. Moreno , 'Introduction', in Garrard-Burnett et al (eds.), *Beyond the Eagle's Shadow: New Histories of Latin America's Cold War* (Albuquerque, 2013), pp. 1-21.
[61] Ibid*,* p. 4.

nineteenth century.[62] The powerful influence held by American corporations, including the United Fruit Company, over export-dominated 'banana republics' was complicated by the interests of right-wing dictatorships in collaborating with them. Nevertheless, US hegemony was always evident in the American government's tendency to step in and defend its corporations when their interests were threatened.[63] Importantly, the Monroe Doctrine had also effectively declared Latin America the domain of the US government in 1823 when it signalled that any external European intervention would be regarded as a direct security threat.[64] When US officials ordered the CIA-orchestrated coup that overthrew reformist President Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, they demonstrated that what constituted a security threat in Central America was liberally defined.[65] As such, when Reagan launched a regional counterinsurgency response to the Nicaraguan revolution, this was embedded in long-established patterns of US interference in Central American affairs.

Before the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, the CIA had already helped to establish a transnational security system in the Southern Cone region during the 1970s. Although the existence of 'Operation Condor' was not publicly confirmed until the 1990s, the covert counterinsurgency network had extensive powers in Latin America in the final two decades of the Cold War.[66] It was formed to facilitate the sharing of intelligence between militaries and security forces across Latin America. In this way, it was expected that right-wing governments would pool resources and even work together in joint police operations across borders in suppressing the communist threat to their power. This meant that if a government critic in Uruguay fled to Argentina, the Uruguayan state could rely on Argentina to inform it of the dissident's whereabouts. The Argentinians would then either illegally arrest the Uruguayan and hand them over to Uruguayan security forces or cooperate with each other in their detention in Argentina.[67] Operation Condor thus represented a cooperative approach to repression, and it built on existing tendencies for

[62] McSherry, *Predatory States,* pp. 183-184.
[63] Marcelo Bucheli, 'Multinational corporations, totalitarian regimes and economic nationalism: United Fruit Company in Central America, 1899- 1975', *Business History,* 50: 4 (2008), pp. 433-454.
[64] McSherry, *Predatory States*, p. 41.
[65] Ibid*,* p. 23, pp. 183-184. For more information on CIA involvement in Latin America, see Marc Becker 'The CIA on Latin America', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 20:2 (2021), pp. 146-167.
[66] McSherry, *Predatory States,* pp. 14-15.
[67] Ibid*,* pp. 24-25.

security forces to covertly target 'subversives' by arresting, torturing and murdering suspects in a manner that left no paper trail or physical trace of detention. These so-called 'disappearances' allowed several Latin American governments to establish 'parallel states' which gave them the power to exert terror over populations at the same time that they retained deniability of involvement in human rights violations.[68]

In the 1980s, Honduras became the base for the expansion of this illegal security network into Central America. Argentinian military officers and CIA agents arrived to share expertise with Honduran counterparts, training soldiers, police and paramilitary death squads in the art of covert counterinsurgency.[69] Central to this newly aggressive counterinsurgency campaign was the Fuerza de Seguridad Pública (FUSEP), renamed the Departamento de Investigaciones Especiales (DIES) in 1982.[70] In addition, one of the most influential people in Honduras during this period was undoubtedly U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte, who was a key player in Condor-related surveillance and suppression activities alongside the head of the Army and the President.[71] Recognisable repression practices pioneered in the Southern Cone soon became employed with increasing frequency in Central America. Suspects were detained in clandestine prisons and the CIA provided instrumental assistance in coordinating police and paramilitary groups, occasionally even supervising torture sessions. Infamously, these practices were accompanied by the particularly grisly tendency to destroy the bodily remains of murdered victims or to throw bodies off helicopters into the ocean.[72] This was the broader context in which Honduran and Salvadoran soldiers collaborated with Orden in the kidnapping of Salvadorans suspected to be supporting the FMLN from refugee camps.

Oxfam and MSF officials were keenly aware of the heavy surveillance they were under in Honduras, along with the existence of covert intelligence operations in the Salvadoran refugee programme. Early on, MSF sensed a strong climate of suspicion in La Virtud, where the organisation ran a clinic in the village and conducted a mobile health programme in the remote hamlets in the surrounding area. These weekly medical consultations were

[68] Ibid*,* pp. 38-40.
[69] Ibid*,* pp. 182-207.
[70] This unit was renamed again as the Batallion 3-16 in 1984. See ibid*,* pp. 188-189.
[71] Ibid*,* pp. 188-189.
[72] Ibid*,* pp. 182-183.

organised informally and on a rotating basis by MSF and Caritas teams each weekend.[73] The hamlets were difficult to reach due to the mountainous terrain, and MSF personnel usually had to drive for one hour from the village, and then walk another one to two hours with heavy bags of medicines on their backs before reaching the settlements.[74] One might think that this remoteness led to a feeling of relative anonymity, in contrast to the constant military supervision that later characterised aid in the camps, yet this was not the case. In February 1981, MSF recorded suspicions that medical students from the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), who came to the area for month-long placements, were sent there 'to "spy" on us'.[75] MSF staff also felt like they were being sized up by CEDEN, whose members asked them questions about their organisation's political outlook.[76] The same report stated clearly that 'We are not free to do as we wish. There are probably checks on our work in the hamlets, there are "ears" everywhere.'[77]

A few months later, widespread allegations of misconduct against the American evangelical charity World Vision indicated that humanitarian aid in the refugee camps had been directly co-opted as a tool of repression. Combining sectarian evangelism with anti-communist intimidation, World Vision implemented forced labour, and humiliated and withheld food from Salvadorans who refused to comply with its vision of re-education. [78] Reports from Oxfam and its ally CRS also detailed a shocking litany of evidence that a network of informers were working through World Vision 'with the tacit consent from the director' and closely collaborating with the Honduran military in the surveillance, kidnapping and murder of refugees.[79] Among the evidence given at an NGO meeting in Colomoncagua in June 1981 was the assertion that 'Many of the World Vision field workers originally worked for the DNI (Division of National Investigation) and FUSEP (Forces of Public Security)' Honduran

[73] 'MSF au Salvador. Les moyens d'une aide humanitaire aux réfugiés salvadoriens', marked with written note 'Aout 80 à fév. 81', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.
[74] Ibid
[75] Ibid
[76] Ibid
[77] Ibid
[78] Confidential CRS report June 25 1981 on 'World Vision's Role in Refugee Camps', 6 August 1981 letter from Robert Quinlan (CRS) to Christine Whitehead (Oxfam), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[79] Ibid; 5 June 1981 Report on 'Salvadorean Refugees in Honduras' sent from Rolando Lopez (Field Director for Central America) to Bridget Wooding and Christine Whitehead, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

intelligence organisations.[80] Moreover, one named World Vision functionary was also suspected to be a CIA agent.[81] World Vision's privileged relationship with the Honduran military meant that it possessed superior access to vehicles and radio communication, which allowed it to monitor refugee crossings and ensure refugees were interrogated by soldiers before they reached the camps.[82] Oxfam's Rolando Lopez soberly reflected that it was at once 'extremely difficult (and very easy at times) to understand how an organization like World Vision can keep operating in the area. For one thing, it is common knowledge that the organization has close ties with the Honduran army. On the other hand, no one would even think of denouncing some of the atrocities they condone or help to commit themselves for fear of repression.'[83]

In this context of constant surveillance, the outward performance of neutrality became a security imperative for Oxfam and MSF. In Oxfam's case, this became evident in a misunderstanding that developed with members of CRS over how to respond to World Vision.[84] All agencies agreed that it was too dangerous to denounce World Vision in Honduras, which is why Oxfam used its international platform and lack of operational presence in the camps to raise the issue with UNHCR in Geneva in July 1981.[85] However, after the meeting, Oxfam staff were alarmed that CRS had circulated a confidential internal memo reporting that Oxfam had forcefully denounced World Vision and expressed the intention to spearhead an inquiry with UNHCR into its misconduct.[86] Instead, Oxfam staff

[80] Confidential CRS report June 25 1981 on 'World Vision's Role in Refugee Camps', 6 August 1981 letter from Robert Quinlan (CRS) to Christine Whitehead (Oxfam), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] 5 June 1981 Report on 'Salvadorean Refugees in Honduras' sent from Rolando Lopez (Field Director for Central America) to Bridget Wooding and Christine Whitehead, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[83] Confidential CRS report June 25 1981 on 'World Vision's Role in Refugee Camps', 6 August 1981 letter from Robert Quinlan (CRS) to Christine Whitehead (Oxfam), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; 5 June 1981 Report on 'Salvadorean Refugees in Honduras' sent from Rolando Lopez (Field Director for Central America) to Bridget Wooding and Christine Whitehead, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[84] 20 August 1981 letter from Michael Harris (Overseas Director, Oxfam) to Robert Quinlan (Director of CRS, International Office, Geneva), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[85] Confidential CRS report June 25 1981 on 'World Vision's Role in Refugee Camps', 6 August 1981 letter from Robert Quinlan (CRS) to Christine Whitehead (Oxfam), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; 'UNHCR Meeting on Salvadorian Refugees in Honduras. Geneva 2.7.81.' Signed 'C. Whitehead 31.7.1981', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[86] 12.8.81 Oxfam internal telex, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; 22 July 1981 letter from Robert Quinlan, Director of International Office to 'His Excellency, The Most Rev. Edwin B. Broderick, Executive Director, Catholic Relief Services- USCC', NY, on 'NGO/ UNHCR Meeting on the Refugee Problem in Honduras- July 2 1981', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

claimed their intention was 'not to pass judgement but to report tensions between groups' and encourage an investigation to be carried out by others.[87] In heated internal correspondence and impatient dialogue with CRS, it was clear that, far from wanting to be outspoken about the evangelical NGO's misconduct, Oxfam's management were terrified of the consequences of acquiring 'an unwarranted reputation for "attacking" World Vision' for Oxfam's future ability to access the camps. [88]

The consequences of surveillance were experienced even more directly for MSF. In response to the feeling of being watched in la Virtud, field staff encouraged their colleagues not to make enemies in Honduras, and to demonstrate an obvious neutrality in their work so as to protect themselves.[89] Despite this, the inclination towards political solidarity meant that some medical practitioners later sent aid across the border to the guerrillas. This resulted in Vincent Jeannerod being 'summoned' one day by US Ambassador Negroponte and shown 'photos of tents and medical supplies with the MSF logo' which 'had been taken in El Salvador in guerrilla-held zones', demonstrating that guerrillas had 'made off with supplies and medicines.'[90] MSF's management reacted by trying to limit the activities of their over-zealous field staff. As such, Rony Brauman remarked that he was routinely called out to Honduras by UNHCR to keep his teams in line when 'the volunteers had gone too far'.[91] This effectively amounted to a top-down enforcement of neutrality as a security imperative.

As these tensions demonstrate, both Oxfam and MSF were keenly aware of the impact of Operation Condor on their humanitarian action in the Salvadoran refugee camps, even if they would not have been able to name the covert counterinsurgency network at the time.

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[87] 12.8.81 Oxfam internal telex, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[88] Letter from RMW to CW/BW on 'ELS refugees in Honduras/ World Vision', 'Oxfam Mexico 13/8/81', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; CRS report that contains handwritten notes left by Whitehead that refute CRS' account of the meeting, 22 July 1981 letter from Robert Quinlan, Director of International Office to 'His Excellency, The Most Rev. Edwin B. Broderick, Executive Director, Catholic Relief Services- USCC', NY, on 'NGO/ UNHCR Meeting on the Refugee Problem in Honduras- July 2 1981', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
20 August 1981 letter from Michael Harris (Overseas Director, Oxfam) to Robert Quinlan (Director of CRS International Office, Geneva), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[89] 'MSF au Salvador. Les moyens d'une aide humanitaire aux réfugiés salvadoriens', marked with written note 'Aout 80 à fév. 81', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.
[90] Vincent Jeannerod, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 15.
[91] Rony Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 15.

It was clearly understood by the NGOs' members that any perceived deviation from neutrality had consequences which included violent reprisals for refugees and humanitarian workers alike. Indeed, accusations made by a World Vision staff member in 1981 about the political sympathies of other aid workers led a CEDEN official to be beaten in his office with a pistol by the Honduran military.[92] Far from an ethical commitment to non-political engagement, the performance of neutrality was thus a simple survival mechanism for many staff, reflecting the position of neutrality as an 'instrumental' rather than 'fundamental' goal of humanitarian action.[93] Unlike the principles of humanity and impartiality, which dictate that humanitarians should respect the value of human life and treat all of those in need equally, the practice of neutrality has historically been based on the need to avoid being seen as a belligerent in the delivery of aid. This was supposed to ensure the safety of teams and aid recipients, and to guarantee continued access to populations.[94] In this way, even though individual staff members in MSF and Oxfam were inclined to express solidarity with Salvadorans, their organisations' actions were constrained by the need to practice an outward display of neutrality in their work. The extreme nature of the security context in Honduras that literally made the performance of neutrality a life or death issue had, in turn, been fundamentally shaped by US interventionism.

Emotion and reason in ethical decision-making

The circumstances encountered in Honduras created competing effects in the humanitarian organisations that provided aid there. On the one hand, field staff were driven to speak out and act in solidarity with refugees when they witnessed the military repression that Salvadorans were subject to. However, at the same time they were often compelled to remain silent and protect their organisation's reputation for neutrality for fear of reprisals. The fundamental precarity which governed everyday life in the camps meant that the threat of violence hung over every operational decision. Delving deeper into these fraught decision-making processes, this section makes the case that internal tensions about ethical

[92] Confidential CRS report June 25 1981 on 'World Vision's Role in Refugee Camps', 6 August 1981 letter from Robert Quinlan (CRS) to Christine Whitehead (Oxfam), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[93] Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics*, p. 70.
[94] Ibid, pp. 70-72.

action in Honduras can best be conceptualised as battles between emotion and reason. Importantly, decisions over how to respond to ongoing incidents of military violence by the host state contained a high moral risk as, no matter what decision was taken, it was likely that lives would be lost.[95] As such, views were entrenched yet there was no certainty about the human cost of any action. On the ground, an emotional proximity was cultivated with the Salvadorans, whose fear and vulnerability to attack was strongly felt, while in Paris and Oxford a more detached perspective allowed management to advocate for reasoned 'big picture' thinking in debates over contentious decisions.[96] According to Hugo Slim, Western ideas about rationality have always favoured reason over emotion as the more worthy basis for ethical thinking, but this is complicated by the fact that seemingly rational calculations which weigh up risks cannot always predict outcomes 'in a world which we do not control'.[97] This section explores how the tensions between these two different modes of thinking played out in practice for Oxfam and MSF, examining two separate instances whereby disputes between emotion and reason conditioned how staff engaged with the idea of neutrality and its relevance to their understanding of ethical humanitarian action in Honduras.

In MSF's case, an intense clash of views became apparent when the Honduran government began to forcibly relocate refugees from the La Virtud area to a closed camp farther away from the border at Mesa Grande between October 1981 and April 1982. This was promoted by UNHCR as a security measure which would increase the Salvadorans' safety by putting distance between them and the ongoing fighting in El Salvador. However, it was also part of the US government's plan to drain civilians from the area so that the border could be fully militarised to closely monitor international crossings.[98] Initially opposed by the Honduran

[95] See Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics*, pp. 156-164 for a discussion of moral risk in ethical decision-making by humanitarian personnel.
[96] In theorising the influence of fear on refugees and humanitarians in the Salvadoran refugee camps, the chapter draws on Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History' and Bourke, 'The Emotions in War: Fear and the British and American Military, 1914-45'.
[97] Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics*, pp. 128-130.
[98] Report 'Honduras: Camps de réfugiés de "Mesa Grande"' (written note: 'Mission fév. 82- Aout 82 [MJ Clarenie] MSF Aquitaine'), 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive; 'Briefing Paper on the Relocation of Salvadoran and Guatemalan Refugees in Honduras', undated with written signed 'Peter Shiras. CRS Teguc.', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; [Julia] Cameron, 'The Salvadorean Refugees in Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande, Honduras (The Relocation Question)', 'Prepared on January 18, 1984 for the ICVA Consultation

authorities, who resisted the idea of giving asylum further inland to 'subversives', it was soon pursued as a matter of urgency from late 1981.[99] The refugees strongly objected to the move and appealed to international humanitarian workers to campaign alongside them against their involuntary relocation.[100] Most NGOs did so, including Oxfam, yet MSF's management in Paris disagreed with field staff, led by Vincent Jeannerod, that this was the best course of action to take.[101]

Jeannerod's recollections of the time suggest that the decision to support the refugees was made instinctively on the basis of what field staff witnessed first-hand. He recalled that relocation was referred to as 'the deportation' and echoed the refugees' anger at having 'to leave everything to go to a camp 40 kilometres away, in the middle of a plain, surrounded by barbed wire, completely isolated and under army surveillance'. [102] From October 1981, increasing levels of intimidation and 'terror methods', including the military encirclement of camps, arbitrary detention of refugees and burning of refugees' papers, had been used as part of a concerted strategy to force the Salvadorans to relocate.[103] In response, the Salvadorans effectively narrated their fear for external audiences, conditioning how international workers experienced the situation with public announcements that described their 'terror' at the 'state of siege' they lived under. [104] In this way, the refugees named the Honduran Army as the object of their fear, successfully politicising their emotions and rendering them visible as the rational reaction to an immediate threat rather than the effects of generalised anxiety or trauma at having fled their country.[105]

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on Central America', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; Vincent Jeannerod, 'Une bête à abattre : le « tiers-mondisme ». L'action sur le terrain et le non-engagement politique', *Le Monde diplomatique,* May 1985.

[99] Report 'Honduras: Camps de réfugiés de "Mesa Grande"' (written note: 'Mission fév. 82- Aout 82 [MJ Clarenie] MSF Aquitaine'), 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.

[100] '[Call] to Action on Behalf of the Salvadorean Refugees in Honduras, March 26, 1982.', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

[101] Oral history interview with Pauline Alvarez, conducted on 27 June 2019; Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, pp. 12-13.

[102] Vincent Jeannerod, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, pp. 12-13.

[103] Confidential report October 16 1981, attached to 6 November 1981 letter from Robert T Quinlan (Director, International Office, CRS) to Richard, Smyser (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, Geneva), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

[104] Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History', p.121; '[Call?] to Action on Behalf of the Salvadorean Refugees in Honduras, March 26, 1982.', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

[105] Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History', pp.125-126.

Moreover, several humanitarian workers, including a CEDEN chauffer and two Caritas coordinators, were also the victims of torture and murder as part of the terror campaign.[106] International staff were admittedly less vulnerable to repression than Hondurans, but it is not unlikely that MSF staff also had a personal experience of fear. They too witnessed the increasingly unhinged acts of violence committed by the military against detainees, illustrated in the savage beating – including the removal of an eye – meted out to a refugee, who died as a consequence in March 1982.[107] Back in Paris, however, Brauman was removed from this context, and was able to advocate for a more pragmatic perspective. He tried to tell field staff, 'this isn't our job. If refugee camps around the world were situated near borders, they would all become political platforms… and pose immediate danger to refugees'. [108] Unsurprisingly, Brauman's argument did not resonate with agency workers on the ground, whose emotional proximity to the refugees meant that they were unwilling to prioritise their own bodily safety or an abstract calculation of long-term consequences in keeping a distance from the politics. Instead, they were compelled to take action in what they argued was actually a more rational response to the extreme circumstances they encountered.[109] In short, MSF field staff and refugees possessed a shared emotional experience of fear and reacted to repression as one threatened social group as a result.[110]

In Oxfam's case, the conflict between a reason-driven and an emotion-driven operational response to repression became evident in 1982 when the organisation was offered the role of programme coordinator in Honduras by UNHCR. This occurred following World Vision's expulsion from the programme in November 1981 and the chaos that quickly ensued within CEDEN as a result. On 27 January 1982, an internal coup orchestrated by World Vision's evangelical allies ousted CEDEN's moderate director Noemi de Espinoza, pushing UNHCR to

[106] 11 March 1982 letter from PS (Peter Sollis) to RMW on conversation with UNHCR representative Ingenar Cederburg (Projects Officer) in Costa Rica, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; Alma Guillermoprieto, 'Foreign Visitors Avert Kidnaping Of Salvadorans', *Washington Post,* 19 November 1981, 13 January Caritas report 'CI demands clarifications following the killing of two Caritas Honduras workers', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; CRS Report on 'Trip to Mesa Grande, La Virtud, and Colomoncagua', 'April 19, 1982 through April 24, 1982', 'Prepared by: Mary Contier, May 6, 1982' PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[107] Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History', pp.121- 123; '[Report] from the Honduran/ Salvadoran Border Region', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[108] Rony Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 15.
[109] On the link between emotion and action in extreme circumstances, see Bourke, 'The Emotions in War: Fear and the British and American Military, 1914-45'.
[110] Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History', p.124.

terminate CEDEN's contract as coordinator due to the insufficient technical competency of the extremist leadership that took charge.[111] De Espinoza quickly regrouped with moderate CEDEN members in a new organisation called CODE. When it was unexpectedly vetoed by the Honduran authorities for legal recognition on 5 March, however, UNHCR reached out to Oxfam. UNHCR representatives hoped that the British NGO could help them out of a 'dangerously exposed position' and prevent them having to take on direct coordination from Geneva.[112] They told Oxfam that it was suitable for the role as it would be 'acceptable to both the Honduran government (and the military) and to the groups in CODE', as well as 'the teams in the camps', and the funding agencies.[113]

UNHCR's desperation undoubtedly led it to play up its confidence in Oxfam's ability to be all things to all people. This faith was not matched by Oxfam staff. Debate ensued over whether it would be a good idea to run a programme which had attracted 'considerable controversy', indicating that Oxfam members knew that if it became coordinator, the performance of neutrality would quickly become a much more immediate and important concern.[114] As the Overseas Director Michael Harris wrote to Area Coordinator for Latin America Richard Moseley-Williams, 'we might so easily be the fall guy, we might so easily be involved in politics, and if anything went wrong, who would get the blame?'.[115] Essentially, the dilemma came down to the fact that Oxfam staff felt emotionally involved in what was going on at the border. There were already limits to the solidarity staff could publicly express with refugees, yet Oxfam's ability to speak freely would be dramatically reduced if it took on the security risks of the whole programme. This would put Oxfam in a particularly

[111] 'Conversation with George Cram [World Council of Churches] (recently back from Honduras) 1/2/82', 'Subject: Resignation of Executive Director of CEDEN + 50 staff members 27/1/82', [George Cram (Secretary, Primate's World Relief and Development Fund/ PWRDF, Anglican Church Canada)]; 2 Feb 1982 letter from Bishop Broderick to Oxfam Mexico Office; 12 Feb 1982 newspaper article (name of publication unclear), 'Salvadorean refugees face new threats'; 22 February 1982 letter from Richard Moseley-Williams to Michael Harris, 'UNHCR plans for the refugee camps in Honduras: Approach to Oxfam', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[112] 22 February 1982 letter from Richard Moseley-Williams to Michael Harris, 'UNHCR plans for the refugee camps in Honduras: Approach to Oxfam'; 9 March 1982 Michael Harris to Richard Moseley Williams, 'Meeting with UNHCR, Geneva, 10 March 1982', signed 'Richard Moseley-Williams 12 March 1982', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[113] 9 March 1982 Michael Harris to Richard Moseley Williams; 'Meeting with UNHCR, Geneva, 10 March 1982', signed 'Richard Moseley-Williams 12 March 1982', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[114] 'Meeting with UNHCR, Geneva, 10 March 1982', signed 'Richard Moseley-Williams 12 March 1982', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[115] 9 March 1982 Michael Harris to Richard Moseley Williams, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oct 1980- Nov 1996', Oxfam Archive.

difficult situation if partners in CRS and Caritas witnessed repression and advocated a certain course of action which Oxfam felt it could not take. Its precarious reputation as an ally rather than an organisation that was 'taking sides' against the refugees would be irrevocably tainted.[116] All the same, UNHCR representatives cautioned that there was a 'real danger of a complete military takeover of the camps if UNHCR does not have a strong NGO counterpart', which led Oxfam to reluctantly accept the offer.[117] Despite some doubts from Rolando Lopez in the Mexico Office, the decision was taken in Oxford to subordinate emotion to reason in the hope that Oxfam could have a positive influence on the programme overall as a progressive yet diplomatic coordinator.[118]

The tensions that existed within MSF and Oxfam about relocation and accepting the coordinator role clearly demonstrated that there was no internal consensus on what ethical humanitarian action in the Salvadoran refugee camps should look like. Furthermore, the ways in which these tensions were resolved were highly consequential for how the NGOs engaged with the refugee programme over the following years. Following Jeannerod's support of the anti-relocation campaign, his contract was terminated by MSF's management team, which brought in a new coordinator to oversee the move to the new camp.[119] The strikingly different perspective of the new MSF team was evident in Mesa Grande a few months later when the overcrowded conditions and lack of adequate sanitary facilities described by Oxfam as 'subhuman' were only referenced in MSF's report in relation to the suspected 'sabotage' of water pipes by activists seeking to make a political point.[120] In 1983, a letter from the French Ambassador in Honduras to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris

[116] 'Meeting with UNHCR, Geneva, 10 March 1982', signed 'Richard Moseley-Williams 12 March 1982', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[117] Ibid.
[118] 23.3.82 telex RMW to Rolando Lopez; 23 March 1982 'Urgent' Rolando Lopez to Richard Moseley Williams; 24.3.82 telex RMW (Oxford) to Rolando Lopez, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; 8 July 1982 Agenda of Latin American Field Committee, PRG/1/5/6, Oxfam Archive.
[119] Vincent Jeannerod, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, pp. 12- 13.
[120] Report 'Honduras: Camps de réfugiés de "Mesa Grande"' (written note: 'Mission fév. 82- Aout 82 [MJ Clarenie] MSF Aquitaine'), 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive; 'Report on UNHCR Mission to Central America (11 to 22 February 1982)', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.
Telex in 30.3.82' (author unclear), 'Re Situation Honduras.'; '[Report] on Trip to the Border Region April 4-10 , 1982'; '[Call?] to Action on Behalf of the Salvadorean Refugees in Honduras, March 26, 1982.', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

also specifically praised MSF team members for conveying facts unclouded by emotion in their regular communications with the embassy.[121]

Conversely, the soul-searching that preceded Oxfam's acceptance of the coordinator role was followed on 7 May 1982 by news from UNHCR that the Honduran government had vetoed Oxfam for the position. This showed just how tightly policed the boundaries of neutrality, or rather compliance, had become in the Salvadoran refugee programme. [122] In the context of constant repression and instability, any emotional solidarity with the refugees was perceived as suspect of political partiality by the Honduran government, and as such Oxfam was likely excluded on the basis of its criticisms of World Vision and support for the anti-relocation campaign. Ultimately, both organisations had opted for reason over emotion in prioritising compliance and cooperation with UNHCR in the internal debates that occurred between 1981 and 1982. However, Oxfam's exclusion by the authorities unexpectedly allowed it to maintain what it called its external 'watchdog' role over the following years as UNHCR assumed direct coordination from Geneva.[123] In MSF's case, the tensions over ethical action were far from resolved following Jeannerod's ousting, and similar issues over field staff's desires to go beyond management's wishes in expressing solidarity with refugees continued to characterise the organisation's operational engagement in Honduras for the rest of the decade.[124]

Honduras as 'the neutrality void'

What does this case study tell us about how the principle of neutrality influenced humanitarian action during the Cold War? In Terry's assessment of international assistance in Honduras, she speaks of a 'neutrality void' to describe the near-total deviation from the

[121] 24 May 1983, Tegucigalpa letter from 'Andre Tronc, French Ambassador in Honduras to His Excellency Mr. Claude Cheysson, Minister for Foreign Affairs- American Division, 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.
[122] 8 July 1982 Agenda of Latin America Field Committee on 'Oxfam and the UNHCR refugee programme in Honduras', PRG/1/5/6, Oxfam Archive.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Bernard Pécoul, who became MSF Coordinator in Mesa Grande and later Honduras Coordinator following Jeannerod's departure, has described the continuation of tensions on these issues. See Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 14.

norm by organisations who provided aid to 'refugee-warriors' in the country in the 1980s.[125] Indeed, ideological neutrality was certainly non-existent in the sense that, despite public performances, most humanitarian organisations had a political position which was known to other actors and which affected key operational decisions.[126] As we have seen, many NGOs followed a solidarity-based position in defending the leftist Salvadorans against repression, while others had a blatantly anti-communist identity, and UNHCR was so politically compromised in its mission that it was in some ways a mouthpiece for the US embassy in Honduras. As a former MSF practitioner (who later worked for the ICRC), the implicit condemnation of this deviation from neutrality is clear in Terry's operational perspective on the Central American crisis.[127] However, the distinct complexity of aid delivery in Honduras in the early 1980s demands that we go deeper and move beyond normative assessments of organisational conduct if we are to appreciate exactly how neutrality was instrumentalised for political purposes. If neutrality was non-existent in Honduras, then what did it actually mean to evoke neutrality there? What purpose did it serve and to what concrete ends was it employed? Slim has concluded that, while partisan assistance in war can be morally sound if aid is given primarily to the oppressed, it ceases to be *humanitarian*.[128] In this strict delineation, there is a complete separation between partisan and humanitarian aid, but this is often not reflected in the reality of international assistance programmes. The most important question then becomes - how well were the boundaries between these two forms of aid policed in practice, and by whom?

In terms of military neutrality, which dictates that humanitarian aid should not give an unfair material advantage to one side in a war, the answer to this question was clear in Honduras.[129] Overall, a disproportionate amount of private NGO and UNHCR funding, both directly supported by the US government, went to the Nicaraguan refugee community, who lived either freely or under much looser military control in border camps that hosted CIA-

[125] Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?,* p. 106 and p. 112.
[126] Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics,* pp. 69-70.
[127] Fiona Terry was head of the French section of MSF in Tanzania after the 1994 Rwandan genocide. See Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?,* p. 2. As of May 2023, she is the head of the ICRC's Centre for Operational Research. See https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/contributor/fiona-terry/, accessed on 29 May 2023.
[128] Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics,* pp. 68-69.
[129] Ibid*,* pp. 68-69.

supported contra guerrillas.[130] Following attempts by the US Congress to limit Reagan's ability to directly support the contras, several private American organisations were set up to provide what they heavily promoted as 'humanitarian' assistance to these camps. However, most of these organisations had thinly veiled primary functions as fronts for the transfer of financial and material support, sometimes in the form of arms, to the contras. After the ban on aid to the contras was lifted in 1985, the establishment of the Nicaraguan Humanitarian Aid Office permitted even more overt military support to be sent to the contras under the banner of humanitarian assistance.[131] Given that these American organisations so blatantly yet seemingly so easily abused the 'humanitarian' label to legitimise partisan military assistance to one side in the civil war in Nicaragua, it is worth reflecting on the contrast between this impunity and the intensity with which aid was policed in the Salvadoran refugee camps. [132] On the Honduran-Salvadoran border, NGOs were denounced for any perceived deviation from neutrality yet any aid siphoned off by the FMLN from the camps has been acknowledged to have been minimal due to the sheer extent of military control in that region.[133] The fundamentally asymmetrical nature of warfare in Cold War Central America thus demands to be taken into account if we are to meaningfully engage with how the idea, rather than the practice (elusive for all actors) of neutrality, became a political tool in the 1980s.

Both Oxfam and MSF were forced to continually engage with questions about the practical relevance of neutrality, and by implication the meaning of humanitarian action, in Honduras. For Oxfam, this became apparent in the inconsistency of its reputation for neutrality with the desire to express solidarity with the poor against authoritarian repression. It says a lot about Oxfam's track-record that UNHCR invested it with the capacity to execute such a delicate balancing act in maintaining harmony between the refugees, solidarity-oriented NGOs and the Honduran military as coordinator. However, the objections that were raised internally to the role also indicated that Oxfam staff were aware that pursuing this balancing act to its logical conclusion would likely result in Oxfam's name

[130] Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?,* pp. 86-91 and 99-105.
[131] Ibid, pp. 86- 91.
[132] Ibid, pp. 106-107.
[133] Ibid, pp. 92-93; Loescher, "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America," in Bruce Nichols and Gil Loescher (eds.), *The Moral Nation: Humanitarianism and U.S. Foreign Policy Today* (Notre Dame, 1989), p. 170.

being used as leverage in the 'politics' of superpower posturing.[134] Because Oxfam did not take up the coordinator role, it continued to pursue the contextually understood values of ethical action it had established in refusing to fund Red Cross relief programmes in El Salvador in 1980. The specific interpretation of ethical humanitarian action that this represented has been articulated by Oxfam's Pauline Alvarez, who described how, in her opinion, the meaning of neutrality had changed due to the extreme circumstances NGOs were faced with in Central America. Although Oxfam ensured it was seen as neutral within El Salvador by providing aid in both rebel and government-held areas, Alvarez claimed that on the 'fundamental' question of what 'impartiality or neutrality mean[s] in those kinds of contexts', she firmly believed that 'working in close solidarity with the people that we were set up to help' was not a violation of principles.[135] Over the following years, this belief led Oxfam to support the refugees in a second campaign against the relocation of people from Colomoncagua, and later to advocate for the refugees' autonomous repatriation programme in opposition to UNHCR-led repatriation efforts towards the end of the decade.[136]

Conversely, the clash that occurred because of Jeannerod's support of the anti-relocation campaign revealed the internal divisions wrought by contested understandings of neutrality within MSF. Rony Brauman has spoken extensively of his own objections to a purist pursuit of neutrality in humanitarian action, which, he argued, can lead to complicity with oppression when silence is favoured over speaking out about human rights violations that staff witness in the field.[137] However, MSF's reluctance as an organisation to engage with the opposition to relocation indicates the uneven application of this ethical caveat. After Jeannerod left, MSF's operational interpretation of neutrality was best encapsulated by one of his successors as Honduras coordinator, Bernard Pécoul, who stated that MSF's goal was to provide 'good quality support' in terms of material assistance to refugees while 'maintaining some distance' from the politics.[138] From this perspective, Jeannerod was

[134] 9 March 1982 Michael Harris to Richard Moseley Williams, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[135] Oral history interview with Pauline Alvarez, conducted on 27 June 2019.
[136] [Julia] Cameron, 'The Salvadorean Refugees in Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande, Honduras (The Relocation Question)', 'Prepared on January 18, 1984 for the ICVA Consultation on Central America', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; Oral history interview with Pauline Alvarez, conducted on 27 June 2019.
[137] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.
[138] Oral history interview with Bernard Pécoul, conducted on 31 August 2020.

removed from the programme because he deviated from the humanitarian principle of neutrality, yet in May 1985, Jeannerod publicly rejected the validity of this narrative in a piece he wrote for *Le Monde Diplomatique*.[139] According to him, all humanitarian aid in Honduras was compromised by the political context. As such, each organisation essentially had a choice - they could either accept the political nature of aid and openly align themselves with the oppressed, or they could espouse the values of apolitical intervention, which often actually led to silent complicity with oppression.[140] In this way, Jeannerod articulated the MSF values of *témoignage* but claimed that the organisation had not stood by them in Honduras. He also objected to the focus on the anti-relocation campaign as the most important indicator of where humanitarianism had deviated from neutrality in the country. For him, it was the disproportionate allocation of funds to Nicaraguan refugees and the 'anticommunist crusade' of the contras that constituted the true violation of the principle.[141] A broader perspective mattered here, for the sharp enforcement of 'neutrality' by management in the Salvadoran refugee camps hid the fact that the very nature of aid at the national level was not neutral or impartial. Jeannerod pointed out that all aid in Honduras had become a political tool, and as the control over this tool was disproportionately concentrated in the hands of a superpower state, then it was not necessarily realistic, ethical or truly neutral to force a narrow definition of neutrality in the specific context of the Salvadoran camps. Jeannerod also put the spotlight on the political beliefs of MSF leaders, asking whether they adhered to the vows taken by all MSF members not to be party to political disputes in the countries they worked in.[142] Jeannerod did not pretend to not have political interests in Honduras himself but he rejected the notion that Brauman and other decision-makers lacked them.

In this way, humanitarians were forced to adapt their understandings of ethical action as a result of the repression they witnessed. By examining how humanitarians thought about their work, the case study also reveals important insights about the role of emotions in humanitarian history. The tendency for historians to downplay the influence of emotions on

[139] Vincent Jeannerod, 'Une bête à abattre : le « tiers-mondisme ». L'action sur le terrain et le non-engagement politique', *Le Monde Diplomatique* (May 1985).
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

historical actors, preferring to attribute social change to more 'rational' socioeconomic explanations for human behaviour, has characterised much of the recent scholarship on humanitarianism and human rights.[143] However, emotions and rationality should not be seen as mutually exclusive factors by historians in our dissections of the past. This chapter demonstrates that an emotional proximity and engagement with the suffering of Salvadoran refugees was an important factor in influencing the behaviour of Oxfam and MSF in Honduras. Its findings also bear relevance for the normative question of whether emotional engagements with suffering create primarily progressive or paternalistic outcomes, as opposed to the supposedly more rational responses to inequality spurred by political justice and solidarity frameworks. In this vein, Didier Fassin has expanded understandings of contemporary humanitarian sentiment to include its influence on what he terms the 'humanitarian government' which has come to dominate Western politics since the end of the Cold War, privileging moral rhetoric and moral approaches to social problems.[144] The debate on the practical implications of this continues, yet Miriam Ticktin's focus on one aspect of France's 'humanitarian government' in the medicalisation of asylum rights shows how the selective granting of residency status to undocumented migrants with serious medical conditions relies on the emotion of pity with paternalistic, depoliticising effects. [145] As such, Ticktin shows that unidirectional emotions like pity tend to result in charity-based responses to suffering that reproduce social hierarchies. By contrast, this chapter has demonstrated that collectively experienced emotions like fear can produce empathy and drive political action that directly challenges entrenched power structures. Finally, it has indicated that in order to deepen understandings of what Fassin identifies as 'humanitarian government' in the post-Cold War era, we need to pay more attention to its roots in the activities of humanitarian NGOs in the 1980s.

