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# **Humanitarian intervention in the Post- Cold War era:**

A postcolonial critique on new interventionism

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# Abstract

The collapse of the Soviet Union saw a shift in the way the international community perceived humanitarian interventions and the principles of sovereignty. With the world no longer divided along ideological lines, the United Nations found itself drawn into conflicts of a different nature, which resulted in the development of a new 'norm' of intervention, which saw human rights being promoted to the detriment of state sovereignty. This paper aims to highlight the emergence of what is described as 'new interventionism' that has developed in the post Cold War era. An analysis of humanitarian intervention through a postcolonial perspective aims to uncover the motives behind certain interventions, to determine whether they are based solely on humanitarian grounds, or if they are influenced by the interests of the state or international actor involved.

**Key Words:** [Humanitarian Intervention, Post Cold War, Imperialism, Sovereignty, Postcolonialism]

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# 1. Introduction

The use of force, by an individual state or international actor, in the name of humanitarian values evolved as a norm and played a major role in shaping international relations during the late 1990s. The action taken by NATO forces in response to the crisis in Kosovo or the Security Council authorized use of force in East Timor resulted in the issues surrounding the legality and morality of humanitarian intervention being driving back into the international legal and political agenda. The Cold War produced a world structured around the centuries of struggle between capitalism and communism, but with the thawing of the War, the international community was ushered into a new era, where a new norm of intervention that favoured the use of force as a response to humanitarian struggles was increasingly supported within the international community as well as international law<sup>1</sup>.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the early 1990s saw a spread of optimism regarding the international community's new found capacity for dealing with humanitarian issues. This so called 'new moral order' that was adopted internationally saw human rights being protected and promoted at the expense of state sovereignty<sup>2</sup>; gross human rights violations provided the necessary ethical grounds for overriding state sovereignty. With the increase of importance placed on protecting human rights, the post Cold War era saw a significant rise in the number of humanitarian interventions, resulting in both praise and criticism from the international community. It has been argued that this growing trend of intervention has been used as a strategic tool for powerful countries to expand their influence and control over weaker regimes. The motives of certain states can be questioned when humanitarian reasons are used to justify violating principles of sovereignty and intervening in the affairs of other states.

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<sup>1</sup> Orford, Anne, *Reading humanitarian intervention: human rights and the use of force in international law*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003. Pg 2

<sup>2</sup> A clear example of this is the NATO bombings of Kosovo that were carried out without Security council authorisation. Douzinas, C. (2003) Humanity, Military Humanism and the New Moral Order. *Economy and Society* 32(2) Pg. 171

## 1.1 Purpose

Humanitarian intervention has been a heavily debated topic over the past decades. It has been heralded as a pivotal, if not necessary, tool in halting gross systematic violations of human rights. But nevertheless it has also faced a myriad of criticism, ranging from its unlawfulness and breach of provisions set out in the UN Charter, to its potential imperialistic tendencies. It is this latter criticism towards humanitarian intervention I intend to investigate and highlight in this essay.

In this paper I will aim to address the claim that the motives behind humanitarian interventions are at times exploitative and imperialistic in nature and that the new norm of intervention that has developed in the post Cold War era can be used to abuse or circumvent principles of sovereignty. In order to achieve this I will begin by examining the emergence of what is described as new interventionism that developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. With a better understanding of this new norm of intervention, I will then highlight the ways in which this new norm is susceptible to abuse, especially by powerful states or international actors that may use humanitarian intervention to cloak their imperialistic interests in weaker regimes.

This paper will aim to analyse the shortcomings of humanitarian interventions with help from postcolonial theory. It is through a postcolonial perspective I intend to analyse the motives behind certain interventions to determine whether these interventions were based, to a larger extent, by a states, or international organizations, own interest rather than on purely humanitarian grounds.

## 1.2 Research Question

As I have stated above, my aim with this paper is to analyse humanitarian intervention through a postcolonial perspective and through this analysis I intend to answer the following questions;

- How has humanitarian intervention evolved in the post Cold War era?
- What is the possible imperialistic nature attributed to this new norm of intervention?

## 2. Methodological and Theoretical Framework

This section focuses on the methods and theories as well as material used to provide an analysis on the topic of humanitarian intervention and the motives that compel them. This section will also highlight previous works written on this topic as well as the limitations set out for this paper.

### 2.1 Methodology and Material

Humanitarian intervention, being a controversial topic, has faced both positive and negative criticism from leaders and scholars around the world. Given the fact that the purpose of this essay is to investigate the possible imperialistic nature behind the motives of humanitarian interventions, the appropriate methodological base for this paper was a qualitative approach which included both empirical and theoretical elements. To be more specific the method used was a qualitative content analysis of my chosen material which pertained to the topic of humanitarian intervention. A qualitative content analysis is a method that allows the researcher to approach texts by uncovering the underlying messages or arguments<sup>3</sup>. This method involved analysing and interpreting a text, which will be addressed shortly, through a postcolonial perspective, with the purpose of determining how humanitarian intervention has evolved since the collapse of the Soviet Union and how this evolution has promoted a new norm of intervention that may be susceptible to abuse.

