

To solve the problem I have compromised, using the proper Somali spellings whenever possible, and approximating them when appropriate. Thus the man known as Aidid, or Aideed in the Western press and as Caydiid in Somalia appears in this text as Aydiid. I use the proper spelling for the port of Kismaayo, which is often rendered as Chismayo or Kismayo. For the town of Gaalkacyo I have used Galkayo instead of Galcaio or any of the other variations that have appeared in print. Most of the spellings chosen for the text should be self-evident. Some of these compromises are certain to irritate Somali scholars and Somali language purists, and for that I apologize. My goal has been to communicate ideas to an audience beyond those with a specific interest in Somalia. The spellings I have chosen serve that purpose.

INTRODUCTION: DARKNESS AND LIGHT

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . . .

—Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

In October of 1977, I traveled from my home near Boston to Kenya, East Africa, via Nashville, Tennessee. Nashville was the site of a Peace Corps staging, a preliminary training program to prepare a group of us for two years of teaching in Kenya. About thirty volunteers showed up, mostly young, recent college graduates, predominantly middle class, all of us white. I was twenty-one years old, the youngest of the group.

We gathered for the first time in a campus lounge on a cool and colorful fall day, not sure what to expect from each other, completely clueless about what the next few years would bring but sure that we were about to share an amazing adventure. On that first day, we were asked to introduce ourselves to the rest of the group. Beyond the standard biographical

data, each of us was to answer the question: Why are you joining the Peace Corps?

None of us had taken the decision to join lightly. The application process that dragged on for months, and in some cases years, weeded out those without a burning desire to join up. But the question of why elicited only vague and ambiguous answers about adventure, exploration, and personal growth. But then in a final flourish of certitude, nearly everyone capped his or her list of reasons with a statement about wanting to help people. The idea was to help Africans. Whatever else this adventure would be, it was built on a solid mission of charity and good will.

I don't recall what exactly I said that day; I hadn't really thought much about why I was going to Africa. It probably had something to do with wanting to spend a few years in a tropical climate. I would have been just as happy to be sent to Malaysia or Bolivia. I'd earlier spent a semester studying in India and had enjoyed the sights, sounds, and even the smells of the Third World environment. And graduating from college with a degree in English I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. The Peace Corps seemed like a low-key graduate program with a full scholarship and a healthy stipend. Whatever reasons I did have, I must admit that helping people was not high among them. It's not that I didn't care; I just wasn't entirely certain that people in Kenya needed help. And if in fact the Kenyans did need help, it wasn't at all apparent that any of us young and eager American kids was really in a position to offer any. None of us had ever been to Africa before, nor did we have any background in development studies. We all just knew, somehow, that our breeding, education, and nationality had imbued us with something valuable from which these less fortunate people could benefit.

It was easy to presume that people needed our help. For us, Africa was more than a place on the map, it was a location in our collective psyche. Our idea of Africa had been shaped by years of advertisements and news coverage that portrayed the continent as poor and helpless. Growing up in an affluent Western society we were invested with a stake in the image of helpless Africa, starving Africa. In public affairs discussions the term "starving Africans" (or "starving Ethiopians" or "starving Somalis") rolls from the tongue as easily as "blue sky." "Americans leave enough food on their plates to feed a million starving Africans." Charities raise money for starving Africans. What do Africans do? They starve. But mostly they starve in our imaginations. The starving African is a Western cultural archetype like the greedy Jew or the unctuous Arab. The difference is that we've learned that trafficking in these last two archetypes is wrong or, at

least, reflects badly upon us. But the image of the bloated helpless child adorns advertisements for Save the Children and World Vision. The image of the starving African is said to edify us, sensitize us, mobilize our good will and awaken us from our apathy.

The starving African exists as a point in space from which we measure our own wealth, success, and prosperity, a darkness against which we can view our own cultural triumphs. And he serves as a handy object of our charity. He is evidence that we have been blessed, and we have an obligation to spread that blessing. The belief that we can help is an affirmation of our own worth in the grand scheme of things. The starving African transcends the dull reality of whether or not anyone is actually starving in Africa. Starvation clearly delineates *us* from *them*.

Sometimes it appears that the only time Africans are portrayed with dignity is when they're helpless and brave at the same time. A person about to starve to death develops a stoic strength. Journalists write about the quiet dignity of the hopelessly dying. If the Africans were merely hungry and poor, begging or conning coins on the streets of Nairobi or Addis Ababa, we might become annoyed and brush them aside—and most aid workers have done that at one time. When they steal tape decks from our Land Cruisers we feel anger and disgust. It is only in their weakness, when their death is inevitable, that we are touched. And it is in their helplessness that they become a marketable commodity.

As I got to know the people in my Peace Corps group, I learned more about why people had joined. We were refugees from failed marriages, broken engagements, and other traumas. We all needed time to figure out what we wanted to do with our lives. The Peace Corps was a temporary escape, like joining the French Foreign Legion but with a much shorter commitment. Most of us associated the Peace Corps with JFK and carried with us a nostalgia for the dream that died in Dallas in 1963. Those of us in our early twenties at that time were the first post-Vietnam generation, slightly too young to have been drafted, but just old enough to have been politicized by the war.

In the post-Vietnam world, the Peace Corps offered us an opportunity to forge a different kind of relationship with the Third World, one based on respect. Vietnam had sowed within us enough suspicion of our own culture to have us looking for answers to the world's problems in other cultures. As Americans, we claimed a certain distance from Kenya's colonial past. We were self-consciously anticolonial. Most of us would have early experiences with colonials and other expatriates who spoke in flippant and demeaning

generalizations about “the Africans.” We were even shocked by experienced volunteers who talked about how the kids didn’t learn or how you have to be firm with your hired help lest they steal everything you own. We bristled when Kenyans called us “Europeans,” by which in fact they just meant “white people.” Our country, after all, had not been a colonial power in Africa.

On several occasions Kenyans came and shook my hand while declaring that we, Kenyans and Americans, shared a historic bond, both of us colonized people who had thrown out the British. It was a profound misunderstanding, one which I never bothered to contradict. It was, I wanted to think, at least true in spirit.