Conclusion

[143] Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History', pp. 121-22. For examples of secondary literature on humanitarianism that downplays the role of emotions, see Tehila Sasson, and James Vernon, 'Practising the British Way of Famine: Technologies of Relief, 1770-1985', *European Review of History*, 22:6 (2015), pp. 860-72 and Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, 2010).
[144] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley, 2011), pp. 1-21.
[145] Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley, 2011), pp. 1-21.

The very ideas of both neutrality and of humanitarianism itself were challenged to their core by the context that humanitarians encountered in Honduras. The escalation of superpower tensions in the 'Second Cold War' combined with the historic tendency for the US government to intervene in the politics of Central America in the 1980s to create a perfect storm for aid delivery there. The 'shadow' of US hegemony hung over the Salvadoran refugee programme, which was rife with evidence of covert surveillance and overt transnational military repression.[146] Both Oxfam and MSF were driven to adapt their understandings of ethical humanitarian action because of what they witnessed, which often resulted in field staff effectively practising a form of political solidarity with Salvadorans. However, the precarious security situation at the Honduran-Salvadoran border meant that the consequences of being seen to deviate from a strict neutrality included violent reprisals by the military against refugees and agency workers. As such, management personnel within Oxfam and MSF were also compelled to protect their organisations' reputations for neutrality, and to discourage radical action on the ground which could compromise the safety of staff and their ability to access camps in the future.

When it came down to it, all decisions in the Salvadoran refugee camps contained a high moral risk. No matter what staff chose to do, violence was a near certainty and the loss of life by refugees at the hands of the host state was to be expected. In such extreme circumstances, emotion battled with reason in conditioning action for Oxfam and MSF. For MSF field staff, a close emotional proximity to the refugees resulted in instinctive support for the anti-relocation campaign in 1981. At the same time, a detached, reasoned perspective informed the rejection of this approach in Paris. In Oxfam's case, the internal tensions that resulted from UNHCR's offer of the coordinator role in 1982 illustrated an awareness that Oxfam could not pursue its balancing act in attempting to be all things to all people to its conclusion without further compromising its ability to act on empathy in advocating for Salvadoran refugees. Overall, a traditional understanding of humanitarian neutrality was non-existent in Honduras. Nevertheless, the internal debates that occurred within Oxfam and MSF revealed that the outward performance of neutrality was clearly

[146] Garrard-Burnett, Atwood Lawrence, and Moreno, 'Introduction', in Garrard-Burnett et al (eds.), *Beyond the Eagle's Shadow*.

understood to be both a strategic form of self-protection for humanitarian organisations and a political tool which was disproportionately wielded by the United States in Central America's asymmetrical conflicts in the 1980s.

Chapter 4

Intellectual formations, professional ideologies and attitudes to human rights in the Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras

In November 1988, *Le Monde* published an article by Bertrand de la Grange, claiming that just a few months previously, MSF staff working in the Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras were ambushed and threatened by refugees with studded clubs. After having been denied entry to the camps, two jeeps were also seized by refugees while a Salvadoran guerrilla radio station denounced MSF personnel as mercenaries in the service of US imperialism.[1] The story was a telling insight into the tense situation in which MSF found itself in Central America. A sharp deterioration of an already precarious relationship between MSF and the refugee committees had occurred in 1988, and by the end of the year, MSF President Rony Brauman felt the organisation had no choice but to leave Honduras. Crucially, the French NGO accused the refugee committees of committing human rights abuses against the rest of the refugee population, thus rationalising the undignified departure as a principled act of rights-based *témoignage*.[2] The contrast between this dramatic exit and Oxfam's strong support of the refugee committees was striking. In 1984, Oxfam officials had put forward their own rights-based vision of the refugee programme when they campaigned alongside the committees against the relocation of camps away from the Salvadoran border. MSF leaders, on the other hand, viewed the proposed relocation as a standard application by UNHCR of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

How did Oxfam and MSF develop such different relationships with the refugee committees? And why did they both use the frame of human rights to articulate their sharply opposing interpretations of ethical action in Honduras? The answer lies in the distinct personal, political and professional backgrounds that shaped the NGOs' members, along with how

[1] Bertrand de la Grange, 'Pour ne pas cautionner l'emprise de la guérilla sur les camps l'organisation Médecins sans Frontières renonce à assister les refugies salvadoriens au Honduras', *Le Monde*, 16 November 1988.
[2] See Laurence Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *Médecins Sans Frontières: Speaking Out Case Studies* (Paris, 2013) for a detailed chronological description of the events leading up to MSF's departure from Honduras.

these factors interacted with the specific context encountered in Cold War Latin America. As described in Chapter 3, this was a highly complex environment for aid delivery, not least because Honduras was not a signatory of the Refugee Convention or Protocol, meaning UNHCR had little leverage over the government in seeking to push back against the Honduran Army's repression of refugees.[3] In the first two years of the refugee programme's existence, Oxfam and MSF realised that it would be extremely difficult if not impossible in these circumstances to uphold the values of humanitarian neutrality. Many humanitarians felt a natural sympathy for the Salvadoran refugees and were compelled to express solidarity with them but the consequences of being seen by the Honduran government to favour the Salvadoran refugees, and by extension the FMLN's campaign in El Salvador, were severe. Security considerations dictated that human rights became the accepted framework through which humanitarian NGOs engaged with what they saw happening on the ground because this allowed them to try to retain their public claims to neutrality. [4] However, interpretations of the relevance of human rights varied, and in this sense the socio-political backgrounds and professional styles of NGOs assumed heightened importance in determining exactly how humanitarians responded to Salvadoran suffering over the course of the decade.

This chapter contends that both NGOs intervened in the Salvadoran refugee crisis according to distinct roles they carved out for themselves in the global Cold War, and that each organisation interpreted the practical relevance of human rights differently as a result. In making this argument, it consciously draws on Odd Arne Westad's construction of the East-West confrontation as a cover for a deeper North-South dynamic of control over the Third World, interrogating the role of humanitarian NGOs in either perpetuating or contesting

[3] See Molly Todd, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War* (Madison, 2010), pp.88-90 for a description of the Honduran government's attitude towards Salvadoran refugees, along with its influence over UNHCR due to the government's status as a non-signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol on refugees; Criticisms of UNHCR for failing to adequately perform its protection duties and for being too close to the US Embassy were platformed in an International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) campaign against the relocation of Colomoncagua camp away from the Honduran-Salvadoran border in 1983-84. See [Julia] Cameron, 'The Salvadorean Refugees in Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande, Honduras (The Relocation Question)', 'Prepared on January 18, 1984 for the ICVA Consultation on Central America', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

[4] Kevin O'Sullivan, 'Civil War in El Salvador and the origins of rights-based humanitarianism', *Journal of Global History*, 16:2 (2021), pp.246-265.

these dynamics.[5] Oxfam and MSF were both undeniably agents of Northern power in the Global South, but they interacted with Southern political actors in different ways. For Oxfam, allegiance to a specific ideology of social development was crucial in shaping its decision to wholeheartedly accept the authority of Salvadoran refugee committees. In contrast to Arturo Escobar's description of the domineering, colonial functionality of social development in Colombia,[6] Oxfam invested development with revolutionary potential borne of its staff's encounters with liberation theology and Paolo Freire's theory of 'conscientisation'. In its most radical form, this view privileged local knowledge over measurable indicators of success in development projects. [7] By contrast, MSF's medical relief mandate drove its primary form of interaction with refugees as patients rather than partners in development. As a result, it clashed with the refugee committees over the enforcement of a medical programme based on technical indicators and the idea of a 'universal suffering body' that was not borne out by the refugees' own articulation of their needs. Drawing on Miriam Ticktin's work on medicalisation and the 'antipolitics of care', the analysis shows that MSF's intervention aimed to depoliticise Salvadoran suffering yet failed to do so due to the refugees' activism in pushing back against this.[8]

In addition to these professional orientations, the chapter also examines the deeper currents of intellectual formation that are key to understanding the core reasons for Oxfam and MSF's divergent approaches to ethical action in Honduras. Eleanor Davey has skillfully outlined MSF's birth in the French left's rejection of radical *tiers-mondisme* in favour of humanitarian *sans-frontiérisme*.[9] However, rather than seeking to emphasise the ideological distance travelled by figures like Rony Brauman from Maoist protest in the late sixties to human rights-based anti-communism in the eighties, the chapter uses a Bourdieu-inspired social movement analysis to complicate this view. It highlights the fact that within the 'anti-

[5] Westad, *The Global Cold War*.
[6] See Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, 2011); See also James Ferguson, *The anti-politics machine "development," depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho* (Cambridge, 1990 & Minneapolis, 1994) for a comprehensive exploration of how development aid served to depoliticise the bureaucratic entrenchment of state power in new spaces.
[7] See Maggie Black, *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years* (Oxford, 1992), pp.180-192.
[8] On medicalisation, see Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of care: immigration and the politics of humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley, 2011) and Ticktin, 'The Gendered Human of Humanitarianism: Medicalising and Politicising Sexual Violence', *Gender & History*, 23:2 (2011), pp. 250-265.
[9] Eleanor Davey, *Idealism beyond borders : The French revolutionary Left and the rise of humanitarianism, 1954-1988* (Cambridge, 2015); See also Ticktin, 'The Gendered Human', pp.252-253.

authoritarian habitus' that structured Brauman's political worldview from an early age, there is far more continuity in thought and practice than has been acknowledged thus far.[10] It is this anti-authoritarian political frame that was so crucial in shaping MSF's encounter with 'the political' in its clashes with refugee committees in Honduras.[11] By the 1980s, the worldview it inspired also pushed MSF to operationalise a vision of human rights that was invested with anti-communist goals.[12] Oxfam, by contrast, was not shaped by the same sharp ideological U-turns that characterised the journey of the French left. Rather, it emerged from a decidedly middle-class section of the British left that channeled its radical instincts into established humanitarian organisations, resulting in the consistency of a solidarity-oriented approach in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s.[13] This approach led Oxfam to be more receptive to the Salvadoran refugees' collective rights advocacy in Honduras. Despite their opposing visions of rights, both NGOs thus demonstrated the salience of human rights discourse in humanitarian action through their interventions, which complicates statist periodisations of human rights history that regard 1989 as a big bang moment for the influence of rights on international politics.[14]

This chapter proceeds in four parts. The first section compares the intellectual formations of two key figures from Oxfam and MSF – Bill Yates and Rony Brauman – to illustrate how their political worldviews were shaped by individual socialisations within different national contexts. The second section elaborates on this by showing how these political outlooks were borne out by the different professional humanitarian ideologies developed by the NGOs. It also analyses how the practice of intervening in the Salvadoran refugee camps served to deepen the distinction between the two organisations, leading to very different

[10] This framework is informed by Erik Neveu, 'Life stories of former French activists of "68": Using biographies to investigate the outcomes of social movements' in Oliver Fillieule and Erik Neveu (eds.), *Activists Forever? Long-Term Impacts of Political Activism* (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 84-107.
[11] Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26 (2000), pp. 611–639.
[12] Eckel, *The Ambivalence of Good*, pp.190-243.
[13] See Chris Rootes, 'The new politics and the new social movements', *European Journal of Political Research*, 22:2 (1992), pp. 171–191 and Fred Rose, 'Toward a Class-Cultural Theory of Social Movements: Reinterpreting New Social Movements', *Sociological Forum,* 12:3 (1997), pp.461-494.
[14] See Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman, 'Human Rights and History', *Past & Present*, 232:232 (2016), pp. 279-310.

kinds of interactions with refugees on the ground.[15] The third section explores how each NGO reacted when confronted with Salvadoran activism and forced to truly engage with the political for the first time in the camps. For Oxfam, the crunch moment came in the attempted second phase of relocation of refugees away from the border. Between 1982 and 1984, Oxfam became increasingly confident in platforming the refugee committees' rights-based objections and adhered to a consciously political criticism of UNHCR policy as a cover for US military interests. Conversely, the moment that pushed MSF into existential turmoil was the stalemate negotiations with refugee committees over medical rationalisation measures in 1988. This led to MSF's descent into overtly political analyses of why it could no longer work with the leftist refugees, preceding its complete departure from the country. In both cases, the way in which the NGOs reacted was consistent with the political values and action repertoires of their distinct ideologies of professional practice. Reflecting on these findings, the fourth section widens the lens to examine the case study's significance for long-term histories of humanitarianism and human rights. It acknowledges the refugee committees' activism as part of an ongoing contestation of the statist application of IHL, which illustrates the unsettled nature of the legal regime and the role of rights discourse in piercing holes in the version of IHL that was codified following the Second World War.[16] With regard to normative debates on the effects of human rights on humanitarian principles, it also argues that Oxfam and MSF's interventions in Honduras should be seen as two competing forms of rights-based humanitarian action that pre-dated the formalisation of the Right to Protect (R2P) ideology after the end of the Cold War.[17]

Intellectual Formations

Oxfam and MSF can be conceived of as vehicles of new social movement activism, as both NGOs were directly shaped by the radicalism of the generation that came of age in the

[15] This argument is informed by Joseph Ibrahim's exploration of distinction in political movements in Ibrahim, *Bourdieu and Social Movements: Ideological Struggles in the British Anti-capitalist Movement* (London, 2015), pp.64-85.
[16] Boyd Van Dijk, 'Human Rights in War: On the Entangled Foundations of the 1949 Geneva Conventions', *The American Journal of International Law*, 112:4 (2018), pp.553-582.
[17] See David Chandler, 'The Road to Military Humanitarianism: How the Human Rights NGOs Shaped a New Humanitarian Agenda', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23:3 (2001), pp.678-700.

1960s.[18] However, the form that this radical energy took in the 1980s was starkly different for each organisation. While MSF's anti-communist conception of human rights drove its sense of global mission, Oxfam's interventions in Latin America were animated by a vision of radical solidarity with the poor that produced an orientation towards collective rights. The only way to truly understand why this was the case is to delve into the biographical backgrounds of key figures within both NGOs, and to examine the intellectual formations that shaped their worldviews. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' – an identifiable system of values and practices that structure people's lives – is useful here as a template through which to compare MSF's Rony Brauman and Oxfam's Bill Yates. As is widely recognised among social movement theorists, Bourdieu's concept captures the importance of social structure and primary socialisation in shaping an individual's values at the same time as it acknowledges the agency of individuals in continually seeking out social worlds and forms of action that appeal to them. In this way, it establishes a distinct habitus that can be examined over a person's lifetime.[19] Of particular interest for the comparison is Erik Neveu's identification of a 'militant habitus' among '68 activists in France, described as 'a lasting input of social energies to involvement in collective action and struggles, shaping a set of skills, interpretative schemes, and ways of behaving that support this orientation'.[20] Reflecting on the relevance of this to Yates and Brauman reveals the existence of two specific variations on the militant habitus that were moulded by a combination of factors, including class, place and religious socialisation.[21] A central argument of this section is that the intellectual formations produced by these backgrounds later shaped the policies of the organisations these actors worked for. As MSF President, Brauman was intimately involved in the decision to withdraw from Honduras in 1988. In the 1970s, Yates had been

[18] See Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders*, for a detailed analysis of MSF's intellectual evolution within the broader currents of the post-1968 French left; Maggie Black describes in *A Cause for Our Times* how Oxfam became a space where radical debates about global inequality were hosted in the 1970s, while Rootes shows in 'The new politics' that this was in keeping with trends of social movement activism in Britain, whereby activist sentiments were channelled into existing civil society organisations.
[19] See Nick Crossley, 'From Reproduction to Transformation: Social Movement Fields and the Radical Habitus', *Theory, culture & society*, 20:6 (2003), pp. 43–68, and Neveu, 'Life stories of former French activists of "68" in Neveu and Filieule (eds.), *Activists Forever?,* and Rootes, 'The new politics and the new social movements'.
[20] Neveu, 'Life stories of former French activists of "68" in Neveu and Filieule (eds.), *Activists Forever?*, p. 91.
[21] See Neveu, 'Life stories of former French activists of "68", for an exploration of religious socialisation; Rose, The new politics and the new social movements' on 'class-cultural theory'; and Kiran Patel and and Sonja Levsen, 'The Spatial Contours of Transnational Activism: Conceptual Implications and the Road Forward', *European Review of History* 29:3 (2022), pp.548-561 on the role of place.

instrumental in radicalising Oxfam's Latin America programme, which continued to determine the organisation's policy outlook in Honduras in the following decade.

Neveu's research is insightful on the role of religion in primary socialisation as it demonstrates the persistence of a militant habitus among the rural, Catholic '68 activists he analyses. However, in seeking to disprove previous constructions of '68 activists as 'frantic social climbers', Neveu inadvertently establishes a new binary between the figure of the 'ugly '68er' and the supposedly virtuous '68ers that retained militant values.[22] In fact, the evidence shows that even '68 activists like Brauman that took U-turns were actually remaining loyal to a deeper variant of the militant habitus. Unlike the largely Catholic '68ers in Neveu's study, Brauman's parents were Polish Jews who emigrated to France. His father was a former *résistant* and his mother was among those who sought refuge in the countryside from Nazi persecution during the war. As a result, Brauman's Jewish identity, within which the recent trauma of the war loomed large, informed his engagement with French society. Before Brauman became well versed in the language of political engagement, he claimed that he was 'instinctively anti-authoritarian' when he encountered far right and far left militancy as an adolescent. He was also partly attracted to Maoist anti-imperialism at university as an expression of 'Jewish universalism' and remained a member of the Maoist *Gauche Prolétarienne* until 1974. Nonetheless, he felt more connected to anarchist conceptions of a struggle to dismantle power itself and establish a 'society of masters without slaves'.[23] Ultimately, these stronger anti-authoritarian convictions were what led Brauman (and the largely Jewish intellectuals of the *nouveaux philosophes* movement) to reject leftist militancy when he saw the abuses of power committed by communist regimes in the Global South.[24]

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[22] Neveu, 'Life stories of former French activists of "68" in Neveu and Filieule (eds.), *Activists Forever?*

[23] See Rony Brauman, *Penser dans l'Urgence: Parcours Critique d'un Humanitaire, Entretiens avec Catherine Portevin* (Paris, 2006), pp. 13-17 on Brauman's description of his Jewish background and how it influenced his political engagement; See also Stephane Lagarde, 'Rony Brauman : le passé maoïste et la jeunesse d'aujourd'hui', *AsiaLyst*, 17 May 2016, accessed at https://asialyst.com/fr/2016/05/17/rony-brauman-le-passe-maoiste-et-la-jeunesse-daujourdhui/ on 2 June 2023 for Brauman's account of leaving *Gauche Prolétarienne* as it gradually disbanded between 1973 and 1974.

[24] Memories of the Holocaust featured heavily in the writings of the *Nouveaux Philosophes*, as is described by Eleanor Davey in *Idealism Beyond Borders*, pp. 144-181; See Bernard Henri Levy, *La Barbarie à Visage Humain* (Paris, 1977), and André Glucksmann and Thierry Wolton, *Silence On Tue* (Paris, 1986), for examples of *Nouveaux Philosophes* writings. For a contemporary critique of the movement, see Oskar Negt, 'Reflections on France's "Nouveaux Philosophes" and the Crisis of Marxism', *SubStance*, 11/12:4 (1982), pp.56-67.

Yates' background, on the other hand, had more in common with the Christian left milieu that Neveu identifies, for whom the psychological effects of communal devotion and of encountering a transnational missionary network at an early age instilled values of collective action and solidarity with the poor.[25] Yates jokingly refers to himself now as an 'Atheist Quaker' but acknowledges that his Catholic socialisation was formative, especially as he spent part of his childhood in Brazil. When he returned there in 1972 with Oxfam as Country Director, he was deeply inspired by the liberation theology movement that had spread among progressive sections of the Church following 1968's Vatican II conference in Medellín. [26] Its central claims were that Catholic scripture readings should be guided by 'a preferential option for the poor', and that priests should directly engage with communities to dismantle systems of social injustice.[27] The Catholic church was already Oxfam's main contact in Latin America; Yates developed relationships with influential liberation theologians like Dom Hélder Câmara, who ensured that the impulse to solidarity was more important in structuring Yates' primary worldview than the 'anti-authoritarian habitus' that was borne of Brauman's Jewish identity.[28]

Social class was also central in shaping the two men's intellectual formations. It is widely acknowledged that new social movements were overwhelmingly middle-class, but the question of why reveals some relevant insights. Reflecting on this requires an engagement with the idea of 'class-culture', which stipulates that class structures not only the economic interests of groups but also their psychology and social attitudes.[29] Yates fits neatly into the category of middle-class activists who sought self-definition through their occupations, as would most Oxfam members at the time.[30] Yates claimed that he experienced something akin to a 'mid-life crisis' in his twenties, and was compelled to join Oxfam when he realised that he was not doing anything worthwhile despite making a lot of money in his post-

[25] Neveu, 'Life stories of former French activists of "68" in Neveu and Filieule (eds.), *Activists Forever?*
[26] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.
[27] See Lilian Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology* (Oxford, 2018), and Christopher Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Second edition), (Cambridge, 2007).
[28] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.
[29] Rose, 'Toward a Class-Cultural Theory of Social Movements'.
[30] Ibid.

university job.[31] This yearning to express his identity through his work meant he was willing to self-limit his earning potential to achieve self-actualisation. By contrast, Brauman's engagement in radicalism came about not as a consequence of middle-class culture, but in reaction to his sense of inadequacy when confronted with the political literacy of his schoolmates in the prestigious *Lycée Lakanal* that he attended. Brauman says his family aspired towards a bourgeois ideal, and he gained a place in the school because of the administrative sector they lived in, but they were really living hand to mouth in his adolescence.[32] While he was certainly influenced by his charismatic classmates, he did not engage much with politics in school as he felt alienated from the bourgeois class-culture that they exhibited. He found it strange to encounter fifteen year olds talking about going to the ENA (National School of Administration), and did not go along to the impromptu seminars on Marxism held by an idolised teacher because he felt 'socially incompetent in that milieu'.[33] Eventually, he became politically engaged in university as a way to fit in with his peers, describing how he chose Maoist militancy among the many 'foreign languages' of leftist rhetoric.[34] Nevertheless, his ongoing sense of difference was evident in his distrust of the way in which militant students talked about workers' protests. The untypical presence of both workers and *petite bourgeoisie* in anarchist circles was a reason why he described his interactions with them as 'joyous', a level of positive association he notably does not use for any other aspect of his youth militancy.[35] A class lens thus reveals clear differences between Yates' late yet stable engagement in social activism, and Brauman's early social alienation and U-turns.

Finally, it is also important to think about the role of place in shaping intellectual formations – in this case the contrast between Britain and France as national settings for social change. There is a trope of British exceptionalism with regards to European experiences of 1968 which rests on the 'decidedly modest' nature of student radicalism in the UK.[36] However, as Chris Rootes has shown, Britain was not an exception to the trend of radicalism through

[31] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.
[32] See Brauman, *Penser dans l'Urgence,* pp. 12-20 for Brauman's description of how class informed his political engagement; For his reflections on *Lycée Lakanal*, see p.13.
[33] Ibid*,* p.14.
[34] Ibid*,* p.19.
[35] Ibid, pp. 15-17.
[36] Rootes, 'The New Politics and the New Social Movements', p. 177.

new social movements.[37] Rather, the institutional constraints of British political culture – its first-past-the-post electoral system, and relatively open civil society – meant that social movement activism was integrated into established political and civil society forums. As a result, Britain lacked an autonomous or overly militant student protest movement, yet its educated middle-class activists were able to combine the 'new' social movements with 'old' economic issues in a more durable manner, without the sharp fracturing between traditional leftist and post-materialist activism that occurred elsewhere.[38] Yates' experiences were consistent with this pattern : his political activism occurred primarily within Oxfam, which by the 1970s was already regarded as an establishment NGO. Oxfam was initially unreceptive to activist infiltration in the late 1960s, until individuals from Yates' generation successfully infused Oxfam with a new sense of (tempered) radicalism in the 1970s.[39] Yates described the intellectual atmosphere within Oxfam in this period as one of constant debate and self-reflection. This 'permanent revolution' underlined the capacity for established British civil society organisations to be remade into sites of activism.[40]

By contrast, Brauman encountered a militant student movement and a much more confrontational youth culture as a teenager in the *Lycée Lakanal*. It is hard to imagine the highly politicised social milieu of Brauman's *lycée*, at which revolutionary engagement was a form of social capital for teenagers, in a prestigious British secondary school. The emergence of the New Left brought a sense of revolutionary potential and ideological renewal to left-wing circles in the UK in the 1960s. [41] Yet there remains something distinctly French about the social context that shaped Brauman's sensibilities. Brauman participated directly in the street protests and confrontations with police in *Mai '68* as a Maoist militant, but only a few years later he rejected the validity of leftist engagement as a way to positively respond to global suffering, marking a sharp rupture with his past views.[42] In Britain, Yates did not participate in a revolutionary student movement and thus felt no need

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid, pp.180-187.
[39] See Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, pp.155-162 on the internal tensions of the 1960s over domestic advocacy. See also pp.177-202 on the radical evolutions that occurred in the 1970s.
[40] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.
[41] See Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands* (London, 2017), and Tony Jefferson, 'Review: Stuart Hall with Bill Schwarz, Stuart Hall: Familiar Stranger; Sally Davison, David Featherstone and Bill Schwarz (eds.), Stuart Hall: Selected Political Writings.', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 34:7-8 (2017), pp. 305-13.
[42] Brauman, *Penser dans l'Urgence,* pp. 17-22.

to reckon with a revolutionary past as an adult, resulting in his ongoing engagement with radical ideologies throughout the 1970s.

In addition to national context, there is a growing body of literature on transnational social movements that shows the importance of comparing 'spaces of imagined belonging' with the actual spaces of social interaction within which activists form their worldviews.[43] Brauman encountered a social milieu that had an expansive global imaginary. Nevertheless, it was the physical and social world of Paris, and more specifically that of the Latin Quarter on the Left Bank, that moulded him. When Brauman entered university, he was dismayed to find classes were to be held in a new suburban campus. What he really wanted was to participate in the revolutionary fervour that centred around the Latin Quarter, and he joined *Gauche Prolétarienne* as a result to seek it out.[44] Long associated with intellectual creativity, the Latin Quarter contained campuses of the Sorbonne and the prestigious École Normale Supérieur on the Rue d'Ulm behind the Panthéon, along with the famous cafés frequented by existentialists in the post-war years.[45] The Panthéon, indeed, represented an imposing shrine to secular ideas and *'Grands Hommes'*, which seemed to tell the privileged Parisian youth who spent their time in its shadow that they had the power to change the world. Brauman later spent time in Africa and the Middle East on humanitarian missions, but Paris remained central in shaping his sense of global ambition, first invested in revolutionary militancy and then transferred to humanitarianism and human rights.[46]

Yates' experience was quite different. Brazil was the most formative spatial environment for his intellectual formation. As Oxfam Country Director, Yates encountered a cradle of radical thinking in the northern Brazilian capital of Recife, where the slums contained the physical evidence of poverty, and the Catholic church had become invested with spiritual radicalism. Dubbed 'conscientisation capital' by Maggie Black, Recife was also the hometown of Paolo Freire, the educationalist who wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and argued for the consciousness-raising or 'conscientisation' of poor youth so that they could be empowered

[43] Patel and and Levsen, 'The Spatial Contours of Transnational Activism'.
[44] Brauman, *Penser dans l'Urgence,* p.15.
[45] Agnès Poirier, *Left Bank: Art, Passion and the Rebirth of Paris 1940–1950* (London, 2018).
[46] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.

to challenge injustice.[47] Furthermore, it was the seat of Archbishop Dom Hélder Câmara, whose famous lament, 'When I fed the poor, they called me a saint. When I asked "Why are they poor?" they called me a communist', became a touchstone for Yates.[48] Finally, Recife bore the hallmarks of entrenched repression, having been the scene for a failed leftist military revolt in 1935 that was mythologized by the right-wing dictatorship in the shrill language of 'fanatical anticommunism' as a uniquely evil episode that justified extreme counterinsurgency measures.[49] Over five years, Yates witnessed several priests and development partners being arrested, and his awareness of Oxfam's vulnerability to CIA infiltration led him to burn his office files, saying 'you didn't have to be paranoid but it helped'.[50] This prolonged exposure to surveillance and fear meant Yates deepened rather than questioned his commitment to using charity as a form of radical solidarity with poor communities in Latin America. While Brauman displayed a durable 'anti-authoritarian habitus' that led him to pursue a strongly anticommunist vision of human rights as a way to advocate for people against governments, therefore, Yates' intellectual formation produced a worldview that was much more accommodating of sovereignty in the Global South, and conceived of human rights as a vehicle to advocate for the collective rights of oppressed groups in Latin America.

Professional ideology and practice

In addition to these opposing political worldviews, both Oxfam and MSF intervened in Honduras with distinct ideologies of professional practice, which reflected their members' intellectual formations yet had independent consequences in determining how the organisations interacted with Salvadoran refugees. MSF's approach to intervention was steeped in ideas about the medicalisation of aid. As Miriam Ticktin put it, the organisation practiced an 'antipolitics of care' whereby its seemingly apolitical interventions served to depoliticise and reproduce systems of inequality.[51] Ticktin also remarks that MSF was

[47] Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London, 1972); Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 185-187;
[48] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.
[49] Vincent Bevins, *The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade & the Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World* (New York, 2020), pp. 101-105.
[50] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020. See also Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* p.187 on Yates' witnessing of state repression in Brazil.
[51] Ticktin, *Casualties of care.*

founded as a rejection of 'the political' in the ashes of 1968, as its members preferred to view the Global South as the realm of victims in need of humanitarian rescue.[52] Indeed, it was MSF's reluctance to accommodate the political agency of the Salvadoran refugees within its vision of care that led to such a strained relationship developing in Honduras. MSF encountered the Salvadorans primarily as patients and ran its programme in a highly technical manner, generating vast amounts of data on the nutrition levels, disease prevalence and mortality rates of refugees, which were relied upon as objective indicators of needs.[53] Anxieties about aid diversion meant MSF's management team was particularly hostile to any deviations from their calculations in aid provision.[54] In 1983, MSF began to advocate for the closure of supplementary nutrition centres, prized by refugees as spaces of autonomous community care that provided access to protein-rich foods for the sick and elderly, along with pregnant women and young children.[55] Without taking the centres' social benefits into account, MSF disseminated a comprehensive chart comparing the nutritional health of Salvadoran refugees with impoverished Hondurans, brandishing calorie consumption (2500 v. 1750) and infant mortality rates (65 v. 98.50 percent) as evidence that the centres were unnecessary.[56] However, MSF never managed to close them; officials remarked in 1986 that they had persisted for 'purely political reasons'. [57] Although MSF downgraded the nutrition programme and removed the Irish NGO Concern, which had supported the nutrition centres, from the camps in 1984, the refugees pushed back against further reforms.[58] In 1986, coordinated refugee action successfully prevented MSF from introducing nutritional surveys of the population, which were to assess a random sample of children from households to determine the nutritional status of the community. Instead,

[52] Ticktin, 'The Gendered Human', pp. 252-253.
[53] MSF medical reports on Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras, 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens' and 'Honduras 87/89 Salvador réfugiés', MSF Archive.
[54] See Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*.
[55] Report 'Honduras: Campa de refugies de "Mesa Grande", 'Mission fév. 82- Aout 82 [MJ Clarenie] MSF Aquitaine', Honduras 80-88: réfugiées salvadoriens, MSF Archive.
[56] MSF report 'Les réfugiés salvadoriens dans les camps du Honduras (Mai 1983)' attached to letter from André Tronc, French Ambassador in Honduras to Claude Cheysson, French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Americas Division, 24 May 1983, 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.
[57] 'Les Camps de Réfugiés au Honduras Bilan Sanitaire (Mars 1986) Dr Jean-Claude Desenclos', 'Honduras 87/89 Salvador Réfugiés', MSF Archive.
[58] Relations soured between MSF and Concern until MSF, along with UNHCR and Caritas, decided not to renew the Concern's contract in September 1984. MSF viewed Concern as too 'paternalistic' in its approach, yet MSF's position led to complaints from refugees. See report on the development of the Salvadoran refugee programme 1980-1986 (report in French, first page missing), 'Honduras 87/89 Salvador Réfugiés', MSF Archive.

refugees forced the retention of more comprehensive nutritional census methods, within which every household was to be assessed.[59]

These clashes over the provision of aid and the collection of medical data disrupted MSF's idea of a 'universal suffering body' which could be objectively cared for in the Global South.[60] Similarly, MSF's medical humanitarian gaze meant it was also unable to adequately respond to refugees' psychological trauma, reported on solely as 'psychosomatic cases' of illness and 'psychosocial issues' that caused an overuse of medicines.[61] In 1986, MSF doctor Jean-Claude Desenclos described how the frequent and varied psychosomatic complaints made by refugees were taking up valuable time in the consultation room. In Mesa Grande, doctors recorded such high numbers of chronic asthma and epilepsy cases that they surpassed the global record for the prevalence of the pathologies in general populations.[62] The refugees, however, articulated their needs differently, speaking of their cultural distaste for the relief food and clearly demonstrating through the persistent presentation of psychosomatic illnesses that some of their healthcare needs demanded a more holistic approach than could be met within a mandate of saving bodies.[63] Despite the expansive nature of the refugees' needs, MSF dismissed their attempts to broaden the parameters of

[59] 'Les Camps de Réfugiés au Honduras Bilan Sanitaire (Mars 1986) Dr Jean-Claude Desenclos', 'Honduras 87/89 Salvador Réfugiés', MSF Archive.

[60] See Ticktin, 'The Gendered Human' for a discussion of how gender-based violence disrupted MSF's idea of the 'universal suffering body' in the 1990s.

[61] Fear among children, stomach problems, and epilepsy were remarked as among the psychosomatic cases MSF that observed in 'MSF au Salvador. Les moyens d'une aide humanitaire aux réfugiés salvadoriens… Aout 80 a fév. 81', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive ; Psychosomatic cases recorded as still being very frequent in 1986 in 'Les Camps de Réfugiés au Honduras Bilan Sanitaire (Mars 1986) Dr Jean-Claude Desenclos', 'Honduras 87/89 Salvador Réfugiés', MSF Archive; High consumption rates of phenobarbital (associated with treatment of epilepsy) attributed to psycho-social issues and long-term assistance, 'Informe fin de mission', 'Tema: Estudio y comentarios sobre consume, utilizacion, demanda y abastecimiento de farmacia.', 'Colomoncagua, Junio/Diciembre 1986… Avelino Pantin Sanchez, Colomoncagua 5 Diciembre 1986', 'Honduras 84-87 rapport de fin de missions', MSF Archive.

[62] 'Les Camps de Réfugiés au Honduras Bilan Sanitaire (Mars 1986) Dr Jean-Claude Desenclos', 'Honduras 87/89 Salvador réfugiés', MSF Archive.

[63] Cultural distaste for relief food remarked upon by Rolando Lopez in 11 June letter to Bridget Wooding and Christine Whitehead, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; MSF rarely commented on the cultural value of relief food but it too felt the need to record its distaste in 1982 in Mesa Grande at the meat pellets donated by the US, which it likened to 'dog food' *('viands en boulettes venant des USA (croquettes pour chiens)'* in Report 'Honduras: Campa de réfugiés de "Mesa Grande"… 'Mission fév. 82- Aout 82 [MJ Clarenie] MSF Aquitaine'), 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive; In 1983, the possible construction of a mental health centre was recorded but other than this no evidence of a strategy to respond to psychological trauma was recorded in MSF reports. See 'Mission Honduras- Mesa Grande- Campements de Réfugiés Salvadoriens- Sept 83 par Elisabeth Dieudonné', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.

the aid programme, refusing to base its programmatic decisions on anything other than the data it collected from the Salvadorans' bodies. In this way, MSF provided evidence for Ticktin's contention that the principal of humanity functions on two tiers; there are some for whom their bodies rather than minds (and voices) are trusted as bearing 'testimonial truth'.[64]

While MSF's intervention in Central America was shaped by the logic of emergency medical relief, Oxfam's was conditioned by the particular vision of social development it had cultivated in Latin America. Oxfam had a broad mandate that incorporated both humanitarian relief and development, and it took account of long-term socio-economic issues and community-level dynamics. This led Ticktin to include Oxfam in a category of 'Anglo-Saxon' NGOs that do not face the same kind of tension between neutrality and 'the political' as the quintessentially French MSF does. [65] In terms of Oxfam's development education programmes, it is true that the organisation engaged more openly with the issue of global inequality in its work from the 1960s.[66] Yet if this was in some senses a more radical approach than MSF's, it is also clear that this was always a tempered radicalism, constrained by the Charity Commissioner's restrictions on political activity in Britain and the tendency of Oxfam's management team to put the brakes on whenever Oxfam strayed too far from the visibility of 'on-the-ground' community development programmes.[67] In addition, social development too has a history of replicating colonial relations of dominance.[68] Because of the concept's broadness and malleability, the idea of development captured the imaginations of a diverse range of actors across the globe in the second half of the twentieth century. 'Development' never possessed a fixed or stable meaning in the minds of those that pursued political and economic projects in its name, and this was certainly true of Oxfam's evolving relationship with the term over the decades.[69]

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[64] 'Les Camps de Réfugiés au Honduras Bilan Sanitaire (Mars 1986) Dr Jean-Claude DESENCLOS', 'Honduras 87/89 Salvador Réfugiés', MSF Archive. See Ticktin, *Casualties of care*, pp.15-16.
[65] Ticktin, 'The Gendered Human', p.258 and p.264.
[66] See Valerie Gorin, 'Advocacy Strategies of Western Humanitarian NGOs from the 1960s to the 1990s' in Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism & Media: 1900 to the Present* (New York; Oxford, 2019), pp. 201-222.
[67] See ibid, pp. 205-206 and Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. pp.155-162, pp.186-192.
[68] See Escobar, *Encountering Development*.
[69] Corinna R. Unger, Iris Borowy, and Corinne Antezana-Pernet (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development* (New York, 2022); Stephen J. Macekura, and Erez Manela, *The Development Century: A Global History* (Cambridge, 2018); Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 177-202.