In order to achieve the papers aim, the works of several established authors and experts in the field of humanitarian intervention were used. I thought it was necessary to use an array of different authors and experts, as each had their own point of view and opinion on the topic, which allowed for a richer assortment of arguments in my analysis. Regardless I have attempted to study both primary and secondary literature, through a post colonial perspective. The primary literature, the material I will be analysing and obtaining empirical

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<sup>3</sup> Rienecker, Lotte & Stray Jørgensen, Peter, *All skriva en bra uppsats*, 2., [rev. och uppdaterade] uppl., Liber, Malmö, 2008. Pg 185, 298-300

evidence from, is Kofi Annan's 1999 annual address to the General Assembly, which I feel to be significant for not only its content but also the time it was delivered.

By 1999 the United Nations (UN) had faced several significant challenges, ranging from the genocides in Rwanda and East Timor, to the unauthorized NATO bombings of Kosovo. It was in light of these dramatic events from the past years that prompted Kofi Annan to tackle the controversial topics of humanitarian interventions and state sovereignty in his 1999 address to the General Assembly. With his speech, Annan revealed and criticised a major fault line of global politics that was made even clearer by the UN's inaction in Rwanda and the unauthorized use of force in Kosovo. Annan addressed the significance of sovereignty, a topic very much in the fray of international politics and instigated the debate of its importance in order to gain consensus on the question. Annan's controversial words, that underlined the conflict between the principles of sovereignty and humanitarian intervention, illustrated the dilemma the international community faced at that time and the future role the United Nations had in guaranteeing universal human rights<sup>4</sup>.

My secondary material is comprised mainly of academic books and articles as well as a couple newspaper articles, all of which will be used to achieve a better understanding of the subject of humanitarian intervention as well as the criticism it faces. I will be taking help from Anne Orford's book *Reading Humanitarian intervention; Human rights and the Use of Force in International Law*, which provides an analysis of interventions in the post Cold War era. Orford also uses postcolonial theory to provide a critique towards humanitarian interventions. Apart from Anne Orford I will be using works from several distinguished scholars such as Noam Chomsky, Jean Bricmont and Nicholas J. Wheeler to name a few.

## 2.2 Theoretical Approach

In order to determine the possible imperialistic nature of humanitarian interventions in the post Cold War era, a theoretical approach was applied, namely postcolonial theory, which aimed to look beyond the general motivations behind humanitarian intervention. Post

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<sup>4</sup> Annan, K. (1999) Secretary-General presents his Annual Report to the General Assembly. The United Nations. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/1999/19990920.sgs7136.html> [Accessed: 09 December 2013].

colonialism aims to shift the ways in which the relations between western and non-western people and states are viewed; it offers a way of seeing things differently<sup>5</sup>. The theory broadly illustrates the effects of colonialism on the colonized states, arguing that these effects still shape the world today as modern societies are still influenced by their colonial history and subjected to the power structures that were set up at that time. The world we live in today is dominated by inequalities, which separates the powerful from the weak, the rich from the poor and west from the rest. This division which culminated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where nine tenths of the entire land surface of the globe was controlled by either Europeans or European derived powers, was legitimized by portraying the people of the colonized world as inferior, childlike and incapable of looking after themselves<sup>6</sup>. Even after national sovereignty had been achieved by the colonized states, postcolonialism argues that Europe and North America remained in a dominate position over the three non-western continents (Asia, Latin America and Africa). This acceptance of the inequalities faced in today's world, differentiating between what is the norm and what is not, contributes to the maintenance of colonial practices even in a postcolonial society<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.3 Previous work

Considering how controversial the topic of humanitarian intervention is it was not surprising to discover a comprehensive amount of literature, in the forms of books and academic articles, that had be developed in the past decades. Events such as Rwanda, Kosovo and even September 11<sup>h</sup> have launched the topic of humanitarian intervention into the international community and opened up the debate for further consideration. The comprehensive amount of literature written on the subject is due also to the complexity of it, as it encompasses several fields of study that include law, politics as well as ethics. As it is such a complex subject, the literature I found, be it books or articles, covers various aspects of the possible imperialistic nature of humanitarian interventions. That being said, in the articles and books I have chosen there is not always a clear effort to present a rejectionist approach to humanitarian intervention as its importance can not be understated.

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<sup>5</sup> Young, Robert J. C., *Postcolonialism: a very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003. Pg 2

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Pg 2

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Pg 4-7

Regardless of this, two works that I will be using in this paper provide a criticism towards humanitarian intervention. Anne Orford's book *Reading humanitarian intervention*, as I have stated, provides critical readings of interventions that have shaped legal justifications for the use of force in the post Cold War era. She draws on postcolonial theory (as well as several other critical theories) to develop ways of reading the cultural and economic effects of interventions<sup>8</sup>. Nicholas J. Wheeler in his book *Saving Strangers, Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*, also argues the legitimacy of humanitarian interventions. He approaches the dilemma by examining the effect Realpolitik has on a state's willingness to intervene, arguing that states' motives behind most humanitarian interventions are mixed<sup>9</sup>.

## 2.4 Limitations

My aim for this paper is to provide a critique towards humanitarian intervention through a postcolonial perspective, but in doing so I by no means intend to belittle the essential role intervention plays in both preventing and halting gross violations of human rights. That being said, this paper will not be focussing on the debate of the legality of humanitarian intervention as such, but I will be taking up issues such as state sovereignty which are principles found in several legal texts. My analysis is of humanitarian intervention in the post Cold War era, so therefore I will be restricted to a specific timeline, namely the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 to the present. With these limitations set, all the literature and material I have used in my analysis have a clear correlation to the topic of humanitarian intervention and its development in the Post Cold War era, but they also share a common trait in their underlying theme of imperialism or post colonialism.