But the reality was that the colonial experience of the European powers had taught us how to view Africa. Many of us discovered just how deep our Western prejudices ran, built as they were on the literature of colonialism. Certainly there had been an early 1960s, romanticized view of African independence movements that deified the likes of Ghana’s Nkrumah, Guinea’s Sékou Touré, Kenya’s Kenyatta. But it was difficult to hold those notions when the icons of independence showed themselves to be incompetent, corrupt, and worse. This “new” Africa of bold revolutionary heroes was, in retrospect, just another chapter in the same Western mythology that gave us Tarzan and further evidence of the patronizing relationship between the powerful and the powerless.

By the time I arrived in Africa, a second generation of African leaders was taking command. Hypocrites were replaced by tyrants and madmen such as Uganda’s Idi Amin, and Jean Bedel Bokassa and his Central African Empire, men who killed their enemies and kept them in refrigerators for snacks. The very week we arrived in Nairobi, Bokassa threw himself a multimillion-dollar coronation in Bangui, the capital of his impoverished country. A wave of nostalgia for colonialism was beginning to surface among expatriates and even among some Africans.

This nostalgia played perfectly into my “experience” with Africa, shaped by films like *Khartoum*, *Beau Geste*, *The African Queen*, *Casablanca*, and a selection of Tarzan movies. These images endured despite my having read Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and other African thinkers. We arrived in Nairobi to find that our white skin was an immediate passport to the best clubs and restaurants in town. We soon learned the joys of drinking on the verandah of the Norfolk Hotel, or of visiting game lodges in Kenya’s national parks. The lure of the hedonistic colonial lifestyle became even more seductive when we were sent out beyond the metropolis to the towns in the hinterland. There we found refuge in the

colonial sports clubs with their billiards tables, dart boards, and squash courts that the servants of the Crown had carved out of the wilderness. There, in the remote colonial refuges, we could gather with a few other expatriates—and even some Kenyans—to talk about, complain about, and even ridicule the Africans for their inability to grasp what it was we were trying to teach them. We had effortlessly become what we had so recently despised. The fit was easy, all of it redeemed by the big idea of aid. They needed our help. We were there to serve.

My first two years were spent as a secondary school teacher in an isolated village in the district of Meru on the eastern slope of Mount Kenya. I was dropped off by a Peace Corps staffer who left me standing outside of a little wooden shack with my duffel bag in hand. I gazed across an idyllic scene of thatched roofs, lush greenery and majestic hills. Then as I watched the old Land Rover rattle away down a rutted dirt road, my mind focused on a single thought: My god, I’m going to be here for two years. What have I gotten myself into?

The experience was overwhelming, so much in fact that I never really had the time to worry about the economic development of my hosts. They seemed to be getting along fine without me. It was I who needed help. I was the one who had to adapt to life without running water or electricity. I had to get used to living in a place where the nearest telephone was ten miles away.

The people in the village were endlessly amused by my ignorance about agriculture. I couldn’t plant maize or raise chickens. They snickered when my uncalloused hands couldn’t hold a scalding hot glass of tea.

It brought to mind an H. G. Wells short story I’d read in high school, “Country of the Blind.” In that story a mountaineer, “a reader of many books,” falls into a deep precipice and finds himself trapped in a lost valley among a race of people who centuries before had lost the use of their eyes. From his perspective, the people of the valley lead a simple and laborious life and he immediately sets out to “bring them to reason”—to enlighten them about the wonders of sight. But inseparable from the notion that he can enlighten them is the notion that he can rule them. Is that not the role, even the responsibility, of the enlightened person who lives among the blind? He recalls the adage, “in the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.”

He learns, however, that the populace has adapted itself to sightlessness. When he speaks of “seeing,” they think he is mad. They have no windows in their houses and prefer to work at night, when it is cooler. Quickly the mountaineer learns that the king of the blind is “a clumsy and useless

stranger among his subjects." In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man can't see.

For the following twelve months I struggled to survive. I was the one who learned to raise and slaughter chickens, grow vegetables, plant cassava. I learned how to live on a diet consisting primarily of maize and beans in various forms. I learned how to shower with a bucket of cold water and cut the chiggers out of my feet with a Swiss Army knife. I learned to speak Swahili and spent my mornings with the old men at a local tea shop listening to stories about the past. These old men viewed me as a curiosity. It never occurred to them that I could bring anything of value to the village.

There were a few people who thought I could, however. A few men in the village had Land Rovers and lived in large stone houses: the local administrative chief, the preacher, the school headmaster. These men had brought me to the village. Later I learned that they had paid someone in the ministry of education some large bribes to get me there. (I was told this when I hiked to a neighboring village that had lost the bribe war.) It was their idea that a white teacher would help attract more students, school fees, and donations to the school. Which I did. (The local pastor was devastated to learn that I was a Jew. He had planned on my active participation in church services and fund-raisers. The headmaster looked at the bright side and confided to me that his biggest fear had been that the Peace Corps would send them a black teacher.) They raised money to build more classrooms. But when the shipments of cement and stone blocks arrived, the headmaster and his buddies carted them away at night and built additions to their own houses and expanded their shops in the market.

These were the people who benefited most from my presence in the village; they were educated, Westernized, and living lives far removed from most of the people in the village. They knew how to manipulate the system that ran on foreign aid. They knew how to get a piece of every contract or public project in the area. It was disheartening, and I complained about it loudly when I traveled to the town of Meru on the weekends and joined with other expatriates at the Pig and Whistle Hotel or at the Meru Sports Club. Unlike the mountaineer in Wells's story, I had a support group to remind me where I came from.

Back in the village, I learned to go with the flow and enjoy myself. I dropped any pretenses that I had anything to offer. I stopped trying to help and began to observe. And I learned some important lessons about economic development. I learned to respect people for what they did. People

usually do things for good reasons, even though it might not be immediately apparent to outsiders.

