"'Africa' as serial morality tale in Canadian foreign policy"

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Africa has always borne a heavy burden of narrative images in the colonial and post-colonial imagination. In Canada, this distant and dimly understood continent has been most commonly associated with extremes – of violence, disease, poverty, corruption, ecological disaster, and the like. This truncated and caricatured view is of course deeply problematic. But it has also rendered the African political landscape as a text on which the Canadian "attentive public" – governmental, non-governmental, and journalistic – has been able to narrate and reprise a favourite morality tale concerning our role(s) and identity in the world. There are at least two dominant narratives that have been interwoven in an ongoing dialectic. The first is of Canada, and Canadians, as selfless and compassionate advocates for those people and countries less fortunate than ourselves, and leaders in mobilizing international responses to their plight. This narrative strand draws on a long-standing sense of 'mission' in Canada's relations with the colonial and post-colonial world (see Macdonald 1995; Nossal 2000). The second is of failure to fulfill these aspirations and obligations – a tale of moral dereliction in which we are indifferent to or even complicit in the suffering of African countries and peoples. In other words, (Sub-Saharan) "Africa" becomes the basis for a narrative concerning what we *can be* in the world, and what we *ought to be*. No other continent/region has served so consistently as the basis for a coherent moral narrative concerning "Canada" and its foreign policy. [1]

This paper probes these stylized images in an effort to understand the themes and meanings that have been "written onto" Canadian responses to a series of African crises and challenges. These successive "moments" can be, in effect, read as chapters in a narrative of moral leadership, failure, and attempted redemption. In this version of the narrative, I will examine four such chapters: the anti-apartheid struggle of the 1980s, the Somalia and Rwanda failures of the early 1990s, the Multinational Force of 1996 and the normative campaigns around human security and the Responsibility to Protect of the later 1990s, and the protracted G8 engagement with the continent in the 2000s, in which Jean

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[1] Both narrative strands can be seen to grow out of the 'humane internationalist' tradition in Canadian political culture, conceptualized by Cranford Pratt as "an acceptance by the citizens of industrialized states that they have ethical obligations towards those beyond their borders and that these impose obligations upon their governments." Pratt 1989: 13.

Chretien's leadership in the formulation of the Africa Action Plan at the 2002 Kananskis Summit was a seminal moment, followed by the mobilization around Darfur of the Paul Martin Prime Ministership. The paper then analyzes the foreign and development policy practices that have been enabled and conditioned by the narratives surrounding these events, with the objective of analyzing their characteristic and contradictory policy repercussions. In short, what are the policy consequences when the dominant focus on Africa is largely, if not principally, *about us* rather than the putative focus of the policy? Finally, it concludes by briefly speculating on whether the near silence of the current Conservative government on African issues through most of its first two years in office should be read as representing a decisive break with Canada's heretofore bipartisan "Africa narrative".

Several caveats should be entered before proceeding. First, it should not be presumed that the dominant narrative concerning Canada's role in Africa has much traction beyond this country's "political class" or "attentive public", concentrated in some quarters of its party-political establishment, public service, civil society, and media. This does not mean it is unimportant. Rather, it has been an important element in the legitimating framework by which this grouping understands the relevance of their country and themselves. This lack of widespread traction also helps to explain why the empirical basis for Canada's role in Africa has been so inconstant in practice. Second, there have always been important subordinate or side narratives to the dominant Canada-Africa story. Two of these will be touched upon in particular: that of what Cranford Pratt termed the "counter-consensus" (Pratt 1983/84) of "progressive" internationalist voices in civil society, the labour movement, Canadian churches, and some quarters of the academy; and that of important segments of the political and bureaucratic establishment, notably including the Canadian Armed Forces, who tend to see the world through a realist/statist lense and therefore have been highly reticent towards the idea of prioritizing Africa in Canadian foreign policy. This subordinate narrative or sub-text has also had important policy consequences. Third, there have of course been many ongoing engagements between Canada/Canadians and Africa/Africans beyond the key moments or chapters I will outline in the narrative account below. These include, in particular, development assistance links, peace operation and military training, trade and investment (notably though not only in extractive industries), and trans-societal (non-governmental, diasporic, etc) relationships. Part of the argument here, however, is that the environment within which these connections unfold, and therefore the *way in which* they are pursued, can be substantially influenced by the dominant public narrative(s) that characterize the relationship. Narratives, Emery Roe (1991) tells us, "help stabilize and underwrite the assumptions needed for decision making." The Canada-Africa narrative(s) has not only shaped decision-making in moments of urgency and crisis, but also the nature of the relationship between these critical moments and the resources that can be brought to bear when they arise.