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<sup>8</sup> Orford, Anne (2003)

<sup>9</sup> Wheeler, Nicholas J., *Saving Strangers Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002

### 3. New Norm of Intervention

As I have stated in the previous sections, the thawing of the Cold War in the late 1980s redefined the way the international community, more specifically the United Nations, dealt with the notions of humanitarian intervention and state sovereignty. This section will aim to highlight the development of a new norm of intervention that dominated the international legal and political agenda after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its effect on the principles of sovereignty.

#### 3.1 Changing Role of the Security Council

Under Article 24 of the UN Charter<sup>10</sup>, the Security Council is granted primary responsibility for preserving one of the United Nations principle aims, namely maintaining international peace and security. Furthermore the Security Council is granted, under Chapter VI and VII of the UN Charter, powers to not only settle disputes peacefully, but to decide what measures should be taken to maintain or restore international peace and security (this can involve the use of a military interventions)<sup>11</sup>. During the Cold War the Security Council was effectively paralysed by the constant use of the veto exercised by the five permanent members; The United Kingdom, the USA, China, France and the Soviet Union. Since the formation of the UN in 1945 to 1990 the veto was exercised 279 times in the Security Council, underlining its inadequacy in dealing with conflicts<sup>12</sup>. The veto power was used by the permanent members, to protect their spheres of interest, by insuring that no action was taken against them, underlining the rift between the Security Council members. The collapse of the Cold War brought an end to the automatic use of the veto power as the international

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<sup>10</sup> **Article 24:** “In order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf.” United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 24 October 1945, 1 UNTS XVI, Pg 7

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Pg 8-10

<sup>12</sup> Orford, Anne (2003). Pg 3

community was no longer divided under ideological lines. As a result of this, the Security Council, for the first time since its formation, was able to exercise considerable power and influence as it was no longer undermined by the constant use of the veto right<sup>13</sup>. With this new found cooperation within the international community, the Security Council was now beginning to function as a global guardian of peace and security, a role that it was designed to fulfil since its formation<sup>14</sup>.

With this sudden influence, the Security Council was a lot more effective in dealing with conflicts that plagued the post Soviet era. The rapid growth of peacekeeping operations launched by the UN highlighted the new wave of optimism felt by the international community and the ability to reach agreements on issues of common interest<sup>15</sup>. During the Cold War the main threat to peace and security was the ongoing ideological conflict between two superpowers, consisting mainly of inter-state conflicts, but with the collapse of the Soviet Union the UN was faced with conflicts of a different nature. The post Soviet era brought an increase in clashes based on ethnic and religious tensions and problems such as dictatorships and tribalism began to spread around the world<sup>16</sup>. Internal conflicts, conflicts occurring within the borders of states, such as civil wars began to pose serious threats to global peace, sparking action from the international community who were slowly abandoning the old anti-interventionist structures fortified during the Cold War. This was clearly evident in the interventions that were carried out in East Timor, Bosnia, Somalia and Haiti in the 1990s but it also illustrated the development of a new norm that allowed for interventions, by the Security Council, to halt violations of human rights and uphold democracy<sup>17</sup>.

As already stated the Security Councils use of a Chapter VII mandate is only triggered by the existence of a threat to peace and security, but through the thawing of the Cold War, the interventions that had taken place showed that the Security Council was increasing willing to interpret 'threats to peace and security' more broadly. Interventions in East Timor, Somalia and Bosnia, to name a few, all point to the Security Councils new inclination to treat

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Pg 3

<sup>14</sup> Doyle, M. W. (2001), The New Interventionism. *Metaphilosophy*, 32: 212–235. doi: 10.1111/1467-9973.00183. Pg 222

<sup>15</sup> **Between 1946 and 1989, 646 resolutions were adopted by the Security Council compared to 638 resolutions adopted during 1990-1999.** Chesterman, Simon, *Just war or just peace?: humanitarian intervention and international law*, Oxford Univ. Press, New York, 2002. Pg. 121-123

<sup>16</sup> Orford, Anne. (2003) Pg. 4

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Pg 4

mass suffering and violations of human rights and democracy as threats to international peace and security<sup>18</sup>, all aiding in the formation of what Kofi Annan described as a “developing international norm in favour of intervention to protect civilians”<sup>19</sup>. This new norm of intervention has become a familiar pattern in international politics in the post Cold War era sparking both praise, for its role in preventing and halting violations of human rights, and criticism for its potential susceptibility to abuse by powerful states.

## 3.2 Rethinking Sovereignty

The principle of sovereignty has been an ever present theme in international law and politics, and is considered one of the cornerstone principles of the UN Charter<sup>20</sup>. Other principles such as non interventions, non use of force and non interferences are all encompassed in the sovereignty doctrine, which was reconceptualised after the collapse of the Soviet Union to incorporate the new global interest in the protection of human rights. With the shift from interstate conflicts that plagued the Cold War, to the more frequent intrastate conflicts that flared up after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the international community was faced with the dilemma of undermining the principles outlined in the Charter by intervening in states where gross human rights violations were taking place<sup>21</sup>.