The relevance of Wells's story continued to resonate with me. The more time I spent in the village the more aware I became of the connection between the desire to enlighten, to do development work, and the desire to rule. It was difficult to sit back and watch the village leaders taking money from the farmers who worked so hard to pay their children's school fees. Yet the only thing I could have done would have been to get involved politically, to take power, to lead, ultimately to rule. (Indeed, several teachers at the school wanted me to become headmaster.) Earlier missionaries had delivered enlightenment as the word of God and had paved the way for political and economic domination from Europe. We were delivering enlightenment in the form of Western culture dressed up as education and development. Like the missionaries, we could not know what would follow.

When my Peace Corps term was up I wanted to stay in Kenya, so I went to Nairobi looking for work. I'd heard that Catholic Relief Services was looking for a Peace Corps volunteer to roam the country starting food-for-work projects. I went to the CRS office and met a smiling man named Jack Matthews. Matthews told me long stories about his work in Korea and India. He then told me that CRS had received a \$900,000 grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to start food-for-work projects around the country. Whoever got the job would be given an apartment in Nairobi, a Land Cruiser, and instructions to drive around the country starting projects. Of course I was interested. Kenya is one of the world's uniquely beautiful places. Few people had the money to spend a year in a four-wheel-drive truck exploring its most remote regions. I asked Matthews what I had to do to get the job.

He told me that he wanted the Peace Corps director to make the choice. The new director had only been in the country a short while and knew very few of the volunteers. When I walked into her office that afternoon, it was the first time I had ever seen her. She immediately told me that she didn't feel right choosing from a group of volunteers she didn't know. So I told her that Matthews wanted to hire me; all she had to do was phone him and say it was okay with her. I had the job that afternoon.

I moved into a beautiful garden apartment in a nice neighborhood in Nairobi. My first day on the job I drove home in a brand-new Land Cruiser. In the morning I drove to my office to figure out ways to give away bags of rice that were already enroute to Kenya from a port in Texas. Meanwhile, CRS notified the country's parish priests and government officials that this

rice was available. All they had to do to receive it was fill out a one-page application describing their proposed project and specifying the number of "recipients"—the number of the project's workers who would receive sacks of rice in exchange for their labor. Hundreds of applications were submitted.

I took some of the USAID money and customized the Land Cruiser, adding extra-large fuel tanks and a really nice stereo system, and then I set off across Kenya to inspect the proposed projects. It was a dream come true. I was getting paid to cross one of the world's most beautiful landscapes. I was so awestruck by my own good luck that sometimes I'd stop in the middle of a huge empty wilderness, or beside a herd of giraffes or elephants, and just yelp with delight.

I was having so much fun running around starting food-for-work projects—water projects, agriculture projects, forestry projects—that I completely overlooked the most obvious problem: I knew nothing about agriculture, forestry, road building, well digging, dam building, or any of the projects I was approving. But nobody seemed to care. Only once did anyone in authority at CRS ever go and look at a project. When I'd return to Nairobi every few weeks, my boss, who let me work completely unsupervised, had only one question: How many more recipients did you sign on? More recipients meant more government grant money, which meant we could buy more vehicles and hire more assistants.

When I slowed down for a moment to consider what was happening, it became clear: Aid distribution is just another big, private business that relies on government contracts. Groups like CRS are paid by the U.S. government to give away surplus food produced by subsidized U.S. farmers. The more food CRS gave away, the more money they received from the government to administer the handouts. Since the securing of grant money is the primary goal, aid organizations rarely meet a development project they don't like.

All of this came into greater focus one morning at an office meeting. We were discussing a famine situation that was developing in Turkana in northwestern Kenya. I had recently returned from the area, where I'd been looking into doing some food-for-work projects. I wasn't very optimistic about succeeding in my efforts, since many of the people were too weak to work and it would be difficult to demand that some people dig holes and move rocks while others were getting food for doing nothing. A young woman who worked for CRS at the time and who was my immediate supervisor conceded my point but said we had to find some way to establish

a program in the region. "We have to take advantage of this famine to expand our regular program," she insisted.

For her, and the organization, famine was a growth opportunity. Whatever the original intentions, aid programs had become an end in themselves. Hungry people were potential clients to be preyed upon in the same way hair replacement companies seek out bald people.

As ignorant as I was about development projects, there was no shortage of donors willing to hand over cash for me to spend for them. Within a few months additional funds were made available for the food-for-work projects. I now had money to buy pipes and cement and apparatus. I came up with an idea: to travel the deserts of northern Kenya drilling wells and setting up windmills to pump water. That, I had learned, was appropriate technology. Appropriate technology was all the rage. It meant anything but high technology, things that didn't run on electricity or require a lot of maintenance. There was money available for appropriate technology. It made donors' eyes light up. So I secured funds to purchase some windmills from a company in the American Midwest, as well as an electronic device that could be used to locate underground sources of water. I'd read some books about how people can dig deep wells by hand; we'd use food-for-work for that. And for places where they couldn't be hand dug, I'd use a not-yet-purchased portable drilling rig that I could drag around behind my Land Cruiser. I'd be the Johnny Appleseed of water. Soon the nomads in northern and eastern Kenya would be drinking clean water and taking showers.

As I was getting excited about the project, a friend suggested that I talk with an American named Andrew Clarke, who lived near Nanyuki to the north of Mount Kenya. Clarke had drilled some wells in his day and knew lots about Kenya's dry frontier areas. I went to see Clarke on his ranch and told him about my plans. I expected him to be excited. Instead, he told me to sit down.

He took out a pencil and drew a small circle in the center of a sheet of paper. "This is the desert," he said, waving his hand across the whole sheet of paper. Then he pointed to the circle: "Here is your well. During the rainy season this well will provide extra water for the nomads. It will allow them to have bigger herds. When the dry season comes, the nomads will begin to migrate toward your well or any permanent source of water. They will arrive with larger herds and begin to denude the land closest to the well. Soon they'll have to wander farther and farther from the well to find food."

