

Necessary Illusions? Representations of Darfur

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examined media and NGO representation of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur over an eighteen-month period between January 2004 and June 2005.

It concentrated on three key questions. The first question relates to the 'noise' graph of emergencies. What factors – and what actors – were involved in determining the newsworthiness of Darfur? This first key question concerns the graph of media coverage of Darfur, through an escalation phase, an abundant phase, and finally a gradually diminishing phase. Ideally, the diminishing phase of media coverage should correlate with the diminishing stage of the actual emergency. This is rarely the case and so logically other dynamics must exist. The second question examines media representation of the Darfur crisis compared with what was actually occurred. How accurate was the reporting, and what were some of the effects of inaccuracy? The final question is one of perception. To what extent was the crisis in Darfur misperceived; who was primarily responsible for generating that misperception; and was a degree of misperception inevitable? This question encompasses both the representation offered by the international media and that offered by NGO media and public relations departments.

The study is framed within the notion of the 'crisis triangle' (UNDP, 1997), which is composed of policymakers, humanitarian actors and the international media. It analyses NGO media functions within the framework of the NGO crisis triangle, composed of internal NGO conflicts between fundraising, advocacy and operational aid.

Darfur revealed beyond doubt that the factors involved in determining newsworthiness are complex and, furthermore, not necessarily controlled by any one actor or any one side of the crisis triangle. US political interests significantly contributed to escalating Darfur to the status of 'worst humanitarian crisis in the world', but equally so did the genocide question, and no one actor manipulated the timing of the tenth anniversary of Rwanda to coincide with a campaign of ethnic cleansing taking place in Darfur. One of the most important factors identified was

that of simplicity, which explains how media attention was engaged, but not necessarily why. The simplicity also ensured that media and NGO representation of Darfur was unavoidably inaccurate.

The media influenced the political will of the international community towards Darfur only indirectly, although it could just as convincingly be argued that the political will of the international community was one of the primary factors influencing the media. There were two identified practical lessons from the examination of the representation of Darfur. The first was that if NGOs were to accept a short-term fall in funding for the longer-term benefit of raising awareness then both a more accurate perception and possibly more sustainable funding could be generated. The second was that if media institutions were to adhere to the Red Cross code of conduct when reporting from disaster situations then a more accurate perception would be generated. This would result in the necessary illusions of disaster reporting not being quite so necessary.

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PREFACE

This study will investigate the media representation of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur from January 2004 to June 2005. These eighteen months can broadly be divided into three periods when media interest was escalating, abundant, and then gradually diminishing.

The motivation for this study was personal experience as an aid worker in the Sudan between August 2004 and June 2005. This study is an attempt to theorise and explain the difference between my practical experience in Darfur and the representation of the conflict by the international media, and to establish what consequences, if any, resulted from the latter. In 1991 an English development economist wrote a resource paper after living with his family in Darfur for six years. In reference to an Africa Watch report on Darfur he commented that the “main reason I wrote this paper was because it never felt as though we were living in the same place as Africa Watch was describing” (Morton, 2004:5). For myself, in 2004 and 2005, it never felt as though I was living in the same place that the international media were describing.

Previous to the Sudan, I worked in Zimbabwe for a year. In the summer of 2005, I worked briefly in Niger. Experiences from all three emergency situations have contributed to my interest in this topic.

Emergency humanitarian aid work is, by its very nature, messy and complex. Media representation of aid work is unlikely to ever be completely accurate but most aid workers would state unequivocally that it could be vastly improved. Yet as this study progressed, it became increasingly clear that the international media are not the only ones culpable of generating a distorted view. NGO media and public relation functions also fed into an inaccurate representation of Darfur and therefore the study expanded to include an investigation of the internal conflicts facing NGOs and how these conflicts contribute to misrepresentation.

The following examination of media and NGO representation of Darfur is intended to shed some light on some of the difficulties and complexities inherent in any attempt to

portray an accurate picture of an emergency situation, though it is unlikely to provide any conclusive answers to the questions raised.

There are four practical limitations to this study. Firstly, I will review media representation of Darfur in general, even though Darfur is actually composed of three separate states, with differences between these states in terms of traditional tribal homelands, access, infrastructure, and rebel activity.

