

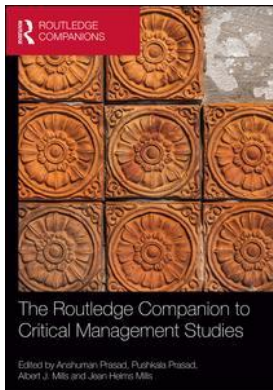
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Anshuman Prasad, Pushkala Prasad, Albert J. Mills, Jean Helms Mills

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Adam Rostis

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# Towards a genealogy of humanitarianism

## Revealing (neo-)colonialism in organizational practice

*Adam Rostis*

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### Introduction

In this chapter, I take a critical approach to the humanitarian organization as a central but undertheorized element of the organization of work. As a contribution to critical organizational scholarship, I will show how Foucault's genealogy can be used as a method for Critical Management Studies. In brief, genealogy will be used to defamiliarize humanitarianism through an examination of a specific organization and a particular historical intersection that has given rise to humanitarianism in its present form: the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1972 and the involvement of an instantly recognizable humanitarian organization – the Red Cross. My main interest is to explore the question of how humanitarianism has become a *taken-for-granted* social construction aimed at alleviating suffering. In so doing, I seek to understand the effects on people and organizations when humanitarianism is wielded as a weapon of common sense. These effects are ironic and hidden because war and disaster have a sense of urgency that compels individuals to accept radical change at the same time as they silence resistance to change. However, the result is the opposite of change: it is the preservation and reinforcement of existing power relations under the guise of neutral humanitarianism.

I believe the trajectory taken by humanitarianism is coincident with that of colonialism and decolonization. Using postcolonialism as a theoretical framework, I will argue that resistance to humanitarianism has yet to be realized. The history of the Red Cross intersects with colonial and post-colonial periods in a way that provides a useful analytical framework. This intersection provides an opportunity to understand how historical representations and contemporary experiences of organization have been shaped by colonialism. Through this examination, I will show how humanitarianism is woven into our thinking about organizations and society. I will describe how humanitarianism requires us to believe that a set of extraordinary circumstances exist requiring immediate attention and justifies what Nietzsche has called “an excess of history” (Nietzsche, 1985). This excess hides contingencies, contexts and alternative explanations with the result that they are forgotten as inconvenient extras thus staunching any debate over the validity of a claim or idea; in this case, the claim is the naturalness or taken-for-granted nature of humanitarianism. I will problematize humanitarianism by arguing that the continued existence of humanitarian

organizations is dependent upon the historical construction of humanitarianism such that it appears to be a static principle that has always existed and is based upon universally accepted values, principles and beliefs.

Beyond a contribution to Critical Management Studies, my motivation for this work is twofold. First is the need to understand the paradoxical behavior of humanitarian organizations: although humanitarianism appeals to the supposedly universal principle that we are all human and therefore all equally deserving of help, humanitarian aid is very selective of the type of suffering that will receive attention (MacFarlane & Weiss, 2000; Marten, 2004). My second motivation is that the humanitarian organization is an understudied aspect of organizations. This is surprising given the extent to which these organizations are involved in people's lives and the amount of trust and legitimacy they are given and with which they are imbued. Beck (1999: 44) argues that NGOs have a "blank cheque for an almost unlimited store of trust" because of their pure public image. Fiering (1976: 196) notes that "of all the great themes of eighteenth-century social thought, humanitarianism has received the least study in intellectual history." Lambert & Lester (2004: 324) argue that a "critical, postcolonial reappraisal" of those "who constituted the nexus of globalized philanthropy in the early nineteenth century is long overdue." Bankoff (2001: 19) suggests that "[i]nadequate attention . . . has been directed to considering the historical roots of the discursive framework within which hazard is generally presented" and that this framework is told within a story of "them and us, where the 'us' is the West . . . and the 'them' is everywhere else."

I will show that humanitarianism is a historical construction and that it has been and always will be subject to change. This implies there is room for resistance to humanitarianism in its current form. Foucault's genealogy instructs us to look for this change in historical points of intersection that give rise to new historical trajectories. I believe the Biafran War of 1967–1970 is just such an intersection that enables us to see the contingent and constructed nature of humanitarianism. It represents the height of the decolonization period in Africa, and it witnessed a fracture and disruption in the taken-for-granted status of the Red Cross as the *de facto* representative of global humanitarianism. Biafra is particularly important because during the war, a new form of humanitarianism emerged through the acts of individuals resisting the existing humanitarian order in a hybridization process well known to postcolonial scholars. These individuals included both recipients of humanitarian aid and those involved in implementing humanitarian action. The key aspect of postcolonial theory for this chapter is that organizations are blind to existing practices that have their origin in colonialism because of the pervasiveness of the colonial period: it influenced all aspects of the lives of both colonizer and colonized. As a method, genealogy decenters common sense, and so, combined with postcolonial theory, I believe it is well suited to reread the practices of the Red Cross to show the extent to which it is a postcolonial organization.