He drew a large circle around the first circle. "Cows must eat and drink water every day. As soon as it's more than a day's walk from the water to the grass, the cows will die." He drew a third, larger circle around the other two. "Goats and sheep can go several days without water, but as soon as the food is consumed for a two-day radius from the water, the goats and sheep will die." He drew a fourth large circle around the other three. "And then there's the camels. The camels can go days without drinking water, but soon the walk will be too great for them. And when the camels die, the people die."

This was not a hypothetical scenario, Clarke explained. It had happened, and was still happening. Aid organizations were coming in and giving water to nomads, the gift of life, and it was killing them.

Then he asked me if I'd seen the windmill on the road to Moyale. I had. In northern Kenya just below the border with Ethiopia, beside a road, was a windmill tower crumpled like an aluminum can. The windmill apparatus lay on the ground. Clarke told me that some well-intentioned missionaries had ordered a top-of-the-line windmill apparatus from the United States and had hauled it to northern Kenya, where they proceeded to build the tower from local materials, held together with Kenyan-made bolts. Attracted by the water, a community gathered and prospered. After some time, the heavy-duty American apparatus began to weigh upon the flimsy Kenyan structure. The bolts sheared and the tower crumbled in the wind. The community disintegrated, and Clarke had heard that some members had died before they were able to find a place to relocate.

"You can put a water system in a community," he warned me, "but then you'll have to be there all the time as a policeman. You'll have to make rules: People can drink from the wells but animals can't. You won't really be able to explain to the people why their cattle can't drink from the water. For them, their herds are everything. A man's wealth and status is dependent on the size of his herd. So he won't understand why you're standing between his cattle and the water. Is that really what you want to do? The water will make you responsible for the community. And that's not why you came here."

Clarke had successfully soured my plans, but more important, he taught me to ask questions about so-called development projects. I still could have gone and drilled wells across the countryside. No one would have stopped me. I could even have gotten substantial grant money to do it. There was no one watchdogging the development business. There was no central authority curbing the ambitions of young people like myself. With my English degree and suburban upbringing and white skin, I could walk

into an African village and throw money and bags of food around. I could do anything I pleased. I had, admittedly, enjoyed the feeling of power. Suddenly it scared me.

If my project created a disaster, no one outside of the village would ever hold me accountable. The missionaries who erected that windmill near Moyale, and other aid workers who bring destruction to communities, are probably still running around doing their "development" work in remote villages from where news of their failures will never emerge.

Kenya was a wonderful place to work and it attracted thousands of aid workers. The place was crawling with them. Aid organizations competed with each other for grant money and projects. Kenya's politicians loved it. They could give aid projects as gifts to their supporters. They weren't about to start asking tough questions or demanding long-term environmental impact statements. No one questioned the idea of aid. It was as if the good intentions alone were sufficient to redeem even the most horrific of aid-generated disasters.

This book is about aid and charity—aid and charity as an industry, as religion, as a self-serving system that sacrifices its own practitioners and intended beneficiaries in order that it may survive and grow. Much of this book is centered in Somalia, but it draws on my experiences with aid organizations over nineteen years around Africa: in places such as Kenya, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Like most people in the United States and Western Europe, I've heard the pleas of aid organizations and boasts of their accomplishments in the Third World, but the Africa I know today is in much worse shape than it was when I first arrived. The futures of Africa's children are less hopeful than ever before. The countries that received the most aid—Somalia, Liberia, and Zaire—have slid into virtual anarchy. Another large recipient, Kenya, inflicts unspeakable abuses of human rights on their own citizens while aid pays the bills.

In Africa, the people who are supposed to benefit from aid see what is happening. They hear foreigners talking about development, but they know development was a colonial policy. Development was a policy of subjugation. When colonials came ashore, they didn't say, "We're here to steal your land and take your resources and employ your people to clean our toilets and guard our big houses." They said, "We're here to help you." And then they went and took their land and resources and hired their people to clean their toilets. And now here come the aid workers, who move into the big colonial houses and ride in high cars above the squalor, all the while insisting they've come to help.

As in colonial times, the foreigners employ an elite cadre of locals to carry out their work. The elites are rewarded for their relationships with the foreigners. They enjoy higher pay than most. They have access to foreign goods, education and visas to foreign countries. And, just as in colonial times, the foreigners use this elite as their link to the rest of the population. They are regarded as the voice of the people and employed to speak on their behalf. In reality, however, the elite, with their vested interests in the system, tell the foreigners exactly what they want to hear: The system is good; the system works.

Thus affirmed, the aid establishment moves forward, as the colonial one did, ignorant of the widening rift between them and the supposed recipients of their beneficence.

In 1981, I left Kenya to take a job with USAID in Somalia. I knew little of what was going on in Somalia except that perhaps a million and a half refugees had entered the country fleeing the Ogaden war in Ethiopia. The world was mobilizing to help. I thought it was a good opportunity to try something new and get a fresh start in a different country. Alert to the corrupt and politicized aid business in Kenya, I felt ready to deal with the situation in Somalia.

I had learned to view development aid with skepticism, a skill I had hoped to put to good use to help ensure that aid projects, at worst, didn't hurt people. But Somalia added a whole new dimension to my view of the aid business. My experience there made me see that aid could be worse than incompetent and inadvertently destructive. It could be positively evil.

1

LAND CRUISERS

Charity creates a multitude of sins.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*

The town of Baidoa in southwestern Somalia, it seems, will forever be called “the city formerly known as the City of Death.” Aid workers attached the City of Death label during the famine of 1992. Before that, Baidoa wasn't really known as anything. It was a dusty little market town in the center of Somalia's agricultural region where nomads would exchange camels and milk for grains, cooking oil, cloth, and other items. In early 1991, after the government of dictator Mohamed Siyaad Barre was overthrown, Baidoa became a battleground, an arena of spectacular brutality. The dictator's retreating armies fled through the region, looting and killing as they passed, wrecking everything they couldn't carry off. They made a special point of pillaging farmers' traditional underground food stores in an effort to halt the advance of the pursuing forces of the United Somali Congress, who nonetheless managed to find more to loot and destroy. Before it was over, the armies would pass through the region four times, achieving monumental levels of destruction.