Nevertheless, in the 1970s, Oxfam was among the network of NGOs that proved themselves capable of challenging the dominant ideology of top-down, capitalist development followed by states and international organisations.[70] Indeed, Latin America represented a space in which Oxfam's pattern was to side with oppressed rural communities against state authority, and to be influenced by non-state actors, including progressive elements of the Catholic church and educationalists like Paolo Freire, when they articulated emancipatory ideologies like liberation theology and conscientisation.[71] In the 1970s, Yates pushed for the application of conscientisation in Oxfam's development programmes, insisting that it should prioritise the fostering of autonomy and critical consciousness over measurable outcomes.[72] Eventual rationalisation measures ensured that practical considerations about market prices for agricultural commodities and projections for sustainable income generation continued to play a part in Oxfam's planning discussions. However, the sense of radical renewal that accompanied Yates' 'politicisation of humanitarianism' had immense influence on contemporaries and was evident in attitudes towards Salvadoran refugees. [73] As such, Oxfam staff viewed both the nutrition centres and craft workshops denounced by MSF in Honduras as important social spaces that allowed a traumatised community to regain a sense of control in the camps.[74] This also made sense within Oxfam's broad vision of long-

[70] The dominant statist ideology of development in the West was articulated by Walt Rostow in 1960. See Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto* (2d ed) (Cambridge, 1971), and Corinna R. Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History* (London, 2018), pp. 7-8, 21; On the role of NGOs in articulating an 'alternative' bottom-up approach to community development, see Kevin O'Sullivan, 'NGOs and development: Small is beautiful?' in Unger, Borowy, and Antezana-Pernet (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development*, pp. 234-249, and Paul Adler, 'Creating "The NGO International": The Rise of Advocacy for Alternative Development, 1974-1994' in Macekura and Manela (ed.), *The Development Century,* pp. 305-325.

[71] On liberation theology, see Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age*, and Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*; On conscientisation, see Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed;* On the influence of liberation theology and conscientisation on Oxfam, see Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, pp. 177-202.

[72] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020; See also Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 186-189. On the broader impact of conscientisation on a process of internal reflection about growth and the ethics of charity within Oxfam, see Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 196-197.

[73] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 189-191; See also Peter Van Dam, 'No Justice Without Charity: Humanitarianism After Empire', *International History Review,* 44: 3 (2022), pp. 653-74.

[74] Oral history interview with Pauline Alvarez, conducted on 27 June 2019; Oxfam enthusiastically funded education and workshop programmes, as described in the report 'Field trip to Honduras, 19-28 May 1982', 'PURPOSE OF TRIP: Visit Mesa Grande, Colomoncagua refugee camps, Accompany Mr. James Howard, Oxford, as translator', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; Oxfam even contemplated taking over the running of nutrition centres when UNHCR announced it was planning to close them in 1984. See 19.1.84 letter from CJ to BFW on 'Refugees- Honduras', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

term societal reconstruction, which was reflected in its support for El Centro de Investigacion y Accion Social (CIAS), a grassroots healthcare organisation that operated within insurgent zones in El Salvador.[75] This applied equally to Salvadorans living in refugee camps in Honduras, where Oxfam promoted the same values of autonomous community development. Viewing them primarily as partners in development rather than patients, Oxfam did not medicalise their psychological trauma either. Rather, it directly engaged with refugee testimony on how communities had been affected by their flight from massacres committed by the Salvadoran and Honduran militaries.[76]

These contrasting approaches precipitated contrasting responses from refugees and, in turn, from the aid workers who interacted with them. Tasked with maintaining high professional standards and avoiding engagement with the refugees' politics, MSF field staff faced a conundrum.[77] In order to work smoothly in the camps, most NGOs respected the authority of the refugee committees, which consisted of democratically elected members, mandated to oversee the administration of aid and represent refugees' views to international agencies.[78] Initially, MSF was enthusiastic about working alongside public health monitors ('*gardiens de santé'*) and medical assistants *('chargés de santé'*) in the clinics, influenced by the fashionable development doctrine of training so-called 'barefoot doctors' in the Global South. [79] However, staff were ultimately unable to maintain a

[75] 11 February 1982 Agenda, 27 October 1982 Agenda and Minutes, PRG/1/5/6, Minutes of Latin American Field Committee 1981-1982, Oxfam Archive.
[76] Rolando Lopez reflected on the 'neurotic, and sometimes psychotic, behaviour' in Salvadoran refugees viewed by doctors as the result of 'hopelessness' and the experience of violence, 11 June letter from Rolando Lopez to Bridget Wooding and Christine Whitehead**,** PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; Detailed accounts of interviews with refugees in Colomoncagua on their experiences of government repression and flight to Honduras also contained in Mercedes Bonorino, 'Project Reports from Latin America: Salvadoran Refugees in Honduras, Oxfam-Canada, No. 20 September 1981', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[77] Oral history interview with Bernard Pécoul, conducted on 31 August 2020.
[78] See Todd, *Beyond Displacement,* pp.97-111 for a detailed description of the system of self-organisation established by Salvadoran refugee committees to oversee the aid programme.
[79] MSF kept a copy of the newspaper article by Annie Thébaud-Mony and Meredith Turshen, 'Vers la médicalisation du sous-développement', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 1981, which engaged in criticism of top-down development discourse and advocated for the 'barefoot doctor' approach to developing healthcare in the Global South. Article contained in 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive; The term barefoot doctor *('médecins aux pieds nus')* was also referenced by André Tronc in a letter to Claude Cheysson, 24 May 1983, 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive. MSF expressed enthusiasm about capacity building and local autonomy in the Salvadoran refugee camps in the following reports: 'Mission Honduras- Mesa Grande- Campements de Réfugiés Salvadoriens- Sept 83' par 'Elisabeth Dieudonné', and 'Honduras: Campa de refugies de "Mesa Grande" Mission fév. 82- Aout 82 [MJ Clarenie] MSF Aquitaine', 'Honduras 80-88: réfugiés salvadoriens', MSF Archive.

functional working relationship with refugees. Take the example of a confrontation that occurred between an MSF nurse and the refugee committee in the San Antonio camp near Colomoncagua in 1986.[80] After taking up a six-month position as the sole permanent health-care professional responsible for the small camp population, the nurse initially encountered a friendly community who had got on well with her predecessor. But relations soon deteriorated following the discovery by Honduran soldiers of three full bags of ampicillin in a refugee's tent on 18 April.[81] Believing her trust had been violated, the nurse changed the locks to the pharmacy, which the committee had a key to, without telling anyone. She later returned from a week off in May to find that three health workers in the clinic had been fired by the committee and replaced by inexperienced yet supposedly politically loyal 'pawns'.[82] Angry at constantly losing experienced assistants and having to spend time on training new appointees, the nurse claimed she was being exploited. Ten refugees had also signed a letter of complaint to UNHCR over what they claimed was the nurse's medical negligence and lack of empathy in treating them. The nurse ignored this, having previously told refugees that she did not have time to be a 'social worker' and treat 'psychosomatic cases'. [83] Over several meetings with the committee, the nurse only hardened her resolve not to reinstate the refugees' privileges. Upon leaving the camp, she articulated a distinctly political interpretation of her experiences. Authoritarian control could produce the illusion of order from the outside, she remarked, but it hid internal chaos, and over the course of what she saw as an isolating and negative experience, her idealistic vision of humanitarian aid in the Salvadoran camps was truly shattered.[84]

[80] Tensions (over aid rationalisation measures) became evident from 1984, when a strike of *charges de santé* was reported in Mesa Grande, and refugees in Colomoncagua refused to respect MSF as manager of the nutrition programme in early 1985. See the report on the development of refugee programme 1980-1986 (report in French, first page missing), 'Honduras 84-87 rapport de fin de missions', and report 'Honduras Mercredi 14 Novembre 84, Bernard Pécoul', 'Honduras 80-88: refugies salvadoriens', MSF Archive.
[81] 'Rapport concernant San Antonio, Janvier 1986- Juillet 1986… Infirmière MSF', 'Rapport strictement confidentiel : À Garder à MSF Tegucigalpa- MSF Paris?', 'Honduras 84-87 rapport de fin de missions', MSF Archive.
[82] 'Rapport concernant San Antonio, Janvier 1986- Juillet 1986… Infirmière MSF', 'Rapport strictement confidentiel : À Garder à MSF Tegucigalpa- MSF Paris?', 'Honduras 84-87 rapport de fin de missions', MSF Archive.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

Oxfam's frames of reference were similarly conditioned by the realities of life in the field. Officials in the organisation had long realised that the kind of development work it practiced was a target for repression in Latin America, especially when in the 1970s this began to encompass legal aid to communities whose land rights were threatened.[85] When violence intensified in Central America, Oxfam felt directly impacted and expanded its role, even going as far as to vocally support a UN Resolution in December 1980 on human rights violations committed by the Salvadoran government.[86] This integration of human rights advocacy into its programme was, however, contested by some members. In 1982, its field director in Central America Rolando Lopez, a Guatemalan national, defended funding a human rights NGO in Guatemala against colleagues' objections by pointing out that the murders being documented by the organisation were often of people Oxfam had closely worked with on development projects.[87] This instinctive solidarity, as articulated by Lopez, was carried through to how Oxfam engaged with Salvadoran refugees in Honduras. Unlike the MSF nurse in San Antonio, however, Oxfam staff avoided having to confront the reality of everyday work in the camps. Lacking a permanent operational presence, Oxfam's relationship with the programme mostly consisted of channelling funds through solidarity-oriented organisations like Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Caritas Santa Rosa.[88] Nevertheless, field experiences of a different manner were formative for Oxfam in framing its perspective. Visits by officials to the region – however brief – helped to establish a direct link to the suffering of the Salvadoran people. Bill Yates recalled a visit to an Oxfam-supported church refuge in San Salvador in the early 1980s, when a priest drove him early one morning to see 'on an incipient rubbish heap, [amid] old car tyres and the odd chucked away household appliance', 'half a dozen bodies … the death squad's work of the previous night'.[89]

[85] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp.191-192.
[86] 11 December 1980 letter from Brian Walker, Director General of Oxfam to Lord Carrington, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, lobbying the UK government to support a UN Resolution condemning human rights violations committed by the Salvadoran government, OD 28/451, UK National Archives.
[87] Annual Report for Central America and Mexico by Field Director Rolando Lopez, 27 October 1982 Minutes of Latin America Field Committee, PRG/1/5/6, Oxfam Archive.
[88] See June 1981 Report on 'Salvadorean Refugees in Honduras' from Rolando Lopez (Field Director for Central America), attached to 5 and 11 June letters from Rolando Lopez to Bridget Wooding and Christine Whitehead, PRG/3/3/3/8, and PRG/1/5/6, Oxfam Archive.
[89] Oral history interview with Bill Yates, conducted on 21 July 2020.

Even though Oxfam's field visits to El Salvador and Honduras were short, they evidently produced deeply emotionally affecting experiences. The question of who narrated these visits and the stories that Oxfam officials were attentive to also mattered. These field experiences were strongly shaped by Salvadoran agency, a fact which was equally true of the regular updates on the camps received from CRS.[90] A report compiled by CRS representative Mary Contier in 1982, for example, included an emotional description of a note slipped to her by a Salvadoran refugee pleading for help.[91] Later on, Oxfam received an Oxfam-Canada report that relied on the testimony of a Spanish NGO worker who had managed to stay behind after international workers were expelled from Colomoncagua to reconstruct the events of a brutal Honduran military incursion.[92] Thus, even though Oxfam had no operational presence, the communication links it possessed promptly provided it with an eyewitness account that revealed the sadistic violence that had been committed by Honduran soldiers. The contrast with MSF's description of the same event serves to highlight Oxfam's position still further. On the ground, MSF staff provided urgent medical care and vowed to report the 'pogrom' that had occurred in Colomoncagua. Yet its operational role also meant it suffered consequences that Oxfam was insulated from, including a harrowing incident when one of its doctors was arrested for homicide because a baby died in its arms.[93] Significantly, MSF reports only ever referenced the Honduran military's sanitised description of the event, and later discussions of it in the media centred on MSF's allegations that committee members had sabotaged the treatment of a wounded man to create a martyr.[94]

[90] See Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp.183-186 on the origins of Oxfam's relationship with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in the mid-1960s, and CRS' secular offshoot Federation of Organisations for Social and Educational Assistance (FASE) in Brazil in the 1970s; Several CRS reports and correspondence between Oxfam and CRS representatives attest to the close ties and sharing of information between the two NGOs on the Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[91] Mary Contier, 'Report on 'Trip to Mesa Grande, La Virtud, and Colomoncagua', 'April 19, 1982 through April 24, 1982', 'Prepared by: Mary Contier, May 6, 1982', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[92] '01.09.85' telex from 'Susan Johnson, Ox-Can' to Oxfam GB, PRG/5/3/3/2, Oxfam Archive.
[93] Rony Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p.16.
[94] Report on the development of Salvadoran refugee programme 1980-1986 (report in French, first page missing), 'Honduras 87/89 Salvador Réfugiées', MSF Archive; See also Bertrand de la Grange, 'Pour ne pas cautionner l'emprise de la guérilla sur les camps l'organisation Médecins sans Frontières renonce à assister les refugies salvadoriens au Honduras', *Le Monde*, 16 November 1988.

What can these experiences tell us about the drivers of militant action? In the most basic sense, they are an important reminder that neither political formations nor professional ideologies alone are sufficient to explain the divergence in understandings of ethical action in Honduras. Instead, practice was key in crystallising the political distinction between Oxfam and MSF because the way in which events in the Salvadoran refugee camps were either directly experienced or mediated to both organisations reinforced pre-existing beliefs, contributing to a process of ideological reproduction.[95] Still processing his personal rejection of leftist militancy, Rony Brauman was attracted to a vision of neutral medical assistance that responded to suffering yet did not seek to engage with its structural causes. In contrast, Bill Yates channelled his discontent with his bourgeois lifestyle into a vision of humanitarianism as a vehicle for radical social change. Both men deepened their commitment to these visions and influenced the development of specific 'action repertoires' that corresponded to them within each organisation.[96] Thus, MSF's function as an emergency medical relief NGO led it to intervene operationally in the camps and to practice a medicalised approach to care that lacked recognition of the political agency of Salvadoran refugees. Oxfam, by way of contrast, continued its existing pattern of channelling support through local, solidarity-oriented partners that were already on the ground, privileging the autonomy of refugees in setting the terms of their aid. The field experiences produced by these interventions sharpened the political distinction between Oxfam and MSF because they conditioned how the NGOs related to Salvadorans.

Confrontations with leftist activism

'Politics' confronted Oxfam and MSF most visibly at different moments of the crisis. For Oxfam, this occurred between 1982 and 1984, when it was lobbied by refugees to participate in an international campaign against UNHCR's planned second phase of relocation from Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande camps. Following the brutal forced relocation from La Virtud to Mesa Grande, which Oxfam and other NGOs had opposed unsuccessfully in 1981 and 1982, the threat of a second relocation was pivotal in forcing Oxfam to embrace the language of human rights and denounce UNHCR's policy as politically

[95] Ibrahim, *Bourdieu and Social Movements*, pp. 64-85.
[96] Ibrahim, *Bourdieu and Social Movements*, pp. 64-85.

motivated. This was not the case for MSF, whose management maintained that relocation away from the border was a justified security measure consistent with IHL, and thus not a human rights violation. It was instead MSF's intense confrontations with refugee committees over aid rationalisation measures in 1988 that forced it to openly engage with 'the political' for the first time in Honduras. The stalemate negotiations with committees led to MSF's expulsion from the camps in August 1988 and Brauman's decision to withdraw all MSF teams from the country in protest at what he perceived as the committees' authoritarian governance.[97] Thus, the moments at which Oxfam and MSF felt compelled to act politically in Honduras were indicative of sharply opposing ideological interpretations of the meaning of human rights in this context. In addition, the way in which the NGOs reacted was consistent with their existing action repertoires. For Oxfam, a preference for collective action was evident in its participation in the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) campaign against relocation. For MSF, a tendency to make lone principled stands was reflected in the NGO's position as the sole agency to decide to leave and highlight the committees' authoritarianism.

When UNHCR officials announced in early 1982 that refugees from Colomoncagua and excess population from the newly-opened yet overcrowded Mesa Grande would be relocated to a new permanent site in Olancho, many Salvadorans claimed they would rather return to war-torn El Salvador than be moved further into Honduras.[98] The refugee committees accordingly produced public announcements that used the language of human rights and the Salvadorans' Christian faith to express their resistance, directly appealing to international humanitarians for support.[99] Oxfam was plugged in to both the professional humanitarian and Christian charity networks, and was highly receptive to the refugees' lobbying. When UNHCR attempted to pressure NGOs to promote relocation, Oxfam claimed

[97] Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*.
[98] Details of second phase of relocation contained in following reports: Mary Contier, Report on 'Trip to Mesa Grande, La Virtud, and Colomoncagua .. April 19, 1982 through April 24, 1982' … 'Prepared by: Mary Contier [CRS], May 6, 1982', and 'Report on UNHCR Mission to Central America (11 to 22 February 1982) … Briefing Paper on the Relocation of Salvadoran and Guatemalan Refugees in Honduras' … 'Peter Shiras. CRS Teguc.', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; Oxfam report 16 June 1983 on incident at El Tesoro (Guatemalan refugee camp), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[99] See 14 January 1984 public letter from 'All of the Refugee Community, Colomoncagua' on relocation, and letter from 'San Marcos Ocotepeque, Honduras 27 de enero, 1982' signed by 'Refugiados de Mesa Grande' (in Spanish), PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

it was not its place to advise the Salvadorans on something of which only they would experience the consequences.[100] As described in the previous chapter, Oxfam had shied away from direct confrontation with UNHCR in 1981. Two years later, however, its aid workers had witnessed at first-hand the brutality with which the La Virtud transfer was enforced by the Honduran military, and were also aware that refugees had since strengthened their organisation and commitment to resistance. Taking these factors into account, Oxfam was willing to be bolder this time round.[101] The organisation made several arguments against relocation grounded in its social development perspective and complained about the overly 'technical' approach of UNHCR.[102] A UNHCR representative assured critics in July 1983 that experts would be brought in to help refugees deal with any psychological distress that resulted from the move. Oxfam's view, however, was that the refugees' psychological trauma from fleeing El Salvador was the primary reason why they should not be uprooted against their will again.[103] Oxfam also contradicted UNHCR's narrative that the border was uniquely unsafe by arguing that the Honduran Army's brutality, rather than proximity to the border, was the essential cause of insecurity.[104] The existence of a forum through which to collectively advocate for the refugees in ICVA made the decision to embrace solidarity an easier one. The British organisation rarely made lone stands on human rights issues, preferring to work with other NGOs in presenting a coordinated front, a tendency which stemmed from the organisation's centre-left background, and which was nurtured by the institutional environment in which political

[100] From MP to File, 'Field trip to Honduras, 19-28 May 1982', 'PURPOSE OF TRIP: Visit Mesa Grande, Colomoncagua refugee camps, Accompany Mr. James Howard, Oxford, as translator', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive; [Julia] Cameron, 'The Salvadorean Refugees in Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande, Honduras (The Relocation Question)', 'Prepared on January 18, 1984 for the ICVA Consultation on Central America', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

[101] Telex from M. Pickard to BFW 26 August 1983, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

[102] 11 March 1982 letter from PS (Peter Sollis) to RMW (Richard Moseley-Williams), about conversation with UNHCR rep Ingenar Cederburg (Projects Officer) in Costa Rica, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

[103] 3 August 1983 report of meeting, sent from Bridget Wooding to Richard Moseley-Williams (Oxfam) and Martin Barber (British Refugee Council), 'Debriefing of O Haselman and C Bertrand following their Mission to Honduras/ Mexico in June 1983', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

[104] A military incursion to the Guatemalan refugee camp El Tesoro in June 1983 was politicised in different ways by UNHCR and Oxfam. UNHCR representatives claimed in 'Mission Report: Honduras (June 1983)' written by 'O Haselman C Bertrand 30 June 1983' that it showed the incompatibility of the border with refugee security, while Oxfam claimed in the report 'Update on Refugee Situation in Honduras' June, 1983 that it demonstrated refugee security had less to do with proximity to the border, and more to do with the Honduran army, which UNHCR had proved itself powerless to protect refugees from. Both reports in PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.

activism developed in the UK.[105] Thus, its officials worked with CRS, the British Refugee Council and others in making representations on behalf of the refugees to UNHCR.[106] Oxfam's members emphasised the need to publicise the refugees' campaign, and repeated refugee objections to relocation at meetings with UNHCR in Geneva. The idea of establishing an 'alarm system' of influential people to go to the camp at any sign of imminent relocation was also discussed.[107]

Oxfam's attention to the values of locally led development quickly led to a noticeable politicisation of its stance. In January 1984, the ICVA campaign compiled a comprehensive report on relocation, which demonstrated clearly how social development concerns had led to a denunciation of US foreign policy interference.[108] The report began by scrutinising conditions in Olancho and Yoro, provinces which had been proposed by UNHCR as relocation areas. The sites being scoped out for purchase were highly problematic, it concluded, due to a history of tensions between locals and Salvadoran immigrants, and the fact that Honduran *campesinos* claimed the land as part of an increasingly contentious land rights struggle. The report also challenged UNHCR's central claim that the move would allow refugees to regain dignity and independence by achieving agricultural self-sufficiency. ICVA relayed the refugees' response that they would not have the capacity to increase their productivity just because they had access to more land.[109] It was from this line of argument that the report exposed American interference in UNHCR policy. When the refugees' concerns were pointed out, the American Embassy in Honduras said it would provide machinery to help them work the land. Yet when NGOs replied that Salvadorans would be unable to obtain permits to operate these vehicles in Honduras, the Americans simply said

[105] Rootes, 'The New Politics and the New Social Movements'.
[106] '83-10-05' telex from Harris, Oxfam Overseas Director to Paul Hartline, High Commissioner for Refugees; 10 November 1983 letter from Martin Barber (Director, British Refugee Council) to other agencies, including Oxfam, on report sent to UNHCR on relocation and planned ICVA Working Group meetings with UNHCR set up for October; 'Briefing Paper on the Relocation of Salvadoran and Guatemalan Refugees in Honduras' (undated) by 'Peter Shiras. CRS Teguc.'. All documents in PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[107] 14 October 1983 letter from Chris Jackson to Bridget Wooding, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
7 May 1984 'Press Statement' by Helen Thackwell 'member of Oxfam America delegation to Central America January 1984' on planned protest against relocation by refugees in Colomoncagua May 20 1983, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[108] [Julia] Cameron, 'The Salvadorean Refugees in Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande, Honduras (The Relocation Question)', 'Prepared on January 18, 1984 for the ICVA Consultation on Central America', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[109] Ibid; See also Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, pp. 129-136.

they would pay Hondurans to do it instead.[110] The goals of relocation were manifestly not agricultural independence for Salvadorans.

Finally, the report recorded that UNHCR staff members had admitted under pressure from late October 1983 that the policy was being pushed by outside influences. This was seen to confirm rumours that UNHCR was clearing the border of refugees to facilitate an invasion by Salvadoran troops (training at US Army base Puerto Castilla in Honduras) to retake guerrilla-held areas across the border.[111] Several facts were described by the report's author Julia Cameron to corroborate this allegation. The most obvious giveaway was the extensive camp infrastructure built by the refugees, which could easily accommodate a military base for 10-11,000 soldiers.[112] Tellingly, after relocation was announced, a road from Colomoncagua to San Antonio was also completed and an airplane landing strip proposed to be repaired with UNHCR money. This was an absurd use of donors' funds, unless UNHCR was being consciously used as a political tool. As such, the ICVA report questioned UNHCR's neutrality in Honduras. Why was it so keen on enforcing a policy that was being pushed by a third-party government and had been initially opposed by the host state? [113] In pointing out the many holes in UNHCR's defence of relocation, ICVA agencies drew attention to the fact that UNHCR was a politically compromised hostage of US foreign policy in Honduras. For this, they were, in turn, denounced as guerrilla stooges by the Honduran military.[114]

Unlike Oxfam, MSF was not accused of supporting a guerrilla campaign against relocation. In fact, MSF was a close ally of UNHCR and clashed with the activism of refugees in 1988 when it attempted to enforce rationalisation measures as part of a broader set of cuts, claimed to be necessary for financial reasons, to the humanitarian programme.[115] For its part, MSF supported the cuts because it was keen to reduce wastage and suspected aid diversion, and

[110] [Julia] Cameron, 'The Salvadorean Refugees in Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande, Honduras (The Relocation Question)', 'Prepared on January 18, 1984 for the ICVA Consultation on Central America', PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] 25/1/84 telex from CJ to MRH/ RMW describes Pauline Martin's receipt of word at ICVA conference that Colonel Turcios (Coordinator of National Refugee Commission in Honduras) had condemned the anti-relocation campaign as a front for guerrilla interference, PRG/3/3/3/8, Oxfam Archive.
[115] Todd, *Beyond Displacement,* pp. 194-195.

because Brauman felt compelled to reduce refugee autonomy in administering certain medications, including cardio-active drugs, which could only be used safely by qualified doctors.[116] However, refugees refused to accept these reforms and launched protests against UNHCR and MSF, even engaging in fasts and hunger strikes from mid-June 1988.[117] In shrewd recognition of the power of their bodies, and in a flipping of the normal depoliticising functionality of medicalisation, they wheeled out patients on stretchers and presented malnourished children to journalists and activists as evidence of medical neglect.[118] In this way, the refugees explicitly argued that they did not trust UNHCR and MSF to mediate their suffering to an international audience, and sought to bypass the international organisations in using their bodies as a form of protest, intentionally contesting the idea of a universally suffering body and refusing to fulfil their unwritten roles as 'ideal victims'.[119] In response, Brauman accused the committees of politically staging the refugees' suffering, and intentionally underfeeding children ahead of an American delegation's visit to the camps.[120] Similarly, UNHCR representatives described refugees as 'spoilt children' and scathingly wrote of how patients were seen walking to their beds at one of the protests.[121] Like UNHCR, MSF instinctively rejected the refugees' agency in attempting to carve out a role for themselves as active humanitarian advocates because this jarred with the ideological outlook and practice of medicalisation.

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[116] Rony Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p.16.
[117] 'Extraits rapport mission Magdi Ibrahim, mission MSF Honduras', undated, 'Honduras 84-87 rapport de fin de missions', MSF Archive; Waldo Willalpando, the UNHCR representative in Honduras, was quoted as confirming that 33 Salvadoran refugees had been fasting for several days but were not on a hunger strike in 'Thirty-three Salvadoran refugees on hunger strike', *El Tiempo* (Honduras) 23 June 1988 (article translated from Spanish), referenced in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out,* p. 18; See also Todd, *Beyond Displacement,* pp. 124-128 for more details on the refugees' hunger strikes.
[118] Telex from the UNHCR Honduras representative to Rony Brauman and Frédérique Marodon, MSF Paris, 8 September 1988, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 26.
[119] Ticktin, 'The Gendered Human', p. 260.
[120] Brauman, quoted in Alain Hertoghe, 'Après le départ de MSF des camps de réfugiés salvadoriens au Honduras: des limites supposes de l'aide humanitaire', *La Croix l'Évènement,* 25-26 December 1988; Also see Bertrand de la Grange, 'Pour ne pas cautionner l'emprise de la guérilla sur les camps l'organisation Médecins sans Frontières renonce à assister les refugies salvadoriens au Honduras', *Le Monde*, 16 November 1988.
[121] UNHCR official, quoted in Bertrand de la Grange, 'Pour ne pas cautionner l'emprise de la guérilla sur les camps l'organisation Médecins sans Frontières renonce à assister les refugies salvadoriens au Honduras', *Le Monde*, 16 November 1988; Telex from the UNHCR Honduras representative to Rony Brauman and Frédérique Marodon, MSF Paris, 8 September 1988 (in English), quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 26.

The professional values of medical humanitarianism thus drove the content of MSF's objections to the refugees' demands, but it is also clear from the way that negotiations with committees played out that this was more than merely a professional clash. Rather, Brauman's 'knowing gaze' when he visited Colomoncagua in July 1988 was evidence of how he steered negotiations partly as a political exercise. Reflecting recently on that process, Brauman likened the committee members he encountered (mostly elderly women) to 'Maoists from the late sixties'; they chastised him for the 'bourgeois academic knowledge' he used in seeking to limit their use of medications. Brauman was also unsurprised by the committees' tactics of wearing opponents out by constantly repeating the same arguments.[122] Here, in these activists, he recognised the image of his younger, communist radical self. While one MSF field staff member emerged from the negotiations crying, Brauman claimed he was exhilarated by the heated talks.[123] UNHCR representatives, for whom the discussions were similarly less-than-familiar ideological territory, soon gave in to some of the refugees' demands. Brauman, by contrast, was resolute that MSF should stand its ground. The result was a battle of wills, in which the refugees used increasingly obstructionist tactics to try to force Brauman to compromise.[124] They picketed the negotiations, called MSF a group of US imperialists, refused to cooperate with doctors in clinics, and in mid-August actively expelled MSF from the camps.[125]

In July 1988, Brauman decided to pull teams out of the camps, and refugee committees anticipated a formal announcement of this by expelling MSF from the humanitarian programme.[126] Over the following weeks, Brauman guided MSF towards complete departure, despite his colleagues remaining less convinced and attempts by UNHCR to get

[122] Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, pp. 18-19.
[123] Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, pp. 18-19.
[124] 'Extraits rapport mission Magdi Ibrahim, mission MSF Honduras', undated, 'Honduras 84-87 rapport de fin de missions', MSF Archive.
[125] 'Extraits rapport mission Magdi Ibrahim, mission MSF Honduras', undated, 'Honduras 84-87 rapport de fin de missions', MSF Archive; Bertrand de la Grange, 'Pour ne pas cautionner l'emprise de la guérilla sur les camps l'organisation Médecins sans Frontières renonce à assister les refugies salvadoriens au Honduras', *Le Monde*, 16 November 1988; Letter from MSF Colomoncagua coordinator to Dr. Magdi Ibrahim, MSF Honduras coordinator, July 1988, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 23.
[126] Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, pp. 22-29.

him to reconsider.[127] Chantal Messié, one of the MSF doctors that was in Colomoncagua in 1988, later said she believed there were lost opportunities to find solutions, and maintained that the clash was over technical aspects of aid delivery rather than authoritarianism, as was claimed in the French press.[128] However, at meetings of MSF's *Conseil d'Administration*, Brauman passionately argued that MSF had to leave for moral reasons. He worked hard to convince board members that the situation was serious enough to warrant departure, claiming that as one of the few people to have visited Honduras regularly, he had observed the committees' steadily deepening authoritarianism. Brauman later admitted he would have quit his job as MSF President if the board did not agree to leave – an indication of the depth of personal and emotional meaning he had attached to the confrontation with committees.[129] Brauman's decisions were fundamentally structured by the values of the anti-authoritarian habitus. As the organisation's president, it was his personal inability to keep the MSF teams in Honduras and remain loyal to his worldview that led to MSF's complete departure from the country by the end of 1988. In keeping with MSF's tendency to make lone stands, Brauman drove MSF to leave Honduras in a principled act of conscience that had become a signature of MSF's action repertoire by the late 1980s.

By supporting and challenging the authority of the refugee committees, Oxfam and MSF interacted with Salvadoran human rights activism in opposing ways. Latin American communities were often forced to make rights claims as 'tortured individuals' during the Cold War, but for the Salvadoran refugees in Honduras, social cohesion and collective rights activism became important means of survival. [130] As this section has shown, the Salvadoran refugee committees represented powerful advocates for their community. They consciously utilised humanitarian NGOs as sources of information about IHL and human rights, and integrated sympathetic NGOs into an international solidarity network.[131] The ideologies that shaped Oxfam and MSF determined how they reacted to these attempts by refugees to

[127] Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 22; Letter from Jean-Pierre Hocke to Rony Brauman asking him to reconsider or delay MSF withdrawal, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, pp. 23-24.
[128] Chantal Messié, quoted in Alain Hertoghe, 'Après le départ de MSF des camps de réfugiés salvadoriens au Honduras: des limites supposes de l'aide humanitaire', *La Croix l'Évènement*, 25-26 December 1988.
[129] Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 22.
[130] Jessica Stites-Mor, *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* (Madison, 2013), pp. 9-12; Todd, *Beyond Displacement,*
[131] Todd, *Beyond Displacement,* pp. 114-117.

enlist them in their cause. MSF's clash with the committees was the result of a confrontation between two very different social manifestations of the global left during the Cold War. In the 1980s, MSF was loyal to a version of human rights that idolised the 'dissident', and which Jan Eckel has described as a tool in the fight against communism.[132] However, the Salvadorans' lived experience of violent oppression by a right-wing state had produced a leftist movement that was driven by the protection of the community. A decade earlier, the same actors may have been allies, yet for the French ex-1968 activists the intervening years had involved a visceral reformulation of their political identities in reaction to the authoritarianism of Third World regimes. As a result, in the media narrative MSF promoted of its departure, MSF primarily focused on the authoritarian abuses practiced by the committees against individuals, citing the strict policing of the community and incidents of violence as evidence of their role as human rights abusers rather than victims.[133] An absolute separation of the refugee community from the committees was needed to support this interpretation, within which the protests against MSF were portrayed purely as the result of manipulation and thus devoid of independent agency. Brauman later claimed that he encountered former refugees in El Salvador who told him 'we were the stones' in reference to the refugees' stone-throwing at MSF vehicles.[134] Likewise, sympathetic French media outlets constructed refugee committees as representatives of a uniquely evil form of authoritarianism and likened them to 'Stalinists' and 'Pol Potists' in a short-hand discourse of universal anti-communism which Western journalists were well versed in.[135] In this way, MSF contributed to a meta-narrative that constructed broadly conceived left-wing actors as uniquely prone to authoritarianism. As Brauman put it 'the system was doomed in advance because of its ideological orientation'.[136]

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[132] Eckel, *The Ambivalence of Good*, pp.190-243; Negt and Daniel, 'Reflections on France's "Nouveaux Philosophes" and the Crisis of Marxism'; Bernard-Henri Levi, *La Barbarie à Visage Humain* (Paris, 1977), p.9; Yasuhiro Matsui, 'Forming a Transnational Moral Community between Soviet Dissidents and Ex-Communist Western Supporters: The Case of Pavel Litvinov, Karel van het Reve and Stephen Spender', *Contemporary European History,* 29:1 (2020), pp.77-89.

[133] Bertrand de la Grange, 'Pour ne pas cautionner l'emprise de la guérilla sur les camps l'organisation Médecins sans Frontières renonce à assister les refugies salvadoriens au Honduras', *Le Monde*, 16 November 1988.

[134] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.

[135] Bertrand de la Grange, 'Pour ne pas cautionner l'emprise de la guérilla sur les camps l'organisation Médecins sans Frontières renonce à assister les refugies salvadoriens au Honduras', *Le Monde*, 16 November 1988; Rene Beckmann, 'Le Salvador entre deux terreurs', *Le Nouvel Observateur,* 30 September – 6 October 1988; See Bevins, *The Jakarta Method,* pp. 101-105 on 'fanatical anticommunism'.

[136] Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 13.

By contrast, Oxfam became a willing participant in the global solidarity network cultivated by Salvadorans, which strategically utilised human rights as a transnational language of political advocacy, and successfully averted a second relocation. As such, the form of human rights activism subscribed to by Oxfam was the direct product of Salvadoran agency.[137] When the refugees used their suffering to elicit sympathy from NGOs, they were consciously demanding the NGOs' support in amplifying their cause in the West to put pressure on the US government and UNHCR in Geneva, demonstrating evidence of what Hector Perla Jr calls 'signal flare' activism. [138] This was also intended to reverberate back to the Honduran government in a so-called 'boomerang' effect.[139] While MSF's anti-communist interpretation of human rights led it to be naturally distrustful of the leftist activism of refugee committees, Oxfam's co-optation within a global solidarity network reflected a collective vision of human rights that focused primarily on community-level rather than individualised dynamics, and was much more accommodating of Global South sovereignty and political activism as a result. Oxfam embraced the Salvadoran refugee community's attempts to break out of the Cold War's disaggregation of their community into individuals. MSF actively rejected this.