### Theoretical framework: Postcolonialism

By the start of World War I, a few European nations held huge amounts of foreign land as colonies. Global power on a scale never before seen was concentrated in the hands of a few European nations, including Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Germany. European societies were organized, in part, to administer and extract surplus value from vast tracts of foreign geography and their subjugated distant populations. However, there was more to colonialism than the profit and power bestowed on Europe: postcolonial scholars claim that imperialism and colonization have more interesting and analytically useful properties beneath their surface and that these are relevant and applicable even today (Prasad, 2005). When combined with the observation that colonialism left virtually no aspect of social and economic life untouched, it is further claimed

that colonialism's retreat in the independence struggles following World War II have left a residue of markers of colonial practices in social and political life (Said, 1994).

I believe there are three justifications for a postcolonial analysis of humanitarianism. The encounter between humanitarians and the populations they intend to serve is one that is between the West and the rest (De Waal, 1997). It largely reflects an established Western epistemology and politico-economic order and the drive to establish this primacy globally in so-called underdeveloped countries of the South through development. Humanitarian practice ranges over populations that were once ruled by distant European powers in a period and process known as modern Western colonialism (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008). Colonialism was extensive and long-lasting: it ranged over most of the planet's geography at its height and has a history of about 500 years (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008). Colonialism "involved the subjugation of one people by another" (Young, 2001: 15), and it was extraordinarily diverse in its approach to subjugation and methods of administration depending upon the colonizing country and the intention of the colonizer (Young, 2001). And so this coincidence of humanitarian practice and colonial practice in targeting the same specific populations and geographies is the first reason that I believe there is justification in somehow linking humanitarianism with colonialism. This should happen within a framework of theory that seeks to describe the ongoing and pervasive effects of colonization. This theoretical framework is known as postcolonial theory.

On the surface, domination appears to be the central practice of colonialism. However, domination is not peculiar to the colonial period, so what is it about this particular form of domination that made it so successful? Furthermore, how was consent gained among both colonizer and colonized to maintain distant rule? Perhaps part of the answer to these questions lies in colonialism being sold to both colonizer and colonized as being done "for a good reason," that is, to improve the lives of the colonized. In this sense, colonialism affected not only the colonized but the colonizers: a sense of duty was evident in European society that this domination was in fact a civilizing mission enabled by viewing the colonized as inferior or subordinate (Said, 1994) but redeemable through a process of civilizing or development.

The key phrase in my description of colonialism relevant to the study of humanitarianism is that colonialism is ongoing and pervasive. Colonialism was not just another form of domination: it was so extensive and has such a long history that Young (2001) and Banerjee & Prasad (2008: 91) argue that it "is an episode of particular significance in human history." Postcolonial theory reflects upon this significant phenomenon and is a framework for interpreting and analyzing the condition of former colonies and colonizers. While there is no longer an overt process of holding land and directly ruling populations, there remain "elements of political, economic and cultural control" (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008: 91). This ongoing form of colonialism is referred to as neocolonialism. However, one practice that extended from the colonial to the neocolonial is the concept of "duty to care": this is the belief that the colonizing power has an obligation to civilize and improve the colonized. In the post-colonial, these become neocolonial practices under one or the other banners of development, democratizing or rescuing (from war or disaster).

This conception of the colonized as being at the receiving end of the West's duty to improve may also have allowed the West the space to imagine itself. In other words, colonialism enabled the West to understand itself in relation to what it was not, to judge itself in relation to what it does not do, and to see possibilities in relation to what others do not have (Said, 1994). However, resistance to colonial rule, authority and the conceptualization of the colonized as being inert and objectified was also a defining feature of colonialism (Said, 1994). What is apparent from all of these practices is that the border between colonizer and colonized, between domination and

resistance is an artificial one. Colonialism was not something that was done to the Other without effect on the colonizing society, and resistance did not suddenly appear at an appointed time in history. It is also suggested by postcolonial scholars (Prasad, 2005; Said, 1994) that the border between the colonial era and today is also artificial: if sought after, the residual markers of colonialism can be found today in the routines of organizations. I contend that they are notably present in the practices of humanitarian organizations engaged in contact with crisis.

I must acknowledge that there is considerable room for confusion here due to terminology: is there really such a difference between postcolonial, post-colonial, and neocolonial, together with their various ‘isms’? I follow the convention adopted by Prasad (2003) and use the term “post-colonial” to refer to the period following the end of colonization, although it is problematic in itself to suggest that colonialism has in fact ended. Therefore, I understand the “post-” period to refer to the end of major European colonization in Africa and Asia at the end of World War II and later up to the present. I will use “postcolonialism” to describe the study of the effects of colonialism on countries, individuals, and organizations in the post-colonial period.

### **Decentering common sense: Genealogy as method**

Central to this chapter is the development of a genealogy of humanitarianism. Through archival research of primary and secondary source documents, this genealogy will reveal the effects of constructing humanitarianism as a unique, extraordinary, and urgent event. Two major features of genealogy make it a unique method and distinguish it from traditional histories. First, genealogy is concerned with a history of the present (Castel, 1994; Meadmore, Hatcher & McWilliam, 2000). In other words, a genealogy does not portray the present manifestation of something as the inevitable outcome of a series of past events. It relies on a second feature, problematization, to understand how present problems have become defined and understood in their current form. It does not view the present as solidified. The result of a genealogy is that the present loses its inevitable and natural feeling, and in its place is a sense of the many trajectories from which the present has been derived (Meadmore, Hatcher & McWilliam, 2000). The accomplishment of these two features is achieved through an examination of the descent and emergence of various historical trajectories, a trajectory here being a path, albeit an unintended or undirected one, taken through the historical record.