Chapter One: "Moral leadership" on South Africa

There are a number of possibly entry points for an elaboration of the Canada-Africa story, including various diplomatic and developmental interventions surrounding white settler minority rule and decolonization within the Commonwealth and the

emergence of *la Francophonie*. It is fair to say, however, that the most sustained and celebrated chapter in Canada's African engagements remains the role of the Mulroney Progressive Conservative government in the end-game of *apartheid* in South Africa during the later 1980s and early 1990s. In Mulroney's own words, "I was resolved from the moment I became prime minister that any government I headed would speak and act in the finest tradition of Canada" on this issue (Mulroney 2007: 398). From 1985 onwards, the Mulroney government reversed long-standing Canadian opposition to sanctions against the South African regime, first rhetorically and then through its participation in the crafting of a package of partial sanctions measures through the Commonwealth. At the 1987 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Mulroney's own image as a stalwart proponent of a forceful stand against apartheid rule was widely cemented by a reportedly "electric" confrontation with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher over the issue. He was lionized by leaders of the Frontline States neighbouring South Africa (including the then-highly regarded Zimbabwean leader, Robert Mugabe – see Valpy, "Mulroney in Africa") and other developing country leaders in a way that arguably paid long-term dividends in the UN context.

Mulroney was not alone in this effort. Stephen Lewis rose to international prominence as Canada's ambassador to the UN and a forceful opponent of apartheid in that context. More controversially, Foreign Minister Joe Clark, though favouring a more cautious approach, was undeniably seized of the issue and spent a great deal of time and effort on it, within and beyond the Commonwealth. Canadian diplomats in Ottawa and in South Africa engaged in quite atypical "positive measures", including working closely with opposition groups in South Africa and attending trials to act as witnesses to and sources of moral support for opposition leaders (see Adam and Moodley). In all, these Canadian efforts came to be widely perceived, notably among Canadians themselves, as key instances of moral leadership in the best tradition of "Pearsonian internationalism." They became, certainly throughout the 1990s, a kind of benchmark for what Canada at its best could and should do.

This was not, of course, an uncontested narrative. Academics and activists associated with the Canadian "counter-consensus" had concluded by the latter part of 1987 that the high water mark of Canadian leadership had passed and articulated an alternative narrative highlighting Canadian prevarication and "backsliding", especially on the issue of sanctions (see Freeman 1997; R. Pratt 1997). I have concluded on the basis of comparative analysis that Canada's role was not nearly as exceptional internationally as it was portrayed within this country (Black 2001). Yet even much critical commentary, for example from Canadian church and labour groups, was consistent with and reinforced that idea that Canada *could and should* play an important moral leadership role in the world. The criticism was that Canadian policy-makers were not fully carrying through with this "natural" Canadian role.[2] Since the focus was on *Canadian* leadership, a

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[2] The critical scholarly commentary, much of it coming from a materialist perspective, took a somewhat different view on this, arguing that the "natural" Canadian role was to act in conformity with the interests of capitalism in this country and beyond, and in consonance with our major western allies. Hence Canada's moment of leadership was either aberrant or best understood as a reflection of "enlightened capitalist" thinking. See Saul 1987, Freeman 1997.

measured assessment of both the relative significance of Canadian efforts, and the degree of importance of these efforts in the undoing of apartheid, was largely occluded in the dominant public narrative.