But Baidoa didn't become famous until the battles ended and people began to starve there. That's when the relief workers showed up with

truckloads of food. That food along with everything else the outsiders brought were the only items of value in the area, so the relief supplies became the center of a new regional economy. It was an economy of theft. In the anarchy that followed the fighting, freelance militias, criminal gangs, ruled the roads and towns. They extorted money from relief organizations or simply stole the food. The nomads and others who fled to towns such as Baidoa expecting to be fed, waited and died.

After the relief organizations brought the media to videotape, photograph, and otherwise capture the death for the outside world, Baidoa became an international symbol of starvation. Then it became a symbol of liberation when the U.S. Marines rolled into town just before Christmas 1992, escorting a first symbolic shipment of relief food for the starving. The next day they escorted additional symbolic food shipments out of Baidoa to the hinterlands. Journalists crowded around to get the first shots of the first shipments arriving and leaving the City of Death. On New Year's Day 1993, President George Bush, on his final official trip, dropped into the symbolic city to meet the marines and tour an orphanage. He was greeted with banners and songs. "The marines saved us. Welcome, President, welcome," the orphans sang in Somali.

As he smiled and waved and grasped hands, Bush betrayed no sense that this site of his bold humanitarian act had once been the focus of intense American interest of a different kind. Under his administration and the previous ones, the same Siyaad Barre who delivered death to Baidoa was a friend and ally. Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Bush, in their campaign against communist influence in Africa, pumped massive amounts of military and economic aid into Somalia and kept the hated dictator in power. Fortress Somalia had been in part built from bags of food, relief food for the hungry refugees from an earlier war. The food fed the troops and kept the cadres in step behind the regime. It enriched loyal merchants in the capital and kept the president's family and friends awash in luxury. And though no one dared stain Bush's visit with questions of history, the Somalis who saw the convoys of food rolling inland toward Baidoa understood something that these relief workers and soldiers did not: The show unfolding before them was much more than a grand gesture of charity. Food was power, and so long as the food came in, the battle to control it would continue, as it had for years.

By the spring of 1993, people had stopped starving in Baidoa. American soldiers had come and gone, replaced by international peacekeepers. Aid workers by the hundreds descended upon the town to nurture the victims.

Many Somalis who had fled the city during more than a year of fighting began to return. And other Somalis, many of whom had never been to Baidoa, showed up looking for work with aid agencies, the United Nations, the Red Cross, and the so-called non-governmental organizations, commonly known as NGOs.

On a typically hot afternoon in June 1993, a young American aid worker climbs into the front passenger seat of his Toyota Land Cruiser. Beside him sits his driver, a nineteen-year-old Somali kid called Jiis. In the back seat of the vehicle sit two other young Somalis; one is Jiis's younger brother, and the other is a cousin of some sort. The trio are employed as security guards. Each holds a battered AK-47 assault rifle, muzzle resting lightly on the door frame and pointing toward the cloudless blue sky. With everyone in position, Jiis steers the car away from a massive tarmac airstrip and starts down a rutted, dusty road. Despite the weaponry, none of the gunmen appears particularly on guard. The American stares silently and grips a medium-sized package that he has collected from the plane. A white-on-faded-blue UN flag mounted on a little metal post crudely welded to the front bumper snaps in the wind. As the Land Cruiser rocks along, Jiis and his friends begin to talk to each other in Somali, softly at first, but the conversation soon escalates into louder, more adamant tones. The American doesn't understand a word, but it sounds to him as if they are arguing. He pays little attention; Somalis always seem to be arguing about something.

This time Jiis and the boys are really arguing. The two guards in the back seat are trying to convince Jiis that they should drive off and kill the American right now. Jiis insists they wait. He knows the package contains something important because the American seems nervous today—more nervous than usual. He was anxious earlier in the day when Jiis was late showing up at the compound where he lived with other foreigners. "Where the fuck is Mohamed," the American had said, using Jiis's real name. When Jiis arrived, he had to endure a lecture about the virtues of showing up on time. Jiis doesn't like the American. The American has complained about his work habits before, calling him lazy, threatening to fire him. Jiis isn't sure he wants to put up with anyone telling him what to do, especially a foreigner, a *gaal*, an infidel. As it turned out, they'd arrived in plenty of time to meet the plane.

When a silence finally settles in, the American speaks. The package, he says, contains food his mother has sent him from home, and when they get back to the compound he is going to open the package and share some chocolate.

Jiis translates for his colleagues and continues. "These people, they talk to us like we're children. They think they can make us happy with pieces of chocolate while they keep boxes of money."

"Thank you," Jiis says to the American.

"Let's kill him now," says Jiis's friend one more time.

"No. We have to have a plan," Jiis insists. "You boys are stupid. You can't just take all this money without a plan. We need to have a plan to take the money, and we need to have a plan to get away."

When troubles come, the Land Cruisers always follow. Airplanes and trucks bring bags of food and blankets, and Land Cruisers bring relief workers. They are young, earnest, healthy, clean, and tanned European and American kids in short pants, T-shirts, baseball caps, and sunglasses. They stride like an invincible force through the mass assembly of vulnerable, sick and dying victims of war, famine, and disease. In their Land Cruisers they glide over dusty streets in faraway, forgotten places, the flags of their aid organizations flying in the wind they make. The faster they drive, the more erect and firm fly their banners, bearing symbols that mean caring and helping to people thousands of miles away.

Now, in the middle of 1993, Baidoa is an aid workers' jamboree. There is food. People crowd the market. Children run and play and laugh. There are the sounds, generators from behind the walls of NGO compounds, and the grinding of tires on gravel. Only occasionally does the sharp crack of gunfire silence the clamor of normal activity. Land Cruisers are everywhere. The NGOs rent the Land Cruisers from their owners, their new owners, who looted them from the aid agencies that were in Somalia before the war. When things get more secure and their presence seems more permanent, the NGOs will buy their own Land Cruisers. Until then, it's safer to rent for \$75 a day.