Secondly, only mainstream western media institutions will be considered within this study, as it is those that predominantly influence and inform the donor community and so have the most impact on funding and on political efforts for resolution by the international community. Western media will also be reviewed in general, with no analysis of the variations between print and visual media forums, or between different media institutions such as the BBC and CNN. Regrettably a detailed dissection of media variances is not within the scope of this study. It is acknowledged that 'the media' are not one homogenous actor and so the limitations inherent in treating them as such are accepted.

Thirdly, the study is limited to the above stated time period. This is partly due the need for a defined time period to analyse, partly due to this eighteen-month period representing the most interesting variation in media interest, and partly due to the time period I myself spent in the Sudan. Many of the NGO and UN documents and reports that I have used in this study I acquired whilst working in the Sudan, and of course my own experience and knowledge of this time period is also significant. Whilst the study itself concludes in June 2005, some of the developments that have occurred since June 2005 have been referred to in the conclusion: all post-June 2005 developments that have been referred to have also been briefly explained.

Fourthly, this study concentrates on the international representation of Darfur and the effects that this had on the conflict. It is not a study of GoS (the Government of the Sudan) or rebel strategies within the conflict and as such only refers to those strategies that are relevant to understanding the representation. Whilst many political initiatives from all players are cited, GoS or rebel strategies are only cited within the context of

how they were presented by the media. This is not a political study of the Darfur conflict.

CHAPTER ONE

MEDIA AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION: A BACKGROUND

The topic of the media and its role within humanitarian crises is one that has received an increasing degree of attention in recent years, from an in-depth study undertaken in the early 1990s (Cate, 1994), through to a September 2005 ‘Imaging Famine’ conference (Durham University Project, 2005). The ‘Imaging Famine’ project took as its starting point the “watershed of 1984” (Durham University Project, 2005) when BBC’s Michael Buerk famously described the Ethiopian famine as “the closest thing to hell on earth” (BBC, 2005, Oct 25). This report was credited with prompting Live Aid and with heightening western public interest in emergency aid response to disaster and famine situations. This growing fascination occurred simultaneously with – and undoubtedly because of – an unparalleled rise in technological capacity that allowed us to literally witness remote disasters in real-time.

The relationship between the international media and humanitarian relief organisations is complex. This study will concentrate on three key questions.

The first question relates to the ‘noise’ graph of emergencies. What factors – and what actors – are involved in determining newsworthiness? To what extent do the media influence what becomes a high-profile emergency; and subsequently, to what extent do the media influence the life span of the news-story? There is a concept of “loud” or “noisy” emergencies, contrasting with those that remain “silent” or “forgotten” (UNDP, 1997:32 and Gowing, 2002:5). This first key question concerns the graph of media coverage of noisy humanitarian disasters, through an escalation phase, an abundant phase, and finally a diminishing phase. Ideally the diminishing phase of media coverage correlates with the diminishing stage of the actual emergency. This is rarely the case and so logically other dynamics must exist.

The second question examines how the media represent a noisy emergency. That is, once an emergency has attained its noisy status, how does media representation of the response compare with what is actually occurring? How accurate is the reporting, and what are some of the effects of inaccuracy?

The final question is one of perception. To what extent is the developing world misperceived; who is primarily responsible for generating the misperception; and is a degree of misperception inevitable? Possibly most importantly, why does misrepresentation matter? This question encompasses both the representation generated by the international media and that generated by NGO media relation functions. These three questions will be applied to an analysis of Darfur as a case study from January 2004 to June 2005.

Prior to the examination of Darfur, the previous efforts that have been made to answer these questions should be discussed. In 1994 a project sponsored by the Annenberg Washington Programme produced a report entitled “Media, Disaster Relief and Images of the Developing World”. This report highlighted the “grossly distorted view” (Cate, 1994:2) of the developing world that was prevalent in the west. The purpose of the project was to suggest strategies to both media institutions and NGOs to improve the accuracy with which developing countries are portrayed.