Chapter Two: Moral Dereliction in Somalia and Rwanda

If South Africa came to represent a high point of Canadian "ethical internationalism," the early 1990s brought two moments of widely-perceived failure and shame on African terrain. As a post-Cold War "new world order" dawned, the United Nations, led initially by the United States, undertook an ever-growing number of multilateral "peace operations" in increasingly complex and intrusive circumstances. One of the earliest of these was the Somalian operation, instigated by a media-fed impulse to arrest a major humanitarian emergency unfolding in that country. In 1992 and 1993, Canada deployed more than 900 military personnel, along with the HMCS Preserver and Hercules transport aircraft, in the context of the UNOSOM I and later the American-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF) operations. Deployed with an inadequate understanding of the local context and in an unprecedented operational environment of ongoing conflict, the result was devastating. For the large American contingent, the furor arising from the ambush, deaths, and humiliating images of American soldiers in Mogadishu spawned the "Somalia syndrome" – a deep reluctance to risk American lives for 'merely' humanitarian purposes - with tragic subsequent consequences. The Canadian military experienced its own "Somalia syndrome", as word and images spread of members of the Canadian Airborne Regiment's role the torture and death in detention of two Somali youths. The subsequent public inquiry highlighted serious leadership failures (see Herold 2004/5) and led to the disbanding of the Airborne Regiment. The "incidents" in Somalia "shook Canadian Forces confidence as well as the confidence of the Canadian public in the Forces", in a manner that has taken many years to recover from (Dawson 2007: 170). Finally, Somalia itself was largely abandoned and continues to exist in the shadows of world affairs as the prototypical "failed state."

In narrative terms then, Somalia came to be seen as a moment of moral dereliction, starkly at odds with what Canada ought to be. That this image failed to take account of the professionalism and accomplishments of many within the Canadian contingent, both military and diplomatic (see Dawson 2007) was largely lost from the public story. An important sub-text for the Canadian Forces was that in this unfamiliar, hostile operational terrain lurked manifold dangers – both operational and political. We see here the seeds of a narrative of Africa as a place where Canada's interests are negligible and where the Canadian Forces run grave risks – and therefore a place where exposure should be carefully limited and tightly time-bound if at all possible.

The Somalia *debacle* was the direct precursor to the even more tragic failure of "international society", Canada included, in the face of the Rwandan genocide. When the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) was approved by the Security Council in September 2003, it "was capped at the minimum viable level of 2500 troops. The mission was expected to be 'fast, cheap, and bloodless'. Major western nations, including Canada, refused to send contingents" (Beardsley 2005a: 46). The subsequent tragedy is well known and need not be recapitulated here. Despite repeated warnings of preparations by extremist elements and requests by the force commander, Canadian Brigadier-General Romeo Dallaire, for permission to act pre-emptively and for

reinforcements, no such authorizations were forthcoming and in April of 2004, the genocide was launched, ultimately costing up to 800,000 lives before the Rwandan Patriotic Front seized control in July. As the genocide gathered momentum, the UN reduced its force presence to a rump of 454 soldiers, Western governments acted with impressive speed and efficiency to evacuate their own nationals while abandoning Rwandans, and the Security Council spent months prevaricating while studiously avoiding naming the unfolding slaughter as a genocide lest they feel compelled to act forcefully as a result. This was widely seen by subsequent investigations as a largely "preventable genocide", and Canadian leaders and officials shared in the sense of collective shame that rightly followed this monumental collective failure (see Beardsley 2005a and 2005b; Dallaire 2003; Anglin 2000/1).