Human rights in humanitarian history

By the end of 1988, Brauman handed over all of MSF's medical responsibilities to Honduran doctors. Before leaving, MSF debated the ethics of speaking out about the authoritarianism it had witnessed in the camps in meetings of the *Conseil d'Administration*. Despite their fears that its actions may not have any effect if it left and said nothing, MSF officials realised that launching a press campaign would have dangerous security implications for the refugees. Put simply, it would play into the hands of Honduran media portrayals of them as

[137] O'Sullivan, 'Civil War in El Salvador and the Origins of Rights-based Humanitarianism'; Eline Van Ommen, 'The Nicaraguan Revolution's Challenge to the Monroe Doctrine: Sandinistas and Western Europe, 1979–1990', *The Americas*, 78:4 (2021), pp.639-666; Kim Christiaens, 'Between diplomacy and solidarity: Western European support networks for Sandinista Nicaragua', *European Review of History,* 21:4 (2014), pp. 617-634; Hector Perla Jr, 'Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.: Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement', *Latin American Research Review*, 43:2 (2008), pp. 136-158.
[138] Perla Jr, 'Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá'.
[139] Margaret Keck, and Kathryn Sikkink, 'Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics', *International Social Science Journal*, 51:159 (1999), pp. 89-101.

subversives.[140] Brauman, instead, privately briefed met two French journalists in Honduras on MSF's point of view on what had happened, and allowed the press to lead the narrative.[141] Brauman's recent reflection that MSF's difficulties in working with the Ethiopian regime (see Chapters 5 and 6) mirrored the confrontations in Honduras, nevertheless, confirms that the departure was intended as a principled *témoignage* in line with the organisation's pattern.[142] Curiously, a few months after it withdrew all personnel, MSF was invited back by the committees to assist with medical accompaniment in the final stage of repatriations in 1989. However, neither party retracted their statements about the other, and MSF performed its duties while keeping its distance from the refugees' politics.[143]

Oxfam, by contrast, remained involved in the Salvadoran refugee programme until it ended in 1989, and fully supported the refugee-run repatriation programme as an act of resistance against UNHCR's separate repatriation effort. While UNHCR's proposed repatriation process, agreed in principle with the Honduran and Salvadoran governments in 1986, was to be 'gradual and orderly', the refugees themselves argued from 1987 for mass repatriations to repopulate specific areas that were to be carried out at times of their choosing and on their own terms.[144] The lengths to which committees went to discourage refugees from participating in the rival UNHCR repatriations (including surveillance and violent intimidation) had been one of the many elements of the committees' governance described as authoritarian by MSF.[145] However, as Molly Todd has explained, the refugee-run repatriations can also be seen as important political acts that helped bring the civil war to an end because they allowed formerly exiled communities to reassert sovereignty over villages in defiance of state control.[146] Oxfam supported that process because it embodied the vision of autonomous community development it cherished.[147] In Britain, Oxfam was also driven to be more outspoken. In 1988, for example, it participated in a 'Central America

[140] Minutes of *Conseil d'Administration* meeting 22 July 1988, 'Honduras 84-87 rapport de fin de missions', MSF Archive.
[141] Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 30.
[142] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.
[143] Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 32.
[144] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, pp. 190-221.
[145] Bertrand de la Grange, 'Pour ne pas cautionner l'emprise de la guérilla sur les camps l'organisation Médecins sans Frontières renonce à assister les refugies salvadoriens au Honduras', *Le Monde*, 16 November 1988.
[146] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, pp. 190-221.
[147] Oral history interview with Pauline Alvarez, conducted on 27 June 2019.

Week' alongside Christian Aid and War on Want, to raise awareness about human rights abuses and US interference in the region.[148] Oxfam was later investigated by the Charity Commissioners for this campaign (among others), and in 1990 was found to be guilty of political campaigning – in violation of charity law. This was more of a symbolic reprimand than a severe reputational blow for Oxfam, but nevertheless it clearly demonstrated the extent to which it felt compelled to push the boundaries of acceptable conduct as a result of its engagements in Cold War Central America. [149]

The confrontations that occurred in Honduras also revealed some broader truths about the relationship between rights discourse, power and humanitarian relief. Stepping back to adopt a *longue-durée* perspective on the history of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) allows us to appreciate the importance of the anti-relocation campaign as part of a pattern of norm contestation that can be traced back to the post-war negotiations that led to IHL's codification. According to Boyd Van Dijk, the two legal regimes of IHL and IHRL were never as distinct or settled as has been retrospectively constructed.[150] The language of human rights was very much present in IHL negotiations despite later attempts to artificially isolate it from the intellectual elaboration of IHL. Yet part of the reason why rights discourse was ultimately separated from IHL stemmed from the inability of negotiators to pin down exactly *whose* rights IHL should prioritise in conflicts – civilians or combatants. Particularly revealing were the intense disagreements that occurred when Israeli delegates asserted in 1949 that the rights of civilians to defend themselves from enemy soldiers should take precedence over the rights of combatants to protection from violence as prisoners of war.[151] The norms of IHL ultimately focused on the rights of states so as to regulate the conduct of war more effectively, but the ethical trade-offs that had been made in negotiations continued to have echoes in the attempted implementation of IHL over subsequent decades.

[148] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 272- 273.
[149] Ibid*,* pp. 278- 284.
[150] Van Dijk, 'Human Rights in War'.
[151] Ibid, pp. 575-577.

What does this have to do with Central America – and, more specifically, the story of MSF's and Oxfam's engagement with human rights in that context? The successful campaign against a second round of relocation in Honduras should be viewed as evidence that IHL continued to be contested in practice by civilian groups, whose interests clashed with the rights of states. According to IHL, the Honduran state's right to protect its security interests by moving refugees away from an international border came before the refugees' desires to remain there, yet the powerful defiance of Salvadorans frustrated this view. By rejecting the relevance of IHL in this case, and instead asserting that its implementation constituted a human rights violation, the refugees and sympathetic NGOs punched holes in the state sovereignty of Honduras and disrupted the idea of IHL as a settled, universally applicable legal regime. In effect, they resurrected the arguments that had occurred over the negotiating table decades earlier by rejecting a statist hierarchy of rights in war. By openly engaging with the political nature of relocation, both refugee committees and supportive NGOs like Oxfam also exposed the fact that IHL was being used as a cover for the partisan agenda of the US government and its allies in the region in seeking to clear the border area for military manoeuvres. The anti-relocation campaign thus proved the capacity of human rights to both disrupt IHL and to contest the impartiality of UNHCR during the Cold War.

Unlike Oxfam however, MSF rejected relocation as a human rights issue, and acted later in response to the intransigence of refugee committees. In so doing, MSF reflected its primary interpretation of the role of human rights as a tool with which to contest the violation of individual freedoms by authoritarian governments (or in this case, a self-appointed government-in-exile).[152] This shows the malleability of rights discourse as a frame through which to justify opposing actions in the 1980s. In a precursor to the more overt institutionalisation of human rights into humanitarian action in the 1990s, human rights already exerted considerable influence on how humanitarians made ethical decisions in the field in this decade. The confrontations that occurred in Honduras constituted one of the key moments at which political formations and professional ideologies crystallised into a clear engagement with human rights in humanitarian action, which has implications for debates over periodisation in the field of human rights history. Arguments that 1989 should

[152] Eckel, *The Ambivalence of Good*, pp.190-243.

be regarded as a big bang moment for the entrance of human rights into the international political arena are overblown because they adopt a narrowly consequentialist logic that limits the importance of human rights to their influence on states in the form of military 'humanitarian' interventions.[153] While this was a considerable evolution, this narrative fails to recognise the key role played by non-governmental actors in the 1980s in negotiating the specific form of human rights activism that gained prominence thereafter.

The competing interpretations of human rights that existed in Honduras also allow us to achieve some critical distance from normative debates on the influence of human rights on humanitarianism in the 1990s. Writing in 2001, David Chandler had a wholly pessimistic perspective on the influence of human rights, viewing it as a negative force that had diluted the purity of humanitarian neutrality, the purpose of which was to allow relief organisations to save bodies without meddling in the politics of sovereign states.[154] According to Chandler, human rights served only to depoliticise conflict in the Global South by advancing paternalistic ideologies of unique suffering and victimhood in need of Western military intervention and ever deepening humanitarian governance. Oxfam was among the many organisations that promoted the human rights infiltration in the 1990s that Chandler criticises, yet he designates MSF as its pioneer. The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the organisation in 1999, he argues, was a vindication by the establishment of MSF's erosion of traditional humanitarian principles. This narrative is complicated by the case of the Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras, which reveals that there were two very different interpretations of human rights competing for dominance in the 1980s. Oxfam may have later been swept up in the dominant currents of human rights discourse in the 1990s, but it articulated an alternative form of rights activism in the 1980s that, in contrast to Chandler's construction, served to politicise rather than depoliticise, platformed rather than silenced southern voices, and directly challenged US interventionism as opposed to encouraging it. These moments demonstrate that the path to interventionism and Right to Protect (R2P)

[153] Hoffman, 'Human Rights and History'. See also critical replies to Hoffmann's argument from Lynn Hunt, 'The Long and the Short of the History of Human Rights', *Past & Present*, 233: 233 (2016), pp. 323-31, and Samuel Moyn, 'The End of Human Rights History' *Past & Present*, 233: 233 (2016), pp. 307-22; See also Michael Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, 2011).
[154] David Chandler, 'The Road to Military Humanitarianism: How the Human Rights NGOs Shaped a New Humanitarian Agenda', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23:3 (2001), pp. 678-700.

was not linear or inevitable. Indeed, the fact that human rights was used to argue for and against US interventionism in the 1980s should not be seen to discount its relevance, as argued by Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman, but to underline how important it was as a flexible transnational language of political advocacy in this decade, allowing a diverse range of actors to translate their struggles for a global audience through a rights framework.[155]

Building on this, it is also important to recognise the implications of the Salvadoran refugee programme in Honduras for how we understand the role of the Global South, and in this case Latin American agency, in shaping global norms. This case study has demonstrated the centrality of the Salvadoran refugee committees in producing an engagement with human rights by both Oxfam and MSF. This was more straightforward for Oxfam, whose staff were directly influenced by the committees and chose to amplify their strategic use of rights language in the campaign against relocation. In MSF's case, the organisation was challenged to define the boundaries of its interpretation of rights-based humanitarianism precisely because it opposed the authority of the refugee committees and the legitimacy of their arguments. Either way, it was the activism of the refugee committees that pushed both Oxfam and MSF to engage with rights discourse and to clarify their interpretations of the relevance of human rights to their work. Reading the Central American case in this way allows us to move beyond historical narratives that reproduce humanitarian constructions of refugees as passive victims, while also challenging Eurocentric analyses that disproportionately locate the formative acts of international norm proliferation in northern actors. In parallel to the advocacy of Salvadoran expatriates in American solidarity networks, the refugees in Honduras skilfully used their personal connections to international workers and a conscious performance of their suffering to expand the reach of their activism and penetrate the political spaces where they knew it would have an impact.[156] The Salvadoran refugees were thus important political actors in Salvadoran history, yet it is also important to think globally, and to explore the dynamics of Latin American history during the Cold War not just for their internal relevance but for their role in shaping the development of human

[155] Hoffman, 'Human Rights and History'.
[156] See Perla Jr, 'Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá' on European and North American solidarity networks fostered by Nicaraguans and Salvadorans.

rights discourse as an international norm.[157] The influence Salvadoran refugees had on British, Irish and North American NGOs in developing a solidarity-oriented, rights-based approach to their international role has already been explored.[158] This case study has shown not only that the refugees influenced humanitarians that agreed with them, but also those that actively challenged them. By contrasting Oxfam and MSF's engagements in Honduras as products of Anglophone and Francophone political formations, we can thus appreciate the multitude of ways in which the refugees affected the negotiation of global human rights norms.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the utility of using biographies to understand the complexities of humanitarian history. In examining the intellectual formations of Oxfam's Bill Yates and MSF's Rony Brauman, it has illuminated the influence of national political culture, social class, religion and activist spaces on the development of these humanitarian actors. These backgrounds conditioned the individuals' conceptualisation of the role of western compassion in the Global South, which was important because both Yates and Brauman were central characters in shaping their organisations' approaches to ethical action in Latin America during the Cold War. The distinct value systems that they represented were reflected in the humanitarian programmes established by Oxfam and MSF to respond to the needs of Salvadoran refugees fleeing civil war to Honduras in the 1980s. For Oxfam, an inclination to prioritise solidarity with poor communities in the face of military harassment was central to its sense of mission in Central America. For MSF, a preference for non-political medical relief brought it into confrontation with the leftist refugee committees it encountered in the Salvadoran refugee camps.

Crucially, the Salvadoran refugee crisis was a space where different social variants of the global left met and confronted each other in a time of relative openness before the institutionalisation of rights norms in the humanitarian sector that followed in the 1990s. In

[157] Todd, *Beyond Displacement;* Patrick William Kelly*, Sovereign emergencies: Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rrights Politics* (Cambridge, 2018).
[158] O'Sullivan, 'Civil War in El Salvador and the Origins of Rights-based Humanitarianism'.

Honduras, a combination of distinct political worldviews and ideologies of professional practice collided to determine the kinds of relationships Oxfam and MSF forged with refugees, along with how the NGOs interpreted the relevance of human rights to humanitarian action over the course of the decade. Because of Oxfam's professional grounding in social development, and the influence of individuals like Bill Yates in spreading the values of conscientisation, Oxfam was open to being influenced by the political activism of the Salvadoran refugee committees. The British NGO's members had cultivated strong emotional ties with the Salvadoran refugees, and in the 1980s they participated in a transnational solidarity network that platformed the refugees' collective rights activism against the relocation of camps away from the border. In contrast, MSF's medical humanitarian function, coupled with Brauman's anti-authoritarian habitus, meant that the French NGO primarily viewed human rights as a tool with which individuals should contest authoritarian state power in this decade. This led the NGO to reject the refugee committees' governance of the population, and to leave Honduras rather than compromise with committees over the terms of medical rationalisation. Oxfam and MSF thus had fundamentally different conceptions of the political role of human rights activism in Central America during the Cold War. Nevertheless, what they had in common was that both of their positions were formulated as a direct result of the activism of Salvadoran refugees, which indicates that Global South actors have had a far stronger role in shaping global norms than has been acknowledged thus far.

Chapter 5

The diffusion of malnutrition response practices in the Ethiopian famine, 1984-1985

The famine that unfolded in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s was the result of a perfect storm. The combined effects of drought, civil war and authoritarian social policies killed approximately 600,00 people, making it the deadliest of several food crises that afflicted Sahelian countries over the course of the decade.[1] It also signalled a shift in the geography and mediatisation of global famines.[2] Most of the largest famines of the twentieth century occurred in closed societies in Asia without international intervention. In sub-Saharan Africa, by contrast, Western journalists and humanitarian organisations flocked to the scene of suffering to provide material relief and record human distress for external audiences.[3] Michael Buerk's harrowing visual portrayal of Ethiopian suffering in Korem, which aired on the BBC in October 1984,[4] for example, produced a lasting popular association of Africa with drought and starvation in the West.[5] The international relief operation that was mounted in Ethiopia has also profoundly influenced how institutions, NGOs and states think about the ethics and logistics of famine response. Just as the Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand produced an 'epistemic community' centred on trauma and rehabilitation, this chapter contends that something similar occurred in Ethiopia with regards to the sharing of knowledge on the relief of mass starvation.[6] Many Western NGOs intervened in Ethiopia for the first time in

[1] Alex De Waal, *Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 63-65.
[2] On the importance of the Ethiopian famine(s) for the history of humanitarianism and the media, see Andrew Jones, 'The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) and the Humanitarian Industry in Britain, 1963–85', *20th Century British History*, 26:4 (2015), pp. 573-601; Jones, 'Band Aid Revisited: Humanitarianism, Consumption and Philanthropy in the 1980s', *Contemporary British History*, 31:2 (2017), pp. 189-209; Jones, 'The Unknown Famine: Television and the politics of British humanitarianism' in Rachel Tavernor and Michael Lawrence (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture* (Manchester, 2019); Valérie Gorin, 'Advocacy Strategies of Western Humanitarian NGOs from the 1960s to the 1990s' in Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media: 1900 to the Present*, (New York; Oxford, 2018); Matthias Kuhnert, 'NGOs, Celebrity Humanitarianism and the Media: Negotiating Conflicting Perceptions of Aid and Development during the 'Ethiopian Famine'' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*, pp.263-281.
[3] De Waal, *Mass Starvation*, pp. 62-65.
[4] See Jones, 'The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) and the Humanitarian Industry in Britain', pp, 584-585.
[5] De Waal, *Mass Starvation*, pp. 49-52.
[6] Bertrand Taithe, 'The Cradle of the New Humanitarian System? International Work and European Volunteers at the Cambodian Border Camps, 1979–1993', *Contemporary European History*, 25:2 (2016), pp. 335-58.

response to the 1973-1975 famine, in which 200,000 people died.[7] A decade later, the larger famine of the 1980s acted as a laboratory for the crystallisation of a set of practices that valued a sharp prioritisation of needs and a medicalised vision of hunger as a biological disease of individual bodies.[8]

This chapter compares Oxfam and MSF's approaches to humanitarian action in the Ethiopian famine between 1984 and 1985, reflecting on how the complex nature of the NGOs' experiential learning facilitated the emergence of a sectoral expertise on malnutrition response. Much scholarly research on the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s has focused on its importance for heralding a new age of pop-culture and consumption-oriented humanitarian engagement through the Band Aid/ Live Aid phenomenon.[9] Collaboration between media and humanitarian organisations in depoliticising a famine that was in fact primarily caused by the counterinsurgency and social engineering policies of Ethiopia's communist government has also been emphasised.[10] However, several research projects which have recently shed light on the historicity of humanitarian aid practices have prompted new questions about the Ethiopian famine response. The paternalistic 'moral economy' model applied by Steffen Werther, Georgina Brewis, and Norbert Götz, for example, poses questions about the ethical frameworks through which famine relief operated.[11] Likewise, the 'quantification of human needs' outlined by Joël Glasman not only informed definitions of impartiality, but also resource allocation and individual triage decisions in the field.[12] Others, like Tom Scott-Smith, have focused on the ethical contradictions revealed by the NGOs' approach to hunger as a biomedical condition – as opposed to earlier understandings of hunger as a social problem that afflicted communities.[13]

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[7] De Waal, *Mass Starvation,* p. 51; Jones, 'The Unknown Famine' in Tavernor and Lawrence (eds.), *Global Humanitarianism and Media Culture*.
[8] Joël Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs* (Abingdon, 2020); Tom Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach: Two Hundred Years of Hunger Relief* (Ithaca, New York, 2020).
[9] Jones, 'Band Aid Revisited', *Contemporary British History*; Kuhnert, 'NGOs, Celebrity Humanitarianism and the Media' in Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Media*; Kevin O'Sullivan, *The NGO Moment: the Globalisation of Compassion from Biafra to Live Aid* (Cambridge; New York, 2021), pp. 156-175.
[10] De Waal, *Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia (Africa Watch Report)* (New York, 1991).
[11] Steffen Werther, Georgina Brewis, and Norbert Gotz, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World: The Moral Economy of Famine Relief* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 1-6.
[12] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs*.
[13] Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach*.

These themes are vital for analysing the nature of NGO intervention in the Horn of Africa in the mid-1980s. In the most basic sense, Oxfam and MSF relied upon technical tools and quantitative measuring systems to determine the eligibility of Ethiopian famine victims for treatment. According to Glasman, such tools were never only scientific, and were often shaped by practical considerations of how much Western organisations could afford to *do* in the Global South as much as concerns for medical accuracy.[14] This was certainly the case in Ethiopia. Supplementary feeding programmes operated by Oxfam and MSF gave specialised rations, carefully calculated by calorie content, to children who fell within specific weight-for-height measurement brackets.[15] The weight-for-height thresholds used by these organisations, in turn, had a tangible impact on the lives and survival chances of the starving people that humanitarians encountered in Ethiopia. As this chapter shows, the use of universal technical indicators in Ethiopia was intended to be more objective than the elite governance of relief in the nineteenth century that produced paternalistic soup kitchens and beliefs that hunger resulted from moral deficiencies. Nevertheless, as Tom Scott-Smith points out, modern forms of famine relief have also led to the dehumanisation of aid recipients, which has been evident in the prescription of distasteful technical foods and the reluctance on the part of aid workers to engage with collective hunger as a social phenomenon.[16] How, we might therefore fruitfully ask, did these complex issues manifest in the field for Oxfam and MSF? Did their members record any resistance or unintended consequences that occurred as a result of their technical, individualised approach to relief? And, in the longer term, how did the experiences in Ethiopia condition the specific roles played by Oxfam and MSF as agents of globalisation in the development of sectoral guidelines on humanitarian action in the 1990s?[17]

As these questions indicate, famine relief has never been as simple as the selfless distribution of food to the hungry. Indeed, Glasman and Scott-Smith's studies have

[14] Glasman, 'Measuring Malnutrition: The History of the MUAC Tape and the Commensurability of Human Needs', *Humanity*, 9:1 (2018), pp. 19-44.
[15] See Tim Lusty and Pat Diskett, *Selective Feeding Programmes* (Oxford, 1984).
[16] See Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach,* pp. 173-179 for a summary of the negative effects of modernising malnutrition response practices.
[17] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs*, pp. 6-11, pp. 122-152.

emphasised how it has often been shaped by the imperative to control as much as the concern to relieve. This is not surprising, considering humanitarian NGOs possessed immense power when they distributed scarce resources in situations of mass starvation. Indeed, the enduring paternalistic logic that underpinned NGO relief projects was also evidence of pervasive colonial entanglements. Tehila Sasson and James Vernon identified a 'British way of famine' response that gave priority to the control of vagrancy and the avoidance of creating dependency in victims.[18] This form of 'expertise' was transferred from British state to non-governmental actors in the post-colonial era, enabling its embeddedness in the thinking of international institutions and states in the Global South.[19] This chapter takes account of the long shadow cast by British imperial practices, but it also considers the legacy of French colonial attitudes to malnutrition in late twentieth century NGO operations. Tizian Zumthurm has analysed the French missionary hospital run by Dr. Albert Schweitzer in inter-war Gabon as a 'colonial situation' where hierarchies between the colonisers and the colonised were inevitable – this is an instructive starting point for reflecting on the myriad ways that similar power dynamics continued to beset modern humanitarian action in the 1980s.[20]

What was most significant about the Ethiopian relief operation, however, was the diffusion of practices on malnutrition response that it set in motion within the humanitarian sector. In the early 1980s, Oxfam and MSF possessed very different visions of how to relieve global hunger – attitudes which were reflected in their early interventions in Ethiopia. Oxfam had cooperated with the Ethiopian authorities in responding to famine and drought from 1973, but after 1976 it switched to a small-scale, development-oriented project style.[21] Such was the strength of this developmentalist focus, indeed, that when famine conditions worsened in the north of the country in 1984, the organisation was slow to divert resources to emergency relief. In October 1984, it belatedly set up 'off the road' feeding centres in Wollo

[18] Tehila Sasson and James Vernon, 'Practising the British Way of Famine: Technologies of Relief, 1770-1985', *European Review of History*, 22:6 (2015), pp. 860-72.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Tizian Zumthurm, 'The Colonial Situation in Practice: Food at the Albert Schweitzer Hospital, Lambaréné 1924-65', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 53:1 (2020), pp. 47-70; See also Albert Schweitzer (translated from French by C. T. Campion), *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest: Experiences and Observations of a Doctor in Equatorial Africa* (London, 1922) and Schweitzer (translated from French by Walter E. Steurman), *Pilgrimage to Humanity* (Open Road Integrated Media, 1983).
[21] Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years* (Oxford, 1992), p. 258.

and began providing sanitation for camps for displaced people.[22] It also sent relief convoys into rebel-held areas in Tigray and Eritrea.[23] MSF, on the other hand, had not intervened in Ethiopia in 1973, having only been founded two years previously. Over the following decade, however, the organisation established a presence in several other Sahelian countries, along with unofficial programmes in Eritrea and Tigray, before it agreed with the Ethiopian government to provide emergency relief in Ethiopia in 1984.[24] Beginning in April of that year, MSF opened medical programmes in northern Wollo, followed by further programmes in Kobo, Kelala and Sekota.[25] Initially, this intervention was entirely medical, lacking any food aid component.[26] Nevertheless, MSF soon drew on the expertise of Save the Children Fund (SCF) and Oxfam in adopting a supplementary feeding approach.[27] This practice was not new – Oxfam already possessed an expertise in supplementary or 'selective feeding' from its involvement in Ethiopian food crises in the 1970s.[28] However, the diffusion of practices between organisations in the 1980s held significant consequences for the subsequent development of sectoral norms. By 1985, both Oxfam and MSF foregrounded supplementary feeding as their most valued response to malnutrition.

The chapter explores these themes in four parts. The first section delves deeper into the colonial entanglements that manifested in both the Ethiopian government's famine response ideology and the interventions of international NGOs. The second section comparatively analyses Oxfam and MSF's relief programmes in terms of their reliance on quantitative data. It contextualises the centrality of weight-for-height measurements within the evolution of a 'field anthropometry' discourse in medical research since the 1950s, and examines the tangible effects this approach had on the ground in Ethiopia.[29] The third

[22] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 258-262; Tony Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist: Relief Work in Famine and War* (London, 2001), pp. 43-53.
[23] Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, pp. 262-263.
[24] Anne Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières: la biographie* (Paris, 2004), pp. 517-521; Laurence Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia: 1984-1986', *Médecins Sans Frontières: Speaking Out Case Studies* (Paris, 2013), p. 12; Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.
[25] Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia', p. 8.
[26] Ibid, pp. 12-13, and quote from Dr. Brigitte Vasset on p. 14; Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.
[27] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020; Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia', pp. 12-13, and quote from Dr. Brigitte Vasset on p. 14.
[28] Paddy Coulter, 'Dr. Tim Lusty Obituary', *The Guardian,* 19 February 2015.
[29] Glasman, 'Measuring Malnutrition'.

section reflects on the beliefs about hunger and starvation epitomised by the supplementary feeding programmes. It looks specifically at the human ramifications of the sole focus on acutely malnourished children, and interrogates the practical and moral implications of the NGOs' enthusiasm for the development of easily transportable technical relief foods for use in emergency settings. The chapter concludes by contemplating the broader significance of the case study's findings for theories about the role of NGOs in globalisation. It argues that NGO experiences in Ethiopia were decisive in conditioning the universalisation of a 'minimal humanity' in the inter-agency Sphere project, along with encouraging the increasing loyalty to ever more technical relief foods such as Plumpy'nut from the 1990s onwards.[30]

Colonial entanglements

The 'moral economy' that underpinned the Ethiopian famine response in 1984-1985[31] was shaped by the legacy of colonial relief technologies. A distinctly paternalistic approach to famine response moulded by the colonial mindset was evident in all aspects of the international relief operation in Ethiopia. It was not only European humanitarian NGOs like Oxfam and MSF that bore the hallmarks of colonial legacies; this was also visible in the policies of the Ethiopian government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). This arm of the state had been formed in the aftermath of the Ethiopian revolution that brought the Derg regime to power in 1974, yet despite the symbolism of moral renewal that it invoked, the RRC's reaction to famine in the 1980s shared some of the characteristics of Emperor Haile Selassie's neglectful response to famine a decade previously. Mengistu Haile Mariam's desire to hold onto power conditioned decisions about resource allocation, while a fundamental distrust of famine victims also pervaded the RRC's attitudes to material relief, mirroring the rationale of British colonial administrators. When international NGOs cooperated with the RRC in 1984 and 1985, they reinforced the Mengistu regime's strategy through their participation in the relief operation.

[30] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs*, pp. 6-11; On the legacy of 'low modernism' and the history of Plumpy'nut, see Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach,* pp. 155-173.
[31] Werther, Brewis, and Gotz, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World,* pp. 191-213.

Sasson and Vernon traced the roots of 'the British way of famine' that went on to inform modern humanitarian thinking to the Irish famine in the 1840s.[32] The twin imperatives to control cost and to create 'self-governing colonial subjects' were at the heart of this relief operation. This resulted in the elaboration of policies that provided a minimal level of relief to famine victims, intended to keep people alive without creating dependency.[33] Infamously, Charles Trevelyan, the British government's Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, pioneered public works programmes, in which men were expected to support whole families with the below market-rate wages they were paid in exchange for manual labour. These were closely followed by 'food for work' programmes, which displayed an even higher level of paternalism by reducing wages to food-in-kind payments.[34] To control vagrancy, an extensive network of institutional workhouses was also set up to isolate the worst affected famine victims from the rest of society, thus protecting urban populations from the spread of crime and disease.[35] From the 1860s, these techniques were adapted for use in India, where the lack of an established Poor Law system meant that workhouses were replaced by famine camps and relief houses. This transfer of ideas, in turn, paved the way for the universalisation of the 'British way of famine' in the Global South in the twentieth century.[36] Combined with the new science of the calorie, which facilitated further experimentation on how low famine relief rations could go while sustaining life, British expertise remained influential during the emergence of an international diplomatic discourse on malnutrition.[37] In particular, the perceived effectiveness of British logistical management techniques led NGOs and intergovernmental organisations to draw on colonial knowledge in the provision of emergency relief to vast and geographically dispersed populations. This was the case in the response to the Russian famine in the 1920s, when affected areas were divided into provinces with dedicated relief coordinators or 'controllers' to manage relief allocation in each region.[38] Following decolonisation, a further transfer of expertise occurred: from governmental authorities to international organisations. This process facilitated the

[32] Sasson and Vernon, 'Practising the British Way of Famine', pp. 861-862.
[33] Ibid, pp. 862-863.
[34] Ibid, p. 862.
[35] Ibid, pp. 862-863.
[36] Ibid, pp. 862-863.
[37] Ibid, pp. 862-866; See also Nick Cullather, 'The Foreign Policy of the Calorie', *The American Historical Review*, 112:2 (2007), pp. 337-64.
[38] Sasson and Vernon, 'Practising the British Way of Famine', pp. 863-864.

continuity of imperial practices in new spaces and helped to ensure that cost-effectiveness, efficiency and the avoidance of creating dependency in victims remained core components of international famine response techniques throughout the twentieth century.[39]

No French 'way of famine' has yet been identified as having similarly moulded the contours of global governance. But the technologies of French colonial medicine certainly birthed many of the attitudes to chronic malnutrition and the treatment of disease that coloured international practice in the 1980s. The lasting influence of the hospital set up by Dr. Albert Schweitzer in Gabon before the First World War was an illustrative case. Described as being 'on the edge of the primeval forest' in the title of Schweitzer's popular memoir, the hospital seemed to epitomise domestic perceptions of the African wilderness and the righteousness of the French civilising mission.[40] The medical missionary outpost in Lambaréné also reflected the home the French Catholic church had found for itself in the colonies, having been isolated from cultivating a close partnership with the secular state in the metropole.[41] Schweitzer himself was a fervent theologian who dedicated himself as an individual to what he perceived as the moral project of the civilising mission, within which the 'civilised' had a duty to both save the bodies of the colonised through Western medicine, and to save their souls through Christian instruction.[42] The influence of the Christian missionary tradition was visible even within avowedly secular NGOs like MSF. That organisation's early members, including Xavier Emmanuelli, well understood the heroic self-regard and naïve optimism which drove MSF's messianic campaigns on disease eradication.[43] Others, including Jean Rigal, who worked as an MSF doctor in Ethiopia in 1984-1985, admitted that reading 'On the Edge of the Primeval Forest' – in his case as an idealistic twelve year-old – had a significant influence, not least in shaping his desire to practice medicine in the Global South.[44]

[39] Ibid, pp. 866-869.
[40] Schweitzer, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest.*
[41] Taithe, 'Reinventing (French) Universalism: Religion, Humanitarianism and the 'French Doctors'', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 12:2 (2004), pp. 147-58. See pp. 154-155; See also Edith Archambault, 'Historical Roots of the Nonprofit Sector in France', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30:2 (2001), pp. 204-20, and Gordon Cummings, 'French NGOs and the State: Paving the Way for a New Partnership?', *French Politics*, 7:2 (2009), pp. 145-66.
[42] Schweitzer, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest,* pp. 153-157 and pp. 171-176.
[43] Taithe, 'Reinventing (French) Universalism, pp. 154-155.
[44] Oral history interview with Jean Rigal, conducted on 21 January 2021.