#### *Genealogy as method*

One has to rely on secondary interpretations of Foucault’s genealogical work (Castel, 1994; Kendall & Wickham, 1999; May, 1993), as well as examples of it in practice (Jacques, 1992; Jacques, 1995), to understand the method of genealogy. His method, it has often been said, is to write a history of the present (Foucault, 2002; Gutting, 2005; May, 1993). The reason for beginning with the present is that many things in the present are “intolerable” (Gutting, 2005). The intolerability of things is found in institutions or practices that are lodged in a seemingly permanent fashion in the present as oppressive features of society. A history of the present embarks on a reexamination of these features to demonstrate their contingent and impermanent nature. For example, when looking at Foucault’s genealogy of discipline, the intolerability of prisons and the lack of prison reform are given as one motivation for embarking on the work (Gutting, 2006; Mills, 2003). But how do we know that the current state of prisons is in fact intolerable beyond the knowledge given by his opinion? It is certainly common sense to me, given my experience as a member of my culture at this point in human history, that

capital punishment as a sentence for prisoners is intolerable. The answer might be to consider as intolerable any practice, institution or concept that presents itself as being as natural, taken-for-granted or permanent.

For example, Gutting (2006: 10) shows the outline of developing such questions in areas such as madness. How could we do anything except set up asylums to treat the mentally ill? How to deal humanely with criminals except by imprisoning them? In the case of my present work on humanitarianism, one could conceive as intolerable the various humanitarian imperatives. How could we not consider the survivors of a disaster as vulnerable? How could we not but help the starving except by feeding them? This seems to be a much better and productive guide to identifying questions that are amenable to genealogy. But how is genealogy actually done in practice?

A considerable amount of historical work is required in conducting a genealogy, and this work provides the justification for any claims made in a genealogy (Gutting, 2006). This includes detecting the uninevitability of current institutional forms or concepts through identifying accidents, contingencies and random occurrences and in examining the broader scale of historical development that can be found in existing histories (Gutting, 2006). Genealogies are not intended to be a complete history but are selective in mining the archive with the goal of uncovering artifacts that help us understand the present (Flynn, 2006). Foucault uses the term “archive” to refer to the way in which statements are formed within a society at a point in time (Prasad, 2005). It works with the details of history to discover how a discourse emerges and persists (May, 1993). However, genealogy is also archival in its method in the more common sense of the word: it is “gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary” (Foucault, 1984: 76), and it involves working within physical archives and with primary and secondary source texts (Mills & Helms Mills, 2011).

The archival nature of genealogy implies that existing methods for accessing archival research can be used (see, for example, Hill, 1993). Materials are collected, kept and then deposited into archives in an unsystematic manner and create multiple layers of documentation with various incomplete sections (Hill, 1993). Thus, while the use of archives by genealogy brings with it the strength of existing archival methodology, it also presents a weakness: the limited completeness of the archival record. Genealogy confronts this with another strength: it uses existing histories both as a supplement to missing primary sources and as a counterpoint to its own genealogical project (Prado, 2000). It does not dismiss existing histories; on the contrary, these can provide bridges between long periods where there are no primary sources. The reuse of history helps point to a continuous and unfolding historical picture that is useful for genealogy in that they serve to contrast the accidents and contingencies displayed in a genealogical approach. These written histories are themselves useful guides to dominant accounts of reality at different points in time.

If the question posed by history is “What is our past?” then genealogy asks “What is our present?” The response to this question involves a departure from traditional histories in two significant ways. First, genealogy does not portray the present as the inevitable outcome of a select series of past events. Second, it relies on establishing a relevant problematization to understand how the present has come to be defined and understood in its current form. For the genealogist, the present emerged and descended from a series of discontinuities that could have, under different circumstances and in a different context, produced something quite different. The result of a genealogy is that the present loses its inevitable and natural feeling, and in its place is a sense of the many trajectories from which the present has been derived (Meadmore, Hatcher & McWilliam, 2000). The accomplishment of these two features is achieved through an examination of the descent and emergence of various historical trajectories.

*Descent, emergence and problematization*

Descent deconstructs the taken-for-granted nature of the present, enabling the genealogist to identify the precontexts of the taken-for-granted. It involves investigating and understanding the various pieces of an event or concept to demonstrate that contingencies, accidents and mistakes were encountered along the road to its emergence as a given or inevitable fragment of knowledge (Hook, 2005; Meadmore, Hatcher & McWilliam, 2000). The appearance of unity is seen instead as a myriad of singular events spread across multiple domains (May, 1993). While descent disturbs the given, emergence points out the interaction of the details of descent that have resulted in their appearance as a given (Hook, 2005; Meadmore, Hatcher & McWilliam, 2000). Put another way, emergence views history as a struggle of multiple forces, with no clear goal or evidence of progress, struggling for dominance (May, 1993).

The problematization of the present is at the core of genealogy. Castel (1994) explains that institutions, propositions of a philosophical, scientific, or moral nature, regulations on behavior or conduct or indeed anything that is produced by discourse are key to understanding what Foucault meant by problematization. Problematization does not create an object or explain something that already exists. Rather, it enables institutions, propositions or regulations to be seen for what they are: the sites of claims to truth and the ways of governing the behavior of others. Problematization thus reframes the conduct of historical analysis to understand how it has transpired that the present has come to be accepted as inevitable or natural. Therefore, one can look at the conditions by which a concept has come into being or rather the history surrounding a concept in order to understand it (Patton, 1978). As well, a concept exists because of the rules or grammar that must be followed or used in order for it to be understood (Patton, 1978). One should examine the text to determine what is not said – in other words, to identify the absences (Assiter, 1984).