Under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, states are prohibited from the “threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence of any state”<sup>22</sup> unless the use of force is in self defence or is authorized by the Security Council who deem it necessary to restore peace and security. As I have stated above the end of the Cold War contributed to the rise in internal conflicts around the world. These conflicts were fuelled by ethnic or religious tensions that in many cases led to civil wars and gross violations of human rights. Thus the protection of civilians and citizens of these ‘failed state’ found itself at the centre of the international community’s attention. Interventions in Somalia, Haiti and East Timor

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<sup>18</sup> Wheeler, Nicholas J. (2002). Pg 183-184

<sup>19</sup> Kofi Annan, *Two concepts of sovereignty*, The Economist, 18 Sept. 1999, Pg. 81–2

<sup>20</sup> **Article 2(1)**; “The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members” United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 24 October 1945. Pg 3

<sup>21</sup> Glennon M., *The New Interventionism – The search for a just international law*, 78(3), 1999, Foreign Affairs. S327.05/1

<sup>22</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 24 October 1945. Pg 3

showed the readiness, by international actors, to circumvent state sovereignty to protect the rights of civilians. This new way of regarding the legitimacy of sovereignty was also emphasised by the NATO intervention in Kosovo (without Security Council authorisation) which clearly highlighted the degradation of the concept of sovereignty in circumstances where human right violations were taking place.

The controversy surrounding humanitarian interventions centres, among other things, on its possible violation of the basic principles of state sovereignty, namely interfering in the internal affairs of states on issues that are within its jurisdiction<sup>23</sup>. In the past this infringement was frowned upon in international circles, but with the changing paradigm of sovereignty where people's rights are promoted at the expense of traditional principles, this practice has been increasingly welcomed in the international community, as more states and actors feel a responsibility to protect. In his annual address to the General Assembly in 1999, Kofi Annan spoke of welcoming a "developing international norm in favour of intervention to protect civilians from wholesale slaughter"<sup>24</sup> which underlined a new age of global politics that was increasingly people-centred .

Annan's words in turn prompted the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) to release "The Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) report in 2001 which aimed at reconceptualising the dilemma between sovereignty and human rights<sup>25</sup>. The R2P doctrine is based on the premise that whenever a state is unwilling or unable to protect their citizens from gross human rights violations, the responsibility is then shifted to the international community, and claims to absolute sovereignty are considered void<sup>26</sup>. The commission underlines the responsibility connected to sovereignty, namely the responsibility to uphold basic human rights. This definition of sovereignty as a responsibility emphasizes two essential elements; firstly that state authorities are responsible for the functioning of the state and the protection of the safety and lives of its citizens, and secondly, that states are responsible for their actions and are therefore legally held accountable for the consequences

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<sup>23</sup> **Non interference prohibition is stated in Article 2(7) of the UN Charter:** "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state [...]". United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 24 October 1945. Pg 3

<sup>24</sup> Annan, K. (1999) Secretary-General presents his Annual Report to the General Assembly

<sup>25</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty., Evans, Gareth J. & Sahnoun, Mohamed., *The responsibility to protect report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty*, International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, 2001. Pg 8-9

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Pg 17

of their acts<sup>27</sup>. The report aims to resolve conflicts between principles of sovereignty and human rights protections by linking the two and ultimately making human rights the basis for sovereignty. Therefore the principles of sovereignty are legitimate only as long as the state provides the fundamental rights for its citizens. This doctrine shows that if a state is unwilling or unable to protect its citizens from human rights violations international actors are able to intervene, as the states claim to principles of sovereignty are not considered valid.

As the world was ushered into the new millennium, it was clear that a new wave of thinking regarding the principles of sovereignty had taken root in international politics and law. Concerns regarding the safety and security of populations increasingly overshadowed traditional concerns of nation states. With the emergence of this new norm of intervention that ultimately minimizes the importance and significance of state sovereignty, concerns have been raised over the possibility of a new period of imperialism. This fear is particularly relevant in parts of the world that had previously fallen under the cloak of colonialism, as humanitarian interventions share certain traits with the civilizing missions of the imperial past, where European colonial policies and practices were justified on similar humanitarian grounds<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Pg 13

<sup>28</sup> Ottaway, Marina & Lacina, Bethany, 'International interventions and imperialism: lessons from the 1990s', SAIS review (Print)., 2003(23):2, s. 71-92, 2003. Pg 74

## 4. Analysis

The previous section outlined the changing role of the Security Council and the reconceptualised principle of sovereignty which emerged in the post Cold War era to encompass a new age of global politics centred on the protection and promotion of universal human rights. It was Kofi Annan who tackled this “developing international norm in favour of intervention to protect civilians from wholesale slaughter”<sup>29</sup> in his 1999 address to the General Assembly which also forced into the open the tender topic over the significance of state sovereignty and the present and future role of the Security Council when dealing with humanitarian interventions. This section will set out to provide an analysis, primarily based on Kofi Annan’s 1999 address to the General Assembly, with an aim of uncovering the possible consequences connected to the emergence of this new global norm that I have stated above. This will be achieved through a qualitative content analysis of Kofi Annan’s speech, where I will examine what he says through a postcolonial perspective, to try and uncover the possible imperialistic nature behind both present and future policies related to humanitarian interventions. I will be investigating the motives behind certain interventions as well as the narratives that accompany them, but I will also be touching on the role certain colonial policies have played in creating the situations where humanitarian interventions are called upon.