When we look at the details of how Albert Schweitzer ran the hospital in Lambaréné, we can also see the sources of many common assumptions and habitual practices that structured the post-colonial interventions of MSF and other international NGOs in the Global South. As a microcosm of what Tizian Zumthurm calls 'the colonial situation', the reality within Schweitzer's hospital reflected the racialised hierarchies and paternalistic dynamics of control that coloured all colonial interactions.[45] The hospital's food supplies were highly vulnerable to shocks in the local and international colonial economies, and often ran short when authorities diverted resources to labourers working on cash crops and in the timber industry.[46] Schweitzer, however, rarely engaged with the structural reasons behind the famines that occurred in the 1920s, which he instead attributed to purely natural events.[47] In the hospital's everyday decisions, food provision was also profoundly influenced by racialised diet differentiations. Both Europeans and Africans in the hospital ate rice as their main carbohydrate, yet access to vitamins, proteins and fats differed significantly due to claims that the European body suffered more in the African heat, and that expatriate staff needed a higher variety of foods in their diet to prevent loss of appetite and exhaustion.[48] A clear hierarchy was thus constructed between the recommended diet for Africans, which was based on a biomedical conception of the human body's basic needs, and that provided for Europeans, which was governed far more by beliefs in the importance of taste and cultural specificity.[49]

The medicalisation of both acute and chronic malnutrition by international organisations later in the twentieth century reflected the persistent dynamics of this 'colonial situation' in international malnutrition response. The development of technical relief foods, for instance, relied on a conceptualisation of food purely as a vessel of calories and micro-nutrients.[50] Building on American nutritionists' research into the science of the calorie in the nineteenth century, the modern international food aid system effectively decoupled nutrition from the social and cultural properties of food in the Global South, paving the way for the commercial

[45] Zumthurm, 'The Colonial Situation in Practice'.
[46] Ibid, pp. 49-50.
[47] Ibid, pp.51-52 and p. 55.
[48] Ibid, 60-68.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach,* pp. 90-105.

formulation of relief foods that were predicated on the use of US agricultural surpluses. In this way, an imperial logic continued to dominate international mechanisms of responding to global hunger in the post-colonial era. No longer explicitly racialised, it was the science of the calorie, coupled with the unholy alliance between the US government and the agricultural sector, that ensured nutrition was still approached in a predominantly biomedical manner in countries with chronic food crises by the end of the twentieth century.[51]

The impact of these ideas was readily visible in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s. In October 1984, the RRC published a policy paper in which it claimed its 'prime aim' was that 'with the exception of children, the old and the handicapped, food assistance will not be handed out freely but will be given out on a "food for work" basis'.[52] Amartya Sen's seminal work on 'entitlement theory' in the 1980s had illuminated the fact that food crises did not necessarily stem from a lack of food but from an inability on the part of vulnerable people to access food due to soaring prices and inequalities built into food distribution systems.[53] The idea of giving employment to affected people responded to this dilemma, but the Ethiopian government's programmes also drew on deep-seated paternalistic assumptions about famine victims – evident in the RRC's preference for food-in-kind rather than cash wages for participants. In addition to these food for work programmes, famine camps were also set up in Ethiopia to gather the hungry and destitute from surrounding areas into institutional relief settings where health services and food rations could be provided.[54]

In this context, therefore, Ethiopia's unique history - never successfully colonised by a European power – makes for a useful lens through which to analyse the ideological and practical influence of outside organisations. In the absence of formal European political control, nongovernmental actors took on an outsized role in spreading 'colonial' practices to Ethiopia. The 1973 famine which led to the overthrow of Haile Selassie's imperial

[51] Cullather, 'The Foreign Policy of the Calorie'.
[52] RRC report on 'Drought Situation in Ethiopia and Assistance Requirements 1984/85' October 1984, OD 53/6, UK National Archive.
[53] Amartya Sen, *Poverty and famines : an essay on entitlement and deprivation* (Oxford; New York, 1981); See also Werther, Brewis, and Gotz, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World,* pp. 8-14.
[54] RRC report on 'Drought Situation in Ethiopia and Assistance Requirements 1984/85' October 1984, OD 53/6, UK National Archive.

government was a turning point. Oxfam's nutritionist Dr. Tim Lusty, for example, worked closely with the Ethiopian government during this time, advising officials on the logistical management of large-scale relief.[55] His story is thus instructive for understanding this process. Lusty was certainly well educated: degrees in both agriculture and medicine from the University of Oxford, along with diplomas in child health and tropical public health from the University of London, led him to assimilate much of the prevailing British expertise around famine relief. In 1973, he was seconded by the Ethiopian government to Wollo, the worst affected province, to act as medical relief coordinator,[56] and it was during this time that he helped to spread the practices of the 'British way of famine' that non-governmental actors like himself had recently become the custodians of.[57] In 1984, the Derg regime continued to eagerly construct a famine relief response around a similar logic because it dovetailed neatly with the state's social engineering goals. Just as the British empire had viewed famine response through the prism of wanting to create self-governing colonial subjects in the nineteenth century, the Derg approached relief in the 1980s through the desire to remake Ethiopians into self-governing communist citizens. In this way, it was hoped that famine victims would cooperate with villagisation and resettlement programmes that were designed to simultaneously revolutionise agricultural production and pacify insurgent regions.[58]

As a result of Lusty's efforts, Oxfam helped to extend the colonial techniques of famine response in Ethiopia in the 1970s. By the 1980s, both Oxfam and MSF could be described as practitioners of a internationalised version of 'the British way of famine'.[59] Most aid from voluntary organisations was transferred to famine victims in Ethiopia via monthly dry ration distributions, but NGOs were also influenced in their programmes by the desire to focus on 'camera-friendly' interventions in famine camps.[60] MSF's operations were naturally concentrated in famine camps due to its medical relief function; Oxfam's response was

[55] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp. 238-239; Coulter, 'Dr. Tim Lusty Obituary', *The Guardian,* 19 February 2015.
[56] Coulter, 'Dr. Tim Lusty Obituary', *The Guardian,* 19 February 2015.
[57] Sasson and Vernon, 'Practising the British Way of Famine', pp. 866-869.
[58] De Waal, *Evil Days*, pp. 211- 230 and 231- 236.
[59] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* p. 258.
[60] Werther, Brewis, and Gotz, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World*, pp. 191-213.

influenced by a '"refugee camp" ideology'.[61] Both NGOs directed aid to famine camps, yet they also emphasised sanitation in their interventions as they were aware of the potential for famine camps to create localised epidemics. To mitigate the impact of camp living on vulnerable displaced populations, Oxfam focused on the provision of clean water systems in order to facilitate safe sanitation and drinking water in the camps.[62] MSF, on the other hand, screened new arrivals and implemented delousing and scabies programmes in Korem, which had quickly become one of the most densely populated famine camps.[63] Despite these efforts, the NGOs still found a recipe for disaster in servicing these islands of professional medical care and food provision. As the numbers swelled in Korem, and the ability of food rations and medical services to cope diminished accordingly, MSF's Dr. Brigitte Vasset remarked in September 1984 that she feared MSF was 'losing control'.[64] Vasset attempted to manage the living conditions of the population, centrally, by moving groups to different locations based on the severity of their state of health and recent arrival status, but all mechanisms of control were somewhat futile in a situation where the displaced kept coming and the government's provision of general food rations was unreliable.[65]

In addition to the focus on famine camps, both Oxfam and MSF also displayed enthusiasm for paternalistic food for work programmes. In 1985, MSF logistician Godfried Dillen remarked that 'one big advantage' to his work in Kobo was the ability 'to direct 75 workers, paid for by RRC as grain for work employees'.[66] Nevertheless, food for work programmes were not always as straightforward as they seemed. In July 1984, Oxfam encountered difficulty in Tigray when it attempted to 'reduce costs by paying one ration to workers from the same family' in a food for work project it supported alongside the Relief Society of Tigray (REST).[67] Locals pushed back against the paternalistic rationale that influenced this

[61] Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist,* p. 57.
[62] Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, 262.
[63] Dr. Brigitte Vasset, Medical reports of MSF team in Korem May to June 1984, 'Ethiopie 1984 Oromos (83), Korem (84), Kobo (84)', MSF Archive.
[64] Dr. Brigitte Vasset, Medical report of MSF team in Korem (1/12/76- 30/12/76 and 8/8/84- 8/9/84), 'Ethiopie 1984 Oromos (83), Korem (84), Kobo (84)', MSF Archive.
[65] Dr. Brigitte Vasset, Medical report of MSF team in Korem September 1984, 'Ethiopie 1984 Oromos (83), Korem (84), Kobo (84)', MSF Archive.
[66] Godfried Dillen, Logistician's report March to October 1985 in Kobo, 'Ethiopie 1984 Oromos (83), Korem (84), Kobo (84)', MSF Archive.
[67] 'Food For the Future: Soil Conservation in Tigray, July 1984', PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.

way of thinking; it was impractical, they argued, not to pay workers in cash because most of them had travelled long distances from their homes, and could not easily transport heavy quantities of grain back with them. They preferred to use their wages as they saw fit, be it to balance the household food needs by buying equally necessary non-food items, or by obtaining grain at a cheaper price in surplus areas. Indeed, many workers were known to simply sell their grain rations in the market for cash after they participated in the food for work scheme. As Sen's theory implied, the Ethiopians were rational market actors who knew how to support themselves in a food crisis better than Oxfam did.[68]

Despite this, the moral economy that governed Oxfam's intervention (and that of other charitable organisations from wealthy countries) discouraged the NGO from paying Ethiopians in cash.[69] Oxfam was more accountable to its donors in Britain, for whom it engaged in a 'construction of altruistic meaning' to justify the resource allocation decisions it made in the field. In the West, the public was anxious about aid diversion and the misuse of international funds in the context of the Ethiopian civil war, which was why governments earmarked funds for distribution through international NGOs rather than the RRC, and why these NGOs preferred to distribute food directly to the hungry rather than giving cash to Ethiopians.[70] Nevertheless, the Tigrayans' advocacy eventually forced Oxfam to introduce a partial cash payment system in the region. The paternalistic moral economy exhibited by Oxfam had been confronted by the classic moral economy of the 'crowd' identified by E.P. Thompson.[71] In this instance, the hungry masses displayed their power by winning a concession on cash payments from Oxfam, gaining some autonomy over the distribution of resources as a result.

Resource allocation and the quantification of needs

[68] Sen, *Poverty and famines.*
[69] See Werther, Brewis, and Gotz, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World*, pp. 1-2.
[70] Werther, Brewis, and Gotz, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World*, pp. 1-6, pp. 201-202 and 191- 213.
[71] Food For the Future: Soil Conservation in Tigray, July 1984, PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive; E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, 50:1 (1971), pp. 76–136.

The question remains, however, as to why this transition from colonial to international aid occurred so smoothly – and how that process took shape. A good place to start is the tension that is at the heart of humanitarian needs assessment: the allocation of aid is driven by hope and empathy on the one hand, but also by the fear of chaos and the urge to control it on the other.[72] This prompts us to reflect on how colonial entanglements continue to manifest in new ways in the post-colonial sector. In the second half of the twentieth century, humanitarians came to idealise quantitative data as indicative of universal facts that could be shorn of localised social contexts.[73] In crises like famines, aid workers were keenly aware of the power they held over the lives of aid recipients and relied on numbers to autonomously govern the allocation of scarce resources accordingly. For this reason, Oxfam's Tony Vaux has described how staff found justification for action in 'technical talk' in Ethiopia – in his words, this gave 'a feeling of solidity when everything else [was] sliding into death'.[74] An even stronger reliance on numbers can be observed in Dr. Brigitte Vasset's monthly reports on MSF's work in Korem. From May to November 1984, Vasset accumulated vast amounts of data on patients that she used to systematically compare morbidity and mortality rates between sufferers of different diseases and patients of different age groups and genders.[75] In both cases, numbers were invested with a supreme level of moral authority. This was made all the more potent by the fact that this generation of British and French NGO workers had invested international humanitarianism with utopian potential. In that context, the demonstration of objectivity with numbers became vital; it allowed aid workers to see themselves as technicians of a universal relief system rather than as inheritors of the colonial power dynamics of their parents' time.[76] Yet the measurement systems in which NGO workers placed such faith were often flawed. Viewed in even the most straightforward terms, the reliance on quantitative planning discouraged reflection on the ethics of paternalistic policies which were by no means the most practically or morally appropriate responses to suffering available in crises like that which unfolded in Ethiopia.

[72] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs,* p.2.
[73] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs,* pp. 1-16.
[74] Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist,* pp. 44-45.
[75] Dr. Brigitte Vasset, Medical reports of MSF team in Korem May to November 1984, 'Ethiopie 1984 Oromos (83), Korem (84), Kobo (84)', MSF Archive.
[76] See Glasman, 'Measuring Malnutrition', p. 35. For a discussion of the desire to break away from a colonial past in British and French humanitarian NGOs, also see Peter Van Dam, 'No Justice Without Charity: Humanitarianism After Empire', *International History Review*, 44:3 (2022), pp. 653-674.

The fallibility of quantitative planning was most evident in the practice of supplementary feeding, which was the primary nutritional response adopted by Oxfam and MSF in Ethiopia.[77] Since the 1950s, Western paediatric doctors working in the Global South had been keenly aware that a clinical assessment requiring medical expertise and local knowledge was needed to accurately diagnose malnutrition in most cases. They also knew that symptoms of malnutrition varied according to genetics, age, gender, environment and diet. [78] However, the drive to achieve rapid diagnoses in the field led them to study the bodies of young children, which varied less than within groups of older children and adults, and which bore more immediately visible signs of malnutrition. Considerations of field practicality pushed doctors to focus on anthropometric measurements, like mid-upper arm circumferences and weight-for-height distributions, over other biomedical assessments, which required laboratory testing and were feared to create culture clashes with aid recipients. In emergency relief settings, this logic of 'field anthropometry' later shaped humanitarian response mechanisms because it allowed humanitarians to numerically record and represent human suffering. The data that this generated was then relied upon to determine ethical decisions about resource allocation.[79] In Ethiopia, Oxfam and MSF focused on the supplementary feeding of acutely malnourished children under five because this highly specific form of relief responded to a need that could be both easily measured and treated. Young children were known to die faster from malnutrition than others. Therefore, it was also expected that supplementary feeding would save the most lives at the fastest rate, thus yielding numerically positive results in mortality rates.[80]

While the attraction of this form of intervention was the clear relationship between numbers and the allocation of resources, this by no means meant that the numbers being employed were objective or transparent. Indeed, the universal thresholds by which children were deemed to be either healthy, or moderately or acutely malnourished, were based on the amalgamation of a number of studies which were known to have limited applicability in

[77] Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive; 'Programme for Dry Rations Distribution in the Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, Ethiopia', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[78] Glasman, 'Measuring Malnutrition', pp. 19-44.
[79] Ibid, pp. 25-34.
[80] Ibid, pp. 21-22.

different contexts. In 1969, for example, the ICRC had focused on the mid-upper arm circumferences of children between the ages of one and ten when it responded to famine in Biafra. As there was no systematic data on children's ages during its response to famine in Biafra, it relied on a combination of studies from West Africa and London from which to glean average height-for-age distributions, along with a set of measurements made by Napoleon Wolanski in Warsaw to determine a base-line of a healthy child's arm circumference, of which no standard indicator existed at the time.[81] This algorithmic mixing of diverse datasets produced an opaque measuring system which was nonetheless invested with considerable decision-making power. By the 1980s, the mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) tape was widely used yet remained controversial. Several studies emerged showing that significantly different diagnoses resulted from the use of MUAC alone, weight-for-height alone or a combination of weight-for-height and MUAC, in measuring malnutrition. The use of MUAC alone captured much less cases of malnutrition, meaning that severely malnourished children were often deemed healthy according to MUAC measurements but not according to weight-for-height.[82] Significantly, for the case that unfolded in the mid-1980s, a study in 1969 found that the average arm circumference of healthy Ethiopians and other nationalities of children was less than that derived from the Polish children in the Wolanski study.[83] It was likely due to similar concerns over MUAC that Oxfam and MSF favoured the use of weight-for-height measurements in determining malnutrition levels in Ethiopia. Vasset later recalled using arm circumference measurements on adults to determine admission to shelters in an overcrowded Korem in 1984.[84] Beyond this extreme case, both Oxfam and MSF seemed to have exclusively used weight-for-height in determining eligibility for admission to supplementary feeding programmes.[85] Yet weight-for-height was also not infallible: weight varies more quickly in growing children than mid-upper arm circumferences, which was one reason why MUAC became the favoured tool in most settings.[86] This is perhaps why Oxfam and MSF narrowed the age bracket of the children they included in supplementary feeding programmes. Both organisations only

[81] Ibid, pp. 27-28.
[82] Ibid, pp. 30-31.
[83] Ibid, p. 29.
[84] Dr. Brigitte Vasset, quoted in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia', p. 15.
[85] Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive, Paris; 'Programme for Dry Rations Distribution in the Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, Ethiopia', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[86] Glasman, 'Measuring Malnutrition', p. 33.

focused on children between one to five years old, as opposed to the under ten years old age bracket used by the ICRC in Biafra two decades earlier.[87]

Due to the scarcity of reliable statistical information in Ethiopia, the weight-for-height distributions of children also assumed an elevated importance in decision-making. It quickly became evident to NGOs that they were operating in a chaotic context in which official population data was at the very least untrustworthy, and which sometimes bore no relationship at all to the reality of people's needs. This was evident in October 1984, when Oxfam's Hugh Goyder reported that the absence of a registration system for new arrivals at the camps in Korem meant that the non-registered majority were not entitled to government rations. According to Goyder, 'the numbers "officially" in Korem stand at 7,860 – the same figure I was given in May', yet 'the only way that the non-registered majority can be given food is through the SCF child feeding programme which now "allows" for the adult accompanying the child to get a small amount to eat'.[88] The inability to cope with these numbers was starkly revealed in Goyder's claim that the Ethiopian Army was batting scavengers away with sticks from the distribution centres, and that there would 'still be 15,000 people with no proper rations' even if SCF started a general rations programme. [89] In less dramatic terms, MSF also remarked that the information it had on the population in Kelala in September 1985 was unreliable. This was because security problems, displacement and population dispersion meant no representative survey had been carried out. MSF had been invited to Kelala by the authorities in July to oversee a programme of dry ration distributions to the most affected children in seventy-three farmers' associations but the number of people in this catchment area varied between 90,000 and 140,000 according to different government and RRC sources.[90]

In these uncertain contexts, Oxfam and MSF followed the military logic of what Bruno Latour called the 'obligatory passage point': they focused their attention and resources on the weight and height of children under five because this was the only form of action they

[87] Ibid, p. 26.
[88] Hugh Goyder, 'Report on visit to Korem, Wollo, 8-10 October', 1984, PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[89] Hugh Goyder, 'Report on visit to Korem, Wollo, 8-10 October', 1984, PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive. More
[90] Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive.

deemed they could succeed at.[91] Because suspicion of aid diversion was high, it also meant the NGOs could generate their own data rather than relying on government figures to determine distribution choices. Within the 'moral economy' that governed allocation in the field, this made sense since it allowed NGOs to describe Ethiopian suffering in numeric terms according to their own calculations.[92] For this reason, Oxfam and MSF went to great lengths to measure weight-for-height distributions and to ensure that broader calculations about levels of community malnutrition were based on these findings. For example, MSF staff claimed that, to the naked eye, the malnutrition problem it encountered in Kelala was as grave as it had been in Korem in 1984. To build a response, however, it needed more than the impressions of its aid workers. To construct a numbers-based nutritional programme out of the scarce information available to it, therefore, MSF officials assumed that its target population of children under five was 15 percent of the number range it had been given by the authorities, amounting to between 13,500 to 21,000 children. Four to five different farmers' associations were seen every day by MSF as part of a programme of rotating fortnightly distributions, which constituted 300 to 500 children daily. From the first round of these distributions, MSF measured children's weight-for-height distributions and extrapolated an estimated acute malnutrition rate in under-fives of between 20.7 and 32.2 percent, which it based further planning decisions on.[93] In the south of the country, in Bolosso Wareda in Wolayta, Oxfam displayed a similar thinking when it conducted nutritional surveys using weight-for-height; this data was used for the purposes of both nutritional mapping at kebele (ward) level and for the triage of individual children. [94] In both cases, weight-for-height distributions were relied upon by the NGOs to generate malnutrition rates and determine the allocation of resources.

However, while both Oxfam and MSF used weight-for-height for similar purposes, the very thresholds by which they determined admission to supplementary feeding programmes

[91] Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), pp. 21–48; The ICRC followed this logic with regards to the use of MUAC in Biafra in 1969. See Glasman, 'Measuring Malnutrition', pp. 26-28.
[92] 'Plateau Claude Malhuret directeur medecin sans frontiere', *Youtube*, accessed on 1st April 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HCeFqp00FU.
[93] Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive.
[94] 'Programme for Dry Rations Distribution in the Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, Ethiopia', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.

varied. There was some flexibility, in other words, to how aid agencies defined malnutrition that was severe enough to warrant treatment.[95] There had long been debate on the correct cut-off points for extreme malnutrition, dating back to the 'arbitrary' decisions made in Dr. Derrick Jellife's influential studies in the 1960s, which eventually settled on '80% of Wolanski's standard' as a cut-off point for MUAC measurements of extreme malnutrition in an effort to 'compromise' between various other standards.[96] In Ethiopia, what was seemingly new was that cut-off points varied for no discernible reason other than the field capacities and resources held by different NGOs. In Bolosso Wareda, for example, Oxfam recorded that kebeles in which 20 percent of children were registered with a weight-for-height distribution of 80 percent or lower qualified for supplementary dry rations distributions.[97] Within this, individual children were themselves admitted to the programme if they had a distribution of 80 percent or lower.[98] However, when MSF was working in Kelala in 1985, it only deemed children that were sick or under 70 percent weight-for-height distribution to be eligible for medical treatment or dry rations distribution.[99] Admittedly, MSF had considered the distribution of general rations to the whole population and the distribution of supplementary rations to the 'moderately' malnourished (defined as being under an 80 percent weight-for-height distribution) as possible alternative interventions. However, what it really wanted was to open a clinic in Kelala to hospitalise the worst cases, which displayed an under 70 percent weight-for-height distribution. It was prevented from doing so by the Ethiopian government, which claimed to fear the concentration of population this would cause.[100]

Subsequently, MSF decided not to engage in a general rations programme due to concerns about the feasibility of transporting large amounts of grain, yet with the opening of a clinic

[95] Oxfam used an 80 percent weight-for-height cut-off point for entry to supplementary feeding. See Sarah Barnes, 'Report on Dry Rations Distribution by Oxfam in Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, 13 December 1984', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive; MSF used a 70 percent weight-for-height cut-off point. See Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive.
[96] Glasman, 'Measuring Malnutrition', 32-33.
[97] Sarah Barnes, 'Report on Dry Rations Distribution by Oxfam in Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, 13 December 1984', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[98] 'Programme for Dry Rations Distribution in the Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, Ethiopia', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[99] Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive.
[100] Ibid.

off the table, it is unclear why MSF decided not to distribute supplementary rations to a more inclusive group of malnourished children. Instead, even though MSF had little reliable information on the true population numbers in the area, it chose to be more conservative than Oxfam and only distributed supplementary rations to children who were significantly more underweight than those treated by the British NGO. Ultimately, MSF concluded it was not achieving its aim in rehabilitating children because of the unreliability of the government's general rations distributions in the area.[101] In Wolayta, Oxfam's Sarah Barnes similarly acknowledged that even with such extensive needs assessment, 'there is always going to be a residue of children failing to survive but I feel we are here to cope with the abnormal'.[102] As a result, the chances of survival for hundreds if not thousands of Ethiopian children varied arbitrarily between regions, depending on which NGOs had taken up supplementary feeding programmes there and what their cut-off points for defining extreme malnutrition were.

What does all this mean for our understanding of the presumptions of nongovernmental aid? The use of weight-for-height measurements to determine access to supplementary feeding was performed as an objective response to need but its implementation contained a 'hidden script'.[103] These programmes further formalised the belief that NGOs had no option but to prioritise needs in a mass hunger crisis, and assumed that age and gender mattered little between the ages of one and five.[104] Crucially, the elevation of weight-for-height measurements as the basis for diverse ethical decisions reflected the belief that the needs of entire populations could be taken from the bodies of certain children, and represented as numeric data removed from the social context in which those bodies suffered.[105] As the next section demonstrates, this approach failed to capture social inequality, a methodological choice which sometimes resulted in severe unintended consequences. In addition, both Oxfam and MSF refused to get involved in the distribution of general rations either because they believed it was the RRC's job, or because they did not want to take on responsibility for

[101] Ibid.
[102] Sarah Barnes, 'Report on Dry Rations Distribution by Oxfam in Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, 13 December 1984', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[103] Glasman, 'Measuring Malnutrition', p. 35.
[104] Ibid, p.30, 33.
[105] Ibid, pp. 25-28.

the logistical difficulties this would entail. Either way, the fact remained that general rations left in the hands of the RRC were highly inadequate.[106] Fundamentally, the supplementary feeding approach assumed that general rations were available; otherwise, the highly targeted and short-term approach to acute malnourishment made little sense. As NGOs knew that this was not the case, they may have achieved better results if they had decided to get involved in general rations. However, knowing that the chances of failure at this were high, Oxfam and MSF retained the focus on supplementary feeding, which was such a limited form of intervention that, at least in quantitative terms, they believed they could not fail. For Ethiopians, on the other hand, the flexibility with which NGOs applied cut-off points for extreme malnutrition spoke of the arbitrary choices that lay behind the supposedly objective, numbers-based programmes.

The techniques of relieving starvation

As has been described above, supplementary feeding was a targeted, individualised response to mass starvation. In addition to being shaped by the quantification of human needs, supplementary feeding was also a product of the medicalisation of hunger, along with scientific trends that favoured the commercial development of technical relief foods. These trends were accelerated following the Second World War, when the mass starvation of Jewish populations and others throughout Europe increased the interest of medical professionals in studying the biology of malnourished bodies.[107] The liberation of concentration camps in particular produced a culture of expertise around the careful treatment of acute malnutrition. Because of a tragic accident, 2,000 liberated prisoners died after eating Allied soldiers' rations due to their body's diminished capability to digest food.[108] In reaction to this phenomenon, dubbed 'refeeding syndrome', the provision of food to the starving came under tightened control. The hungry became patients who were prescribed specialist food, and given plasma and glucose intravenous therapies, along with

[106] Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive; Oxfam considered conducting dry ration distributions but concluded that this would be counter-productive as it would only make the RRC even less likely to distribute itself, Hugh Goyder's 'Notes on visit to Wegel Tena' on 26 April 1985, PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[107] Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach,* pp. 106-121.
[108] Ibid, pp. 103-105.

experimental hydrolysate drug treatments, under intense supervision by doctors. Holocaust victims became test subjects, and some died in the experiments performed on them in the new science of emergency nutrition.[109] Much scientific knowledge was gained as a result of the war, yet the practices promoted by a growing group of practitioners of emergency nutrition often encouraged a view of relief food solely as medicine, disregarding taste and cultural specificity, and institutionalising a highly technical approach to famine response.

By the 1980s, the medicalisation of hunger had even become part of the moral economy of famine relief.[110] Despite Oxfam's generally developmentalist approach, its emergency programme in Ethiopia was strongly shaped by Dr. Tim Lusty's influential leadership of its health department,[111] along with the value placed on the visibility of Oxfam nurses prescribing supplementary rations to malnourished children in the field.[112] As mentioned, MSF initially conducted only medical activities in the clinic it opened at the RRC's distribution centre at Korem in 1984.[113] Once extremely malnourished patients were admitted, MSF collaborated with SCF in administering them therapeutic foods through naso-gastric feeding tubes until they were deemed fit enough to be discharged with supplementary rations.[114] However, with no food to offer people itself, there was limited value to MSF's purely medical function in Korem. Brigitte Vasset recalls how she and her colleague felt like 'executioners' while triaging patients, despairing at the fact that they 'would give people pills and they would die of hunger'.[115] For this reason, MSF was driven to learn from the experience of Oxfam and SCF in developing a supplementary feeding competency in Ethiopia. The handbook that Lusty had written with Oxfam's public health coordinator Pat Diskett on how to implement selective feeding programmes, based on the NGO's experience of providing aid in the 1973-1975 famine in Ethiopia, was published for other NGOs to consult in 1984.[116] MSF integrated a nutritional component to its programme when it engaged in supplementary feeding in Kelala as a result, but this retained a

[109] Ibid*,* pp. 103-105.
[110] Werther, Brewis, and Gotz, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World*, pp. 191- 213.
[111] Coulter, 'Dr. Tim Lusty Obituary', *The Guardian,* 19 February 2015.
[112] Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist,* p. 58.
[113] Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations', pp. 12-13.
[114] Dr. Brigitte Vasset, Medical reports of MSF team in Korem May to November 1984, 'Ethiopie 1984 Oromos (83), Korem (84), Kobo (84)', MSF Archive.
[115] Dr. Brigitte Vasset, quoted in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations', *MSF Speaking Out*, p. 15.
[116] Lusty and Diskett, *Selective Feeding Programmes* (Oxford, 1984).

medicalised logic – children admitted to the programme were given Vitamin A and mebendazole with their rations, along with a blanket and a health booklet where their personal and medical information was recorded.[117] In Oxfam's case, it strongly valued the professional expertise it possessed in emergency nutrition but it too faced criticism from some staff over the perceived inadequacy of supplementary feeding. Tony Vaux believed a general rations approach may have saved more lives, but Oxfam's nutritionists resisted any attempt to downgrade the centrality of their expertise in emergency response settings.[118] Clearly, the very idea (and visibility) of a medical approach to malnutrition in the field had the capacity to drive policy.

Overall, however, the most important legacy of the medicalisation of nutrition was that it produced a lasting emphasis on starvation as a biological disease of individual bodies.[119] Supplementary feeding epitomised this approach, as it targeted only the most acutely malnourished children, who were treated with specialist food until they were brought back from the brink of death. They were then released from the programme with no guarantee of a sustainable access to food for themselves, their adult caregivers, or their siblings. Unsurprisingly, this blinkered approach had severe unintended consequences, the starkest example of which was the exploitation of orphans witnessed that MSF staff witnessed in Kelala, whereby children were trafficked to distribution points to collect supplementary rations. According to MSF, these rations were then stolen from them by traffickers before the children were abandoned, and often devoured by hyenas in the surrounding area.[120] The inappropriate nature of such an individualised approach was also made abundantly clear to Oxfam when it realised that some mothers were known to share the supplementary rations meant for one child among other family members, thus making it possible that more of them could survive yet resulting in the acutely malnourished child staying ill for longer. [121] In the absence of other reliable food sources, and with monthly government rations often

[117] Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive.
[118] Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist,* pp. 58-60.
[119] Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach*, pp. 106-121.
[120] Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive.
[121] Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist,* pp. 57-61.

only distributed every two to three months,[122] this effectively meant that parents were incentivised to keep their children malnourished so they could retain access to the supplementary rations.[123] Or, to put it another way, supplementary feeding effectively isolated malnourished children from their families and communities, making the NGOs' programmes blind to social inequality and more complex questions about the children's long-term survival prospects.

To compound matters, the supplementary feeding approach was also rooted in nutritional research which studied food as a chemical substance in such a way that dislocated it from its immediate social and ecological environments.[124] Once food had been made numerically legible in terms of its calorific and micronutrient content, the provenance of relief foods was secondary. In Oxfam's instructions to staff in Bolosso Wareda, for example, children were to be admitted to the supplementary feeding programme at 80 percent weight-to-height distribution, and were to be given dry rations amounting to 1,250 calories a day, before being discharged at 85 percent weight-to-height distribution with 2 weeks' departure rations.[125] The actual content of the food they were giving to Ethiopian children was rarely mentioned, as the quantitative measuring of food as a vessel for calories rendered this largely irrelevant.[126] In this context, a distinctly commercial logic also came to dominate the manufacture of relief foods for use in emergency settings. The three main agricultural surplus products in the US – corn, soy and milk – were initially the most common ingredients in relief foods as a result.[127] From the mid-1960s, American companies responded to these trends in nutritional science by creating nutritionally fortified blends of Corn-Soy-Milk that elevated these food products as the basis for 'technical foods', which were transported to the field as powder and then had to be reconstituted with milk or

[122] The distribution of monthly rations every two to three months was reported in Wello and Tigray in the following reports: '8/3/85 Report on Tigray & Drought Update on Welayit' and 'Kembata Hadiya January 1985', PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[123] Memorandum 'Ethiopia Food Situation- Memo No.3, 9th July 1985-Dessie' from Tony Vaux to Marcus Thompson, PRG/2/3/1/8, Oxfam Archive.
[124] Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach*, pp. 121-137.
[125] 'Programme for Dry Rations Distribution in the Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, Ethiopia', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[126] Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive; 'Programme for Dry Rations Distribution in the Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, Ethiopia', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[127] Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach*, p. 139.

water.[128] When milk surpluses ran out, this product was modified to a Corn-Soy-Blend and artificially fortified to replace the lost nutrients from milk.[129] As such, the content of food in emergency feeding programmes was to a significant degree shaped by the needs of the US agricultural industry, along with the US government's direct intervention in supporting its profitability in a globalised market. In Ethiopia, MSF referred to using 'PREMIX' blends in its supplementary feeding programmes, which can be identified as one of these specialist relief foods. Rony Brauman remembers the 'High Energy Milk' they made, and the mixing of a type of porridge with oil as a dietary supplement.[130] However, MSF encountered practical difficulties in using this relief food in the field. It distributed rations of PREMIX on a fortnightly basis to the acutely malnourished, yet recorded in one of its reports that it was likely impossible to conserve the product in the necessary sanitary conditions for more than a week in the Ethiopian climate.[131]

This leads us to another aspect of the evolving practice of emergency feeding. Tom Scott-Smith has described how, after a period of 'high modernist' utopian fervour and experimentation with technical foods in the 1960s, researchers and humanitarian organisations sought to innovate in new directions. The new technical foods they created retained the goals of isolating all of the human body's nutritional needs into specific foods and supplementary pills, yet also took more practical considerations like transportability, ease of use and taste on board.[132] MSF's use of the PREMIX relief food demonstrates how, even by the 1980s, some of the technical foods in use were impractical. By contrast, Oxfam was at the vanguard of what Scott-Smith calls the new 'low modernist' turn in nutritional planning. Oxfam had previously been marketed utopian high modernist products in the 1960s,[133] and even briefly invested in Supro, a high protein food for school feeding in Kenya, but it sold its shares once the product was discredited for its ash content and relationship to digestive problems.[134] In the early 1980s, Oxfam then turned to manufacturing its own 'High

[128] Ibid, pp. 146-148.
[129] Ibid, p. 146.
[130] Oral History Interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020:
[131] Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive.
[132] Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach*, pp. 137-155.
[133] Oxfam was marketed products incuding Polymine S (made from sesame), Polymine M (from soya), and Nutrimine C (from cottonseed) in the 1960s. See Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach*, p. 140.
[134] Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach*, pp. 143-145.

Energy Biscuits' with Oxford Polythechnic and Fox's Biscuits in the UK.[135] Tim Lusty's enthusiasm for scientific innovation was openly recognisable in this process. In 1984, the organisation collaborated with nutritional scientists to manufacture, test and refine a recipe for the new relief biscuit. An academic article describing the process by which the biscuit was created attested to how the recipe had been altered numerous times and compared against similar products to ensure it contained all nutrients needed for survival, had a high calorie content, was easily transportable, and had a long shelf life.[136] Compared to the PREMIX blends, this biscuit was the epitome of the practical and commercial logic of the low modernist relief foods: it could be consumed immediately by those prescribed it in the field, while its low manufacturing costs meant it could be produced on a mass scale.

The process of developing the 'high energy biscuit' was also revealing of how such products reinforced racist stereotypes rather than enforced the universalist ideals they purported to promote. A first group of tasters, which were not identified, ranked versions of the product by texture, taste and general 'acceptability', yet the authors of the study deemed this evidence inadequate as these tasters did not represent the true demographic of people that were to be prescribed the relief food. As a result, the researchers went into English 'nursery schools' and sought out 'Asian and Caribbean children' to taste the biscuits, specifically recording that when some members of this group disliked versions of the biscuit, the headmistress confirmed to the researchers that this was likely because they came from families in which 'Western' food would not be part of their 'traditional home diet'.[137] In addition to these tests, the biscuit was trialled for use in the treatment of malnutrition in Indian schoolchildren 'from lower caste families'.[138] Both of these targeted taste tests illustrated the uncomfortable racial dynamics of the manufacture of technical foods that were intended solely for use in relief settings in the Global South. If malnutrition was a biological disease of individual bodies, and not a social problem experienced by

[135] Coulter, 'Dr. Tim Lusty Obituary', *The Guardian*, 19 Feb 2015; H. Young, P. Fellows, and J. Mitchell, 'Development of a high energy biscuit for use as a food supplement in disaster relief', *International Journal of Food Science & Technology*, 20:6 (1985), pp. 689–695; Caroline Grobler-Tanner, *Use of Compact Foods in Emergencies* (Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project, Academy for Educational Development; Washington, 2002), pp. 1-2; Werther, Brewis, and Gotz, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World*, p. 202; Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* p. 262.
[136] H. Young, P. Fellows, and J. Mitchell, 'Development of a High Energy Biscuit'.
[137] Ibid, pp. 693-694.
[138] Ibid, p. 694.

communities, then it could be treated with technical foods manufactured by specialists in the West, and as black and brown bodies disproportionately suffered from this disease, they should be targeted in taste trials so that the product could be manufactured as the perfect relief food for their bodies. Although this approach may have seemed straightforward to Lusty, it contradicted the humanitarian sector's claims to the emancipatory potential of universalism in its unsavoury racial dynamics.[139] It also discouraged reflection on the broader issues surrounding hunger and social inequality which affected the treatment of starvation. Instead, the new low modernist research sought merely to improve on the practicalities of distribution, transportation and taste in the manufacture of emergency foods.

Globalisation

NGOs contributed in important and distinct ways to the universalisation of what Glasman calls a 'minimal humanity' in the second half of the twentieth century.[140] He points out that, while the consolidation of governance by nation states was facilitated by the collection of vast amounts of data on populations in Europe, a similar process did not occur in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This was due to the fundamentally different structure and functionality of states that were established there through colonial intervention.[141] Within the logic of these 'gatekeeper states', the governing authorities ensured their continued grip on power not by increasing surveillance of the populations they governed and widening the provision of social services, but by controlling access to the global market through which local raw materials were exported and foreign exchange was obtained.[142] As such, in their primary orientation towards the 'gates', colonial governments and their postcolonial successor states in Africa often came to rely on international NGOs to operate welfare systems in place of the state.[143] This process was highly limited in scope compared to the social services which developed in Europe, and relied heavily on quantification in order to

[139] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs,* pp. 8-9.
[140] Ibid, pp. 1-15.
[141] Ibid*,* pp. 11-12.
[142] See Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The past of the present* (Cambridge, 2002), and Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs,* pp. 11- 12.
[143] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs,* pp. 11-12.

justify a sharp prioritisation of needs in the allocation of scarce resources. In addition, the short-term importation of NGO staff from the West to administer social programmes produced a heightened attention to forms of intervention that valued the transportability of tools, along with measurement systems that required less professional medical expertise on the ground. As a result, even outside of emergency situations, a kind of perpetual emergency logic governed humanitarian programmes in the Global South, which often prioritised the practical and low-technology responses that were epitomised by the 'field anthropometry' discourse.[144] In gathering data and responding to human needs, international NGOs thus played central roles in helping to universalise a specific type of social welfare provision in nation-states in the Global South.

What was the significance of the Ethiopian famine response for this process? The 1990s have been acknowledged as a crucial decade when both Oxfam and MSF contributed in distinct ways to the institutionalisation of needs quantification and the further use of low modernist relief technologies in humanitarian action.[145] However, these developments cannot be understood without reference to the events that unfolded in the Horn of Africa in the middle of the preceding decade – not least the accelerated diffusion of malnutrition response practices across the humanitarian sector.[146] As described above, Oxfam still possessed a primarily developmentalist approach to world hunger at the start of the 1980s.[147] However, by the middle of the decade, it reached its apex in another area: emergency nutrition.[148] MSF, on the other hand, intervened in the Ethiopian famine with a medicalised approach to treating hunger, which relied primarily on hospitalisation and the

[144] Glasman, 'Measuring Malnutrition'.
[145] On Oxfam and MSF's roles in the development of the Sphere standards, see Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs,* pp. 122-153; On the further development of technical ready to use therapeutic relief foods including Plumpy'Nut, see Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach*, pp. 155-170; On MSF's promotion of Plumpy'nut, see 'MSF urges new approach to malnutrition treatment', *The New Humanitarian,* 10 October 2007, accessed at https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/74737/global-msf-urges-new-approach-malnutrition-treatment on 31 May 2023; and Jean-Hervé Bradol and Jean-Hervé Jezequel, 'PART 3 The Plumpy'nut revolution: an uncertain future?', Centre de Réflexion sur l'Action et les Savoirs Humanitaires (CRASH), Fondation Médecins Sans Frontières, 20 December 2009, accessed at https://msf-crash.org/en/publications/denutrition-infantile-interets-et-limites-de-lapproche-medicale-humanitaire/part-3-0 on 31 May 2023.
[146] Similarly, Glasman refers to the 'diffusion of the tool' of MUAC tape in 'Measuring Malnutrition', p. 34.
[147] Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist,* pp. 43-53.
[148] H. Young, P. Fellows, and J. Mitchell, 'Development of a High Energy Biscuit'; Coulter, 'Dr. Tim Lusty Obituary', *The Guardian,* 19 February 2015; Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.

use of naso-gastric tube feeding in responding to starvation as a biological disease in the most acutely malnourished bodies.[149] Over the course of the Ethiopian famine, it too developed its expertise, not least by absorbing some of the more practical, low modernist interventions that had been pioneered by the nutrition departments of Oxfam and others in distributing therapeutic foods to outpatients. [150] In addition to this convergence of practice on supplementary feeding, both NGOs relied heavily on numbers to measure and prioritise need, and to calculate exactly how to ration relief food by calorie content.[151] However, the numeric thresholds used by Oxfam and MSF to determine levels of malnutrition varied, and MSF generated far more quantitative data on human needs than Oxfam did due to the comprehensive nature of its medical reporting.[152] Oxfam may have been on the vanguard of the development of low modernist technical relief foods, but MSF illustrated through its work that the biological needs of suffering bodies could be represented and responded to in purely quantitative terms.