However, while there are other interpretations of events, problematization is not a license to rewrite history (Castel, 1994). It must make a contribution beyond that made by other disciplines to the same topic (Castel, 1994). Furthermore, recasting a problem in terms of the history of how it has become seen at the present time has its own issues, as discussed by Castel (1994). First, one should be wary of projecting today's concerns onto the past as today's problems and concerns will be different in the future. Second, using a genealogy as a justification for searching back to the beginning of recorded history is fruitless: problematizations emerge at a specific point in time. A feature of the genealogical approach is that the researcher cannot claim to have examined the entire archive (Poster, 1987). Third, problematizations do not repeat themselves but occur as background noise in a continuity of other events and emergences. Fourth, in a particular span of history, a problematization may appear to be insignificant against the backdrop of other events or emergences that carry greater weight at the time. Fifth, as a problematization spans large historical periods, the method of studying a problematization must rely on primary and secondary sources by rereading historical documents as well as secondary sources from historians.

In sum, Foucault's genealogy rejects a linearity of explanation and uncovers the silences, accidents and intersections that have resulted in a taken-for-granted approach to knowledge; it acts as a counterweight to a process of forgetting created by an excess of history. These other ways of knowing are part of the silenced voices of the victims of crises; seeking out these silences should be part of the empirical work of a genealogy. The method of genealogy relies heavily on archival research, and, for practical reasons, this chapter will situate the exploration of humanitarianism within the archives of a specific organization: the Red Cross. It is important to note that "the archive" for Foucault is a decentralized construct. It is not only a physical container embodied in libraries and national "archives," but it is the belief that discourse is scattered everywhere and

traces of its development can be found in multiple locations. This would include existing literature, histories, documents and practices of organizations.

### *Foucault's archive and the physical archive*

My research strategy for choosing archival material was to look at material from the Red Cross archives in Geneva from the Biafran Civil War, as I believed that it indicated a point of rupture in humanitarianism. Both the IFRC and the ICRC are headquartered in Geneva, and both have physical archives with policies related to public access. The IFRC has a 30-year moratorium on accessing material, while the ICRC's is 40 years. Since my research was conducted in 2009, this meant that I could have access to certain material dealing with events occurring before 1979 for the IFRC and before 1969 for the ICRC. In practical terms, this meant that although I could access material on Biafra within the IFRC archive, I was not permitted access to Biafra-era materials from the ICRC. There was, however, a considerable amount of material from the ICRC contained within the IFRC archive. Therefore, despite not having direct access to the Biafra material in the ICRC archives, I was able to fill in the gaps through the archival material in the IFRC, together with third-party reports. In total, I examined 2670 pages of documentation from these two archive sites.

### **Results of the study: The Red Cross in Biafra**

The Red Cross is an organization that is instantly recognizable for its humanitarian pedigree. In 1864, it was agreed to establish national societies dedicated to caring for battlefield casualties and to enshrine the principles and conventions of these societies in international law (Moorehead, 1999). The emblem used to identify the neutral volunteers on the battlefield was a red cross on a white background, the reverse colors of the Swiss flag; eventually the organization came to be uniquely known by this symbol, and the committee eventually became today's International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (Moorehead, 1999). The power of the agreement among states gave the Red Cross leave to intervene in conflict, obliged armed forces to respect the neutrality of Red Cross volunteers and compelled nations to accept the establishment of Red Cross national societies (Forsythe, 2005). Since its creation in 1864, the Red Cross has diversified outside of armed conflict, and this causes some degree of confusion for outsiders to the organization as the Red Cross is actually three different organizational forms: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) are both based in Geneva, and the National Societies are based in each of the 186 member countries (ICRC, 2005). The two "international" organizations are often referred to as the International Red Cross, and the other organizations as the National Societies. By agreement among the International Red Cross, the IFRC focuses its attention on natural disasters and recovery from conflict, while the ICRC has the guardianship of international humanitarian law and concerns itself almost exclusively with conflict and issues surrounding conflict (Forsythe, 2005). The International Red Cross refers often to its network of national societies and a legion of volunteers in disaster relief and recovery.

The Red Cross was created with the consent of, and existed alongside, colonial states using state power and sanction to achieve humanitarian goals (Moorehead, 1999). Indeed, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) today holds pseudo-state power through its guardianship of international humanitarian law (Forsythe, 2005). Its organizational development was shaped through decades of European conflict, most notably World Wars I and II. But what is conspicuously absent from the Red Cross formation stories is that it was formed by colonial European powers in a Europe that was actively colonizing. The Nigerian Civil War (also known



as the Biafran War) of 1968–1971 was a post-colonial war in that it followed after the decolonization of most African states and was at the end of most African independence struggles. The expectation by the Red Cross was that the parties in that conflict would behave rationally according to principles tested in over 100 years of European wars. However, the Biafran War was fought in the media as well as on the battlefield, and in effect both sides utilized civilians to convince the world of the rightness of their cause. In Biafra, the template for provision of assistance did not fit with contemporary reality.