It was acknowledged within the Annenberg report that this “distorted view” of the developing world was “as profound as it is widespread” (Cate, 1994:2), but the reasons as to why the misrepresentation is significant were either not discussed or not considered to be of sufficient importance to find a place within the final report. The Annenberg study acknowledged that there was a general misrepresentation of the developing world. It further acknowledged that this was a significant and dangerous trend. Yet these two facts were taken as a fundamental assumption of the study, without any significant analysis of why the misrepresentation was dangerous, or how it translated practically into negative consequences.

In 1997 the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) Disaster Management Training Programme produced a training module to be used as a tool to assist humanitarian workers, journalists, and policymakers in understanding the complex relationships within what was termed the “crisis triangle” (UNDP, 1997:7). This triangle is composed of humanitarian organisations, policymakers, and the international media. Humanitarian organisations include the various operational agencies of the United Nations – such as WHO and WFP – and NGOs. Policymakers

include both the UN in its political capacity (i.e. the Security Council) and (predominantly western) national Governments. The international media includes both commercial media institutions and, potentially, the media functions of NGOs. Thus the complexities of the topic can be seen even in the very framework that was designed as a tool for easier analysis.

In direct contrast to the Annenberg report, the UNDP document stressed that any evidence that the media influenced humanitarian action was, up until this point in time, “inconsistent and debatable” (UNDP, 1997:7). They evaluated the ‘CNN factor’, as it was quickly dubbed, within the framework of the crisis triangle, using a number of early 1990s emergencies. It was stressed throughout the UNDP document that any and all attempts to “capture the vigour, complexity, and idiosyncrasies of interaction” (UNDP, 1997:11) between the three sides of the crisis triangle will inevitably suffer from oversimplification.

In 1997 the fundamental question of whether the media actually have any influence on humanitarian crises was still contested. By the end of the decade it became the almost universally accepted truth that the media do have “a profound impact on complex emergencies” (Adam, 1999:5). Further questions emerged, particularly after the phenomenal media and public response to the Asian tsunami in December 2004. The ensuing debates focussed on whether the tsunami generated a renewed interest in humanitarian response or whether, to the contrary, it had ‘killed’ other aid (Kielthy, 2005, Jan 24).

So by the beginning of the twenty-first century there was general consensus that the media do have a significant effect on humanitarian crises. There was also consensus that the western public have a considerably distorted perception of the developing world. It was accepted that both the media and NGOs themselves contributed to representation that is inconsistent with reality by choosing to portray images that “focus on the unusual, the extraordinary, the dramatic” (Cate, 1994:2), and feeding these images to an audience without the necessary background information or knowledge within which to contextualise them. UNICEF information from questionnaires distributed to US high school children illustrated the extent of this distortion when it came to western awareness of the developing world. As an

example, one question – ‘what percentage of the world’s children are starving?’ – produced answers of between fifty and seventy-five percent. In reality, the answer is less than two percent. (Cate, 1994:2). This illustrates that the focus on the ‘dramatic’ and the ‘extraordinary’ – civil war, conflict, drought and famine – without any counter-balancing depiction of positive aspects, leads to a general western belief that developing countries only have civil war, conflict, drought and famine.

One of the key questions outlined above is: how important is the accuracy of perception? To ignore, for the moment, the notion of truth as an absolute value in itself, or the idea that the primary function of news media is to portray as accurate a picture as possible, there exists a more deep-rooted problem. What difference does an inaccurate representation make? What consequences, specifically, does western misperception have for the developing world?

In general terms there are three core consequences of a distorted perception for the developing world, and for Africa in particular. Firstly, when media coverage concentrates on dramatic emergency situations with no counter-balancing reporting of positive aspects of African life, it perpetuates the myth that Africans are pitiful victims who will never be capable of helping themselves. This leads to ‘donor fatigue’; a condition in which the general western public believe that Africa is unavoidably doomed and so donating money is futile. This view is emphasized when media reporting concentrates on western aid workers going to a crisis to ‘save’ the local population, with little corresponding reporting on the relief efforts of local people themselves.

Secondly, media concentration on dramatic emergencies leads to an influx of short-term funding for noisy crises at the expense of other, longer-term development projects. For the purposes of “infotainment” (UNDP, 1997:36) the complex, underlying reasons for a crisis are frequently ignored in favour of striking visuals of starving children. The resulting aid is taken in a direction that fails to fully embrace the notion that sustainable development is a lengthy and extensive process; and a media generated six-month emergency response to a situation of chronic poverty is both inadequate and inappropriate.