Each Land Cruiser carries one or two foreigners and three or four Somali kids. It gives the aid workers a thrill. And it gives jobs to the kids with guns. To most Somalis, the kids with guns are known as *mooryaan*, little bandits, punks, street kids. For the aid workers they are security guards. Most Somalis fear them and wonder why the helpers from abroad spend so much time with these *mooryaan*. These are the same kids who were looting the Land Cruisers before, and now it's not exactly clear whether they are paid to protect the vehicles or bribed not to loot them.

Mohamed Sheikh is a former looter who now has a job with the United Nations as a driver and gunman. He has a round, boyish, mischievous face, like brown skin and sandy hair that appears streaked with blond when he

stands in the sunlight. Mohamed was born with one leg slightly shorter than the other, and as a child he had walked with a barely perceptible limp. He had long ago learned to compensate for his imbalance, but the nickname he was given as a child had stuck. Everyone calls him Jiis, which means "limp." He had been living in the town of Beledweyne when the war to oust Mohamed Siyaad Barre began in 1989. Members of his Hawaadle clan had joined with the victorious forces of the USC, the United Somali Congress, and captured the capital of Mogadishu in January 1991. Jiis never fought with the guerrillas, but within days of their victory, he was in the capital, gleefully joining the festival of looting that had engulfed the city. He stole a rifle and began breaking into the abandoned homes that were once occupied by foreigners, NGOs, and members of Siyaad Barre's clan, the Daarood. He stole electric generators, televisions, and VCRs.

In Mogadishu in those days, a major cause of death was car accidents, as kids from the bush, former cattle herders, took to the streets in looted cars and Land Cruisers, driving on whichever side of the road they chose, not knowing any better and not really caring. In the new Mogadishu the *mooryaan* made the rules.

Jiis and his brother and a few friends took what they wanted and sold what they didn't need. They spent their time chewing *qat*, spending \$10 or \$20 a day on the stimulant, which even during the worst of the fighting and the peak of the famine was imported daily from neighboring Kenya. They watched looted movies on looted VCRs and televisions, all powered by looted generators. They particularly liked American movies, violent American movies. Jiis watched and worked on his English by listening to Clint Eastwood and Sylvester Stallone.

When there was nothing left to loot, the USC forces split into their clan and subclan factions and began to loot from each other. Mogadishu exploded again, and Jiis got out of town, first heading south along the coast to the port city of Kismaayo. Out of money and in need of work, he got a job there with the UN doing security, riding around in Land Cruisers, and protecting the occupants. He also made money on the side by running errands in the market for the foreigners who were afraid to leave their protected compounds. For example, a lot of them wanted to buy a *macawis*, the Somali sarong. Jiis would buy one for \$8 and sell it to them for \$25. Occasionally they would pay him off by letting him take bags of food, which he could sell on the market.

Not long after the Americans arrived in Somalia, Jiis was fired from his job in Kismaayo for being rude to his employers and not showing up for work. So he and his brother headed for Baidoa, where NGOs were setting

up shop and work was plentiful. He had a gun. He knew how to drive. And he spoke English, after a fashion.

Several times a day in Baidoa the Land Cruisers congregate around the long tarmac airstrip. The aid workers talk quietly among themselves, exchanging news like African women at the village well. They complain about their Somali workers. They discuss the dangers of life in Somalia, or they pass along legends from the days before the arrival of the marines: the looting of the Red Cross warehouse, the hijacking of the CARE convoy on its way to Baidoa, aid workers who had been held hostage or murdered. They talk of the former Somali army major who ran the airport before the Americans came, how he charged landing fees and entrance fees and made a fortune from every relief plane that landed.

Their Somali escorts gather in their own group to complain about and ridicule the foreigners. They are certain the foreigners are getting rich in Baidoa. Why else would they have left their plush California mansions and English country estates to come here?

At first there is only the soft murmur of voices trailing away into the open air. Wind faintly rustles the thorny bushes. Heat rises from the tar. Most of the aid workers have walkie-talkies on their belts that occasionally squawk in unison. The landing lights of the C-130 Hercules appear in the distance long before any sound is heard. The plane emerges as a blurry white ball through the midday heat. Even the nomads gather just to watch. Sometimes they wander out on the runway and the aid workers shout and wave them off.

Then, instantly, in a shower of sound, the plane is on the ground. The Land Cruisers ring the hulking transport plane like suckling piglets. The ear-ripping rush from turbo props, and the toxic sweet smell of burning jet fuel fills the torrid air. The plane drops its rear cargo door and pallets are rolled toward a waiting forklift. There are crates of bottled water for aid workers and peacekeeping troops. There are cases of beer and boxes of medical supplies for UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). And there are smaller packages for individuals and organizations containing messages, personal mail, food from home, and cash for salaries. A wiry, gray-haired white man with no shirt stands in the back of the plane shouting in a colonial English accent at the Somalis who are unloading the packages. They don't understand and they can't hear anyway beneath the whine of the engines. Still, they respond to his directives. The white man's flesh is sticky with sweat, and flecks of grain, grains of sand and cardboard-

brown dust from the boxes coat his body. Then the Hercules closes its door and is gone.

Most of the Somali security guards help their employers load the boxes into the backs of the Land Cruisers. But Jiis just watches. I'm not your fucking slave, he once told the American. The American is getting paid a lot of money, Jiis figures. He wants to be here. Let him load the boxes.

The American would like to fire Jiis, but he's afraid. He knows that labor disputes have led to deaths. A Red Cross worker was recently shot to death in the nearby town of Bardera by an angry former security guard. It's best to take these things slowly. It may be possible to make friends with the boy, make him understand that working with the UN is a big opportunity. He's already earning \$300 a month in a country where annual per capita income is \$150. Maybe he'll start to cooperate. But Jiis isn't going to cooperate. He's not impressed with the foreigners and their technology, the way they come and go in airplanes. They have their CD players, radios, and notebook computers, their Swiss Army knives, their running shoes and Gore-Tex clothes with Velcro fasteners. Jiis has seen this all before. The town of Beledweyne was full of them. They'd been there as long as he could remember, taking care of refugees from Ethiopia. As long as he could remember, the foreigners had been coming and staying for a few months and then leaving. There were always new ones walking wide-eyed through the market, staring at camels. But eventually they would become scarce, preferring to ride in their air-conditioned Land Cruisers, plowing slowly through crowds of Somalis as they passed on their way to work or to enjoy each others' company behind the walls of their compounds.