In the case of Canada, however, there was one additional dimension that has become very important to the way the genocide has been remembered. This is the role of Dallaire as force commander. Required to bear impotent witness to the slaughter, Dallaire was subsequently haunted and very nearly destroyed as a person. When he began to recover, he channeled his own ghosts into becoming a tireless critic of Western (and Canadian) indifference to African suffering, and advocacy of a far more robust, timely, and effective capacity and will to respond to humanitarian emergencies on the continent. Later becoming a Liberal party Senator in Canada's Parliament, he has continued to speak and write passionately and forcefully on these themes. The result in terms of the dominant narrative on Canada in Africa has been paradoxical: on the one hand, Dallaire has often been critical of Canadian policy; yet on the other hand he has come to represent for many Canadians the best tradition of Canadian ethical or humane internationalism. Dallaire himself continues to believe firmly in the idea of Canada "as a leader of the world's middle powers" and a leading global citizen" (Dallaire 2006). Thus, our own sense of ourselves and our collective moral failure in Rwanda was at least partially mitigated by Dallaire's dignified and passionate advocacy. Moreover, as a direct result of his personal witness and trauma, Dallaire has become a highly visible and influential public voice in Canada with ready and reliable access to major media outlets. In this and other cases, then, impressive internationalist Canadian citizens and organizations have become visible and vocal symbols of what Canada can/ought to be, even as they are often sharply critical of official Canadian policy. Another case in point is Stephen Lewis, latterly through his tireless advocacy on HIV/AIDS in Africa; and on a somewhat less high profile scale the work of individuals and organizations such as Gerald Caplan, Partnership Africa-Canada (an important player in the instigation of the Kimberley Process on Conflict Diamonds) and Gulu Walk (popularizing and engaging in the quest for peace in Northern Uganda).

Chapter Three: Towards Redemption through 'Human Security'
The "Rwanda effect" was particularly telling in the dominant Canada-Africa narrative, in part because of Dallaire's role but also in part, I would argue, because it was so starkly at odds with the sense of moral purpose that has been at the core of this narrative.[3] That

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[3] It is also noteworthy that Stephen Lewis was one of seven members of the Organization of African Unity's "Panel of Eminent Personalities to Investigate the 1994 Genocide in

Canada, albeit in the company of many others, had so manifestly failed to do what was possible to avert or at least limit the genocide has continued to elicit a kind of 'redemptive reaction'. This reaction was manifested both in responses to discrete events, and in broader "norm entrepreneurship" efforts to define and promote principles and practices that would forestall similar tragedies in future.

The most obvious and immediate reaction to Rwanda was manifested in Canada's role in the Zaire/Great Lakes crisis of November 2006, a looming humanitarian emergency that was a direct by-product of the Rwandan genocide and that threatened hundreds of thousands of refugees camped near the eastern border of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). On November 9th, the UN Security Council voted to establish a Multinational Force (MNF) to provide security and relief, and enable repatriation of the refugees; three days later, when it was clear that neither the US nor France was prepared to lead the force, the Canadian government stepped forward, uncharacteristically, to lead the MNF. The decision was an intensely personal one for then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien, and one that also reflected the ethical impulses that have underpinned the Canada-Africa narrative. Although the precise dynamics of the decision to participate and then lead are uncertain, it is clear that Chretien felt compelled to act, influenced in part by some combination of his wife Aline and his nephew, Canada's Ambassador to the US and the Secretary-General's recently appointed Special Envoy to the Great Lakes region, Raymond Chretien (Cooper 2000: 65-66; also Hennessy 2001). In doing so, he was also responding positively to urgent appeals from humanitarian NGOs and acting in conformity with a 'humane internationalist' self-image. His public rationale reflected the moral impulses on which he was acting: "Canada may not be a superpower but we are a nation that speaks on the international scene with great moral authority… now is the time to use that moral authority to stop suffering, avert disaster" (Chretien, 12 Nov. 1996).

The problem, as various authors have aptly noted, was that the Canadian government and particularly the Canadian Forces lacked the resources or experience to successfully fulfill the role for which its leadership had volunteered. As Hennessy (2001: 18) notes, for example, the   Forces Operational Planning procedures were premised on the assumption that they would be "a dependent receiver of wider campaign planning by some other nation." They were therefore unequipped to take on the additional demands of leadership. Similarly, inter-departmental planning capacities were underdeveloped and had to be improvised. Throughout, it became starkly clear how dependent Canadian "leadership" was on the support and approval of US elements. In the end, although 354 Canadian military personnel were deployed to Rwanda, the crisis quickly dissipated when the various parties to the regional conflict effectively instigated a mass movement of refugees back to Uganda without (indeed partly to forestall) international intervention. The MNF was disbanded, with something close to a palpable sigh of relief from the Canadian Forces.