### *Nigeria: Independence and conflict*

Nigerian independence from Britain in 1960 resulted in a nominally democratic, civilian government ruled in this post-colonial period (Meredith, 2005). Existing histories of Nigeria seem to agree that the country, like others in colonial Africa, had pre-independence borders that served colonial interests, did not reflect the cultural divisions that existed within countries and in fact set the stage for future conflict (Meredith, 2005; Post, 1968). One of these conflicts was a coup in 1966 that put in place a military government (Diamond, 2007) that was at odds with an oil-rich region of Nigeria known as Biafra. Biafra possessed oil resources and was peopled by the Igbo, a minority ethnic group (Post, 1968). The specific events of the beginning of the Biafran War have been detailed numerous times (see, for example, Kirk-Greene & Wrigley, 1970; Meredith, 2005; Gribbin, 1973). In summary, though, a declaration of independence in 1967 by Biafra was opposed by the federal government of Nigeria. The overwhelming military power of federal Nigeria meant that the Biafrans were effectively surrounded. However, the conflict persisted because of a proxy Cold War that was fought throughout Africa (de Montclos, 2009). Additional matériel and resources supplied to the Biafrans enabled them to extend their resistance. The eventual military success of Nigeria was through attrition: after 30 months of blockade, the population within Biafra was faced with shortages of food, currency and commodities (Falola, 2008). Before the Biafran rebellion collapsed, humanitarian organizations and humanitarian individuals maintained a sustained effort to prevent starvation and render aid to soldiers and the civilian population.

### *Biafra and humanitarianism*

De Waal (1997: 73) contends that “an entire generation of NGO relief workers was molded by Biafra.” Biafra was “the first humanitarian effort dominated by NGOs” (De Waal, 1997: 73) and while the ICRC receives the credit for the organization of the relief effort, the combined efforts of church groups in providing aid must not be forgotten. In fact, the Joint Church Aid (JCA) delivered an amount of aid that was “surpassed only by the Berlin airlift” (De Waal, 1997: 73). The war itself was of no great interest initially to the press or to people outside of Nigeria (De Waal, 1997). However, the key to its eventual impact on the world was the simplification of the complexity of the conflict through images of starving children that were reminiscent of Nazi concentration camps (De Waal, 1997). Not only did this provide the motivation for people to do something for the distant, suffering stranger, but it enabled the Biafran rebel combatants to seize upon something with which they could promote their cause (De Waal, 1997).

At one extreme, the humanitarian intervention influenced the conflict by prolonging it through the provision of food, medicine and foreign currency to the Biafrans who were, by all accounts, surrounded by the military forces of federal Nigeria and effectively blockaded. The success of the humanitarian response, as evidenced through the volume of financial resources contributed, can be attributed to the claim that the Biafran War was a personal war: people

witnessed images and appeals through direct media such as television and advertisements in newspapers that utilized the image of starving children to motivate action on the part of those outside the war (Perham, 1970). The largest and most scrutinized of these organizations was the ICRC.

In Biafra, the archives of the Red Cross revealed several themes. First, there was a struggle for control between the ICRC and the Nigerian government and also with other parts of the Red Cross organization. This struggle was for control of the meaning of the war, as well as for the control of the humanitarian operation. Second, the war in Biafra was an exceptional event that justified the lack of success that the Red Cross had in convincing the Nigerian government and the Biafran rebels to respect the Geneva Conventions, and the Red Cross authority. Third, colonial attitudes regarding Africa surfaced in the organizational practices of the Red Cross.

### *A struggle for control*

Biafra was a war fought not only between soldiers “on the ground” but also between competing interests of the ICRC, the Nigerian Red Cross, the Nigerian and the Biafran governments. The struggle was not just over land, but it also included a struggle over the meaning of the war and over control of the massive relief operation. As the literature continually emphasizes (Forsythe, 2005, 2007; de Montclos, 2009; Moorehead, 1999), this was a highly televised and public conflict, with highly emotive imagery influencing public perceptions of the war. As a result, there were huge opportunities for the Biafran and Nigerian governments, as well as for the Red Cross, to control the public’s perception of the war. Biafra, through its use of a public relations firm, took out advertisements in major newspapers and on television to convince people that genocide was taking place and to argue for the correctness of their independence cause (Forsythe, 2005; Gribbin, 1973; Moorehead, 1999; Perham, 1970). Archival material from the Red Cross also reveals a struggle between the Nigerian Red Cross and the ICRC for control of the meaning of the relief operation as well as the physical operation.

### *The Nigerian Red Cross*

In its final review of the relief operation, the Nigerian Red Cross (NRC) stated that the “relief operation did not start with the declaration of war, it started as far back as 1963 during the flood disaster at Abeokuta” (RCRCC, 1968: 2) and that it was the NRC that made the request for “experts to come and ascertain the type of assistance needed” (RCRCC, 1968: 2). This seems to be an effort at renarrating the story from one where outside experts make decisions to one where the NRC called for outside expertise and where the war and relief operation existed under circumstances different from what those outside Nigeria might think. In effect, the Nigerian Red Cross tried to influence the narrative such that it becomes viewed as a stable organization in the midst of crisis.