Thirdly, the over excess of short-term funding raised by frenzied media interest in a disaster is not conducive to responsible programming. The appropriate direction for humanitarian programming to take is to start with a situation in which people require assistance (a project), and then to seek the funding to respond to the particular needs with an appropriate programme. In high-profile disasters a “good proportion of NGOs start not with a project in search of resources, but with resources in search of a project.” (Porter, 2002:3) The driving force in noisy emergencies is often the need to spend all the money that has been raised within a specified time – in these cases, NGOs become the victims of their own fundraising achievements. This is a “recipe for poor programming” (Porter, 2002:3).

These are the general consequences of a distorted perception of the developing world. How, exactly, does the perception become so distorted? And how does the relationship between the media and NGOs (within the crisis triangle) influence the representation generated? These are the subsidiary perception questions to be applied to Darfur as a case study.

When analysing the media representation of humanitarian crises it is important to recognise that the media are not one homogenous, coordinated actor, with one single, static, and agreed upon, agenda. The media are “neither monolithic or homogeneous. They are a diverse, highly competitive, unpredictable lot.” (Gowing, 1997:24). This is something that NGOs have repeatedly failed to appreciate in the past. In all the strategies that have been recommended over the last two decades, there is a consistent urging for NGOs to improve their media relations, particularly within the realm of understand the complexities and limitations of both the media as an institution, and the nature of the news cycle. But there is little evidence to suggest that this has happened.

The starting point of the news cycle is determined by various dynamics establishing ‘newsworthiness’. There is not an absolute value of newsworthiness, but instead a complex fusion of many different elements – “[u]nderstanding news as the dynamic commodity within a competitive process qualifies any notion of an intrinsic or net news value.” (UNDP, 1997:39).

The factors involved in determining the newsworthiness of a crisis include both facts and perceptions. The location of the emergency is a fact. The importance of the location lies in both the proximity to the media-base country (Haiti, in the early 1990s, for example, received significantly more coverage in the nearby US than it did in Europe) and also the geo-political importance of the region to the media-base country.

Empathy is important, more as a perception than as an intractable fact. A crisis will have a better chance of becoming a story if the intended audience can empathise, in some way, with those that are suffering. Boltanski (1999:4) argues that the fundamental difference between compassion and pity is that true compassion is only possible with a degree of empathy. Compassion will always outweigh pity for any media interest in a foreign news story. The phenomenal response to the tsunami was largely due to the number of western tourists in Sri Lanka and Indonesia at the time. It was easier for western audiences to empathise with their bereaved compatriots than it was to empathise with, for example, local Indonesian fishermen. The western media coverage of the tsunami reflected this, and some of the most powerful images generated were not those of the disaster zone itself, but of grieving mothers from western countries.

Simplicity is another aspect – again, more as perception than as actual fact. Simplicity for the international media does not imply that the situation itself is simple, but rather that the inherent complexities can be easily stripped away, leaving a story about “good people to whom bad things are happening” (UNDP, 1997:76). Graham Wood, head of the NGO Ockenden International, suggested that a significant attraction to the Asian tsunami for the media was that there was no “complex political undercurrent” (Reuters, 2005, Mar 10[a]:2). There were, of course, many political complexities within the countries affected by the Asian tsunami, but these complexities were not relevant to the tsunami itself. A straightforward, natural disaster is an easier emergency from a purely journalistic perspective.

Another factor in determining newsworthiness is the number of people affected by the crisis. In most emergencies the number of people affected or killed will only ever be an estimate, and these estimates will routinely vary wildly depending on the source.