How this abortive leadership initiative relates to the dominant Canada-Africa narrative is complex. On the one hand, Canadian leaders responded as their attentive public expected, with a forthright commitment to take the lead if necessary in multilateral

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Rwanda," and Gerald Caplan was its senior writer. These two eminent Canadians have continued to be prominent voices in Canadian public discourse.

efforts to bring relief to the affected people. Moreover government officials subsequently claimed, not without reason, that the international initiative they had briefly led had helped to break the impasse and bring an end to the looming crisis (see Cooper 2000: 74/5). On the other hand, for humanitarian NGOs the MNF's rapid demobilization represented an effective abandonment of the thousands of refugees who were still at large and at risk in the forests of eastern Zaire. Thus the international community's precipitous decision, in which Canada was centrally involved, was seen as another instance of moral dereliction. Finally, for the Canadian Forces the lessons learned centred primarily around their own limited capacity and external dependence, the fact that an operational fiasco was only narrowly averted, and (once again) that African conflict zones were complex, operationally-forbidding, and fraught with risks which should be minimized to the extent possible.

A second, more protracted case that provided a platform for redemptive reaction was the government's response to the rights-abusive military regime of General Sani Abacha in Nigeria, especially after its execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists in November 1995. As this issue became a central focus in Commonwealth politics, with Abacha's Nigeria being "suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth" and becoming a focus for debate on various sanctions options, Canadian policy makers arguably came to "read" the crisis as a kind of echo or natural extension of the anti-apartheid politics of the 1980s (Black 2001). Domestically, it became a means through which, in the dominant public narrative, Canada could re-capture its "traditional" moral leadership role and thus, implicitly at least, redeem itself not only for failures in Africa but the failure to stand up for rights issues elsewhere in the early Chretien years. A telling, June 1996 editorial in *The Globe and Mail* thus concluded that:

> …the generals in Lagos will not cower before Canada, but that was never the intention. The purpose of imposing sanctions is to lead by example, which was once second nature to this country on issues of conscience. It is to show that morality has returned to Canada's foreign policy, where it belongs ("Punishing Nigeria", 28/6/1996).

From *the Globe's* perspective then, the issue of how to respond to Abacha was largely "about us." There were, however, two main problems with this type of reaction. The first was that the idea that morality in foreign policy was "second nature" to this country perpetuated a potent but dubious historical myth. The second was that, as it turned out (and not unlike the MNF experience), Canadian efforts to lead by example suffered from a lack of willing followers, particularly among the developing country majority in the Commonwealth context.

Throughout the latter half of the 1990s Lloyd Axworthy was Canada's Foreign Minister, and much of the public politics of Canadian foreign policy during this period can be read at least partly through a redemptive lense – often masking, as numerous critics have noted, an underlying erosion of means and continuity of practice. For much of his tenure, the "Human Security Agenda" became Canada's foreign policy signature and a key element of the Canadian "brand" (see Grayson 2004). Much if not most of what came to be prioritized under this Agenda – for example, the protection of civilians

in armed conflict and peacebuilding – both reflected and reinforced a renewal of official interest in Africa, since the preponderance of the conflict zones on which the Human Security light was shone were in Africa (see Brown). In addition, much of this Agenda was prosecuted at a relatively high and abstract diplomatic level of norm entrepreneurship and institution building. And of these efforts, the one that may yet prove most far-reaching in its effects but remains most highly contested and controversial is the Canadian government's sponsorship of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), and subsequent championing of the Commission's signal innovation – the idea of the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P – see ICISS 2001).

It is beyond the scope this paper to probe the origins, content, and ongoing contestation around R2P in any depth. Suffice it to say that the Canadian government's role in underwriting the Commission and then championing its Report was crucially motivated by the Rwandan genocide and the desire to give practical effect to the imperative call for "never again." In some respects, the championing of R2P has been a striking diplomatic success. The principle was ultimately embedded in the UN General Assembly's World Summit outcome document, albeit in diluted form (see Riddell-Dixon 2005: 1077), in part thanks to vigorous lobbying by Prime Minister Martin. In this respect, it has reinforced the central moral leadership frame of the Canada-Africa narrative, and enabled attentive Canadians to feel some measure of relief that the Canada that "ought to be" has been partially "restored." At the same time, it has become clear that the level of diplomatic consensus around the principle is shallow at best; and moreover that the Canadian government's own willingness and ability to *act* in conformity with it is sharply limited. This has been
illustrated most starkly by the international and Canadian responses to the Darfur crisis, which will be touched upon in the next section.