### 4.1 Interventionist Narratives

As I have stated above the collapse of the Soviet Union ushered the international community into a new age of global politics where action taken by the Security Council was increasingly based on the doctrine of collective humanitarian intervention. The nature and range of resolutions passed by the Security Council in the post Cold War era suggested that the Council was progressively willing to treat gross violations of human rights and

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<sup>29</sup> Annan, K. (1999) Secretary-General presents his Annual Report to the General Assembly

democracy as threats to international peace and security<sup>30</sup>. The unauthorized NATO intervention in Kosovo was a testament to this new norm regarding human rights violations. Arguments in favour of the intervention suggested that there are situations in which the international community is justified in undertaking military interventions even when such action may be outside the law due to the international community's commitment to justice<sup>31</sup>. It was generally accepted that even if the NATO bombings were considered legally illegitimate, due to their lack of Security Council authorisation, they were nevertheless accepted as morally legitimate as they were seen as necessary in halting gross violations of human rights. It is this argument that Anne Orford examines claiming that the "desire to intervene militarily in cases of crisis is a product of the deeper narratives and flow of meaning within which intervention stories are inserted"<sup>32</sup>.

Orford argues that this new wave of humanitarianism and deeper narrative, that is shaped through agencies such as the media, help to legitimise humanitarian military interventions regardless of whether they conflict with international law. She adds that this deeper narrative acts to underline the role and justify the actions of certain Western actors and also aids to obscure any critique of Western involvement in either producing the conditions that call for intervention, or their involvement in aggravating the crisis or chaos that may arise due to their intervention<sup>33</sup>. In his 1999 address Kofi Annan stated that:

"From Sierra Leone to the Sudan to Angola to the Balkans to Cambodia and to Afghanistan, there are a great number of peoples who need more than just words of sympathy from the international community. They need a real and sustained commitment to help end their cycles of violence, and launch them on a safe passage to prosperity"<sup>34</sup>

Plagued by the United Nations failures in Rwanda and Kosovo, Kofi Annan was determined to ensure that simple inaction would not result in gross violations of human rights, as he felt

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<sup>30</sup> Fernando R. Teson, 'Collective Humanitarian Intervention', Michigan Journal of International Law, Vol. 17. 1995–1996

<sup>31</sup> Orford, Anne (1999). Muscular Humanitarianism: Reading the Narratives of the New Interventionism, European Journal of International Law, Vol 10 No. 4. Pg 680

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Pg 682

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Pg. 682-683

<sup>34</sup> Annan, K. (1999) Secretary-General presents his Annual Report to the General Assembly

the international community has a responsibility as a guarantor of humanitarian values. This responsibility that Kofi Annan attaches to international actors correlates with the interventionist narratives Orford describes. The new threats that plagued the post Cold War era, fuelled by ethnic, political and religious tensions, mirrored the barbaric tendencies of our past and emphasised the need of a 'hero' to step in and intervene to restore order<sup>35</sup>. In the interventionist narratives Orford describes, the 'heroes' are represented as being authoritative figures that are able to intervene in a situation and bring about peace, democracy and order<sup>36</sup>. Annan describes in his speech that the sole responsibility to intervene into those troubled states to provide salvation for their citizens lies with the international community, who therefore encompass the role of 'hero' in the interventionist narrative.

Another role that is encompassed in this narrative is that of the victim. Orford states that the victims in the interventionist narratives are usually found in the Third world and are generally characterized as 'failed state' where order democracy and peace are absent. The victims are usually described as "emotional, fearful, and hysterical"<sup>37</sup> and are portrayed as "childlike, primitive and barbaric"<sup>38</sup>, they are perceived as being helpless and unable to save themselves, which results in these states depending in a heroic intervention to bring them salvation. In Anna's address he use Sierra Leone, Sudan, Angola, the Balkans, Cambodia and Afghanistan, all of which can be considered third world countries, as examples of states in need of help from the international community, highlighting the victimised role they play in the narrative. He also adds that these states "need a real and sustained commitment to help end their cycles of violence"<sup>39</sup> underlining the fact that they are not only seen as non-functioning but are also helpless in that they are unable to help themselves and are therefore reliant on international actors to restore peace and democracy.

By identifying with the heroic character we in turn acknowledge the existence of a victim that is both weak and unable to help themselves (Annan using third world countries as examples), thus leaving them with only one option for liberation; that being international intervention. As a result of this we legitimise the actions of these heroic characters, or in

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<sup>35</sup> Orford, Anne. (2003) Pg. 162-163

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Pg 166

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Pg. 167

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Pg. 172

<sup>39</sup> Annan, K. (1999) Secretary-General presents his Annual Report to the General Assembly

other words we justify military intervention, regardless of the consequences these actions may bring. We are left identifying with a violent, masculine character that tells us that intervention is necessary to bring about the Western notion of democracy and order<sup>40</sup>.