The importance of this factor comparative to others appears to be particularly low. There are numerous examples of forgotten emergencies with extremely high death tolls over the previous twenty years: south Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, and Angola, to name but a few. Journalist Mark Jones observed that the under-estimation of the initial death toll in the Asian tsunami inadvertently worked in favour of retaining media intrigue:

With Bam [the 2003 Iranian earthquake] the first estimates were horrendous. They rapidly were downgraded and after day three by and large the media had lost interest. In this one [the Asian tsunami] the total just got horrendously worse and worse day on day...and that meant that there was a constant refreshing of news editors' interest in this story...(Reuters, 2005, Mar 10[a]:7)

Suitability for the particular media format is also important. Long-standing chronic issues tend to receive more coverage via documentaries and commentaries, rather than headline news. NGOs have been urged to utilise these media outlets more than they currently do. Suitability for headline news, and in particular television news, requires a certain 'telegenicity' that can derive from mass population movement, mass displacement and visible starvation – particularly of children. Regarding again the tsunami response, the number of western tourists there at the time ensured that hard-hitting and powerful interviews could be conducted in real-time, as those being interviewed spoke English. This made the Asian tsunami eminently suitable for television in particular. In contrast, any interviews conducted, for example, in Darfur, must be done so through a translator, which reduces the power of the impact for the audience at home.

The novelty of the story is a comparatively strong factor. News, by its very nature, is new. Unfortunately, people dying in Africa is not new, whilst “people being swept out to sea, killed in five minutes from a big wave that came up the beach, that is new” (Reuters, 2005, Mar 10[a]:31).

The timing of the story is the last major determinant of newsworthiness, with Gowing claiming that “vivid coverage will only create major national political resonance if, by chance, it hits a critical, often unpredictable void in the news cycle” (Gowing, 1997:19). This generally occurs during the northern hemisphere summer months

when most western legislatures are on vacation. Alternatively, disasters during the festive Christmas season also attract comparatively more media attention due to high levels of general benevolence.

An example of how all these factors coalesce – or not – is Niger. In the summer of 2005, Niger enjoyed a brief spell at the top of the crisis pile. Niger holds no strategic geo-political importance for any country in the western world. With the possible exception of its ex-colonial master, France, there is limited knowledge in the west of where the country is situated. The number of people affected within the emergency was not particularly high when compared to its silent counterparts. At the time of the Niger food crisis, there were also food crises in half a dozen other African countries that received no mainstream media coverage. There was little novelty to the story. The only defined factors that were even relevant were the suitability for the media format, and the timing of the story. The suitability for media format – in this case predominantly television – consisted of visibly malnourished children all collected together for ease of filming within therapeutic feeding centres, as evidenced by the predominant visuals from the MSF feeding centres in Maradi and Tahoua, rather than any reporting from the villages where over ninety-five percent of the population remained. The timing of the story was the traditional ‘slow’ summer months. Yet this does not explain why Niger fleetingly became a noisy emergency, when other comparable food crisis situations remained silent. What was the ‘X-factor’? What led to the critical mass, or tipping point, of newsworthiness for Niger? This is a question that has not yet been comprehensively answered, either for Niger or in general.

Once newsworthiness has been determined – that is, once a confluence of elements has led to a critical mass of media attention – is media influence upon policy decisions an inevitable consequence? The notion of a direct cause-and-effect link between media coverage and policy action (and so conversely, between lack of media coverage and lack of policy action) is highly disputed. This may seem to contradict the consensus that the media have a “profound impact on complex emergencies” (Adam, 1999:5). Yet the influence of the media can be examined in two distinct areas: influence upon the general public (specifically in relation to fundraising), and influence upon policymakers in relation to framing policy decisions.

The influence of the media on the general western public is not disputed. The media impact on actual policy decisions is significantly more difficult to evaluate. There are many different dynamics within the crisis triangle that affect any international response to a crisis. The UNDP training tool proposed a further framework within which to analyse media influence (UNDP, 1997:20). This framework suggested four stages of crisis response, relating to four stages of policymaking. These stages were defined as discovery, inundation, business-as-usual, and wind-down. The correlating stages of policymaking consisted of setting the agenda, delineating alternatives, adopting policy, and implementing decisions. Within this framework, it was suggested that only on “rare occasion are the media the primary impetus to a government’s course of action.” (UNDP, 1997:47). Other commentators have advanced this debate, suggesting that the only genuine chance the media have in influencing policy is within moments of “policy panic” (Gowing, 1997:8). Where there is a lack of clearly defined policy within western governments (as prime policymakers within the international community) then the media can be seen to fill that vacuum and become a determinant in framing policy initiatives.