Chapter Four: 'limits of leadership' in the G8 and beyond
The climax of the Canada-Africa narrative, at least to date, can be located in then-Prime Minister Chretien's sustained campaign to focus the G8 on a coherent and concerted plan for Africa, responding in turn to African leaders' "New Partnership for Africa's Development" (Nepad). Chretien, working with his Summit Sherpa and Personal Representative for Africa, Robert Fowler, spent the year between the Genoa Summit in 2001 and the Kananskis Summit in 2002 laying the groundwork for the G8's Africa Action Plan (AAP), adopted at the latter (see Chretien 2007: 356-364; Fowler 2003). Fully half of the Kananaskis Summit was spent focusing on African issues – no mean feat given that it was the first G8 Summit following the trauma of 9/11. Another key innovation was that several African leaders were given a prominent place on the Kananaskis agenda. Leaving aside for the moment the question of what precisely was achieved through the AAP then, the events leading to and from Kananaskis can be constructed as a high point of Canadian leadership in focusing the world's attention on the challenges of the African continent.

Certainly the dominant public characterizations of the initiative within this country during the preparations for the Summit were largely consistent with the favoured moral story of both Canadian leaders and our country. "Man of action aims to make a difference in Africa," one glowing account of the Prime Minister's major preparatory tour of the continent was titled (*The Globe and Mail*, 13/4/2002). In a speech concerning

Africa before the World Economic Forum plenary in New York in February 2002, Chretien himself noted that:

> I am especially pleased and proud that my G-8 colleagues asked Canada to take the lead on this vital issue even before we took the Chair on January 1st. It was a strong vote of international confidence. In our credibility on the world stage. And in the progressive values we project in the world. Values of caring and compassion. And our belief in an equitable sharing of global prosperity and opportunity.

This quote provides a particularly striking illustration of the way in which "initiativemanship" on Africa has been used to nurture and re-inscribe a favourite story of Canadian moral leadership in world affairs. Certainly, as with Mulroney on South(ern) Africa, it has provided a means through which Canadian political leaders can assert their own moral credentials and/or attempt to cement their political legacies: this was, after all, a kind of valedictory initiative for Chretien as the end of his long political career approached.

The problem, of course, is that it masks a great deal of inconsistency with the image it projects. For example, in the next line of the same speech, Chretien pronounces that "For many years, we have been an innovative international leader in development assistance." This from the same Prime Minister who presided over the deepest and most disruptive cuts to foreign aid in the history of Canadian aid-giving. Moreover, the degree and character of real progress in G8 Africa policies initiated through the AAP and the Kananaskis initiative is questionable, but certainly limited. While Africa has continued to feature prominently on subsequent G8 Agendas, these have often been portrayed as novel initiatives by subsequent host leaders (notably Tony Blair at Gleneagles and, latterly, Angela Merkel at Hellingedamm). Concertation has been compromised by the intra-hegemonic politics of G8 leaders. Meanwhile, especially with the transition to the Conservative Prime Ministership of Stephen Harper, it is not at all clear that the Canadian government has any continuing interest in engaging with African issues in a sustained and determined way – in other words finishing what its predecessor started. This is a theme to which I will return in the Epilogue below.

The longer-term effects of the dynamic that the Chretien government sought to instigate in G8-Africa interactions at Kananskis are the subject for another paper. Here, however, it is sufficient to note that in much commentary in this country, what seemed to matter most was the *initiative itself*, and the way in which it manifested a return to Canadian moral leadership on Africa, after the dark days of Somalia, Rwanda, and the savaging of the aid budget in the austerity years of the 1990s. The fact that the Summit was widely regarded in media and NGO commentary as a substantive disappointment, with other G8 countries being unwilling to join Canada in making a firm collective commitment to transfer new resources to Africa served, ironically, to buttress the Canadian government's relatively progressive credentials – notwithstanding the harsh cuts to Canadian aid of the previous decade ("G8 snubs", 28/6/2002).