That evening, Jiis and his friends chew *qat* and talk. There are four of them now, as another security guard has been brought in on the plan. The *qat* keeps them awake and alert. The plan, a simple plan, is settled upon. The Americans have made the roads safe for travel at night. Buses will be going to Mogadishu before dawn. That is how they will make their escape.

In the very early hours of the morning, with everyone asleep, Jiis walks into the room where the American sleeps. He pushes the muzzle of his rifle against the sleeping man's head and prods him awake. Then, in the voice of a bad guy from one of the American movies he had once watched, Jiis says, "Open the fucking safe and give me the fucking money."

The American obeys. He is tied up and gagged and locked in his room. Then Jiis and his friends drive to the edge of town and abandon the Land Cruiser. Stealing the Land Cruiser would have brought problems. The Somali owner would have tracked them down or found a relative of his in

Mogadishu or Beledweyne. As dictated by Somali tradition, somebody would have had to pay. That crime would have trailed Jiis for the rest of his life. But stealing from the foreigners is something different. They would have no idea how to find him because they had no idea who he was.

The safe contained nearly \$100,000 in cash. Jiis takes his \$25,000 share and gives most of it to his ailing father in Mogadishu. He passes out more to friends and relatives and takes the last \$5,000 and goes to the port city of Mombasa in Kenya, where he spends it on women and drugs. It is a glorious four months. Jiis, the limping kid from the Somali bush is a big man in the big city. The Mombasa bar girls call him the sheik.

When the money is gone, he moves in with family in Nairobi, where he is looking for another job with the UN. "The money was mine," Jiis explains a year later in Nairobi. He's wearing blue jeans and a U.S. Navy baseball cap, and looks very much at home slurping down a gin and tonic at the Serena Hotel. "You may say it's the UN's money, but what is the UN? This money comes to Somalia and people are taking it. I have just taken mine."

In the town of Galkayo, in the heart of Somalia's rangeland, I sit down to dinner with a group of aid workers at the United Nations compound. They are American and Belgian and Danish. There is a woman from India. The food is local meat with canned imported vegetables whipped up into a meal by a Somali cook who's learned to prepare food for Westerners. It is April of 1994 and Galkayo has been suspended in a tense peace for nearly a year despite its location at a point where two major feuding clan groups face each other.

The dinner conversation drifts over a number of subjects: negotiations with local leaders, information about supplies arriving on the next flight, the logistics of living in the middle of nowhere. Coffee is served. Electric lights pulse with the distant straining of diesel generators. A bottle of whisky is pulled from a cabinet, and the world slows. Cigarettes are lit. There is time to be thoughtful, and the conversation shifts from the daily details to the more general subject of aid, and the question arises: Are we doing more harm than good by being here? Nighttime discussions among aid workers always end up at this point. I've had this conversation with hundreds of different aid workers, on hundreds of occasions: with a Catholic priest in Kakuma, northwestern Kenya, during the famine of 1979; with the head of an NGO in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso, in 1986; in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1995; in Kampala, Uganda in 1989;

in New Delhi, India in 1974. And nearly every night in 1981 when I was living in Beledweyne, Somalia.

Aid workers notice things: Food aid attracts people to refugee camps, where they die from dysentery or measles or other diseases they wouldn't have contracted in the bush. Is there really a food shortage when anyone with money can find all the food he wants, when the aid workers themselves enjoy meals that the locals could never get even in the best of times? And why does it always seem that a group of local elites finds a way to get rich from the disaster? Are we contributing to the problem by dealing with these businessmen-politicians who lease Land Cruisers and homes to the aid agencies and who provide trucks to transport food?

Someone offers history: Twenty-five years ago most of the countries in Africa had indigenous methods for dealing with food shortages. Somalia in particular had a well-established system for dealing with regular cycles of drought and famine. Farmers in the river valleys built secure underground vaults where grain was stored during the fat years. When drought threatened the nomads, animals that might die anyway were exchanged for grains. Though nomads showed very little respect for farmers, they were aware that their lives might one day depend on these sedentary clans. They were therefore generous with the bounty of their herds when times were good. The result was a mutual insurance system and a truce of necessity across the land.

But few of the aid workers here know anything about pre-civil war Somalia. Their only experience is with the beaten and anarchic society they see beyond the high walls of their compounds. Some of the more experienced aid workers can offer the wisdom that no country was ever transformed from being famine-prone to food self-sufficiency by international charity. In fact, as Harvard economist Amartya Sen has shown, famines always occur in authoritarian states, when the government mismanages the economy. Famines disappear when those countries become market-efficient. India, for example—the epitome of the famine-afflicted land when I was a child—no longer suffers famines despite its huge population.

And some targets of charity get worse. Today, after huge infusions of international aid, Somalia and all its formerly self-sufficient neighbors are chronically hungry and dependent on foreign food. It becomes increasingly difficult for aid workers to ignore the compelling correlation between massive international food aid and increasing vulnerability to famine. "Our charity does not overcome famine, and may help to prolong it," someone will always lament. Those who spend the time to study the local economies

see that the people have now geared their own activities not to returning to their old lives but to getting their hands on aid.

And in the case of Somalia, the notion was beginning to dawn on a number of aid workers that the food aid was helping to prolong the war as well. Could it be that it was the food that was causing the conflict and the instability that was making it impossible for people to get their own food? Though the answers were never clear, the questions were always troubling.

While these doubts are often sent back to the home office in New York or Atlanta, they receive very little discussion beyond the walls of the relief agencies. To let that happen would mean having to consider the possibility of going out of business. Instead, the relief agencies advertise.