This process of identification leads to learned assumptions of value, based on old stories of gender, race and class that are reminiscent to the imperialistic policies during colonial time. These interventionist narratives I have explained above are very similar to the narrative of colonialism. Colonisers who capture the role of 'hero', where portrayed as being wealthy, powerful, white and civilized males who had a 'responsibility' to civilize and bring order to the native 'savages', who where portrayed as primitive, weak and barbaric, as they did not have the means to do it themselves<sup>41</sup>. Both the narrative of colonialism and interventionism involve a heroic character (the white man or Western actors) swooping in and liberating the suffering victim (the uncivilized third world people and states), a victim unable to help itself, and in turn bring about order and democracy.

## 4.2 Nation Building

The role that the international community has in the wake of humanitarian interventions is a complex one. Not only is the halting of human rights violations of essential importance, the international community is also charged with post-conflict reconstruction. This process can include the design of a new constitution, legal and administrative arrangements, nation-building as well as the creation of a stable environment in which foreign aid and investment can take place<sup>42</sup>. One possible consequence of post-conflict reconstruction is that those who inhabit the state where an intervention is conducted have very little opportunity to fully participate in determining the conditions that will ultimately govern and shape their lives. It is this argument that I will addressing in this section as it can be argued that the process of post-conflict reconstruction mirrors the support the international community provided for colonial policies in periods after World War I.

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<sup>40</sup> Orford, Anne. (2003) Pg. 167-170

<sup>41</sup> Orford, Anne. (2003) Pg. 171

<sup>42</sup> Orford, Anne. (2003) Pg. 126

In order to tackle the issue of whether interventions and post-conflict reconstruction mirror colonial policies it is useful to highlight the main characteristics of imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This period was defined by the imperial powers domination of subject states and people and their use of colonial policies to not only rule over conquered populations but to exploit the natural resources in pursuit of their own economic and national goals<sup>43</sup>. The people of these states were not seen as citizens but merely subjects to the colonial powers, which meant they had very little influence in the political and cultural spheres of the regime. Furthermore the colonisers felt they had to engage in a civilizing mission, to bring order and values to the native people who were generally considered backward if not savage<sup>44</sup>.

International interventions in the 1990s were triggered by the increasing civil conflicts that plague the post Cold War era. Because of the nature of these conflicts, the international community was tasked with transforming the governing systems to ensure lasting peace in those regions. This restructuring of states included both military and political pressure from international actors which placed them in a position of great power as they were able to shape and influence the reconstruction of the conflict-torn states political and economic framework, which many argue had underlying imperialistic characteristics<sup>45</sup>. In his 1999 address Kofi Annan highlighted the role the international community has in post-conflict reconstruction, stating that;

“Finally, after the conflict is over [...] it is vitally important that the commitment to peace be as strong as the commitment to war. In this situation, too, consistency is essential. Just as our commitment to humanitarian action must be universal if it is to be legitimate, so our commitment to peace cannot end with the cessation of hostilities. The aftermath of war requires no less skill, no less sacrifice, no fewer resources in order to forge a lasting peace and avoid a return to violence”<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Ottaway, Marina & Lacina, Bethany, 2003(23):2. Pg 74

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Pg. 75

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Pg. 76

<sup>46</sup> Annan, K. (1999) Secretary-General presents his Annual Report to the General Assembly

This role the international community has in post-conflict reconstruction is imperative to the future peace and safety of the war torn states where humanitarian interventions have taken place. Nevertheless this role that Annan highlights enables international actors, like the UN or NATO, to limit the concept of self-determination and in turn ‘reconstruct’ a state motivated by the ones own national interest. Reconstruction that is carried out under international financial institutions, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), are usually concerned with creating a stable environment in which foreign investment can produce the maximum amount of profit. This in turn leads to a state that is ultimately governed by these international financial institutions that are considered representatives of the international community<sup>47</sup>.

Under the mandate system implemented by the League of Nations after World War I, defeated powers were forced to give up territories which were then placed under the control of mandate powers who were responsible for the development and administration of those territories. It has been argued that this same system is being implemented in post conflict policies instituting a new form of colonialism based on economic instead of political control<sup>48</sup>. This neo-colonial process would be overseen by an international institution, like IMF of the World Bank, who would have a technical rather than political role. As a result of this the international community, in the name of reconstruction to “forge a lasting peace and avoid a return to violence”, impose a set of capitalist constraints on a broken society which in turn hinders its right to self determination and prevents the leaders of these broken states from adopting policies for development that benefit the people of the country over foreign investors<sup>49</sup>.

Kofi Annan’s words on the role the international community has in post conflict reconstruction warrants consideration as those policies are vital for the future safety and prosperity of the conflict torn states. In spite of this, the role international actors have in this process allows for potential abuse, as it has enabled the continual exploitation of these ‘failed states’. This reconstruction process of territories produces an unequal and unjust economic order and promotes a neo-colonial mode of governance where the third world countries are exploited to produce the wealth of Europe and North America. Thus emerges a paradox, as humanitarian interventions promise a world where human rights and self-determination will

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<sup>47</sup> Orford, Anne. (2003) Pg. 27

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Pg. 140

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Pg. 141-143

be privileged over imperial ambitions and national interests, yet exploitation, invasion and dominance are ever present and legitimized in its wake<sup>50</sup>.