The final installment of this Canada-Africa chapter came after the transition to the Paul Martin Prime Ministership in late 2003 with the unfolding of the Darfur crisis. The transition was an uneasy one given the long rivalry between Chretien and Martin and the

need for the latter to establish some distance between himself and his predecessor. Nevertheless Martin was a committed if somewhat unfocused internationalist who attempted to articulate foreign policy around a "Responsibilities Agenda" that both strongly endorsed R2P and clearly made a central discursive place for Africa (Martin 2004). Thus, when the Darfur crisis "broke" internationally in 2004, Martin's rhetoric was bold and strong, expressing in unequivocal terms the need for urgent and robust action and Canada's willingness to "…do whatever is required…we cannot simply sit by and watch what is happening in Darfur continue" (cited in Nossal 2005: 1024). Yet as Kim Nossal has incisively shown, the government's actual response was, for many months, "conservative, limited, and symbolic." Indeed Nossal has provocatively argued that what this case demonstrated was that both Canadian political leaders and citizens had become addicted to "ear candy" on foreign policy, with minimal connection to what was being done or even what was possible (Nossal 2005: 1025).

While Canadian commitments to humanitarian and developmental efforts in Sudan as a whole, including Darfur, have built subsequently to over CDN 400 million since 2004, and while Canada was among the top donors to the African Union's overmatched force in Darfur (AMIS) and has become one of the largest financial backers of the emergent "hybrid" UN-AU force for Darfur (UNAMID), two features of the effort are particularly noteworthy in illustrating the limits of Canadian involvement. The first is that Canada was unwilling to offer a substantial troop commitment ('boots on the ground') for UNAMID. The ongoing commitment to Afghanistan is often invoked to justify our "inability" to commit forces in Sudan (a separate question is whether the Sudanese regime would allow Canadian troops to enter in large numbers). The second is that, given limited capacity and infrastructure in the region prior to the precipitous prioritization of Sudan around 2003/4, there has been a relatively high level of improvisation to the formulation of policy and no firm medium- or long-term commitment to peacebuilding in Sudan beyond the transitional process (Matthews 2005). This clearly reflects the sub-text amongst permanent officials that long-term commitments and exposure in Africa should be carefully limited.[4]

Analysis

How and why does this ongoing "morality tale" of Canada in Africa matter in policy terms? I would argue that it matters in at least four key respects. First, the "discursive environment" surrounding Africa has expected, indeed demanded, bold statements framed in moral terms. Thus, as several of the statements from both politicians and editorial opinion cited above have indicated, there is a clear expectation that Canadian leaders *should* express willingness to respond ethically and generously to situations of human suffering in Africa, and that it is in our "best tradition" to do so. Thus, there has been a powerful expectation and incentive for political elites to respond to crises in expansive rhetorical terms, and to engage in periodic initiatives that re-inscribe these narrative images. This narrative has thus clearly underpinned the "ear candy impulse" among the Canadian "political class."

Second, the parallel sub-text among many officials in the bureaucracy and personnel in the Canadian Forces that Africa is a place of limited Canadian interests and

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[4] For elaboration on some of these points, see Black 2007.

high risks, and therefore a continent in which Canadian involvement and exposure should be minimized, has been a constant drag on the inclination of permanent officials to create the long-term basis for engagement in Africa that the dominant narrative projects and expects. The result is that all too frequently, Canadian efforts lack the depth of understanding, the established infrastructure (both human and physical), and the personal and institutional connections on which successful initiatives typically draw. This problem was manifested in both the MNF and Darfurian cases, for example, and has arguably compromised the sustainability of the more comprehensive and concerted effort to shape the G8 agenda for and response to Africa. In short, narrative text and subtext contribute to an ongoing mismatch between public aspiration and expectations, and long-term will and capacities for effective action.