Based on this information, one might expect Oxfam to have gone on to pioneer more technical relief foods in the 1990s. One might also think it likely that MSF championed the quantitative standardisation of needs in the inter-agency Sphere project's *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*, first published in 2000.[153] However, the organisations' paths did not follow a neat linear trajectory in this way. Instead, after the end of the Cold War, Oxfam made a commercial decision to disband its health department amid the increasing competitiveness of the sector and focused primarily on its expertise in water and sanitation, areas where it felt it could continue to have an edge in relief operations.[154] By the 2000s, it had become one of the few major international NGOs to offer

[149] Dr. Brigitte Vasset, Medical reports of MSF team in Korem May to June 1984, 'Ethiopie 1984 Oromos (83), Korem (84), Kobo (84)', MSF Archive.
[150] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020; Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive.
[151] Dr. Brigitte Vasset, Medical reports of MSF team in Korem May to June 1984, 'Ethiopie 1984 Oromos (83), Korem (84), Kobo (84)', MSF Archive; Kelala Bilan Septembre 1985, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive; Sarah Barnes, 'Report on Dry Rations Distribution by Oxfam in Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, 13 December 1984', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive; 'Programme for Dry Rations Distribution in the Bolosso Wareda, Wolayta, Ethiopia', PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[152] Dr. Brigitte Vasset, Medical reports of MSF team in Korem May to June 1984, 'Ethiopie 1984 Oromos (83), Korem (84), Kobo (84)', MSF Archive.
[153] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs,* p. 7.
[154] Coulter, 'Dr. Tim Lusty Obituary', *The Guardian,* 19 February 2015; For a discussion of how humanitarian NGOs act as rational market actors and display entrepreneurial traits, see Heike Wieters, 'Reinventing the firm:

a counterweight to the domination of technical foods, through its promotion of cash transfers and basic food packages in crisis zones.[155]

It was also Oxfam Emergency Director Nicholas Stockton – rather than his equivalent at MSF – who became one of the key players in formalising the quantification of needs in the Sphere project. Stockton conceived of Sphere with Peter Walker, Director of Disaster Policy at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), after the two men reflected on their shared experience of working with survivors of the Rwandan genocide in Zaire in the mid-1990s.[156] Their starting point was the (often erratic) variation in relief standards between the organisations that operated in the region. This issue was hardly new – it had certainly been present in the Ethiopian famine response in the 1980s. The Sphere project, however, conceptualised it as an urgent problem to be solved by standardising global relief programmes at an agreed universal benchmark of minimum needs. To do this, Stockton and Walker sought input from across the humanitarian sector on producing individual quantitative indicators for phenomena as varied as the human daily requirement for water by litre, living space per square meter and food requirement by calorie and micronutrient content. This process was anything but harmonious. Yet Sphere managed (with difficulty) to create some consensus by opting for numbers that met the red lines of as many organisations as possible while at the same time reflecting the reality of global funding levels and the kinds of interventions that were possible in even the most resource-scarce contexts.[157]

While Sphere, in effect, led Oxfam to become a leading actor in the institutionalisation of universal values for humanitarian intervention, MSF was highly critical of Sphere and went on to become a vocal advocate for new technical relief foods in the 2000s. Its position on the board of Sphere certainly did not preclude MSF from joining several French NGOs in

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from post-war relief to international humanitarian agency', *European Review of History*, 23:1-2 (2016), pp. 116-135.

[155] Coulter, 'Dr. Tim Lusty Obituary', *The Guardian,* 19 February 2015; 'Making the case for cash: humanitarian food aid under scrutiny', Oxfam Briefing Note (April 2005), pp. 1-5, accessed at https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/making-the-case-for-cash-humanitarian-food-aid-under-scrutiny-114544/ on 20 April 2023.

[156] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs*, pp. 122-153.

[157] Ibid, pp. 122-153.

pointing out that universal minimum standards would be impossible to uphold in conflict settings which lacked reliable data. MSF officials also denounced the inequality that standardisation would cause between Northern and Southern NGOs, which did not possess the same capacity for quantitative programme planning.[158] Less reliant on state funding, French NGOs like MSF were not as enthusiastic as others about enforcing a bureaucratic monoculture in the humanitarian sector, [159] and they resisted what they saw as the bad data and arbitrary number setting in Sphere's strategically negotiated norms. [160] MSF's attention was instead directed towards technical solutions, not least Plumpy'nut, the high energy peanut paste created in 1996 by French paediatric nutritionist André Briend and food technology and manufacturing company Nutriset that was sold as a magic bullet in solving child malnutrition.[161]

Following MSF's chequered experience in the distribution of PREMIX rations in Ethiopia, it soon became highly enthusiastic about the benefits of Plumpy'nut. Crucially, like Oxfam's High Energy Biscuits, Plumpy'nut could be consumed immediately upon prescription, and was manufactured with transportability, ease of use and taste acceptability for young children in the Global South as central considerations.[162] Initially, MSF chastised the producers of Plumpy'nut for the enforcement of its patent, seen to limit access to life-saving treatment, yet when Plumpy'nut introduced a more liberal 'patent usage agreement', MSF dropped its critical attitude.[163] It did not join with activists in the Indian 'Right to Food' movement in defending the value of medicalisation when they denounced Plumpy'Nut for its encouragement of less medical supervision of the malnourished.[164] Instead, MSF officials argued in 2009 that Plumpy'Nut's use should not be confined to the treatment of cases of extreme acute malnutrition in emergency settings – according to Jean-Hervé Bradol and Jean-Hervé Jezequel, it should also be deployed in the fight against chronic malnutrition that occurs as a result of seasonal 'hunger gaps'.[165] In keeping with Glasman's observation that

[158] Ibid, pp. 142-145.
[159] Ibid, pp. 142-145 and 151-152.
[160] Ibid, pp. 122-153.
[161] Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach*, pp. 155-170; 'MSF urges new approach to malnutrition treatment', *The New Humanitarian*; Bradol and Jezequel, 'The Plumpy'nut revolution'.
[162] Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach*, pp. 155-170.
[163] Ibid, pp. 164-167.
[164] Ibid, pp. 164-167.
[165] Bradol and Jezequel, 'The Plumpy'nut revolution'.

the definition of needs is never separated from resource considerations in the Global South, MSF explicitly promoted Plumpy'nut because it was a cheap and easy solution to the seemingly intractable problem of global hunger that international NGOs could administer. When governments were either unable or uninterested in addressing the social inequalities that caused communities to regularly go hungry in between harvests, Bradol and Jezequel passionately argued that Plumpy'Nut could save the day.[166] In this advocacy, MSF combined a quantitative reading of human needs with a low modernist eye on practical and achievable solutions to human suffering. In medicalising chronic malnutrition, MSF also echoed Albert Schweitzer's inability to engage with the structural causes of hunger in colonial Gabon. The enthusiasm for technical foods similarly mirrored Schweitzer's purely biomedical conception of Africans' dietary needs in the hospital at Lambaréné.[167]

The seemingly contradictory trajectories of Oxfam and MSF in the post-Cold War years indicate the complexity of the process of globalisation that NGOs were engaged in. Since the 1990s, several revisions to the Sphere standards have been published, and in 2011 Sphere introduced regional guidelines, finally acknowledging that the absolute universality of needs it had initially strived for was not appropriate.[168] Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the project has been hugely influential in setting the terms of engagement for international NGOs and entrenching a quantitative vision of human needs that has neglected social and cultural, and justice and rights-based protection issues.[169] MSF may have been a thorn in Sphere's side in its early years but it never seriously questioned the basic assumptions that underpinned it, and it eventually came round to become one of its supporters. Oxfam, too, arguably only articulated an alternative cash transfers-based solution to malnutrition in the 2000s because it had acted as a rational market actor in retreating from emergency nutritional expertise in the 1990s.[170] We can best conceive of the process that occurred in the 1980s, therefore, as a diffusion of knowledge and practice within the humanitarian sector. Even if the NGOs that pioneered certain relief technologies were not the same ones that carried them through into the increasingly competitive post-Cold War field, they still

[166] Glasman, 'Measuring Malnutrition'; Bradol and Jezequel, 'The Plumpy'nut revolution'.
[167] Zumthurm, 'The Colonial Situation in Practice'.
[168] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs*, p. 140.
[169] Ibid, pp. 122-153.
[170] Wieters, 'Reinventing the firm'.

contributed in unique and complementary ways to a process of globalisation that sought to universalise practices of responding to human need in the Global South.

To conclude, it is worth returning to the moral economy framework that has been used to understand how humanitarians make ethical choices in famine relief.[171] Both the standardisation of humanitarian guidelines and the invention of technical relief foods contributed to a global project of setting the floor of basic needs. But, if humanitarians used quantification and technical tools to denote impartiality in the field, it must be asked, who was this performance for? The use of numbers to determine admission to feeding programmes served to publicly demonstrate objectivity and fairness in the distribution of scarce resources, yet local communities did not absorb the logic of supplementary feeding. Instead, they often visibly cooperated with it while privately using any resources they could get their hands on as they saw fit – as Oxfam recognised when it observed ration sharing among family members. The prevalence of numbers in the public statements of NGO workers in the West instead suggests that this performance of impartiality was primarily intended for donors. When MSF's Claude Malhuret appeared on French television in October 1985 to criticise the Ethiopian government's obstruction of the opening of a clinic in Kelala, for example, he outlined the gravity of the crisis by stating that 'There are 8,000 children [at Kelala] today that are under 70% of their normal weight', and out of this, '600 are under 60% of their normal weight'.[172] By explaining ethical choices to the French public in this way, Malhuret illustrated that the moral economy that governed international aid to the Global South was centred on accountability in the eyes of Western donors.

Conclusion

Humanitarian NGOs have helped to reduce the lethality of famines and to extend a global norm of famine prevention since the 1980s. This was obviously a highly laudable achievement. Nevertheless, the specific ways in which NGOs have gone about responding to malnutrition in the field deserve more attention from historians. This chapter has added to

[171] Werther, Brewis, and Gotz, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World*.
[172] 'Plateau Claude Malhuret directeur médecin sans frontière', *Youtube*, accessed on 1 April 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HCeFqp00FU.

this discourse by examining the historicity of supplementary feeding practices. At its heart, supplementary feeding was a highly paternalistic relief technology, which built on colonial practices by removing all decision-making on how to allocate resources from Ethiopians to external professionals. Ethiopians sometimes reclaimed autonomy over the distribution of relief food. However, the idea of quantitatively determined needs assessment and targeted supplementary feeding remained largely undented within Oxfam and MSF. These organisations were fully aware of the power they held over the lives of Ethiopians and sought to distance themselves from colonial dynamics by investing supposedly objective tools with autonomous decision-making power.

The method of describing hunger that crystallised in the Horn of Africa thus represented a key moment in the diffusion of practices and the development of an epistemic community around the treatment of malnutrition in the humanitarian sector. Since the mid-1980s, 'humanitarian needology'[173] has become increasingly standardised, while the low modernist, medical approach to treating malnutrition with technical foods has often been seen as a magic bullet in responding to chronic collective hunger. The fact that NGOs have saved many lives should not be diminished, but it must be asked whether the highly controlled yet often arbitrary hierarchy of needs they established in doing so has always been just.

[173] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs*, p. 2.

Chapter 6

Repressive developmentalism in the Ethiopian famine: NGOs, resettlement and the continuity of colonial counterinsurgency practices on the African continent

In November 1984, the Ethiopian government announced that the national priority was to resettle 1.5 million people from the supposedly barren north to the more fertile south and west of the country.[1] Promoted as a famine relief measure, this was in fact a counterinsurgency strategy that aimed to drain civilian populations from certain territories so as to deprive Tigrayan and Eritrean rebel groups of their support bases.[2] MSF took an outspoken stance on the policy. So much so, indeed, that in late November 1985, some of its doctors reported being physically assaulted when attempting to intervene in a planned resettlement in Sekota, a town close to the border with Tigray.[3] The consequences for its aid programme were significant. On 2 December 1985, MSF received word that it no longer had permission to work in Ethiopia, where it had been providing medical relief and supplementary food to famine victims since March 1984.[4] Its bank account was frozen and emptied immediately, and the movements of its staff were restricted.[5] When MSF subsequently left Ethiopia, it did so not only on bad terms with the political authorities but also with most of the international NGO community, including Oxfam, which refused to support MSF in its public campaign. [6]

[1] Laurence Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia 1984-1986'*, Médecins Sans Frontières: Speaking Out Case Studies* (Paris, 2013), p.18.
[2] Alex De Waal, *Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (Human Rights Watch, 1991), pp. 211-230.
[3] Letter from Dr Bertrand Desmoulins, MSF France medical Coordinator in Ethiopia to Berhanu Deressa, RRC Deputy Commissioner, 29 November 1985 and Report by the MSF team at Sekota, 26 November 1985 in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations', p.75.
[4] General Agreement for Undertaking Relief and/or Rehabilitation Activities in Ethiopia by Non-Governmental Organisations, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive. See Anne Vallaeys*, Médecins Sans Frontières: la biographie* (Paris, 2004), p.517 for details of when MSF commenced its humanitarian engagement in Ethiopia.
[5] Letter from MSF France Administrator in Ethiopia to RRC Deputy commissioner, 3 December 1985 (in English), Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations', *MSF Speaking Out,* pp. 78-80.
[6] Summary of the board meeting, MSF France, 25 November 1985 in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations', *MSF Speaking Out,* pp. 76-77.

Oxfam's policy was to limit the direct association of its aid with resettlement sites.[7] Yet it also decided not to publicly confirm its view on the forced nature of the population transfers.[8] It did so despite having access to human rights reports and eyewitness testimonies from its own staff that described the coercive nature of the process.[9] Over the following years, when forced resettlement continued to be observed by aid workers, Oxfam instead refined a policy of discreet human rights reporting, which involved channelling information through the British Embassy and United Nations representatives in the hope that action would be taken further up the diplomatic chain.[10] In so doing, Oxfam demonstrated the key dividing line that separated its organisational outlook on ethical humanitarian action in Ethiopia from MSF's. While MSF had taken on the responsibility of publicly exposing human rights violations itself, Oxfam preferred to leave this task to political actors and avoid the risk of expulsion by staying silent, thereby ensuring it maintained a positive relationship with the Ethiopian authorities and continued to have an operational presence in the country, where it had been working since the mid-1970s.[11]

This chapter asks three questions. First, how did the two organisations come to practice such opposing interpretations of what it meant to provide ethical humanitarian relief in the Ethiopian famine? Second, why did MSF believe it was worth sacrificing its ability to provide emergency medical care and food to famine victims to be able to publicly denounce what it saw as humanitarian complicity with forced resettlement? And third, why was Oxfam so reluctant to acknowledge the large-scale human rights abuses that it too knew were occurring in Ethiopia, and which MSF claimed was killing as many people as the famine itself?[12] To date, MSF's distinctive actions have been explained by Eleanor Davey with reference to the evolution of the French left, and how this conditioned the emergence of human rights and *témoignage* as core components of MSF's organisational identity in the

[7] Evaluation and Monitoring, March 1985, PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive; Tigray report 8/3/85, PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[8] Memorandum from John Magrath, Press Office to Regional Coordinators, Area Organisers and Area Campaigns Organisers, 4 November 1985, PRG/2/3/1/8, Oxfam Archive.
[9] 4th Report from Wegel Tena, 8 February 1985', PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive; Oral history interview with Tony Vaux, conducted on 28 May 2020.
[10] Tony Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist: Relief Work in Famine and War* (London, 2001), pp. 64-68.
[11] Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years* (Oxford, 1992), p. 258; See also Kevin O'Sullivan, *The NGO Moment: The Globalisation of Compassion from Biafra to Live Aid* (Cambridge, 2021), pp. 34-55 for details of how Oxfam acted in a similar way in Bangladesh between 1970 and 1972.
[12] AP, 'Expelled doctors accuse Ethiopia', *The New York Times,* 4 December 1985

1980s.[13] In taking a broad, comparative approach, this chapter aims to enrich and add a new perspective to understandings of why international NGOs act differently when confronted with complex environments for aid delivery. To do so, it combines a comparison of British and French colonial pasts with an examination of the more immediate, practical factors that affected decision-making by looking at the political economy of aid and the internal institutional pressures that guided certain 'path dependencies' in operational policies.[14] This deeper exploration of the forces that influenced Oxfam's and MSF's activities in Ethiopia reveals precisely why the NGOs reacted so differently in similar circumstances, and thus illuminates the importance of national imperial histories in shaping the variations in how European NGOs perceived the role of humanitarian relief in conflict in the Global South. It also emphasises the importance of looking at NGOs as market actors that responded rationally to many non-ideological pressures when weighing up the practicality of ethical choices in the field.

Before delving into the comparison, however, it is necessary to take account of the Ethiopian political context that shaped the forced resettlement programme. Since 1974, Ethiopia had been under the communist rule of Mengistu Haile Mariam, who had become leader of the government after the revolution that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie. By 1984, Ethiopia was in the midst of a civil war, with the northern regions of Tigray and Eritrea rebelling against the centralised military government known as the Derg.[15] It was no coincidence that the famine hit hardest in the North; the Mengistu regime had exacerbated harsh conditions there by limiting the capacity of trade and other local coping strategies to mitigate the impact of a drought in 1983.[16] Consequently, the famine and the official response to it were both deeply political. The resettlement programme was embedded in the state's counterinsurgency strategy, combining concerns about the acute threat to human life caused by the drought with the state's need to re-assert its authority over contested regions. In promoting resettlement as a benevolent, humanitarian programme

[13] Eleanor Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954-1988* (Cambridge, 2015).
[14] Heike Wieters, 'Reinventing the Firm: From Post-war Relief to International Humanitarian Agency', *European Review of History*, 23: 1-2 (2016), pp. 116-35. See p. 118.
[15] Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (Second ed.) (London, 2001), pp. 236-243, 256-268.
[16] De Waal, *Evil Days*.

and an emergency health measure, the authorities appealed to existing understandings of 'development' as requiring a transformation in the practice of agriculture in the Global South.[17] The utopian rhetoric around the creation of new agricultural settlements, however, belied the state's vision of these villages as spaces of governmental surveillance, pacification and re-education for civilians who had resided in insurgent zones.[18] In short, the resettlement programme aimed as much to remake Ethiopian society and to preserve the Derg's grip on political power as to save people from famine conditions. This chapter accordingly examines forced resettlement as a classic example of the cross-contamination of developmentalist and securitarian objectives in what Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo calls 'repressive developmentalism'.[19]

In its logic and its rhetoric, the policy echoed similar resettlement schemes implemented by European colonial authorities in Kenya, Algeria, and Angola, which had also used humanitarian language and the involvement of humanitarian organisations to legitimise violence in the 1950s and 1960s. [20] The Ethiopian government was thus drawing on a rich heritage of European military practice and humanitarian collusion when it practised this strategy in the hope of enlisting the tacit support of humanitarian NGOs. Both Oxfam and MSF inadvertently supported the government's resettlement strategy through their field presence and international fundraising campaigns. Yet as the involuntary and often violent implementation of the policy became clearer, and the poor conditions encountered in resettlement reception sites were reported, the lack of a true humanitarian basis for the population transfers was revealed to NGOs.[21] In addition, NGOs became aware that they were being used directly as tools of counterinsurgency in Ethiopia because the presence of

[17] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, 2011); Corinna Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History* (London, 2018), pp. 109-115.
[18] De Waal, *Evil Days*, pp. 211-230.
[19] Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, 'A Robust Operation: Resettling, Security, and Development in Late Colonial Angola (1960s–1970s)', *Itinerario,* 44:1 (2020), pp. 55-79.
[20] On humanitarian organisations and counterinsurgency in 1950s Kenya, see Emily Baughan, 'Rehabilitating an Empire: Humanitarian Collusion with the Colonial State during the Kenyan Emergency ca. 1954-1960' in *Journal of British Studies* (59), 2020, pp.57-79, Baughan, *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire* (Oakland, California, 2021), pp. 160-166, and Beth Rebisz, *Violent Reform: Gendered Experiences of Colonial Developmental Counter-Insurgency in Kenya, 1954-1960* (Doctoral thesis, University of Reading, 2021); On the same in Algeria, see Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders,* pp. 50-77; On the same in Angola, see Jerónimo, 'A Robust Operation'.
[21] De Waal, *Evil Days*, pp. 211-230.

international organisations attracted civilians to distribution sites where forced resettlements occurred.[22] Even without direct implication in the scheme, the tendency of Western NGOs to depoliticise crises in the Global South played directly into the Ethiopian government's hands, whose emphasis on the famine's purely natural causes provided the justification for resettlement.[23] The successful implementation of the policy thus relied in no small part on the cooperation of humanitarian NGOs. The extent to which Oxfam and MSF were willing to play along with this was shaped by their own histories of embeddedness in colonial counterinsurgency strategies.

To analyse the factors that shaped Oxfam and MSF's motivations in this context, this chapter is divided into four parts. The first section delves deeper into how British and French experiences of decolonisation directly influenced the development of post-colonial humanitarian NGOs and their practices. The second section examines the political economy of aid. It argues that a sense of precarity drove professional considerations about organisational survival for Oxfam and MSF in the 1980s, leading both NGOs to act as rational market actors in prioritising very different forms of humanitarian action in Ethiopia.[24] The third section takes this further by emphasising the importance of practice and on-the-ground experiences in producing path dependencies. While Oxfam's developmentalist background produced a kind of allyship with the Ethiopian authorities in some areas of its intervention, MSF's medical focus brought it into direct confrontation with government representatives, leading to the rapid disintegration of a short-lived relationship. The fourth section concludes by locating the different degrees of susceptibility to collusion with 'repressive developmentalism' in Oxfam's and MSF's contrasting political worldviews and institutional cultures. Colonial pasts influenced the organisations' overall sensitivity to co-optation in military strategy by conditioning the NGOs' understandings of the role humanitarianism should play in conflict situations. However, practical factors related to

[22] Interview with Rony Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia', p.52.
[23] De Waal, *Evil Days*, pp. 211-230.
[24] For an overview of the theory of political economy, see Allan Drazen, *Political Economy in Macroeconomics* (Princeton, 2000); On humanitarian NGOs as rational market actors see Wieters, 'Reinventing the Firm', Wieters, *The NGO Care and Food Aid from America, 1945-80 : 'Showered with Kindness'?* (Manchester, 2017), and Gordon Cumming, 'French NGOs in the Global Era: Professionalization "Without Borders"?', *Voluntas,* 19:4 (2008), pp. 372-94.

political economy and professional specialisation also played a significant part in shaping action in Ethiopia.

The legacy of colonial counterinsurgency and humanitarian collusion

The suppression of colonial revolts in Algeria and Kenya during the 1950s demonstrate the contrast between the domestication and depoliticisation of colonial violence that occurred in European metropoles. In France, the Algerian war penetrated deeply into domestic political debate from 1954 to 1962. As a settler colony which contained overseas *départemen*ts, Algeria was widely understood to be an extension of France by the French public.[25] As such, the French government was willing to use extreme violence to guard its valued possession. This became visible, quite literally, on the streets of Paris in October 1961 when a peaceful pro-independence protest led by the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) was brutally repressed by the police, resulting in up to 200 deaths and eye-witness accounts of bodies 'disfigured and mutilated, floating on the Seine'.[26] Large numbers of men were also conscripted to serve in the French army in Algeria, which blurred the lines between colonial counterinsurgency and metropolitan violence, and made it extremely difficult for the government to persuade the public that what was occurring did not amount to a dirty war.[27] By contrast, although the British response to the Mau Mau insurgency was similarly brutal in many ways, it was not invested with the same political currency in the domestic context between 1952 and 1960. Kenya was not settled as extensively as Algeria with white Europeans nor similarly integrated into the British political system, meaning that the unrest remained largely confined to its colonial setting in the minds of the British public.[28] It was portrayed as the authorities wanted it to be: as a depoliticised, criminal affair.[29]

[25] Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders,* pp. 50-51, 54-55.
[26] Helene Jaccomard, 'The Algerian War on French Soil: The Paris Massacre of 17 October 1961' in Philip G. Dwyer & Lyndall Ryan (eds.), *Theatres of Violence: Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity Throughout History* (Oxford, 2012), pp.258-270.
[27] Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders*, pp. 50-52 and 62-63.
[28] Baughan, 'Rehabilitating an Empire'.
[29] See David Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues in British Politics 1945-1961: 'Colonial Development' to 'Wind of Change'* (Oxford, 1971) and Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968* (London, 2007).

This disparity in how people engaged with colonial violence in Britain and France was directly linked to the ability of the authorities to co-opt humanitarian organisations and rhetoric in service of military objectives. To this end, the counterinsurgency operations in Algeria and Kenya both followed the blueprint of repressive developmentalism. The Mau Mau rebellion was described to the British public as part of the development process; 'experts' told them the Kikuyu were suffering from psychological distress from the rapidity with which Kenyan society had experienced developmental change. [30] In accordance with this pathological view, police pacification was thus constructed as a benevolent, humanitarian endeavour that was necessary to restore civil order and the smooth progression of economic and social development.[31] In Algeria, development was reactively employed as a pacification measure when the French government began to invest in health infrastructure in the country, which had possessed a poor social service provision prior to the war.[32] Alongside these token efforts, the French military pursued a policy of *regroupement* within which civilians were forcibly resettled to new 'model villages', which despite their name, were often little more than military outposts surrounded by barbed wire.[33] In Kenya too, the British authorities forcibly resettled civilians to militarised camps, and in both settings, the participation of humanitarian NGOs was central to the social construction of population transfer policies as 'development'. For example, Save the Children Fund (SCF) and the British Red Cross (BRCS) actively colluded with colonial violence in 'prison schools' and 'rehabilitation' villages for Mau Mau supporters.[34] Significantly, BRCS avoided total co-optation into military objectives by resisting pressure to withhold food aid from politically non-compliant villages, which allowed it to maintain an image of impartiality.[35] Instrumentalising its reputation for impartiality, SCF aided official propaganda by telling the British press that the 'emergency' was not overly disrupting civilians' everyday lives. [36] In contrast, it was difficult for the Croix Rouge Française (CRF) to convince French and international audiences that it was not merely a tool of the official counterinsurgency efforts. Its leaders proclaimed that their mission was in support of their patriotic national

[30] Baughan, *Saving the Children,* pp. 160-166.
[31] Ibid*,* pp. 160-166.
[32] Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders,* p. 54.
[33] Ibid*,* p. 52.
[34] Baughan, 'Rehabilitating an Empire'.
[35] Rebisz, *Violent reform.*
[36] Baughan, *Saving the Children,* pp. 160-166.

duty to *'l'Algérie Française'*, and when a French decree on the medical blockade of Algeria made the treatment of FLN members a prosecutable offence in 1956, CRF was denounced by other Red Cross societies for its complicity.[37] Humanitarianism was much more successfully used in support of the FLN's political cause in Algeria through the foundation of the Croissant Rouge Algérien (CRA), which combined humanitarian relief work with international advocacy on the violation of International Humanitarian Law by French forces.[38]

The existence of two competing forms of humanitarianism in the Algerian crisis rendered the strategy of repressive developmentalism unsuccessful. French authorities may have attempted to combine reform and repression, but despite the CRF's enthusiastic participation in the counterinsurgency efforts, these two objectives frustrated rather than complemented each other in practice.[39] Public knowledge of torture and mass human rights violations committed by French forces fuelled courtroom sagas and political debate in France, leading to one of the most important intellectual crises since the Dreyfus affair.[40] This culminated in an organised anti-colonial coalition published the damning *Manifeste des 121* in September 1960, which set out the case for a principled conscientious objection to the war. [41] The strong emotions which the Algerian war animated in the French left were evident in the glorification by Jean-Paul Sartre of anti-colonial violence as a legitimate force for good, and the fact that some pro-Algerian French progressives dubbed *'pied-rouges'* even moved to Algeria after the war ended in 1962 to contribute to the process of state-building.[42] The long-term impact of these developments was significant. MSF emerged from the same intellectual currents which animated early *tiers-mondiste* activism in opposition to the Algerian war, which goes some way towards explaining the NGO's fierce resistance to co-optation by the Ethiopian government in 1985. In Britain, by contrast, repressive developmentalist tactics succeeded in controlling the public narrative about the Mau Mau

[37] Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders,* pp. 56-58.
[38] Ibid, pp. 55-56. See also Fabian Klose (translated from German by Dona Geyer), *Human Rights in the Shadow of Colonial Violence: The Wars of Independence in Kenya and Algeria* (Philadelphia, 2013) and Klose, 'Human Rights for and against Empire - Legal and Public Discourses in the Age of Decolonisation', *Journal of the History of International Law*, 18:2-3 (2016), pp. 317-38.
[39] Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders,* p. 53.
[40] Ibid, p. 51 and pp. 59-63.
[41] Ibid, p. 62 and pp. 58-59.
[42] Ibid, pp. 66-68, 62, 58-59.

crisis. The actions of SCF and BRCS during the crisis, thereby, normalised a set of practices that conditioned how British NGOs interacted with military authorities in the field. For example, BRCS relied on the security provided by the British colonial military during the Mau Mau crisis, which is why it asserted a minimal level of independence from the Army at the same time as it effectively aligned itself with the counterinsurgency effort. In Ethiopia (and Cambodia), Oxfam's support of the government's narrative was similarly influenced by the practical considerations of maintaining a working relationship with the authorities.[43] Oxfam's pragmatic approach conferred a level of legitimacy on the government's conduct, while its discreet protests can be seen as an attempt to claim token independence in a situation where co-optation was practically unavoidable.

In a broader sense, the effectiveness with which repressive developmentalism was deployed in Algeria and Kenya went on to directly shape postcolonial civil society in Britain and France. In Britain, the depoliticisation of counterinsurgency meant that anti-colonial activism failed to deeply penetrate public consciousness. Even in relation to Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence by white settlers in 1965, groups like the socialist Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) failed to gather traction with their anti-colonial critiques.[44] The protracted, violent counterinsurgency war which followed, only ending in Zimbabwean independence in 1980, echoed France's dirty war in Algeria. However, because the British government could portray Rhodesia as a rogue state, whose actions were unconnected to the broader official process of decolonisation, the dominant narrative of a benevolent transfer of power, exemplified by Harold Macmillan's 'Wind of Change' speech in 1960, went largely unchallenged. As a result, anti-colonial groupings like MCF swiftly lost their foothold in British public discourse to single-issue protest movements and humanitarian organisations.[45] This sense of continuity similarly characterised the development of post-colonial humanitarianism in Britain, where the same organisations which had populated the sector in the 1950s remained dominant, and a certain deference to military authority in humanitarian relief can be observed.

[43] See Chapters 1 and 2 on Oxfam in Cambodia during the 1980s.
[44] See Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: the Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford, 1993) and Maria Cullen, *British Radicals and Decolonisation: The Movement for Colonial Freedom's Reaction to Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence,* (BA dissertation, Trinity College Dublin, 2017).
[45] Cullen, *British Radicals and Decolonisation.*

Political economy

Political conceptions of the role of humanitarian NGOs in conflict situations thus mattered a great deal. However, they lack the capacity to fully explain why NGOs acted in specific ways in Ethiopia. This section sheds light on the more practical considerations that exerted influence over Oxfam and MSF's everyday decision-making processes. Drawing on the theory of political economy, it understands politics and economics as two mutually constitutive phenomena.[46] Applying this to humanitarian history, it describes humanitarian NGOs as products of capitalism; these organisations emerged from the same capitalist structures that moulded the modern humanitarian impulse.[47] In this environment, NGOs operated under the authority of the donors that funded their continued existence, yet they were also rational capitalist organisations whose management personnel displayed entrepreneurial agency in continually responding to changing market conditions.[48] Both external and internal pressures were brought to bear on humanitarian organisations.[49] In the 1980s, both Oxfam and MSF expressed a sense of their own precarity and directed their attention towards cultivating distinct reputations for themselves in order to ensure organisational survival. As we shall see, the contrasting market environments within which Oxfam and MSF operated were also deeply political, shaped as they were by societal conceptions of national retreat from the empire and the moral role of humanitarian organisations within this. In this way, existing reputational imperatives largely determined how the organisations reacted when confronted with the ethical dilemmas presented to them in the Ethiopian famine.

Oxfam's brand longevity in Britain was far from certain in the minds of its members in the 1980s. In a speech given by its director, Brian Walker, in 1983 it was acknowledged that, while the organisation had achieved financial success in recent years, others like War on

[46] Drazen, *Political Economy*, pp. 3- 5.
[47] Thomas Haskell, 'Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1' in *The American Historical Review,* 90:2 (1985), pp. 339-362; Haskell, 'Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2' in *The American Historical Review*, 90:3 (1985), pp. 547-566.
[48] Wieters, 'Reinventing the Firm'.
[49] Ibid, p. 118.

Want had experienced losses. The precarious nature of this achievement was a real concern, which Walker emphasised 'had to be earned and maintained'. [50] In this context, visibility at the site of humanitarian emergencies became increasingly important, especially as the power of television grew to document human suffering in harrowing detail. The 1979 Cambodia appeal had been particularly significant as an income-generating event for Oxfam, which had propelled the NGO 'into the big league' (see Chapters 1 and 2), setting the tone for a greater reliance on emergencies donations in the 1980s. [51] Oxfam officials recognised that if the organisation was to capitalise on the vast sums of money that emergencies made available – in particular from multi-agency Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeals – a certain kind of respectable image and early field presence were essential. [52] Oxfam still placed a large emphasis on development work in the 1980s,[53] but there was also a clear consciousness that its reputation as an emergency relief NGO was of great value to the organisation, and had to be carefully protected. Indeed, it was precisely because Oxfam did not have an easily definable mandate in the 1980s that it felt unable to adopt a radical human rights stance in Ethiopia.[54] In particular, the sense of having committed a massive blunder in responding to the famine six months too late (the organisation only redirected resources from treasured development programmes to relief work in late 1984) exerted a strong influence on Oxfam's unwillingness to jeopardise its field presence later in the crisis.[55] The strength of public engagement with the famine was also an important factor: Oxfam officials felt vulnerable to accusations of abandonment if they acted in a manner that resulted in expulsion.

Relatedly, the financial danger of behaving in too political a manner was strongly felt. Brian Walker, who took over the reins of Oxfam as Director General in 1974, had brought a more

[50] Director General's Speech to Council- 22/21 April 1983 "The Next Ten Years in Oxfam", PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[51] Dan Van der Vat, 'How Oxfam got into the big league', *The Times,* 17 November 1979; Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, pp. 234- 235.
[52] Andrew Jones, 'The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) and the Humanitarian Industry in Britain, 1963–85', *Twentieth Century British History*, 26:4 (2015), pp. 573–601.
[53] Tony Vaux attributed the delayed famine response in Ethiopia in 1984 to Oxfam's commitment to development work. See Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist,* pp. 43-51.
[54] Vaux describes Oxfam's internal debate between developmentalists and emergency response practitioners in *The Selfish Altruist*, pp. 76-81
[55] Ibid*,* pp. 45- 50.

practical, business-like mindset to the organisation than had existed before.[56] Reflecting what has been referred to as the 'managerialisation' of institutional work culture in the second half of the twentieth century,[57] Walker's pursuit of organisational growth eclipsed older conceptions of charitable ethics and frugality.[58] While doing away with any squeamishness towards operating with a growth mindset, Walker also discouraged the generation of humanitarians that had joined Oxfam in the late 1960s and early 1970s from endangering Oxfam's reputation with their activist outlook. He pointed to the financial losses experienced by the more overtly political (and left-wing) War on Want, which had diverted resources to domestic political advocacy, and concluded that Oxfam must not make the same mistake in promoting 'divisive political debates'.[59] Human rights advocacy, as he put it, was 'more avant garde' work, inherently connected to change and violence. It took Oxfam away from the more 'traditional' relief work valued by 'our founding fathers'. Speaking to Oxfam's governing council in 1983, Walker expressed uncertainty about Oxfam's broader advocacy work, concluding that all campaigns should be regarded as 'an experiment, in which we are to test the market', and which must not go so far as to 'deter the donor'. Herein lay a clear indication of his goals for the organisation: he wanted Oxfam to maintain and build on its established position as a respectable British humanitarian NGO, to follow donor preferences, and not to be a leader of change with regard to public opinion on radical or contentious issues.[60]

MSF too was guided by the instincts of organisational survival and growth in cultivating a specific reputation for itself in the 1980s. Its approach, however, led it in the opposite direction to Oxfam. Indeed, the passionate pursuit of human rights in humanitarian action was understood to be what made MSF stand out as a relatively new organisation in the ever-expanding international NGO sector in this decade. Looking back from the vantage point of the early 2020s, Rony Brauman described how, during his tenure as President of MSF in the 1980s, the organisation 'still seemed very fragile'. The organisation's leaders

[56] Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, pp. 203- 208.
[57] Alfred D. Chandler Jr., *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Harvard, 1990); Wieters, 'Reinventing the Firm', p. 128.
[58] Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, pp. 203- 208.
[59] Director General's Speech to Council- 22/21 April 1983 "The Next Ten Years in Oxfam", PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[60] Ibid.

were apparently 'very hung up about the big organisations', next to which they 'felt like novices who had to prove themselves'.[61] In this context, Brauman regarded human rights advocacy as a way for MSF to 'consolidate' its professional image, and aimed to utilise MSF's activist identity to gain the organisation professional recognition through the pursuit of a human rights award from the European Council.[62] Contentious human rights work thus became MSF's Unique Selling Point, a way to open doors for the organisation and enable it to consolidate its status as an aid insider. The extent to which MSF increasingly catered to an anti-communist audience was also evident in its close relationship to the *nouveaux philosophes* movement, and its creation of the human rights think-tank Liberté Sans Frontières (LSF) in 1984, which held its first conference entitled 'Challenging *tiers-mondisme*' in January 1985. At this moment, human rights were closely linked to anticommunism in the minds of MSF leaders; the Ethiopian crisis bolstered the ideological legitimacy of LSF by demonstrating the dangers of utopian communism in real-time. [63] In this sense, MSF's decision to speak publicly about aid manipulation and forced resettlements in Ethiopia was entirely in keeping with how it conceived of its professional image.

