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The NGO Moment

This book is a study of compassion as a global project from Biafra to Live Aid. Kevin O'Sullivan explains how and why NGOs became the primary conduits of popular concern for the global poor between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s and shows how this shaped the West's relationship with the postcolonial world. Drawing on case studies from Britain, Canada and Ireland, as well as archival material from governments and international organisations, he sheds new light on how the legacies of empire were repackaged and repurposed for the postcolonial era, and how a liberal definition of benevolence, rooted in charity, justice, development and rights, became the dominant expression of solidarity with the Third World. In doing so, the book provides a unique insight into the social, cultural and ideological foundations of global civil society. It reveals why this period provided such fertile ground for the emergence of NGOs and offers a fresh interpretation of how individuals in the West encountered the outside world.

Kevin O'Sullivan is Lecturer in History at National University of Ireland, Galway. He has written extensively on NGOs, aid, global justice and human rights, including the book, *Ireland, Africa and the End of Empire* (2012). He is co-editor of the Royal Irish Academy's Documents on Irish Foreign Policy series.

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The NGO Moment

*The Globalisation of Compassion from Biafra
to Live Aid*

Kevin O'Sullivan

National University of Ireland Galway



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	1
Part I: The Ends of Empire	15
1 Encountering the Third World Biafra, 1967–1970	17
2 Putting Down Roots Bangladesh, 1970–1972	34
Part II: An NGO Movement	55
3 Charity or Justice? Radical Compassion	57
4 NGOs and Advocacy A New International Economic Order	78
Part III: Conduits of World Culture	97
5 NGOs and Development Basic Needs	99
6 In Search of Legitimacy Cambodia, 1979–1981	117
Part IV: A People's Compassion	135
7 The Turn to Human Rights El Salvador, 1979–1984	137
	v

vi	Contents	
8	Populist Humanitarianism Ethiopia, 1984–1985	156
	Conclusion	175
	<i>Notes</i>	186
	<i>Bibliography</i>	237
	<i>Index</i>	264

Acknowledgements

This book has its origins at Lar da CEAST, on Rua Antonio Assis Junior, in the Maianga district of Luanda. Or, at least, every time I try to pinpoint when I became aware of the themes that run through *The NGO Moment*, my mind returns to that Catholic-run guesthouse and a conversation I had there, over breakfast, in December 2007. My companion was a first-generation Angolan, whose parents had migrated from Portugal in the early twentieth century. The meal (mine; I don't remember his) was bread and marmalade. Our chat started innocuously. I was there, I explained, to help make a television documentary about China's influence on the Angolan economy, particularly its wealthy oil industry. My associate, however, was more interested in the narrative of outside intervention that my presence represented. 'You Americans are all the same', he told me, before brushing aside my correction and attempts to highlight Ireland's anti-colonial credentials with a gruff but brutally to-the-point rejoinder: 'What's the difference?'

I tell this story not to suggest that there was anything unique about this encounter. After all, I was just one in a long line of interlopers from the West to be faced with the limits of how far their good intentions could take them. Rather, I recall it because it opened my eyes to just how deeply normalised the presence of outsiders in postcolonial states had become, and how little thought we gave to why – and whether – their compassion might be wanted. That realisation sowed the seeds of another idea: to ask how we had gotten to that moment. Having grown up in Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s, it was difficult to escape the self-congratulatory tone that accompanied any discussion of Ireland's role abroad (see Bono, Bob Geldof, Mary Robinson, Irish peacekeepers, missionary orders and NGOs like Trócaire and Concern). Yet here, in my Angolan friend's provocation, was a challenge to that assumption. It seemed pertinent not only to ask how we had come to that image, but also to try to document some of its longer-term consequences.

It took time to piece that story together. *The NGO Moment* began life at the University of Birmingham, where I spent a year as an Irish Research

viii Acknowledgements

Council/Marie Curie postdoctoral fellow in 2011–12. I am grateful to the many colleagues there, notably David Gange, Chris Moores, Sadiah Qureshi and Ben White, who expanded my intellectual horizons and taught me new ways to think about these subjects. It was my very good fortune to have Matthew Hilton as a mentor on that project – he remains a good friend and has proven an inestimably valued collaborator (and purveyor of sensible advice) in the years since. After I cut short that fellowship to take up a permanent post at NUI Galway in 2012, financial support from that institution (through a Millennium Fund grant) and successive network funding grants from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (with Matthew Hilton) and the Irish Research Council (three New Foundations awards) proved vital in creating the space for my ideas to develop.

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x Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

ARRK	Agricultural Relief and Rehabilitation in Kampuchea
ASESAH	Asociación Salvadoreña EcuMénica de Servicios y Ayuda Humanitaria
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CCF	Cooperative Commonwealth Federation
CCIC	Canadian Council for International Cooperation
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIDSE	Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité
CUSO	Canadian University Service Overseas
DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
EC	European Community
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FFHC	Freedom from Hunger Campaign
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional
G-77	Group of 77 Third World states
ICCHRLA	Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IGO	Inter-Governmental Organisation
ISVS	International Secretariat for Volunteer Service
JCA	Joint Church Aid
LAWG	Latin American Working Group
MNCs	Multinational corporations
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NDP	New Democratic Party
NIEO	New International Economic Order
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
REST	Relief Society of Tigray

xii List of Abbreviations

RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (Ethiopia)
SUPA	Student Union for Peace Action
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDRO	Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator
UNEPRO	United Nations East Pakistan Relief Operation
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation
VCOAD	Voluntary Committee on Overseas Aid and Development
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WHO	World Health Organization
WCC	World Council of Churches
WFP	World Food Programme