### *The ICRC*

For its part, the ICRC attempted to exert control through its access to donors, resources and responsibility under International Humanitarian Law (the Geneva Conventions). It was “thanks to large scale technical assistance which had been provided for several years by Scandinavian Red Cross Societies [that] the Nigerian Red Cross was able to work throughout the whole territory” (ICRC, 1970: 2). The ICRC “sent in delegations . . . to ensure that supplies and financial assistance, as are provided are put to the best use possible, and in accordance with the wishes of

donor Societies” (RCRCC, 1968: 6). The International Red Cross also exerted its financial control and authority through visits of the LRCS’s financial controller, who “paid a visit to Nigeria during which he had the opportunity to have a look into the financial situation and also to advise the [NRC] in the procedure of financial control” (LRCS, 1970: 4). Therefore, the International Red Cross acted as a gatekeeper of resources: “the ultimate authority for planning, finance and administration . . . was exercised by the ICRC Headquarters in Geneva” (NRC, n.d.: 5). It was also up to the International Red Cross to decide who gets aid as “the Red Cross must see that only the needy receive relief in proportion to their degree of need based on medical intervention” (LRCS, 1970: 1). Agreements in place at the international level prevented the NRC from directly appealing to donor societies. In response to a letter sent by the NRC to all Red Cross national societies, the secretary-general of the LRCS responded regretfully that “[y]ou know our sympathy for the cause of Nigeria and how much we want to be helpful” but “[t]here is . . . an agreement in force between the ICRC and the League, and you know that the ICRC have insisted that owing to the specific circumstances in Nigeria . . . the matter of relief to victims . . . should be handled by the International Committee” (Beer, 1968). It was also the ICRC that influenced the human resources used in the operation as “the rule followed in the ICRC’s close cooperation with the Nigerian Red Cross was not to place a non-African in a post until after it had been ascertained that it could not be filled by an African” (ICRC, 1969a: 5). Many archival documents show the ICRC’s attempt to exert control through the Geneva Conventions. For example, the ICRC “draws attention to the principles . . . embodied in the 1949 Geneva Conventions which today are universal . . . the ICRC expects instructions to be given . . . that these rules shall be strictly applied in all circumstances” (ICRC, 1969b). In the “relief operation which the ICRC is conducting,” it “expects governments and responsible authorities to enable it to continue” the operation (ICRC, 1969b). There was also an expectation that victims should behave in a certain fashion, and the struggle for control extended to placing them at fault for not behaving correctly. For example, August Lindt, the ICRC’s chief delegate for the operation, noted that “[it] must be avoided . . . creating a refugee mentality among the beneficiaries of relief, i.e. that they become accustomed to receiving supplies without working for their subsistence. Otherwise they would end up by enjoying this situation” (ICRC, 1969a: 2). Finally, the International Red Cross and the non-Nigerian donors decided when the emergency was over: “Mr. Sverre Kilde of the Norwegian Red Cross . . . maintained that as the emergency phase was over Red Cross action should be considered as concluded” (NRC, n.d.: 5).

For the ICRC, the exceptional nature of the conflict was used to explain why the Geneva Conventions were not followed and why there was so much suffering despite the intervention of the organization. The relief coordinator for the ICRC argued that “resettlement and rehabilitation is [sic] not normally considered one of the Red Cross activities. However, it has been done in some countries where all normal administration and authorities have broken down, and no other agencies were able to carry out plans for resettlement” (Kilde, 1966: 1). To be clear, the war was exceptional for the ICRC because the organization was involved in rehabilitation work that it normally did not undertake; this included mass feeding of civilians. It was also exceptional in that a party to the conflict was not a recognized state and that neither the recognized Nigerian government nor the unrecognized Biafran government consistently extended protections to citizens affected by the conflict; in other words, civilians were neglected deliberately. It seems that the conditions of the war caused humanitarianism to break down, not that humanitarianism (through the Geneva Conventions) didn’t work for a particular set of circumstances. This is more clearly stated by the LRCS when it observed that “[t]he structure of the ‘Biafran’ forces, with their military, para-military militia and civil defence units . . . made a ‘regular warfare’, abiding to the Geneva Conventions, nearly impossible” (LRCS, 1968: 17).

### *Essentialization*

The archival material does show an essentialization of Africa. This included broad generalizations about the nature of Nigeria and Nigerians. For example, the ICRC believed that in Africa “it was easier than in Europe for displaced persons to resettle and speedily become self-supporting, owing to the free land available and the quick harvests” (ICRC, 1969a: 2). This reflected the *terra nullius* (Fitzmaurice, 2007; Marten, 2004) conceptualization of Africa that, because the land on the continent was not under anyone’s direct control or ownership (according to European notions of ownership), the land was therefore free from political or social claims and available to be settled. The Red Cross observed that the “scope for health services is unlimited in a developing country” (LRCS, 1968: 12), but “tribal antagonism made Red Cross work impossible in some places” (LRCS, 1968: 8). That the ICRC believed it had a duty to care is evident in the archival material. First, the organization had taken on the burden of costs that was “particularly difficult and heavy owing to [the ICRC’s] character” (ICRC, 1969a: 6). It had “a responsibility to so many governments” and “appealed to the parties involved in the conflict to see to it that its impartial work of charity meets no further hindrance” (ICRC, 1969c).