Oxfam and MSF thus possessed distinct organisational priorities when they began their response to the Ethiopian famine. These tendencies were only accentuated by the manner in which the British and French publics engaged with the famine. In Britain, the popular response served to legitimise Walker's argument that emergency relief should be a cornerstone of Oxfam's work. The DEC appeal in the summer of 1984 was the most successful it had ever undertaken, and the intensity of the public reaction only grew over the next few months, especially following Michael Buerk's television report for the BBC from Korem in October 1984.[64] Band Aid and the Live Aid concerts it spawned in July 1985 attracted a new generation of donors to the humanitarian cause. Oxfam had long courted the attention of a specific type of educated, middle-class British youth, and had found it

[61] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.
[62] Ibid.
[63] 'Liberté Sans Frontières - Information on Human Rights and Development,' Introductory Materials, January 1985, quoted in Laurence Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia 1984-1986', *Médecins Sans Frontières: Speaking Out Case Studies* (Paris, 2013), pp.23-24; Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders,* pp. 215-247; G.V., 'Le tiers-mondisme en question', *Le Monde*, 14 January 1985.
[64] Jones, 'The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) and the Humanitarian Industry in Britain'.

difficult to cultivate mass engagement since the voluntarist heyday of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign in the 1960s.[65] The organisation, therefore, was wary of Band Aid's new brand of populist humanitarian engagement.[66] Yet it also coveted its domination of the media landscape, and sought to benefit from the 'PR potential' of association with Geldof's initiative. [67] In private, Oxfam officials expressed their discomfort that Band Aid insisted on controlling the money it raised itself, but they cooperated, lending Band Aid their expertise in the hope that this would 'make us appear, particularly to the UK youth, as a progressive, trendy organisation'.[68] In January 1985, it was estimated that the funds generated by Band Aid's hit Christmas single would amount to £8 million but this was just the tip of the iceberg compared to the Live Aid concert fundraising in summer 1985.[69] Overall, Band Aid raised £50 million, while Oxfam itself raised £12.5 million in just 4 months after Michael Buerk's report.[70] In April 1985, Oxfam's Africa field committee reported that its income had doubled compared to the equivalent total from 1983-1984.[71] £29 million had been raised by the organisation for the year by December 1984, of which £14 million was allocated to Ethiopia, while normal fundraising was up by 17 percent on the previous year – not least because of the 'Hungry for Change' campaign and the 'enormous public response to the Ethiopia tragedy'.[72] The Ethiopian famine had significantly boosted Oxfam's overall income and public visibility, a significant development for an organisation keen to capture a share of the market in an increasingly competitive British humanitarian sector.[73]

Band Aid's cultural impact was such that a contagion of imitators swept through the West, including proposed copycat events in the US, Canada and France. The extent to which

[65] Director General's Speech to Council- 22/21 April 1983 "The Next Ten Years in Oxfam", PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[66] O'Sullivan, *The NGO Moment,* pp. 156-175.
[67] "Band Aid" (memo) from John Clarke, Campaigns to David Bryer, Sam Clarke, Bill Yates, Peter Coleridge, Disasters, Press & Information, 2 January 1984, PRG/2/3/1/8, Oxfam Archive; See also Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist,* pp. 53-54.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* p.261.
[71] Minutes of the Field Committee for Africa, Oxfam House, Thursday 11th April 1985, PRG/1/3/11, Oxfam Archive.
[72] Minutes of the Field Committee for Africa, Oxfam House, Wednesday January 16th, 1985, PRG/1/3/11, Oxfam Archive.
[73] Brian Walker mentions that 'competition will increase' in an already 'competitive business', partly due to the threat from American agencies with 'American capital, ideas and enthusiasm' in the Director General's Speech to Council- 22/21 April 1983 "The Next Ten Years in Oxfam", PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.

Oxfam was interested in courting these possible funding sources was evident in its dealings with John Marshall, the British Chairman of International Promotions Limited, an American corporation, who claimed at the beginning of 1985 'to be in a position to set up a huge television fundraising event in the United States expecting to raise tens of millions of dollars'.[74] When Oxfam sent a representative to his apartment in January 1985, things didn't get off to a great start. 'The meeting was somewhat marred by a small "misunderstanding"… John Marshall was indeed here. But asleep. 40 minutes later I met the man'. Despite this awkward beginning, it was concluded that this contact, who 'could have a considerable nuisance value', was 'to be nurtured with care'.[75] This odd meeting spoke to the new context for fundraising opened up by Band Aid, in which ambitious celebrities and entrepreneurs rose to the fore. Ethiopia transformed the Western media landscape into a vast, untapped resource for humanitarian NGOs, where 'tens of millions of dollars' in donations suddenly became a prize to be won if a successful communications strategy and visible presence at the site of disaster was maintained. [76] If Oxfam was to excel in this environment, it could not afford to compromise its commitment to material aid and field presence.

In France, by contrast, there was no equivalent of the Band Aid phenomenon. Musical fundraising initiatives popped up in the Francophone world but none attained the same level of influence as Geldof's.[77] In March 1985, for example, a group called *'Chanteurs Sans Frontières'* released its fundraising single *'Éthiopie'* in France.[78] While Band Aid had been fiercely independent and had consciously set itself apart from the establishment humanitarian NGOs, however, *Chanteurs Sans Frontières* was developed in cooperation with MSF, which was the primary beneficiary of its fundraising. This had two consequences: first, it meant that MSF was in control of the fundraising effort, rather than being overshadowed by it; and second, it also affirmed that the musical fundraising initiative in France was much less of a bottom-up, popular project than that which had developed in Britain. *Chanteurs*

[74] John Marshall Briefing on Ethiopia (undated), PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[75] Sam Clarke's Report on Visit to John Marshall- Chairman, International Promotions Limited, 3rd January 1985 in John Marshall Briefing on Ethiopia, PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[76] Ibid.
[77] 'Tam-Tam pour l'Ethiopie' is mentioned as another fundraising song in a detailed account of the French campaigning on Ethiopia in Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières,* p.515.
[78] Claude Fléouter, 'Chanteurs Sans Frontières', *Le Monde*, 15 April 1985.

Sans Frontières raised the not inconsiderable sum of 24 million francs, which was used by MSF to fund the opening of two relief camps at Sekota and Kelala, yet it paled in comparison to the amounts raised by Band Aid. [79] On 13 October 1985, an effort to mimic Live Aid with a concert held in Paris also flopped.[80] Over 100,000 spectators had been expected, but barely 20,000 showed up. The concert, Claude Fléouter wrote in *Le Monde*, was staged 'six months too late'.[81] The organisers' good intentions, Fléouter continued, had led them to a false belief that they could recreate the success of their Anglophone counterpart.[82] The disappointing turn-out was probably also influenced by the fact that MSF's discomfort with the ethical parameters for aid delivery in Ethiopia was becoming well known by this time. Thus, for several reasons, this kind of popular fundraising, which relied on a simple, apolitical narrative of the famine, did not exert the same cultural or economic influence on MSF as Band Aid did on Oxfam in Britain.

This misstep aside, MSF displayed a similar tendency to Oxfam to follow donor preferences. Without the 'critical resource' of state funding, which encouraged professionalisation and convergence of practice for NGOs in Britain, MSF placed even greater value on individual donors as key sources of funding.[83] Crucially, however, donors did not exert a conservative influence on MSF's organisational policy. [84] While Brian Walker was anxious to ensure Oxfam did not 'deter the donor' with any risky political or human rights advocacy,[85] in France, it was precisely the famine's political currency which represented the largest influence on MSF's engagement. MSF was constantly held to account by both supporters and critics in the French media, which exerted pressure on the organisation to maintain the image of an activist, rights-based humanitarian actor. In spring and summer 1985, for example, MSF was strongly criticised by left-wing commentators in *Libération*, who likened the humanitarian fundraising campaigns on Ethiopia to 'emotional terrorism that exploits ignorance of the

[79] Claude Fléouter, 'Six mois trop tard', *Le Monde*, 15 October 1985.
[80] Claude Fléouter, 'Chanteurs sans Frontières parc de La Courneuve', *Le Monde*, 5 October 1985.
[81] Claude Fléouter, 'Six mois trop tard', *Le Monde*, 15 October 1985.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Gordon Cumming, 'French NGOs in the Global Era: Professionalization "Without Borders"?', *Voluntas,* 19:4 (2008), pp. 372-94.
[84] See Edith Archambault, 'France, A Late-Comer to Government-Nonprofit Partnership', *Voluntas,* 26:6 (2015), pp.2283-2310 and Cumming, 'French NGOs in the global era'.
[85] Director General's Speech to Council- 22/21 April 1983 "The Next Ten Years in Oxfam", PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.

scandalous famine's structural nature',[86] and described the public response as 'a sort of orgasm of generosity that washes the world of all responsibility past, present and future'.[87] Brauman responded to these criticisms and defended neutral famine relief in situations of acute human need by mocking the *tiers-mondiste 'une-seule-solution-la-révolution'* commentary.[88] The following year, Brauman wrote an article in *Reader's Digest* in which he described how aid obstruction had been present in Korem from the start, when Dr. Brigitte Vasset was forbidden from handing out blankets to famine victims in 1984.[89] In this way, Brauman addressed MSF's politically engaged supporters, and assured them that MSF's conduct in Ethiopia fit with its organisational commitment to oppose authoritarian abuses of human rights in the field.[90]

Interactions with the Ethiopian authorities

At the other end of the activist spectrum, Oxfam and MSF also had fundamentally different relationships with the Ethiopian government when they began providing emergency relief in 1984. Because of MSF's specialisation in emergency medicine, it had no prior experience in the country apart from its unofficial work in contested zones in Eritrea.[91] By contrast, Oxfam's focus on development work in Ethiopia over the preceding decade meant that when it shifted to famine response in late 1984, it did so with a set of existing assumptions and expectations about what the future of its involvement in Ethiopia would look like. These differences in professional outlook mattered because when the specific interventions favoured by Oxfam and MSF were translated into the practice of famine relief, they crystallised into opposing styles of interaction with Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) officials and other Ethiopian authorities, which preceded the escalation of tensions over forced resettlement in 1985. By examining Oxfam and MSF's trajectories in dealing

[86] Article by Lionel Rotcage in *Libération*, 20-21 April 1985, quoted in Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières,* p.516.
[87] Article by Paul Fort in *Libération*, 13-14 July 1985, quoted in Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, pp.515-516.
[88] Article by Rony Brauman in *Libération*, 24 April 1985, quoted in Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontière*s, pp.516-617.
[89] 'Famine Aid: Were We Duped?', Rony Brauman in *Reader's Digest*, October 1986, 'Ethiopie 1985 Press', MSF Archive.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia', p. 12.

with the Ethiopian government as a partner in emergency response, therefore, we can appreciate the depth of the distinction between how the two organisations operated.

The mindset that drove Oxfam's development programme in Ethiopia contained several underlying assumptions and habitual tendencies. First, it was built on an ideological bedrock drawn from nineteenth century discourses of 'progress' and 'improvement'. [92] These ideas had animated Christian charity and attitudes to the 'moral shortcomings of the poor' in Europe before being transported by missionaries and imperial authorities to colonial settings. [93] There, racialised interpretations of a hierarchy of civilisations informed understandings that societies in the Global South were in need of external guidance to evolve along a fixed path towards modernity.[94] Development was thus always deeply connected to the needs of states. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, development activities were explicitly understood as part of the imperial project; in the post-colonial era, Western states, international and intergovernmental (IGO) organisations continued to promote development as a universally applicable process of economic improvement.[95] By the 1970s, Oxfam was among several NGOs which challenged the top-down approach favoured by states with a more people-centred, 'alternative' development ideology.[96] Nevertheless, for the most part, this people-to-people development model remained 'what states and IGOs made of it'.[97] Take, for example, the World Bank's promotion of 'basic needs' and the targeting of 'absolute poverty' in community-level interventions, which influenced Western states in the use of official aid funding to support

[92] Kevin O'Sullivan, 'NGOs and development: Small is beautiful?' in Corinna R. Unger, Iris Borowy, and Corinne Antezana-Pernet (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development* (New York, 2022), pp. 234-249. See pp.235-237.
[93] Ibid, pp.235-237.
[94] Ibid, pp.235-237.
[95] Ibid, pp.237-240; Anna Bocking-Welch, 'Imperial Legacies and Internationalist Discourses: British Involvement in the United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign, 1960-70', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth history*, 40:5 (2012), pp. 879–896; For a contemporary statement of the dominant development ideology in the 1960s, see Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto* (2d ed, Cambridge, 1971); See also Corinna R. Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History* (London, 2018), 7-8 & 21.
[96] This movement was inspired in part by the following book, first published in 1973: Ernst Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (London, 1993); See also Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* pp.180-181; O'Sullivan, 'NGOs and development', pp.240-245.
[97] O'Sullivan, 'NGOs and development', p.246.

non-governmental organisations.[98] The ascent of NGOs as important players in international development policy would not have been possible without this.

Equally, Oxfam's supposedly grassroots development interventions in the Global South were often far more embedded in the centralised governance programmes of states than it let on.[99] For example, the Tanzanian government's *ujamaa* socialism ideology provided a framework of rural community development that Oxfam keenly attached itself to in the 1960s, while in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, Oxfam's outward enthusiasm for people-to-people interactions was quickly eclipsed by the regime's intention to utilise international aid within a centrally planned economy.[100] An important exception to these trends was of course Oxfam's programme in Latin America, where it was profoundly influenced by vocal non-state actors in the interpretation of social development it enacted there.[101] However, the situation in Ethiopia had more in common with that of the Tanzanian and Cambodian experiences. At the same time that Oxfam deepened its commitment to solidarity and bottom-up approaches to development in Latin America, it applied the same utopian rhetoric to Ethiopia but with the key difference that in this setting the transformational visions of social change that it professed were also being pursued by an authoritarian state. This led Oxfam to be less sensitive than MSF was towards the co-optation of humanitarian rhetoric in the service of the state's military and social engineering objectives in resettlement.

By contrast, MSF's specialisation in emergency medical response produced an altogether different pattern of interaction with state authorities that fed into its experiences in Ethiopia. The medicalisation of human suffering that guided MSF's work led it to prioritise its vision of a universal suffering body, which could be uniformly and objectively treated in

[98] Ibid, p.240.
[99] Matthew Hilton, 'Charity and the End of Empire: British Non-Governmental Organizations, Africa, and International Development in the 1960s', *The American Historical Review*, 123:2 (2018), pp. 493–517.
[100] O'Sullivan, 'NGOs and development', p.243; Michael Jennings, *Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development and Ujamaa in Tanzania* (Bloomfield, Conn., 2007); See Chapter 2 of this thesis.
[101] See Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

the same way anywhere in the world.[102] In putting this professional ideology into practice, MSF had a tendency to react fiercely when it believed it was being prevented by other actors from providing medical care as it saw fit in the circumstances it encountered. This led MSF into direct confrontation with local authorities more often than the similarly utopian yet less clearly defined objectives of development did for Oxfam. MSF's emergency function also meant that it valued the maintenance of long-term, continuous access to the same spaces much less than the accomplishment of the immediate goal of saving bodies.[103] MSF made concessions in order to gain access to Ethiopia – when it negotiated with the authorities in 1984,[104] it complied swiftly with the government's demand that it alter the colouring of a promotional map to ensure Eritrea would not be perceived as a separate political entity in the West.[105] However, as MSF was only ever interested in intervening in Ethiopia on a short-term, emergency basis, it was less willing to bend to the government's strict inflexibility on more serious issues later on. In October 1985 in Kobo, an MSF representative recorded in a medical report that the organisation should start considering retreat as the conditions there no longer constituted an emergency.[106] This suggestion reminds us of the targeted nature of MSF's role and priorities in Ethiopia, which differed fundamentally from Oxfam's.

Conversely, Oxfam's developmentalist framework for intervention meant that the organisation was structurally averse to the radical change in policy that speaking out against the government on resettlement would have implied. According to Tony Vaux, Oxfam's Global Emergencies Coordinator, the staff based in the NGO's country headquarters in Addis Ababa tended to adopt the government line on issues of contention. In 1984, he concluded an internal report on Oxfam policy in Ethiopia with the remark that 'the people who had worked there for long periods were generally those who overlooked the government's

[102] See Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley, 2011) and 'The Gendered Human of Humanitarianism: Medicalising and Politicising Sexual Violence', *Gender & History*, 23:2 (2011), pp. 250-265.
[103] See Chapter 4 of this thesis.
[104] General Agreement for Undertaking Relief and/or Rehabilitation Activities in Ethiopia by Non-Governmental Organisations, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive. See also Vallaeys*, Médecins Sans Frontières*, p.517 on how MSF commenced its humanitarian engagement in Ethiopia.
[105] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.
[106] Godfried Dillen, Logistician's report March to October 1985, Kobo, 'Ethiopie 1984 Oromos (83), Korem (84), Kobo (84)', MSF Archive.

faults or acted as apologists'.[107] Oxfam's reliance on the state's nutritional monitoring system, along with the difficulty of obtaining permission to travel to the worst affected northern regions, were among the reasons that it was slow to contradict the Derg's downplaying of famine conditions in the months that followed. [108] The organisation had the good fortune to have sent a ship of grain to Ethiopia by the time that Michael Buerk's influential BBC report on Korem aired in October 1984, ensuring its reputation as a first-responder was not damaged. Yet its emergency relief programme continued to reflect a developmentalist outlook on the ground.[109] In November 1984, when Oxfam finally increased its focus on the famine in Wollo, its tendency to prioritise public health interventions was evident in its collaboration with the Ethiopian Water Authority in helping to establish water and sanitation facilities in 40 camps.[110]

Oxfam's commitment to the longevity of its Ethiopian development programme also meant that it was reluctant to seriously jeopardise this spirit of collaboration even when it became aware of extensive aid diversion. In early 1985, Oxfam objected strongly to the fact that external aid in Bora was seen as a resource to be captured by the state, and angrily rejected an attempt by the government to make NGOs 'self-sufficient' in their distributions. Hugh Goyder told colleagues in Oxford that he and the officials on the ground had 'pointed out, again, that much of "their" stocks are "ours" anyway – consigned to them for ours and others' uses'.[111] Evidently, trust had broken down between Oxfam and the Ethiopian authorities, yet the organisation did not feel it had any option but to continue to cooperate with government representatives, even when Vaux reported that there was a 'strong feeling' of 'serious scandal' among field staff, given their knowledge that 'huge stocks' of grain were piling up while Wollo starved.[112] As such, the pattern that governed Oxfam's attitude to resettlement was evident throughout its engagement in Ethiopia. Indeed,

[107] Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist*, pp.48-50.
[108] Ibid, pp.48-50.
[109] Ibid, pp.48-50.
[110] Black, *A Cause for Our Times,* p. 262.
[111] Hugh Goyder's 'Notes on visit to Wegel Tena' on 26 April 1985, PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[112] Memorandum on 'Ethiopia Food Situation' from Tony Vaux to Marcus Thompson 6th July 1985, PRG/2/3/1/8, Oxfam Archive.

Oxfam's position as 'the only aid agency active in the provision of water' was later directly cited by Vaux as a key reason why Oxfam had less scope to speak out than MSF.[113]

This was in contrast to MSF's tendency to push for specific medical interventions that widened the scope of its role in Ethiopia and disregarded the attitude of the Ethiopian authorities. In 1984, for example, controversy developed over MSF's proposal for the mass administration of antibiotics in response to a devastating cholera outbreak that had occurred in Korem.[114] When MSF officials consulted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on the outbreak, they strongly argued for this solution. RRC officials thought differently. Such a programme, they argued, would stimulate antibiotic resistance. Dr. Jean Rigal, who left Ethiopia in April 1985, later recalled that over the course of a 'very difficult discussion' with the RRC, MSF threatened to leave the country if they could not treat cholera patients as they saw fit. The RRC eventually backed down but forbade MSF to administer a second round of antibiotics, which the CDC had claimed was necessary. MSF went ahead with the second round anyway, 'prepared to take it all the way' and risk expulsion over the issue, only for the CDC to later amend its recommendation of the necessity of a second dose.[115] Although MSF was not expelled over this unilateral decision, the sharp escalation of tensions that it precipitated established a pattern to its practices which eventually caused the organisation's expulsion in December 1985.

MSF's medical expertise meant that it also directly experienced the futility of trying to engage in an ethical manner with population transfers on the ground. In September 1985, it intervened in a plan to repatriate Tigrayan Maychew natives from Korem back to their homes.[116] Through its involvement, MSF pushed for stronger minimum health criteria for inclusion, arguing that medically vulnerable people should not be allowed to travel. It also tried to ensure that there was food available upon arrival in Maychew, and that the ICRC, which was based there, was aware of the scheme and ready to provide assistance. At the time, MSF believed that if it had disengaged, the RRC and UN representatives would have

[113] Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist,* p.63.
[114] Oral history interview with Jean Rigal, conducted on 21 January 2021.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Letter to Brigitte Vasset from Bertrand, 27/09/85 on meetings with UN and ICRC, 'Ethiopie 1985 Courriers', MSF Archive.

sent the population away without any guarantee of departure and arrival rations, and without making the ICRC aware. Thus, MSF took the view that it could do more good through mitigating the worst effects of population transfers. However, for all MSF's efforts, aid was suspended to the reception region not long afterwards. This led many residents to return to Korem in search of relief food. From Korem, 6,000 out of a total of 20,000 people were subsequently resettled by government militia on 5 October.[117] Experiences like this clearly illustrated to MSF that the Ethiopian authorities were preventing the organisation from fulfilling its mandate of saving lives and providing medical care as it saw fit. As a result, MSF came to value its relationship with the authorities less and repeatedly clashed with government representatives in the months preceding its expulsion.

Repressive developmentalism and the susceptibility of NGOs to collusion

These tensions came to a head once the resettlement process – and into it, accusations of complicity – accelerated in the middle of 1985. We can begin to understand why by adopting Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo's concept of 'repressive developmentalism' and applying it to Ethiopia. Just as Jerónimo observed in the Portuguese authorities' pursuit of population movement in colonial Angola, the Derg's plan for resettlement clearly blended the logics of military strategy and socio-economic development in both its rhetoric and implementation.[118] To encourage voluntary participation and provide the impression that social considerations were at the heart of the initiative, Ethiopian officials showed videos depicting utopian images of rolling green fields and abundant harvests to villagers in drought-stricken regions.[119] The extreme human suffering resulting from the famine added another layer to this pattern. Because of the drought, the government portrayed resettlement as an emergency health measure and viewed the famine as an opportunity to encourage Ethiopians to fully cooperate with its vision of societal and agricultural transformation. In this sense, parallels can also be drawn between Ethiopian resettlement and the schistosomiasis eradication programme in Maoist China, which aimed to dramatically reduce the snail population in rural lakes so as to eliminate the infectious

[117] Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia', pp.533-534.
[118] Jerónimo, 'A Robust Operation'.
[119] De Waal, *Evil Days,* pp. 213-124.

disease they were associated with.[120] Both policies were presented as urgent public health programmes that accorded with the state's wider plans for large-scale national economic development. They aimed not only for social but also ecological engineering, predicated on the belief that humans could master their environments with the right technology and ideology on their side. The Ethiopian resettlement programme similarly marshalled humanitarian and development discourse for the pursuit of political ends. Like in colonial Kenya and Angola, this was also bound up with the securitarian objective to isolate insurgent groups. Ultimately however, the mixing of military and socio-economic objectives caused many problems due to the visible involvement of military personnel, along with the increasingly violent enforcement of resettlement. In 1984 and 1985, for example, there were multiple reports of deaths occurring in transit, as well as complaints over the lack of fertile land in reception sites.[121]

How did Oxfam and MSF contend with the ethical dilemma that this posed for their interventions in Ethiopia? Initially, their views were sharply divided along political lines, as became evident when American human rights NGO Cultural Survival made broad-ranging allegations of rights violations and mass death as a result of the resettlement scheme in July 1985.[122] Using interviews with escapees in Sudan to construct data on the effects of population transfers, the reports' authors claimed that the death rate in resettlement camps ranged 'between 33 and 270 per 10,000 per day'. Crucially, Cultural Survival also alleged that the famine itself had largely been caused by the Derg's ideological orientation. Villagisation had reduced the productive capacity of communities in order to render them dependent on the central state, which became a death sentence when authorities proved unable to provide in times of crisis. [123] In addition, the lauded 'early warning system' used by the Ethiopian government to predict food shortages was said to have merely allowed it to

[120] Xun Zhou, 'Triumph or tragedy: unintended consequences of political planning and social engineering in Maoist China' in Iris Bowery and Bernard Harris (eds.), *Yearbook for the History of Global Development: Volume 2 Health and Development* (De Gruyter, 2023).
[121] De Waal, *Evil Days,* pp. 211-230.
[122] See Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières,* pp.529-530 for information on the receipt of Cultural Survival material by MSF in July 1985.
[123] Press statement of Jason Clay (social anthropologist and director of research at Cultural Survival), 16 October 1985, 'Éthiopie 84, 85, 86: conf press/ colloques/ parlement européen/ rapport PAM', MSF Archive.

'define, identify and expropriate surpluses from peasant farmers'. [124] This assessment acted like a bombshell for MSF. For many within the organisation, it confirmed all of their worst fears about resettlement, and accorded with MSF's effective declaration of an anti-communist position through the formation of the *Liberté Sans Frontières* think-tank. The response was simple. MSF's leaders unequivocally accepted the conclusions of the report and escalated their protests against resettlement, later launching a media campaign which amplified a calculation of up to '100,000 deaths' arising from population transfers.[125] Oxfam officials, on the other hand, were deeply suspicious of the report's findings. There were concerns not only that Cultural Survival was untrustworthy but also that it was a front for the CIA.[126] For this reason, Oxfam was reluctant to base any changes in organisational policy on the word of Cultural Survival report.[127] Indeed, staff in Addis Ababa had been toying with the idea of directly supporting the resettlement villages with Oxfam aid before witness accounts from field staff made the involuntary nature of the policy's implementation undeniable.[128]

That is not to say that – over the coming months at least – Oxfam was in any way short of direct knowledge of the inhumane nature of resettlements. In February 1985, a report arrived from Wegel Tena which described the 'ten tonne highway trucks, which came in empty, and took out up to 80 settlers, horrendously packed, at a time'. Two months earlier, this policy had resulted in an incident whereby one 'truckload tragically spilled its human cargo [because] its steering failed on our punishing road, killing many, maiming more'.[129] The same report also claimed that there was 'clear evidence [of] coercion [in] all areas', and that some 'settlers [were] being moved from one drought area to another'. [130] Clearly, resettlement was not a famine relief measure. Denouncing it was another matter. An

[124] Research paper by David Clay on 'Famine and western humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia', 'Ethiopie 84, 85, 86: conf press/ colloquies/ parlement europeen/ rapport PAM', MSF Archive.
[125] 'In Ethiopia, Your Money Finances Massive Deportations', Interview with Rony Brauman in *Paris-Match,* 14 November 1985, quoted in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations'.
[126] Oral history interview with Tony Vaux, conducted on 28 May 2020.
[127] See the Oxfam publications by Tony Jackson, *Just Waiting to Die? Cambodian refugees in Thailand* (Oxford, 1987) and Eva Mysliweic, *Punishing the Poor: The International Isolation of Kampuchea* (Oxford, 1988) for examples of the vehement moral critique of American foreign policy that characterised Oxfam's advocacy work throughout in the 1980s.
[128] Oral history interview with Tony Vaux, conducted on 28 May 2020.
[129] 4th Report from Wegel Tena, 8 February 1985', PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[130] Ibid.

internal memo that circulated within Oxfam in early 1985 specifically recorded that, when asked, 'Oxfam had to be careful not to give way to media pressure for their confirmation of forced resettlement'.[131] The result was a fudge. Oxfam did not contest the policy, yet it asked the authorities for a 'clear assurance [that] their grain not [be] used for resettlement' and made discreet protests to the UN Coordinator in Ethiopia on the use of force, thus protecting the organisation's reputation from direct implication in the scheme.[132]

This policy was not accepted without criticism. Some field staff grew frustrated with Oxfam's caution, and pushed for a more radical response. They even threatened a mass resignation in protest both at this issue and at the futility of supplementary feeding in July 1985.[133] Oxfam nurse Carol Ashwood defected from the organisation amid the internal unrest and participated in press conferences held by MSF in London in November 1985 to denounce the resettlements.[134] In response, Oxfam merely reiterated that it was not itself involved in the programme and did not have 'enough hard evidence to either confirm or deny claims about the failure or the success of resettlement'.[135] That response further highlighted the strength of the institutional position on the issue. Put simply, Oxfam's view of itself did not include stoking 'divisive political debates' in Britain.[136] Rather, by resisting complete co-optation and ensuring that its grain was not used in resettlement villages, Oxfam's policy instead mirrored the symbolic independence pursued by BRCS in 1950s Kenya.[137] It maintained the appearance of neutrality in its humanitarian action, yet it did not venture to speak out about human rights abuses committed by its hosts in the Ethiopian Army.

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[131] 'Evaluation and Monitoring: Ethiopia', [early 1985?], PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[132] Evaluation and Monitoring, March 1985, PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive; Tigray report 8/3/85, PRG/5/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[133] Memorandum 'Ethiopia Food Situation- Memo No.3, 9th July 1985-Dessie' from Tony Vaux to Marcus Thompson, PRG/2/3/1/8, Oxfam Archive.
[134] Richard Hall, 'Oxfam in Protest at forced Migration', *Sunday Observer*, 8 December 1985, quoted in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia', p.82.
[135] Memorandum from John Magrath, Press Office to Regional Coordinators, Area Organisers and Area Campaigns Organisers, 4 November 1985, PRG/2/3/1/8, Oxfam Archive.
[136] Director General's Speech to Council- 22/21 April 1983 "The Next Ten Years in Oxfam", PRG/2/3/1/5, Oxfam Archive.
[137] Rebisz, *Violent reform.*

MSF's story could not have been more different. It acted decisively in mid-1985 in Kelala, when it became increasingly clear that the NGO's inability to open a feeding centre was related to the government's strategy to discourage people from resisting resettlement.[138] According to Brauman, MSF had become implicated in 'a trap for catching people'.[139] In an MSF report published in December 1985 on the topic 'Why were we expelled?', a nurse who was based in Kelala gave the following account of the brutality she witnessed: 'These were the choices people faced; being hunted down, victimized by a settling of scores, pursued endlessly or heading for transit camps'.[140] She also described the crowded and insanitary conditions discovered by MSF in a transit camp, which she referred to as 'a death house', where those who were not fit enough to return home before the next resettlement departure were kept.[141] In the final months of 1985, MSF's relationship with the Ethiopian government rapidly broke down when it mounted a public campaign against resettlement based on these experiences. The NGO targeted French and English television and print media, and demanded a three-month moratorium on resettlement until a commission of international experts could ensure minimum standards of voluntarism and humane conditions were restored.[142] The French Ambassador to Ethiopia realised by late October 1985 that these public statements would likely result in expulsion for MSF, and tried to persuade Brauman that this method 'would not solve the problem'.[143] Eventually, Brauman was invited to a private meeting with RRC second-in-command Berhane Deressa in Addis Ababa, which turned out to be a press conference of sorts, designed by the authorities to embarrass Brauman into retracting his criticisms. Three UN representatives and the French Ambassador were also present. However, instead of a retraction, Brauman merely reiterated and intensified MSF's condemnations of resettlement. As a result, MSF's relationship with the UN and RRC turned hostile, and the French Ambassador 'became

[138] 'Famine Aid: Were We Duped?', *Readers Digest* article by Rony Brauman in 'Ethiopie 1985 Press', MSF Archive.
[139] Interview with Rony Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia', p.52.
[140] 'The Death House,' Account of Claire Couquiaud, MSF France Nurse in Kelala in 'Why Were We Expelled?', MSF France Special Publication on Ethiopia for the Media and Donors, December 1985, quoted in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations', *MSF Speaking Out,* p. 51.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Summary of the board meeting, MSF France, 25 November 1985 in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations', *MSF Speaking Out,* p.70.
[143] Note à l'attention de Monsieur Lefas, Paris, le 24 octobre 1985, 2210-INVA/367, French Diplomatic Archives.

violently angry with MSF towards the end'. [144] Not long after the meeting, on 2 December 1985, MSF received a letter from the RRC requesting it leave the country.[145]

While MSF sacrificed its access to suffering populations to speak out, Oxfam remained in the country and continued to pass concerns about human rights violations through UN and British Embassy channels when resettlement was ramped up again in 1988.[146] The contrast between the two NGOs' trajectories prompts us to reflect on how the complex relationship between humanitarianism and military actors has evolved in the late twentieth century. When investigating the emergence of a military humanitarianism since the end of the Cold War, international relations scholars have conceptualised NGOs as passive victims of military co-optation in so-called 'humanitarian interventions'.[147] However, this case study demonstrates that the opposite was true in the mid-1980s: during the Cold War, NGOs were in fact important political actors in conflicts who made conscious decisions about whether and to what extent they were willing to cooperate with military instrumentalisation of their work. These practical and moral decisions were informed by the NGOs' positions as market actors in distinct fundraising environments, but they were also embedded in the French and British experiences of decolonisation. International military interventions were not the only form that the military-humanitarian nexus took. Indeed, the internal suppression of dissent in civil war deserves more attention for what it reveals of the legacy of repressive developmentalism in the Global South, along with the role played by nongovernmental actors as agents of history.

The Ethiopian example also forces us to broaden conceptions of military humanitarianism beyond the focus on Western power and the Right to Protect (R2P) doctrine.[148] By recognising that military humanitarianism was not merely a post-1989 or a solely Western

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[144] Summary of the board meeting, MSF France, 25 November 1985 in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations', *MSF Speaking Out,* p.70.
[145] Letter from Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (The Provisional Government of Socialist Ethiopia) to Bertrand Desmoulins, Coordinator, Médecins Sans Frontières France, 2 December 1985. Quoted in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations ', *MSF Speaking Out,* p. 78.
[146] Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist,* pp. 64-68.
[147] Michael Pugh, 'Military Intervention and Humanitarian Action: Trends and Issues', *Disasters*, 22:4 (1998), pp. 339–351.
[148] David Chandler, 'The Road to Military Humanitarianism: How the Human Rights NGOs Shaped a New Humanitarian Agenda', *Human rights quarterly*, 23:3 (2001), pp. 678–700.

phenomenon, we can incorporate the role of Southern states as norm proliferators in new visions of how the military-humanitarian nexus manifested in practice. The Ethiopian government's counterinsurgency strategy during the famine existed within a genealogy of colonial practices, which have been diffused throughout the international system, and continue to actively shape operational considerations for armies around the world.[149] Like Western states in the twenty-first century, the Ethiopian authorities drew on the example of repressive developmentalism because the instrumentalisation of humanitarian rhetoric and humanitarian action in the service of military objectives was presumed to be effective. However, European humanitarian NGOs continued to reflect the habitual patterns of cooperation and contestation of this strategy that had arisen out of national experiences of colonial conflict. For this reason, Oxfam accepted that it could not avoid some level of co-optation in military objectives if it wished to retain access to populations in Ethiopia. Similarly, MSF was unable to contemplate becoming a direct tool of state violence in this way because of the politicisation of humanitarianism that occurred in France as a result of the Algerian war.