### 4.3 National Interests

Following on from the previous section, when humanitarian catastrophes take place, the dilemma on how the political decision making process is shaped is cast into the open to determine whether interventions are based on legal and humanitarian grounds or based solely on vital national interests. The latter motivation sees humanitarian interventions used to undermine state control and cloak own national interests, which Jean Bricmont coins as 'humanitarian imperialism'<sup>51</sup>. This theory suggests that the emerging norm of humanitarian intervention has become a prominent feature of Western discourse policies aimed at justifying new ways in gaining power in developing countries<sup>52</sup>. The theory states that an ongoing conflict between the first and the third world exists and that regardless of the independence of those developing countries, they still face oppression in the form of economic and political constraints imposed by Western actors. What this shows is that humanitarian intervention is understood as a concept of Western imperialism, where elites use the guise of humanitarian campaigns to establish economic and political advantages in the states they intervene in<sup>53</sup>.

In his book *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*, Nicholas J Wheeler highlights four significant objections towards humanitarian interventions. Firstly Wheeler argues that interventions based on humanitarian grounds always cloak the pursuit of national self interests and that legalizing a right to humanitarian intervention would in turn

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Pg. 188-189

<sup>51</sup> Bricmont, Jean, *Humanitarian imperialism: using human rights to sell war*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2006

<sup>52</sup> Chomsky, N. (2008), 'Humanitarian Imperialism: the new doctrine of imperial right', *Monthly Review*, Vol. 60 No.4, pp. 22-55

<sup>53</sup> Damboeck, Johanna (2012) "Humanitarian interventions: western imperialism or a responsibility to protect?: An analysis of the humanitarian interventions in Darfur", *Multicultural Education & Technology Journal*, Vol. 6 Iss: 4, pp.287 – 300. Pg 291-292

open it up for abuse by states. Wheeler continues by stating that due to national interests motivating most humanitarian interventions, a state will not intervene primarily for humanitarian reasons. He adds that a state would be willing to intervene only if its own vital interests are at stake, but not if the intervention would risk their soldiers' lives or incur significant economic costs. The third objection Wheeler takes up concerns the selectivity of humanitarian interventions. Wheeler contends that because states apply principles of humanitarian intervention selectively, they are more likely to intervene in a state where national interests are at stake and not because of the severity of human rights violations taking place in other situations. Finally Wheeler claims that states are unwilling to intervene on purely humanitarian grounds as they have no business risking their soldiers' lives to save 'strangers'. Again the presence of national interests is the only factor, according to Wheeler, that would prompt states to intervene in a state to save 'strangers'<sup>54</sup>.

Kofi Annan also understood the connection between state interests and humanitarian intervention, stating in his 1999 address that:

“It is clear that sovereignty alone is not the only obstacle to effective action in human rights or humanitarian crises. No less significant are the ways in which the Member States of the United Nations define their national interest in any given crisis [...] the traditional pursuit of national interest is a permanent feature of international relations and of the life and work of the Security Council”<sup>55</sup>

From this we can see the problem with humanitarian interventions where no other motives exist. More and more states are unwilling to intervene in humanitarian causes if the intervention does not benefit the state in some way. The optimism felt in the 1990s, of a new age of human rights, began to wither with each failed attempt at humanitarian intervention. This underlines the link between humanitarianism and politics, as the success of an intervention is reliant, regrettably, on the presence of strategic or economic motives for the intervening states, rather than on the level of human suffering taking place in any particular

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<sup>54</sup> Wheeler, Nicholas J., *Saving Strangers Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002. Pg 29-31

<sup>55</sup> Annan, K. (1999) Secretary-General presents his Annual Report to the General Assembly

territory. As Annan states that the “pursuit of national interest is a permanent feature of international relations”, humanitarian interventions are becoming more and more reliant on the imperialistic interests of powerful states<sup>56</sup>. Rwanda is a clear example of what happens when, despite gross human rights violations are taking place, the lack of strategic national interest is the deciding factor in whether states are willing to intervene.

As I have stated in previous sections Kofi Annan’s words on the emergence of a “developing international norm in favour of intervention to protect civilians from wholesale slaughter”<sup>57</sup> has faced criticism and praise from all over the international community. His words revealed a major fault in global politics and questioned the significance of state sovereignty over human rights protection. Several critics of intervention saw the right to intervene as an inconsistent and discriminatory instrument of colonial policies, plagued by the national interests and greed of Western states, contradicting principles of equality, sovereignty and self-determination, principles humanitarian interventions are intended to promote and protect. After Kofi Annan’s address, the President of Algeria illustrated his misgivings commenting on Western dominance of global institutions and how they enhanced their power at the expense of the poor. He then questioned whether this norm of intervention would be deployed in all states without distinction or if weak or weakened states would be targeted. He also commented that the principle of sovereignty was the “last defence in an unequal world”, reminding the international community, that principles of non-intervention and sovereignty, were developed as barriers against the flood of imperial interventions by Western states<sup>58</sup>.