### *Government of Nigeria and the victims of the conflict*

The archival material reveals resistance on the part of the government and citizens of Nigeria. The resistance is found in the whole operation to remove the ICRC from controlling the relief operation, but it can also be found in the general population. Sverre Kilde, an LRCS delegate, noted that displaced persons had “formed their own association with a committee in each of the Provinces and they are working in close connection with the provincial officials. This association may turn out to be an advantage in the way it may be easier to collaborate. But on the other hand this association can be a heavy pressure group” (Kilde, 1966: 2). Even the Geneva Conventions were resisted and adapted to the Nigerian context. The Nigerian Armed Forces adopted a Code of Conduct for the Armed Forces that was based on the Geneva Conventions but held out certain specific exceptions such as mercenaries who “will not be spared: they are the worst of enemies” or youths and school children who “must not be attacked unless they are engaged in open hostility” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, n.d.).

### **(Neo-)Colonialism in humanitarian organizations**

The post-colonial world has witnessed a weakening of the ability of the state to look after citizens (Agamben, 2005; Ophir, 2003; Redfield, 2005). Examples of this can be found in sub-Saharan Africa where nations have widely varying abilities to provide services to citizens. This weakening is broadly referred to as the failure of states (Hendrie, 1991; Ophir, 2003) but may more properly be attributed to the precarious ability of many nations to manage the multiple pressures of economic decline, conflict and disasters under conditions of a limited economic base. This state of permanent emergency has challenged the established disaster discourse and makes space for novel approaches to humanitarianism (Alexander, 2006; Bello, 2006). These approaches often include the privatization of aid and relief, and, despite appearances, they are not inherently beneficial to the population affected and may serve corporate or other interests (Banerjee, 2008). Underlying all these approaches is a discourse that depicts disasters as sudden shocks that temporarily divert a society from a deterministic movement forward (Alexander, 2006; Stefanovic, 2003). Evidence for this view can be found in the flourishing business in *sans-frontières* organizations ranging from Reporters- to Veterinarians- to Engineers-*sans-Frontières*.

Meinecke (1970) and MacIntyre (2007) develop arguments that there is now a borderless imperialism because local practices and knowledge have been replaced with those of the stranger. This does not result in greater inclusion of the local but rather conquest of the local by strangers. Laws that are valid for all of humanity (such as International Humanitarian Law and the Geneva Conventions) mean that there can be no laws peculiar to the local situation, and so there is no check against outside ambition. This creates “an imperial administration of the stranger” (Ossewaarde, 2007), resulting in the inability of the locals to set their own goals. Even though humanity is globalized, the individual human must live somewhere local. Hanging on to this locality through resistance to strangers and becoming strange is seen in forms such as “nostalgia, protest, terror and hope” (Ossewaarde, 2007). What do borders mean in a borderless world? What role is there for resistance to humanitarianism that relies on this borderless movement?

### *Resistance, stakeholders and borders*

A specific contribution of postcolonial theory to Critical Management Studies is to reveal the historical context of management practices that have their genesis in colonialism (Özkazanç-Pan, 2008; Prasad, 2003). The genealogy of humanitarianism that I have outlined has revealed the extent to which these organizations perpetuate colonialism by hanging on to colonial practices unawares (Kwek, 2003; Prasad, 2003). The perceived colonial duty to look after the less advanced (Said, 1994) is evident from the texts studied as they reveal that the Red Cross views disaster-affected individuals as vulnerable people, forming vulnerable populations not capable of protecting themselves or even of having the ability to decide whether to accept the care being offered.

By extension, the state is also judged on its vulnerability and capacity to administer to its population, as evidenced from the Red Cross duty to intervene in conflict as afforded to it by international law. This behavior is consistent with Narayan’s (1995: 136) argument that the relative capacity or vulnerability of individuals is “contested terrain” and is liable to variation depending upon who defines these terms. In this case, the definitions are made within the organizations that are in turn products of former colonizing nations. This echoes the observation of Lambert and Lester (2004) that colonial philanthropists did not argue against imperialism and an empire; rather, they sought to curb the excesses of imperialism.

This sentiment and approach still exist in the practices of the Red Cross as far as conflict and disaster are concerned. They take conflict and disaster as givens and seek to curb the excesses of violence and risk, respectively. Following on from this perspective, the clients of humanitarian organizations are viewed as vulnerable, and these same organizations are granted authority to intervene through international law. It is therefore argued that the current practices of the Red Cross are an extension of a colonial past.

Postcolonial theory argues that colonialism and resistance were dependent upon each other for their very existence as meaningful constructs. It also implies that colonization contained within it the seeds of change and eventual replacement with another set of power relations through a process of resistance. Given the argument that humanitarian organizations are part of a discourse that has a common colonial past, one would expect to see some accounting of resistance within these organizations. However, there is no place in the policies of the Red Cross for states or individuals to resist humanitarianism. This is in contrast to empirical evidence presented in documented cases of resistance to aid; these can be found, for example, in Ethiopia during the famines of the 1980s as explained by Hendrie (1991). In this case, resistance by the vulnerable was met with shocked incredulity by the humanitarian organization, together with claims of malfeasance lodged against the resisters. The obvious reason for this position of the humanitarian organization and for omission of resistance in the humanitarian discourse is that

resistance seems illogical and counter to the goal established by the organizations to help those populations considered vulnerable. Just as the colonized subject was the receiver of a duty to care or to civilize, so the construction of the idea of vulnerability and vulnerable persons has no room for the subjects to participate in the definition or their inclusion in these categories (see, for example, Furedi 2007a, 2007b).