Conclusion

The forced resettlement of civilians in Ethiopia constituted a classic strategy of repressive developmentalism. In combining military strategy with development rhetoric, it recalled the colonial tactics of co-opting humanitarian NGOs into counterinsurgency and using population transfers to isolate rebel groups from their civilian support base. It is thus no surprise that the distinct British and French domestic engagements with colonial counterinsurgency campaigns contributed to shaping the susceptibility of NGOs to collusion with counterinsurgency policies in the Global South in the postcolonial era. When MSF publicly protested the forced resettlement of famine victims in Ethiopia, it was acting in accordance with the values of the *tiers-mondiste* anti-colonial movement from which it had emerged. In contrast, the depoliticisation of colonial violence aided by humanitarian NGOs in Britain meant that the perception of a peaceful transfer of power dominated over British anticolonial sentiments. As a result, the reactionary nature of MSF's commitment to

[149] Pugh, 'Military Intervention and Humanitarian Action'.

humanitarianism as activism was not present for Oxfam, which instead emulated its colonial predecessors in resisting complete co-optation into military objectives at the same time as it flatly refused to jeopardise its relationship with the authorities by publicly confirming any knowledge of the forced and inhumane nature of resettlement.

Oxfam and MSF's actions were embedded in French and British colonial pasts, yet they were also grounded in the economic realities of the humanitarian marketplace in the 1980s. Both NGOs acted as rational market actors in reacting to the ethical dilemma that resettlement presented in Ethiopia. Oxfam's sense of precarity led it to be conservative and to follow the preferences of British donors for non-political emergency relief in refusing to publicly condemn resettlement. While MSF took the opposite approach, it too was responding to its external environment by protecting its activist reputation in the politicised French media landscape. The vast sums of money donated by the British public to Ethiopia appeals left Oxfam in no doubt of the loss it would experience if it jeopardised its access to Ethiopia, yet the absence of similarly large donation numbers in France reassured MSF that remaining true to its mission in speaking out would not be a professional sacrifice. If we are to truly understand the diverse forces that shaped the evolution of the military-humanitarian nexus throughout the twentieth century, it is practical factors like this that need to be engaged with alongside ideological influences on humanitarian action. In this way, we can appreciate the complex manner in which NGOs operated as active participants in conflict situations alongside military actors.

Conclusion

Oxfam and MSF's contrasting reactions to forced resettlement in Ethiopia were not only indicative of how national experiences of decolonisation and the market had influenced humanitarian action. They also spoke of the fundamentally different visions of human rights which the two NGOs possessed, and which were later carried through to the post-Cold War era. For MSF, the formation of the anti-communist Liberté Sans Frontières think-tank in 1984 encapsulated the centrality of a specific vision of human rights to its worldview.[1] Indeed, LSF's foundation can be read as the clearest expression of the rejection of utopianism by the former leftist militants that joined MSF in the 1970s. As such, MSF was not accommodating of a developmentalist vision of human rights or of the Global South because the utilisation of rights discourse in the service of collectivist projects of social and economic improvement was never a priority. The intellectual journey MSF's members had been on had made them all too sensitive to the instrumentalisation of the idealistic language of societal transformation by states in the service of authoritarian violations of human freedoms. Instead, the underlying logic of MSF's vision of human rights as expressed through LSF – and through its call in 1985 for the Ethiopian government to halt resettlements so that an international panel of experts could assess its humane and voluntary implementation – was that there was a contingency attached to sovereignty in the Global South.[2] If large-scale human rights abuses were being committed by the state, then international observers had a duty to step in and do what they could to stop it.

In the post-Cold War era, this was the exact line of thinking that led MSF founder-turned politician and UN diplomat Bernard Kouchner to help promote French theorist Mario Bettati's idea of the right of intervention, paving the way for the UN's integration of what

[1] 'Liberté Sans Frontières - Information on Human Rights and Development,' Introductory Materials, January 1985, quoted in Laurence Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia 1984-1986', *Médecins Sans Frontières: Speaking Out Case Studies* (Paris, 2013), pp. 23-24; Eleanor Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954-1988* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 215-247.
[2] Summary of the board meeting, MSF France, 25 November 1985 in Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia', p.70.

became known as Right to Protect (R2P) within its security rationale.[3] It was also the rationale that lay behind MSF President Rony Brauman's decision to publicly advocate for the use of military force against the Serbian military in the conflict spawned by the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in June 1992.[4] In that instance, Brauman broke with humanitarian neutrality to condemn the European Community and the UN's reluctance to get involved in the conflict beyond their support for humanitarian aid.[5] However, the demand for states to intervene in 1992 merely opened pandora's box, and MSF had to contend with the implications of NATO using the idea of a 'humanitarian war' to justify bombing campaigns in the Balkans later in the decade.[6] Although MSF distanced itself from the 'responsibility to protect' concept as a result, it was hard to get away from the fact that its advocacy had helped to give the doctrine legitimacy in the first place.[7] As NATO increasingly hijacked humanitarian action (distributing relief and running refugee camps) in Kosovo, MSF protests were remarked to be more 'symbolic than real'.[8] In 1999, MSF was 'crowned' by the establishment when it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of the distinct brand of rights-based humanitarianism, based on 'speaking out', that it had cultivated.[9] In many ways, MSF's rights-based humanitarian identity had played no small part in providing the ideological bedrock on which the post-Cold War interventionist turn was built.

By contrast, Oxfam's developmentalist worldview, coupled with its self-professed goal to transcend Cold War politics and partner with internationally isolated states during the 1980s, meant that it had an altogether different interpretation of rights-based action. [10] As demonstrated in the chapters on El Salvador and Cambodia, Oxfam's vision of the relevance

[3] David Chandler, 'The Road to Military Humanitarianism: How the Human Rights NGOs Shaped a New Humanitarian Agenda', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23:3 (2001), pp.678-700. See p. 685. Also see
[4] See Binet, 'MSF and the War in the Former Yugoslavia 1991-2003', *Médecins Sans Frontières: Speaking Out Case Studies* (Paris, 2015), pp. 12-13
[5] Binet, 'MSF and the War in the Former Yugoslavia'.
[6] Binet, 'Violence Against Kosovar Albanians, NATO's Intervention 1998-1999', *Médecins Sans Frontières: Speaking Out Case Studies* (Paris, 2014).
[7] David Rieff, 'Kosovo's Humanitarian Circus', *World policy journal*, 17:3 (2000), pp. 25–32, see p. 29; In the twenty-first century, MSF publicly criticised the R2P doctrine. See Fabrice Weissman, '"Not in our name": Why Médecins sans frontières does not support the "responsability to protect"', *MSF CRASH,* 1 August 2010, https://msf-crash.org/en/publications/rights-and-justice/not-our-name-why-medecins-sans-frontieres-does-not-support, and Rony Brauman, *Humanitarian Wars? Lies and Brainwashing* (London, 2019).
[8] Rieff, 'Kosovo's Humanitarian Circus', p. 30.
[9] Anne Vallaeys, *Médecins Sans Frontières: la biographie* (Paris, 2004), blurb.
[10] Brian Walker, 'NGOs break the Cold War impasse in Cambodia' in Larry Minear and Hazel Smith (eds.), *Humanitarian diplomacy: Practitioners and Their Craft* (Tokyo; New York, 2007), pp.133-153.

of human rights to humanitarianism was at once more expansive and more flexible than MSF's. Oxfam was attracted to idealistic projects of societal development and, although it preferred working directly with communities to bypass states, it was generally unwilling to act in ways that contested the sovereignty of states which granted it long-term access to their countries. This outlook was exactly what made Oxfam unwilling to challenge the Ethiopian state on the issue of forced resettlement. Crucially, resettlement could be connected in the minds of some Oxfam staff to the organisation's long-term vision of agricultural and societal improvement in the country.[11] Essentially, Oxfam's developmentalist worldview was underpinned by a vision of human rights as connected to the global project of securing a basic minimum of social and economic provisions for communities in the Global South. In the 1970s, this project had been animated by the World Bank's language of 'basic needs' and the targeting of the most poverty-stricken communities with development programmes, yet in the 1990s it became most visible in the leading role played by Oxfam's Nicholas Stockton in institutionalising quantitative standards for international relief provision in the Sphere handbook.[12] Importantly, Sphere was consciously promoted as a human rights project in Europe – even if the language of 'technical standards' was used to cater to American NGOs, who were wary of litigation, it was clear that Sphere was the culmination of a specific vision of human rights for Stockton.[13] With the goal to embody this human rights project in its work, Oxfam encouraged the NGO sector to take on the social role of a state in the Global South. NGOs did this through Sphere by setting supposedly universal standards of emergency welfare provision that defined social rights as the basic minimum beneath which international organisations agreed 'less is nothing and more is optional'.[14]

In summary, MSF's vision of human rights was essentially a negative one – it was the freedom *from* state oppression that the organisation prioritised. However, Oxfam's vision was informed by the positive implications of states (or the international community)

[11] Tony Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist: Relief Work in Famine and War* (London, 2001), pp.48-50.
[12] Kevin O'Sullivan, 'NGOs and development: Small is beautiful?' in Unger, Borowy, and Antezana-Pernet (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development*, 234-249. See pp. 240-241; Joël Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs* (Abingdon, 2020), pp. 122-153.
[13] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs*, p. 32.
[14] Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs,* pp. 11-12, 122.

providing social and economic rights, as had also been encoded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1947.[15] Despite their differences, Oxfam's and MSF's visions of human rights both had something in common. They were minimalist projects that departed from earlier political interpretations that had hoped, in the first half of the twentieth century, that the rights framework could be used as a tool with which to enforce a social ceiling above which people could not rise as well as a social floor beneath which they should not fall.[16] In Samuel Moyn's reading, the language of 'sufficiency' which eventually won out over that of 'equality' and came to dominate ideas of rights discourse from the 1970s has proven to be 'not enough' in truly tackling soaring global inequalities.[17] Indeed, the ways that both Oxfam and MSF mobilised human rights were concerned only with ensuring humans were free from the most extreme violations in the form of either state violence or poverty at a level so egregious that human survival was threatened by it. At this point, one might counter that it was not the role of humanitarian organisations to do more than this – humanitarians were not politicians, nor were they revolutionaries. This is true, but it is important to remember that rights discourse was invested with a utopian, world-changing capacity by the generation of Oxfam and MSF members who rose to positions of power in the 1980s.[18] When the revolutionary optimism that had initially influenced some of them was shattered in an era of bloody ideological conflict, they put all of this energy into humanitarianism and human rights, which it was hoped would contain their idealism and desire to do good in a more practically productive manner.

National comparative approach

This thesis has traced how this generation acted out their moral worldviews through humanitarian action during the 1980s. In so doing, the comparative approach has demonstrated the importance of national contexts in shaping the specific approaches favoured by Oxfam and MSF. In many ways, Oxfam and MSF were British and French political actors. Their actions in the Global South were not straightforwardly connected to

[15] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), accessed at https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights on 25 May 2023.
[16] Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2019), pp. 3-9.
[17] Moyn, *Not Enough*, pp. 1-11.
[18] Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, 2010).

the foreign policies of their countries, and indeed they often conflicted with them in the field, yet they were always seen as vectors of the compassion of French and British civil societies in the Global South. In this sense, the assumptions that underlay their interventions are best understood as expressions of national culture. By uncovering the social, economic and political foundations on which key decisions were made by Oxfam and MSF, this thesis has thus provided a greater understanding of the extent to which national particularities shaped the transnational project of humanitarianism, both through the actions of individual NGOs and through their influence on the elaboration of shared sectoral norms.

The impact of the nation has been visible on several levels. In the most minute sense, it informed the distinct sociological environments in Britain and France in which important Oxfam and MSF personalities grew up. In Honduras, this directly conditioned action because the intellectual or 'habitus' formations of Bill Yates and Rony Brauman informed organisational policy outlooks and key operational decisions in the field. In Britain, Yates was part of a generation of educated, middle-class idealists who were predisposed to channel their activist energies through established political and civil society forums. In the absence of a large, militant student movement, Yates acted according to the political culture he lived in by joining Oxfam in the 1970s and spearheading the radicalisation of its development programme in Latin America through his role as Country Director in Brazil. Yates' influence on Oxfam was driven by an optimistic view of humanitarianism as a vehicle for political solidarity with the oppressed *campesinos* and urban poor he encountered in this region, which led to Oxfam's support for the leftist Salvadoran refugees' campaign against the relocation of camps in Honduras in the 1980s. By contrast, Brauman's Jewish background, combined with the highly factional student movement he engaged with in France, produced the anti-authoritarian habitus that structured his leadership of MSF in the same decade. Whereas Oxfam staff were naturally sympathetic to the Salvadorans, Brauman saw the refugee committees who represented their interests to international organisations as authoritarian communists and clashed with them repeatedly over the years as a result. When MSF left Honduras in 1988 following stalemate negotiations with the committees over the extent of medical care in the camps and the autonomy of Salvadoran medics in the treatment of patients, a large part of this outcome stemmed from Brauman's

inability to reconcile his personal worldview that the committees were ideologically 'doomed in advance' with the desire by others to compromise.[19]

In a broader sense, the history of NGO-state relations in Britain and France played an important part in shaping the different patterns of interaction with sovereignty in the Global South exhibited by Oxfam and MSF. In Britain, the position of charities as the natural partners of the state in social provision resulted in NGOs assuming prominent roles in imperial welfare programmes, a mutually beneficial arrangement which later informed Oxfam's predisposed optimism in dealing with post-colonial state authorities.[20] This was most evident in 1979 and 1980 in Cambodia, when Oxfam naively believed it could work with the Vietnamese-supported People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime in pursuit of its grassroots development goals. Instead, it became a surrogate of the state when it traded access to the country for instrumentalisation in the precarious regime's consolidation of political power.[21] MSF, on the other hand, was formed in a national context which had not been favourable to the establishment of close ties between NGOs and the state. In France, the government preferred to administer social services directly without the intrusion of so-called 'intermediaries' on the public interest.[22] The development of French NGOs in isolation from the 'critical resource' of state funding created a greater reliance on income from militant donors, which goes some way towards explaining why MSF valued its independence so fiercely and was often distrustful of establishing partnerships with states in the Global South.[23] However, this did not mean MSF was immune to being instrumentalised by states. It may have been far more comfortable following the direction of UN agencies in refugee camps at the Thai-Cambodian border, yet in Cold War Southeast Asia the policies of UNHCR and the UN Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) merely reflected the interests of their most

[19] Brauman, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', *MSF Speaking Out Case Studies*, p. 13.
[20] Matthew Hilton, 'Charity and the End of Empire: British Non-Governmental Organizations, Africa, and International Development in the 1960s', *The American Historical Review*, 123:2 (2018), pp. 493-517.
[21] See Michael Jennings, *Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development, and Ujamaa in Tanzania* (Bloomfield, Conn., 2007).
[22] Gordon Cummings, 'French NGOs and the State: Paving the Way for a New Partnership?', *French Politics*, 7:2 (2009), pp. 145-66, see pp. 148-149; Cummings, 'French NGOs in the Global Era: Professionalization "Without Borders"?', *Voluntas*, 19:4 (2008), pp. 372-94, see p. 378; Edith Archambault, and 'Historical Roots of the Nonprofit Sector in France', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30:2 (2001), pp. 204-220, see pp. 204-208.
[23] Cummings, 'French NGOs and the State', and 'French NGOs in the Global Era'.

powerful funder: the United States government. In this sense, MSF too became a surrogate of statist realpolitik. Just as Oxfam delivered resources and a measure of legitimacy to an embattled and diplomatically isolated regime in Phnom Penh, MSF furnished the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) resistance with a sanctuary at the border and carried out the strategic aims of Western foreign policy by helping to maintain a military counterweight to Vietnamese power.

Beyond the influence of the state, there was also much evidence of the importance of French and British social phenomena on action in the Cambodian crisis. In 1979 and 1980, Oxfam and MSF constructed contrasting narratives of the humanitarian emergency, which were embedded in the collective memory cultures of the Second World War which had developed in Britain and France.[24] For instance, Oxfam focused on the genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge as by far the most important cause of Cambodian suffering and built a heroic narrative around its position as one of the first NGOs to set up a relief programme in Cambodia. It also platformed images of starving children, which were accompanied by captions that compared the situation in Cambodia to the Holocaust, in its fundraising campaign. The success of Oxfam's campaign in Britain was unprecedented, signalling the emotional chord Oxfam had struck with the public, and indicating the important ways in which representations of Cambodian suffering had interacted with the ongoing development of a consciousness of the unique horrors of the Holocaust in post-war British society. In France, it was an altogether different story. Both organisations made genocide, the ultimate crime, a core element of their mediation of Cambodian suffering to European audiences, but the anti-communist outlook of MSF's ex-militants informed the organisation's distrust of the PRK regime, and its claim (later disproven) that a second genocide was occurring in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. Around this allegation, it staged a protest dubbed a 'March for the Survival of Cambodia' against the PRK's closure of the Thai-Cambodian border to aid convoys. Unlike in Britain, where enduring beliefs that the state had heroically stood alone against the Nazis permitted Oxfam's simplified narrative to triumph, in France it was the collective shame felt at the complicity of Vichy collaborators

[24] Tom Lawson and Andy Pierce, 'Britain and the Holocaust: An Introduction' in Lawson and Pearce (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust*, pp. 1-37; Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991).

with the Holocaust that informed engagements with Cambodian suffering. For this reason, the imagery of political protest and righteous anger resonated with the French public because it provided proof that a new generation of French citizens had the courage to resist a genocide while it was happening. In this way, the national experiences of the Second World War in Britain and France directly informed how humanitarian crises in the post-colonial Global South were mediated and received in each country in the 1980s.

This emphasis on the importance of collective memory also permits a deeper understanding of why Oxfam and MSF acted in the ways that they did in responding to famine in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s. When Oxfam decided it would not speak out about the forced nature of the resettlement programme being implemented by the government, there was more to its reluctance to embrace a radical stance than the desire to protect its relationship with the authorities and its access to famine victims. Similarly, when MSF forcefully condemned the policy in the media, resulting in its expulsion from the country in December 1985, this decision was rooted in more than just MSF's ideological distrust of Ethiopia's communist regime. Crucially, the distinct nature of French and British experiences of decolonisation, and specifically of colonial counterinsurgency campaigns, had conditioned the evolution of the humanitarian sectors in each country. In France, the public consciousness of the use of torture in the Algerian War, coupled with the activism of the Croissant Rouge Algérien in condemning French violations of International Humanitarian Law, had resulted in a rejection of the silence and collaborationism of the French Croix Rouge Algérien with repression in the war.[25] In Britain, however, the public largely accepted the official narrative of the put-down of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, which was constructed as an apolitical, criminal affair that needed to be responded to with benevolent military control and humanitarian rehabilitation.[26] Later, the continuity that characterised the development of Britain's humanitarian sector in the postcolonial era contrasted with MSF's platforming of itself as a radically new kind of NGO in the 1970s. These characteristics, in turn, conditioned Oxfam and MSF's instinctive understandings of the moral role of NGOs in conflict situations in sub-

[25] See Davey, *Idealism Beyond Borders,* pp. 52-62.
[26] See Emily Baughan, 'Rehabilitating an Empire: Humanitarian Collusion with the Colonial State during the Kenyan Emergency ca. 1954-1960' in *Journal of British Studies,* 59 (2020), pp.57-79, and Baughan, *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire* (Oakland, California, 2021), pp. 160-166.

Saharan Africa. In Ethiopia, this was reflected in Oxfam's silent acceptance of military co-optation, which echoed the actions of the British Red Cross and Save the Children Fund in Kenya. On the other hand, MSF's vision of a rights-based humanitarianism as a tool with which to contest military violence directly recalled the influence of the Croissant Rouge Algérien on the French anti-colonial movement.

Finally, the assumptions that informed the practices of relieving suffering in the Ethiopian famine were also borne of British and French colonial entanglements. The internationalisation of the 'British way of famine' response – driven by the priorities of controlling vagrancy and avoiding the creation of dependency in famine victims – was evident in the policy framework through which the Ethiopian government and external NGOs provided emergency relief there in the 1980s.[27] Similarly, the roots of the modern aid system's enthusiasm for the manufacture of easily transportable technical relief foods, primarily valued as vessels for calories, can be found in inter-war Gabon, where the French colonial missionary Dr. Albert Schweitzer wrote of his purely biomedical conception of the African diet.[28] In contrast to many of the examples explored in the thesis however, the influence of French and British colonial entanglements can be seen in these areas beyond their impact on NGOs from their own national sectors. Instead, the pervasiveness of certain colonial-era assumptions around emergency aid in the late twentieth century remind us of the transnational nature of the humanitarian project, which nevertheless cannot be fully understood without reference to the national colonial pasts that informed the core assumptions and practices that animated it.

NGOs, states and the agency of the Global South in the international system

Although national contexts were formative, it is also important to remember that Oxfam and MSF constructed their interventions around the idea of a universal humanity, of which they were the custodians. For MSF, this was encapsulated in its conception of a 'universal

[27] Tehila Sasson and James Vernon, 'Practising the British Way of Famine: Technologies of Relief, 1770-1985', *European Review of History*, 22:6 (2015), pp. 860-72.
[28] See Tizian Zumthurm, 'The Colonial Situation in Practice: Food at the Albert Schweitzer Hospital, Lambaréné 1924-65', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 53:1 (2020), pp. 47-70.

suffering body', and for Oxfam this was reflected in its commitment to 'development' as a relatively flexible ideology that was nevertheless presumed to be applicable as the solution to poverty everywhere it worked.[29] However, the examples explored in this thesis have shown that civilians and political actors in the Global South often pushed back against the enforcement of supposedly universal values in their encounters with international NGO workers. In Cambodia, for example, Oxfam had to accept that the authorities had no interest in allowing the NGO to practice the form of grassroots development programme it was used to implementing elsewhere. At the Thai-Cambodian border, where MSF worked, refugees asserted some autonomy from international workers by practising customary forms of Khru Khmer medical treatment and by resisting MSF's attempts to influence women in their decisions about how to give birth. Instead of seeing the benefits of coming to the hospital to be assisted by MSF doctors and midwives, the majority of women in Khao I Dang in 1983 opted to stay at home and put their trust in the Cambodian midwives that were already known to them.[30] Similarly, in Honduras, Salvadoran refugees strongly pushed back against MSF's efforts to close the supplementary feeding centres run by refugee committees. In this case, the clash between humanitarian workers and locals was as much to do with MSF's fears of aid diversion and the desire by Salvadorans to assert control over the resources that international aid brought them. This was a recurrent problem – in both the Cambodian and Salvadoran refugee camps, MSF had to deal with strikes by medics who refused to cooperate with its overhauling of the pharmaceutical systems. In both cases, the NGO's reduction of the amount of drugs and medical equipment entering camps had been precipitated by a fall in international funding levels for the programmes, but was also strongly informed by MSF's suspicion that the medics in these 'refugee warrior' communities were siphoning aid off to military forces nearby.[31] In Phnom Penh too, aid diversion was recognised to be a problem by Oxfam, yet there was little the British NGO could do about it because the PRK authorities had asserted full control over the transport of

[29] See Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of care: immigration and the politics of humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley, 2011) and 'The Gendered Human of Humanitarianism: Medicalising and Politicising Sexual Violence', *Gender & History*, 23:2 (2011), pp. 250-265; See Corinna R. Unger, Iris Borowy, and Corinne Antezana-Pernet (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development* (New York, 2022), and Stephen J. Macekura, and Erez Manela, *The Development Century : A Global History* (Cambridge, 2018).
[30] Undated medical report on home and hospital births in Khao I Dang in 1983, 'Thaïlande 1984: courriers/ comptes, rapports diverses', MSF Archive.
[31] See Courtland Robinson, 'Refugee Warriors at the Thai-Cambodian border' in *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 19:1 (2000), pp. 23- 37.

aid into the country. Together, these examples illustrate an essential truth about humanitarian aid: once external resources were brought into a region, the strength of local actors in gaining considerable control over them was impressive. In the battle of wills that often ensued over aid materials, it was never certain that the international humanitarian NGOs would win out.

Thus, the nature of power was complex and messy in what can be described as the micro-interactions of humanitarian aid on the ground. In each of the case studies examined in this thesis, Oxfam and MSF proved themselves capable of being both counterweights to and surrogates of local forms of power. In a broader sense, the evidence presented here on the agency of local actors has also illustrated the role of the Global South in shaping global norms. However, this was by no means a straightforward story of locals positively influencing the international system in favour of their concerns. In Honduras, the political activism of Salvadoran refugees resulted in human rights becoming an important element of humanitarian action, yet not in the way the Salvadorans would have intended. Christy Thornton has demonstrated how the lobbying of Mexican diplomats in the inter-war period for the creation of multilateral lending institutions and a rules-based international economic system resulted in the formation of the decidedly US-dominated International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in 1944. [32] Similarly, the Salvadorans' utilisation of human rights as a tool with which to contest US interventionism in Central America sowed the seeds for the embeddedness of human rights discourse in military humanitarianism, which has fostered a renewed culture of Northern intervention in the Global South in the post-Cold War era. The example of the militarised resettlement programme in Ethiopia also forces us to reassess what we mean by 'military humanitarianism' – this was not a merely Western or post-Cold War phenomenon, as demonstrated by the Ethiopian government's conscious co-optation of humanitarian NGOs into its counterinsurgency objectives in 1984.[33] In addition, in all three case-studies, Oxfam and MSF were confronted with the complexities of integrating rights discourse into humanitarian advocacy (whether they agreed with the

[32] Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the governance of the global economy* (University of California Press: 2021).
[33] See Chandler, 'The Road to Military Humanitarianism'.

activism of local actors or not), and sharpened their organisational commitment to specific interpretations of rights-based humanitarian action as a result.

These findings hold relevance for how we think about the idea of 'global governance' (the process by which states and non-state actors collaborate to govern and reproduce North-South hierarchies in the international system) because they reveal the complexity of how power functions at local and global levels.[34] Mark Duffield claims that a system of 'networked' global governance has emerged since the end of the Cold War, whereby governments, military actors, private companies and NGOs have increased their cooperation in promoting the respect of shared norms around the spread of liberal democracy and the prevention of conflict.[35] With the existence of broad theories about the global role of NGOs like this, it is imperative that we more deeply historicise the evolution of NGOs' participation in the international system. For example, in order to understand how and why humanitarian NGOs began to see themselves as practitioners of peacebuilding, it is imperative to look at the Cambodian crisis, alongside other case-studies which have already been explored such as the involvement of international organisations in Afghanistan.[36] Both within Cambodia and at the Thai-Cambodian border, Oxfam and MSF viewed their roles as part of a process of post-genocide rehabilitation for Cambodian society. In the 1980s, these were rival visions of Cambodian reconstruction, yet when the Cold War ended and Vietnamese troops left Cambodia, Northern NGOs reunited in service of a shared agenda – to bar the Khmer Rouge from power, consolidate liberal democracy and promote development in Cambodia. In this way, NGOs did more than Western states and international organisations could do alone in the 1980s – they intervened in politically contested spaces and launched international advocacy campaigns in pursuit of their visions of a path out of diplomatic isolation and large-scale human rights abuses for the Cambodian people. As such, Oxfam and MSF were in fact prominent actors, alongside states and the UN, in the effort to end conflict and integrate Cambodia into a liberal global economy. Again though, this has not been a straightforward story – the Cambodian state was hailed as a

[34] Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (2nd edn.) (London, 2014).
[35] Duffield, *Global Governance,* p.2.
[36] See Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (Cambridge, 2018).

developmental model by the World Bank in the 1990s, yet this has not encouraged any radical poverty reduction or increase in the respect of human rights since then.[37] Hun Sen, the leader of the PRK in the 1980s, is still in power today and embraces a model of 'Chinese-funded economic development' while at the same time promoting his supposed belief in democracy and human rights.[38] As this example demonstrates, the power of states has not necessarily grown weaker in recent decades, yet the norms in the international system by which they can hold onto power have shifted; humanitarian NGOs have helped to shape these norms but this has by no means always resulted in a decline in the ability of governments to exercise power as they see fit.[39]

The importance of the 1980s

The 1980s were thus a crucial decade wherein NGOs like Oxfam and MSF carved out new roles for themselves as influential actors in the international system. This all began on the cusp of the decade in Southeast Asia, where the Cold War deadlock left UN and Red Cross agencies (the traditional leaders of international humanitarian response operations) with their hands tied, reluctant to assume responsibility for the messy geopolitical implications of directly running aid programmes in Phnom Penh or in the contested border camps between Cambodia and Thailand. Along with the confusion over Cambodian sovereignty that caused the diplomatic isolation of Phnom Penh for most of the decade, the abdication by UNHCR, UNICEF and ICRC of their usual roles in relief amounted to an international 'sovereignty deficit' that NGOs were only too willing to step into.[40] Both in Phnom Penh and at the Thai-Cambodian border, Oxfam and MSF correctly perceived this as an important professional opportunity and took up positions in aid programmes that massively increased their organisational incomes and the influence of NGOs vis-à-vis international organisations in the humanitarian sector. This was a crucial turning point or 'moment of acceleration' in the rise

[37] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', p. 234.
[38] Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place', p. 234.
[39] See Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann, 'Governance to Governmentality: Analyzing NGOs, States, and Power' in *International Studies Quarterly*, 50:3 (2006), pp. 651-672.
[40] Davide Rodogno, 'Non-state actors' humanitarian operations in the aftermath of the First World War', in Fabian Klose (ed.), *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas and Practice from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 185-207.

to prominence of NGOs, without which the developments of the following decade cannot be understood.[41]

In Honduras, we can also observe how NGOs gradually grew into a more assertive role in dealing with states and the UN. While Oxfam had been wary of standing up to UNHCR over the issue of relocating Salvadoran refugee camps in 1982, by the mid-1980s it took confidence from the existence of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) as a collective forum through which NGOs could advocate together against the policy. Through ICVA, Oxfam and other NGOs successfully blocked a second phase of camp relocation from being implemented in 1984, representing a strategic victory for its vision of a rights-based humanitarian action in this setting. In addition, the language used by the ICVA campaign against the policy demonstrated that NGOs were willing to criticise what they saw as the US government's utilisation of UNHCR as a puppet for its foreign policy goals in Central America. In MSF's case, we can also see how the experiences in Honduras allowed the NGO to grow into a sense of its own power in the international humanitarian sector. By 1988, its value to UNHCR was evident in the extent to which the international organisation's Jean-Pierre Hocke pleaded with MSF President Rony Brauman to reconsider withdrawal from the country over disagreements with Salvadoran refugee committees.[42] In contrast to the feelings of precarity which Brauman remembers animated MSF's decisions in the early 1980s, MSF was keenly aware of the power it held in this scenario on the eve of the end of the Cold War.[43] Accordingly, it acted independently in utilising its influence to embody its own interpretation of rights-based humanitarian action, which it continued to promote in the 1990s.

In Ethiopia, MSF's characteristic commitment to *témoignage* was similarly evident. However, the famine was also important in providing the setting for the diffusion of practices between NGOs on malnutrition response, evident in the sharing of knowledge around supplementary feeding programmes and the use of technical relief foods. In this

[41] Kevin O'Sullivan, Matthew Hilton, and Juliano Fiori, 'Humanitarianisms in Context', *European Review of History* (23: 1-2, 2016), pp. 1-15.
Letter from Jean-Pierre Hocke to Rony Brauman asking him to reconsider or delay MSF withdrawal, quoted in Binet, 'Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras 1988', pp. 23-24.
[43] Oral history interview with Rony Brauman, conducted on 14 January 2020.

way, just as the Cambodian crisis has been credited with creating an 'epistemic community' around post-genocide rehabilitation and the emerging culture of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) treatment, the Ethiopian famine resulted in the creation of a community of practice centred on the relief of mass starvation.[44] The experiences in the Ethiopian famine further entrenched the reliance of humanitarian workers on quantitative needs assessment and encouraged the perfection of a more practical medical approach to malnutrition. While MSF was arguably the leader in the quantification of human needs in the 1980s, Oxfam paved the way for the increasing centrality of technical relief foods in the post-Cold War era with its manufacture of its own High Energy Biscuits in 1984.[45] In the 1990s, the main innovation was in the further collaboration between nutritionists and corporations in the manufacture of Ready to Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTFs) like Plumpy'nut, which were enthusiastically integrated by MSF within a new, 'low modernist' approach to medicalised malnutrition treatment that valued transportability, the lack of field preparation and the possibility of outpatient treatment programmes requiring less professional supervision in the field.[46]

As each of these case studies shows, the 1980s was a crucial decade of shifting power dynamics, growth and norm negotiation for NGOs, without which the proliferation of formal NGO-led sectoral standards, exponential growth in NGO incomes and the specific phenomenon of 'military humanitarianism' in the 1990s cannot be understood.[47] While some surveys of twentieth century or post-war humanitarianism have examined the 1980s as part of more long-term analyses, this thesis has demonstrated that a sole focus on that decade can be revealing.[48] Indeed, the final years of the Cold War were more than just a

[44] See Taithe, 'The Cradle of the New Humanitarian System? International Work and European Volunteers at the Cambodian Border Camps, 1979–1993', *Contemporary European History*, 25:2 (2016), pp. 335-58, and Taithe, 'Between the Border and a Hard Place: Negotiating Protection and Humanitarian Aid after the Genocide in Cambodia, 1979- 1991' in Michael N. Barnett (ed.), *Humanitarianism and Human Rights: A World of Differences?* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 219-235.
[45] See Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs* and H. Young, P. Fellows, and J. Mitchell, 'Development of a high energy biscuit for use as a food supplement in disaster relief', *International Journal of Food Science & Technology*, 20:6 (1985), pp. 689–695.
[46] See Tom Scott-Smith, *On an Empty Stomach: Two Hundred Years of Hunger Relief* (Ithaca, New York, 2020).
[47] See figures on the income growth of Oxfam, MSF and other European NGOs cited in the Introduction.
[48] Kevin O'Sullivan, *The NGO Moment: The Globalisation of Compassion from Biafra to Live Aid* (Cambridge; New York, 2021); See Silvia Salvatici, *A history of humanitarianism, 1755-1989: In the Name of Others* (Manchester, 2019).

stop-gap before the turning point that reoriented the international system away from bipolar confrontation in 1989. Rather, the 1980s deserve more attention for what this transitional period reveals of the intense disagreements, alternative visions of rights-based action and contingencies in the rise of Oxfam and MSF that shaped the later consolidation of specific norms and practices in the 1990s and in the twenty-first century.

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This thesis has utilised a national comparative approach, which has revealed why Oxfam and MSF acted so differently in similar situations in the 1980s. For example, MSF did not react as strongly with aid diversion to a war economy and striking medics in the Cambodian camps as it did when it encountered the same circumstances in Honduras. Similarly, Oxfam did not feel compelled to contest the authority of UN agencies and the host-state in which it operated over the issue of forced population transfers in Ethiopia, despite the fact that it took such a principled stand on a similar issue in Honduras (and vice versa for MSF). In order to truly understand the forces that shaped Oxfam and MSF's distinctive interpretations of what it meant to practice an ethical humanitarian action in the 1980s, it is thus imperative to take account of how their members' worldviews were shaped by intellectual formations and national political cultures. Because of the ideologically charged nature of the French left in which MSF's members forged their global ambitions, the organisation carved out a clear moral role for itself in the 1980s as a rights-based actor that could morally contest the abuses of authoritarian communist regimes in the Global South through its universal medical relief work. By contrast, the less sharply polarised political environment in Britain in which a new generation of Oxfam members moulded their sense of moral purpose in the 1970s led Oxfam to articulate a specific role for itself as a counterweight to Western realpolitik that could transcend Cold War dynamics with its people-to-people development work in the 1980s.

Both Oxfam and MSF professed to practice non-political humanitarian projects in their interventions, but this thesis has demonstrated the centrality of politics to understanding

the goals and impacts of their international programmes in Southeast Asia, Central America and Ethiopia. In addition, it has demonstrated that while NGOs came into their own in the 1980s as diplomatic actors that asserted independent objectives against the traditional authority of states and international organisations, they also came up against the power of Global South actors, who ensured that the practical functionality of aid on the ground was far more complex than they anticipated. The evidence explored in this thesis has thus complicated understandings of the part played by NGOs in the international system, yet its findings are obviously most relevant to histories of British, French and European humanitarianism. It is hoped that, in applying a national comparative approach to other NGOs and national sectors in the future, other historians may introduce more insights to an understanding of how different societies and political cultures have shaped ideas about international humanitarianism. There are many European and North American contexts which would benefit from this treatment, yet perhaps the most promising field for future research of this kind lies in the Global South. Since the 1970s, increasingly influential NGOs have emerged from beyond the West to articulate new visions of ethical humanitarian action – FASE in Brazil and BRAC in Bangladesh, both of which Oxfam established partnerships with over the years – are cases in point.[49] New questions could be posed by looking at these NGOs. For example, what factors have influenced the forms of emergency response, social development and international advocacy which have emerged from these countries? How have these organisations interacted in distinct ways with local and global forms of political power, along with military and private economic actors? By widening the analytical lens in this way, we may have to change our perceptions of the specific role played by NGOs in the international system. Will the existence of an 'NGO model' of development hold, for instance, or do we have to qualify the roles we have ascribed to NGOs as a specifically Northern phenomenon?[50] Perhaps not, but it is clear that by broadening the comparative field, we will gain a deeper understanding of why NGOs act in the ways that they do, and how they have carved out positions for themselves as important actors in international interventions, emergency relief and long-term social provision in diverse settings across the globe. Fundamentally, this thesis has illustrated that while NGOs

[49] See Maggie Black, *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 185-194.
[50] See O'Sullivan, 'NGOs and development: Small is beautiful?' in Unger, Borowy, and Antezana-Pernet (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development*, p. 246.

may claim to be custodians of universal values, we can deconstruct the inherent contradictions of their projects by analysing their visions of ethical global action as distinctly local products.

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