Third however, because in the dominant public narrative on Canada's role in Africa is largely "about us", there is little domestic political price to be paid for the failure to act effectively and sustainably in Africa. What matters most, as I have suggested above, are the initiatives themselves, re-inscribing a favoured international self-image, rather than their outcomes. Long-term scrutiny and accountability is weak, and instances of dereliction are readily transcended by the next, redemptive initiative that "restores" Canadian policy to its good and "true" self. What is harder to know is whether a serious long-term price is paid for this gap between discursive promise and policy performance in terms of *international* reputation, credibility, and influence. While it seems logical to expect that this would be the case, in some respects because of Canada's relative unimportance internationally there has been a higher level of tolerance for such inconsistencies than there should be.

Fourth and finally, this narrative pattern effectively works against serious analysis of, and engagement with, the structural conditions that help to entrench Africa's continued global marginality – including Canada's complicity in these conditions. For example, too little attention is given to the complex effects of unstable aid volumes and erratic priorities, the impacts of large and growing Canadian extractive industry investments, and the effects of the "brain drain" of many of Africa's best and brightest to this country. When Africa comes to be principally understood as a landscape of ongoing hardship in which Canada's "moral impulse" is manifested and exercised, there is little incentive to look *beyond* this narrative to identify and act on the requirements to decisively alter this apparent cycle. And Africa's distance, both physically and metaphorically, from Canadian realities means these challenges and contradictions need not be confronted.

Epilogue: A 'post-Africa' narrative?

While the Canada-Africa narrative as described above has been a decades-long one, a striking feature of the emergent foreign policy priorities of the Harper Conservative government is its virtual silence on Africa (see Clark 2007; Africa-Canada Forum 2007). Indeed, at the Hellingedamm G-8 Summit in Germany in June 2007, Harper went out of his way to emphasize that while Canada would fulfill its existing commitments to Africa, its *priority* would shift to the Americas – a priority that has now been elaborated and formalized, though its practical repercussions remain unclear. How are we to understand this apparent shift, and how durable is it likely to be? Has the Canada-Africa narrative

that has been so prominent in elite political discourse, at least intermittently, run its course?

Any answers at this stage are speculative. One possible explanation for this apparent shift is simple petulance: Harper was being harassed by NGOs and "celebrity diplomats" (notably Bono and Bob Geldof) in Germany for Canada's failure to commit to a more ambitious timetable for increased aid to Africa and, not uncharacteristically, he reacted by, in effect, stating that he wouldn't play their game anymore. A somewhat more substantial explanation is that what we are seeing is the end of bipartisanship on Canada's global role, particularly as it pertains to Africa. The continent may be seen by the current Conservative leadership as a "Liberal" issue, and Canada's "new Government" will chart a different course. This would be a decisive break from Africa policies of the past, as reflected in the continuities between the foreign policies of the Mulroney government and the Diefenbaker government before it with those of successive Liberal governments. This is one way in which the current "Conservative" government may be seen as decisively different from previous "Progressive Conservative" ones, with their substantial "red Tory" element. A third, deeper still, explanation is that the Conservatives are merely reflecting a longer-term trend towards the decline of what Cranford Pratt, almost two decades ago (1989), described as a "limited and eroding" humane internationalist tradition. In short, the sense of obligation felt by Canadians towards those confronted by poverty and suffering in other countries may have eroded to the point where our governors no longer feel the need to "nail their colours to the mast" on the moral imperatives of Africa. The Harper government and caucus may be simply reflecting this new reality.

Alternatively however, it may be that we are simply living through another "moment of dereliction"; that sooner or later, a humanitarian "trigger", orchestrated by media and societal pressure, will prompt a conditioned response in which the old story gets re-invoked, by this or a successor government. Indeed, there are already telltale signs of re-engagement; for example, former Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier's high profile visit to Sudan and the government's strong renewal of support for the UNAMID and UMIS operations there, as well as its ongoing (though understated) involvement in the peace process in Northern Uganda. Time will tell, but the depth and popularity of the Canada-Africa narrative amongst our attentive public suggests that there are likely to be new chapters to come.

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