Since humanitarianism, vulnerability and aid are now “common sense,” how can an individual or state choose to refuse aid or define the terms with which aid is accepted? Unmasking common sense can be achieved by noticing what is not said and by observing that the silences within discourse contain the possibility for change (Foucault, 2002; Marcuse, 2002; May, 1993). These silences do exist around resistance and the refusal of humanitarianism in, for example, the Biafran War. Thus, a space can be opened in the humanitarian discourse to include resistance. This space can be used to reimagine the individual recipient of humanitarianism from that of a passive subject of a distant duty to care into an active participant in the discourse.

Perhaps a first insight into this problem can be obtained by recalling that management theory compartmentalizes its ontology by drawing a boundary line at the organization (Burrell & Morgan, 1985; Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Weatherbee, Dye & Mills, 2008). Just as it is often necessary to hold some variable constant to solve an equation, the constant of the organizational equation is the individual external to the organization. This ontology has excluded relevant social actors, in particular those without voice yet still negatively affected by organizations. As an example, individuals living in communities impacted by the social and environmental decisions of industry have sought to influence decision making so that profit yields to local interests and conditions. Thus, exclusion from decision making results in resistance by external groups that seek to have a legitimate voice in internal decision making that affects the world outside of the firm.

In response, organizations engage in legitimizing processes that reduce resistance by including these external groups as partners or stakeholders. But clearly organizations do not admit all to the decision making process. In the case of disaster survivors and humanitarian organizations, aid recipients have enormous legitimacy as they provide to the vulnerable population so central to the existence of the humanitarian organization. Therefore, it becomes possible to admit the recipients of aid to the humanitarian discourse. I am suggesting that resistance to the humanitarian organization is an act of decolonization in a post-decolonization period. The task now becomes one of suggesting how this resistance might emerge within the humanitarian discourse. What can be learned from resistance and decolonization to guide this process?

### *Learning from decolonization*

Resistance as a political movement resulted in decolonization through independence from the colonizing power (Fanon, 2004; Said, 1994). However, the state that replaced the colonizer often reproduced the colonial structures of power, albeit under the guise of trying to change existing conditions, liberating the population or seeking economic freedom. Pointing to examples from Chile and Cuba, Mignolo (1991) argues that decolonization projects were set to fail from the outset because the initial conditions were the same; that is, they used a logic that came from within modernity – socialism, in the cases of the two preceding examples. Therefore, resistance was futile because it is governed by the same epistemology and ontology that resulted in oppression. In the case of resistance to humanitarianism, the parallel would be the establishment of local humanitarian organizations. Interestingly, the Red Cross has already taken this approach through its global network of national societies. How, then, can resistance be conceptualized so that it avoids reproducing the existing discourse, albeit in a local disguise?

Mignolo (1991) argues for a solution that originates outside of modernity, and in the case of this chapter, the solution would be separate from the logic that created and perpetuates humanitarianism. However, according to Mignolo (1991), caution should be exercised so that the result of such a delinking does not result in furthering the essentialism overseen by the colonial project. In decolonizing from humanitarianism, one may attempt to attribute different ways of knowing about helping to the group that is delinking. This can result in an epistemology that is appropriate only to the decolonized and that stands in contrast to Western knowledge of humanitarianism, which views the survivors of conflict or disaster as receivers of a duty to care and improve as part of a continuing colonial discourse. In other words, a new essentialism regarding humanitarianism may emerge. Mignolo rejects the development of an equal but opposite essentialism in favor of the acceptance of more than one approach to knowledge: a hybridity of knowledge. Hybridity is part of the postcolonial perspective that sees the interaction of the colonizer and colonized as being implicitly interdependent (Bhabha, 1994; Prasad, 2005). The role of essentialism is challenged by hybridity: one cannot speak of the fundamental characteristics of the Other when these are increasingly shared with the colonizer. Mignolo (2007) uses the argument of delinking and shared cultural space to introduce the concept of border thinking or border epistemology. This notion contrasts quite sharply with the colonial ideal of the frontier.

Borders identify a geographical space and divide it into countries, defined by politics and often ordered as a result of colonial power sharing rather than respect for the cultural or linguistic heritage of those on either side. But a border implies the existence of people on either side and the possibility of exchange and movement between the sides. This is in contrast to the concept of the frontier, which conjures images of pushing into the unknown and the new (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). Border thinking is achieved by accepting the idea of multiple perspectives. In terms of epistemologies, the frontier is characteristic of the modernist view, while the border adopts the view that multiple ways of knowing are possible. The frontier represents “the hubris of the zero point” (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006: 214). In other words, through colonialism, modernity’s legacy has been the belief that it occupied new spaces and thus was able to gain an understanding of itself through a comparison to what it is not; the zero point or point of comparison is this “empty” colonized space. I suggest that disasters are a new uncharted territory seized upon by the West to rule ideologically over former colonial states: disasters most often play out on the same physical territory that was once colonized by Europe. Disasters present humanitarian organizations with a ready stock of souls to be discovered and rescued, be they tsunami survivors or the victims of financial disaster. I have shown how postcolonial theory can interrogate and expand Critical Management Studies through the defamiliarization of the humanitarian organization.

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## History and discourse

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