There is no question for Annan that humanitarian interventions in the post Cold War era can possibly be part of an ongoing imperial enterprise. In his 1999 address, Annan sums up the reservations of humanitarian interventions this paper has aimed to highlight, by suggesting that while certain interventions in East Timor and Kosovo should be welcomed there is:

“A danger of such interventions undermining the imperfect, yet resilient, security system created after the Second World War and of setting dangerous precedents for future

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<sup>56</sup> Ayoob, M. (2002) Humanitarian Intervention and State Sovereignty. *The International Journal of Human Rights* 6(1), pp.81-102. Pg 86

<sup>57</sup> Annan, K. (1999) Secretary-General presents his Annual Report to the General Assembly

<sup>58</sup> **Quoted from:** Daws, Sam, and Shashi Tharoor. "Humanitarian Intervention: Getting Past the Reefs." *World Policy Journal* 18.2 (2001), 21-30. Pg 25

interventions without a clear criterion to decide who might invoke these precedents, and in what circumstances”<sup>59</sup>

Annan himself was conscious of the fact that this new norm of intervention could be abused by powerful states, where imperialistic policies could be implemented into weaker states all under the veil of humanitarian intervention.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid

## 5. Conclusion & Discussion

The debate surrounding humanitarian interventions continues to rage fiercely within global politics and the development of a new norm of intervention “will no doubt continue to pose profound challenges to the international community”<sup>60</sup>. One question this paper aimed to highlight was how humanitarian interventions have evolved in the post Cold War era. The collapse of the Soviet Union spelled a new era of global politics, as the international community was no longer split down ideological lines. Interstate conflicts that defined the Cold War era were replaced by the ever increasing intrastate conflicts, fuelled by ethnic, religious and political tension that plagued the 1990s. As a result of this new nature of conflicts, the international community faced pressure and growing calls for more humanitarian action to resolve the bloody civil wars and humanitarian crises of the 90s. The increased peacekeeping operations that took place after the collapse of the Soviet Union were testament to the international community’s new commitment towards human right protection. Intervention operations in Haiti, Kosovo and East Timor illustrated the abandoning of old anti-interventionist structures fortified during the Cold War, and the development of a new global norm that allowed for interventions, by the Security Council, to halt violations of human rights and uphold democracy.

The role of the Security Council also changed dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the Cold War the Security Council was more or less paralysed by the permanent member’s constant use of the veto. This constant use underlined the Security Councils inadequacy in dealing with humanitarian crises and highlighted the rift between the permanent members as the veto was used as a tool to protect their spheres of interest, by insuring that no action was taken against them. The collapse of the Soviet Union though dismantled the ideological barriers set up between the permanent members and brought an end to the automatic use of the veto power. Thus the Security Council for the first time since its formation was able to exercise considerable power and influence as it was no longer undermined by the constant use of the veto.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid

The second question that this paper aimed to answer was uncovering the possible imperialist nature behind this new norm of intervention that promoted the rights of citizens over tradition principles such as sovereignty and non intervention. Humanitarian interventions, I have argued, are embedded in the heroic narrative which draws distinctions between us and them by promoting colonial stereotypes. International actors are portrayed as powerful all-knowing entities promoting peace safety and democracy, while the weaker states (usually third world countries) are portrayed as childlike, helpless, barbaric and in need of a saviour to establish peace and democracy in their lands. By identifying with this heroic character, played by the international community, we in turn acknowledge the existence of a victim that is both weak and unable to help themselves and as a result of this we legitimise the actions of these heroic characters regardless of the consequences they may bring.

Post conflict reconstruction is another point I have addressed in this paper. The reconstruction process that takes place in a conflict torn state is vital for its future peace and security, but the role the international community has in the process allows for abuse. This role enables international actors to limit the principle of self-determination by 'reconstructing' a state motivated by their own national interests. These failed states are ultimately controlled and governed by international financial institutions and actors through this process of reconstruction, mirroring the colonial natured mandate system set up after WWI. This reconstruction process of territories produces an unequal and unjust economic order and promotes a neo-colonial mode of governance. Anne Orford also argues the role the international community plays in the surfacing of humanitarian crises', stating that in spite of the ancient ethnic hatred felt in the former Yugoslavia and its role in the escalation of violence, modern capitalist policies implemented there were equally to blame for the crises. This economic reconstruction, Orford argues, contributed significantly in creating the conditions in which age old hatreds were inflamed<sup>61</sup>. I also underlined the role national interest's play in the process of humanitarian interventions. With an increase in peacekeeping operations in the post Cold War era, interventions were regularly called upon to halt gross violations of human rights. Taking my key from Nicholas Wheeler, states are unwilling to intervene in an absence of state interests. So it can be argued that humanitarian interventions are used to cloak economic and material exploitation by Western states, thus rendering

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<sup>61</sup> Orford, Anne. (2003) Pg. 13

humanitarian interventions as a discriminatory instrument of colonial domination, fuelled by the national interests and greed of Western states.

The imperialist nature behind this new norm of intervention will continue to pose great challenges towards the future debate on humanitarian interventions. A more humanitarian future requires a shift away from the significance of sovereignty and national interest and a move towards an approach where the rights of human beings should be the primary motivation for intervention. This future though seems unlikely as the new War on Terror highlights the way states have used humanitarian interventions to justify interventions with ulterior motives. Interventions based purely on humanitarian ground are very unlikely in today's world as national interests play a large role in the decision making process. Nevertheless, this imperfect system is all the international community has if it is to avoid more humanitarian catastrophes, like Rwanda or Kosovo<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Orford, Anne. (2003) Pg. 186-219

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