In America's intimate morning hours, television screens pulse with images of starvation. A typical television advertisement carefully scripted by an agency hired by Save the Children runs as follows:

VIDEO: SHOT OF NEEDY CHILD

A child's face collapsed around its pleading eyes.

The script calls for

SHOT OF MORE NEEDY CHILDREN

and then

EMOTIONALLY CHARGED CHILD SHOT

followed by

SHOT OF VERY MALNOURISHED CHILD

For sound effects, the script asks for

APPROPRIATELY HARD-HITTING, EMOTIONAL ORIGINAL MUSIC

The viewer might sink into helpless despair but for the interviews of a weepy actress who steps through the misery with a solution.

Voiceover: You've seen the frightened faces . . . heard their cries of hunger . . . watched their small bodies fall prey to sickness.

VIDEO: MORE HOPEFUL SHOTS OF KIDS—EATING, PLAYING, SMILING, ETC.

But you can help ease the pain—by becoming a Save the Children sponsor. It's so easy—just a phone call . . . then only pocket change—65¢ a day. Your concern can help stop horrible hunger with nutritious food . . .

Now is the time to rescue one fragile, weakened girl or boy . . . your \$20 monthly gift will be combined with those of other sponsors . . .

Please—reach out . . . end this nightmare. You can do it, right now. With just a phone call, you can help stop a different kind of child abuse.

This is the extent of the public discussion instigated by the charity. The goal of the message is not to make us think about hunger and poverty. It is to relieve us of the burden of having to think about it. The charity provides this narrow portal into the world of hunger, a way to reach through the dark distances of space and culture to touch the child. This is real interactive TV. Pick up the phone. Pick up the phone. The deed is done. The child is healed before the viewer's eyes. The relentless message is that it is all so simple. It's easy. Just send money.

The \$20 or \$50 that the viewer has pledged now begins its long journey from his Visa or MasterCard account through the bank and bureaucracy of the charity, and into other bureaucracies of subsidiary charities. The funds appear as an asset on a series of spreadsheets and merge with funds from other donors and governments. Some is used to pay the \$200,000 in salary and benefits for the president of the charity, and some is used for his \$2,000-a-month housing allowance, which doesn't show up on public financial statements. Part of the money is used to pay the rents for the charity's offices and to buy airline tickets for the people who make the videos that are shown on television. Some of the money shows up in the ledgers of organizations in the country where the picture of the starving child originated. Some of that will be used to buy or rent a Land Cruiser or put petrol in the tanks of other Land Cruisers. Some will pay the salaries of expatriate workers. In Somalia, some of it will be used to pay the gunmen who protect the expatriate workers. And some of it will be stolen by those very gunmen. The bureaucracy is a hungry beast. It must be fed.

The donor doesn't really want to know any of this as he reads his credit card number over the telephone on that sleepless night. That's not the point. The aid is an offering, an act of compassion and sacrifice. Perhaps it will buy a good night's sleep and a feeling that from the dark interior fortress of America, a life can be touched 8,000 miles away. The charities count on that. They know that out in what they call "the field," the recipi-

ents of the charity are not exactly what they seem to be. The donors are amateurs. The recipients are professionals. The expatriate relief workers have been playing this game for a few months, or maybe a few years. The recipients have been on the dole and beating the system for decades.

For ten years before the famine of 1992, Somalia was the largest recipient of aid in sub-Saharan Africa, and in some years the third largest in the world behind perennial leaders Egypt and Israel. But most of Somalia's 6 million people never saw a penny. Much of what wasn't filtered out to pay the expenses of the relief agency was lost in the corrupt maze of the Somali government's nepotistic bureaucracy. Only the wiliest and most entrepreneurial of Somalia's people ever saw any tangible benefits from the aid. That money went to Somali bureaucrats whose primary skill was in earning money by dealing with foreign charities. And when money did drip down to the people it was used in ways designed by a government desperately trying to cling to its diminishing power. And in all these things, Somalia was only a slightly more extreme case of how aid works everywhere. The other big recipients of aid in Africa have fared no better than Somalia.

As Somalia stood on the brink of chaos in 1990, it was utterly dependent on foreign aid. It is little wonder then that when aid started pouring into the country once again in 1992, humble gratitude was not people's immediate response. Instead, another generation of Somalis prepared to get its share, to get rich by doing whatever it took to get as much as possible from the foreigners.

And it wasn't as if the foreigners weren't making out in the deal. The Somalis saw young white people in their mid-twenties with no recognizable skills driving about in Land Cruisers and living in nice houses for which their organizations were paying thousands of dollars a month in rent—rent money that was going to the biggest criminals in the country. The young foreigners didn't speak Somali and knew nothing of the history of the place. They always had plenty of money to spend and didn't mind paying absurd prices for what they bought. The people back home might have regarded what these people were doing as a sacrifice, but the Somalis saw them living high.

Few foreigners ever invested the time or effort to see aid from the point of view of the recipients. They rarely looked beyond their own idealized images of famine and charity. Into Somalia's nightmare world of warlords and forced starvation, they held aloft the image of the hungry child-God they themselves had created to justify their own actions. And they marched blindly into the mire.

2

FAR FROM SOMALIA

All domination involves invasion—at times physical and overt, at times camouflaged, with the invader assuming the role of a helping friend.

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Chris Cassidy felt a rush of revulsion. Then a queasiness arose in his stomach. His life seemed to be unraveling all over again. He had tried to exile himself in eastern Washington State, as far away from Somalia as he could get, but now Somalia had come and found him. It appeared on the front pages of the local paper and on local radio and television stations. It wouldn't leave him alone.

Cassidy said from the beginning that the Americans should not have gone into Somalia. When he spoke, people were surprised to learn that the man who now lived alone in Yakima doing agricultural work on the nearby Indian reservation could become so enraged over what was seemingly a brave and charitable gesture from the United States government. Cassidy has always impressed people as the giving and caring type.

But then Cassidy would explain that he had lived in Somalia for six years. He had worked there with the U.S. government and with Save the