The notion of media influence intensifying within moments of “policy panic” is convincing. General consideration of the topic of media and humanitarian action has grown exponentially as technology allows more real-time coverage from remote corners of the world; but this has happened within the same time-scale as the end of the Cold War and a certain policy vacuum within western governments suddenly adrift in a world void of a clearly defined enemy. The resulting global ‘disorder’ guaranteed a degree of policy panic, as more complex situations arose without any clear framework within which to define them.

The Chairman of the US Congressional Committee on Somalia claimed that “[p]ictures of the starving children, not policy objectives, got us into Somalia in 1992. Pictures of U.S. casualties, not the completion of our objectives, led us to exit Somalia.” (UNDP, 1997:62). This is a prime example of media influence during a time when the US appeared to have ill-defined foreign policy objectives, emerging as they were from the bipolarised Cold War and having not yet entered the newly bipolarised ‘war on terror’ environment. The US intervention and subsequent

withdrawal from Somalia in 1992, influenced heavily by the media, can be directly contrasted with current US involvement in Iraq where extremely clear policy objectives withstand any influence that the media (or even the American public) may try to assert.

Policy as defined here relates to a proactive attempt to address and resolve the fundamental issues underlying a crisis, rather than the generation of funding leading to palliative efforts. Darfur itself:

makes clear the limits of media attention alone. In the Western world, the situation in Darfur is now relatively well known...but it has done nothing to stop the ongoing killing or return people to their home (Evans, 2005, Mar 9)

This serves to illustrate the above hypothesis; when policymakers have clearly defined policy objectives, the influence of the media in swaying those objectives is extremely limited. In relation to Darfur, western governments and the United Nations were unequivocal in their objectives for the north-south Sudanese peace process. There was an explicit understanding amongst policymakers regarding how far they were willing to address the issue of Darfur without jeopardising their objectives for the north-south peace process. Within this context, the capacity of the media to influence policy decisions was minimal.

The previous paragraphs have examined the factors involved in determining the newsworthiness of humanitarian situations, and the extent to which the media can influence policy action within crises. The same topic can be examined from the opposite side of the fence – i.e. an NGO perspective.

It is not just the media, but also aid organisations themselves who are accused of producing a wholly inaccurate portrait of the developing world. NGOs have long since viewed the primary function of their media relations as one of fundraising. A long-standing dilemma within the aid community is how to continue to raise funds, within an increasingly competitive industry, whilst portraying a more dignified, respectful, and essentially truthful view of the developing world. Dry, bland and educational images are ineffective for fundraising purposes. It is dramatic, heart-

wrenching images that generate the funds necessary to respond to disasters. Many might question why this is even problematic. Surely the primary goal is for funds to be generated and a response initiated, and anything else is of secondary importance?

There are three fundamental dilemmas for NGOs regarding PR and media relations. These dilemmas can broadly be defined as financial, ethical and practical. Firstly, there is the financial dilemma. Currently, few formal donor (government) budget-lines include any resources for media relations. Public relations, or media relations, is viewed as a more general, peripheral organisational cost and traditionally government aid-allocation departments will not welcome project proposals that include funding for media relations.

This results in each NGO deciding how to utilise their informal (public) donations. NGOs receive varying percentages of their overall annual budget from the general public. Médecins Sans Frontières, for example, avoid formal governmental funding (precisely because it is so restrictive) and rely almost one hundred percent on public donations. Other organisations have a more fifty-fifty split between formal and public donations and others still rely almost exclusively on formal, government donations.

Public donations are, by their very nature, contributed as a result of NGO fundraising activities. It is the public expectation that NGOs will use the donated funds wisely, and with only the humanitarian imperative in mind. The western public are generally happy to donate money to a particular cause in the knowledge that the money will go directly towards food, medicines and other essential requirements for a population in need. They would likely feel less benevolent if they believed that their hard-earned donations were funding competitive benefit packages for public relations experts. Therefore many NGOs are reluctant to utilise vast amounts of public funds for the more peripheral activities such as media relations.

Some believe that the resolution of this dilemma is a straightforward internal business decision. Journalist Andrew Gilligan used the example of Médecins Sans Frontières who spend a significant proportion of their funds on professional media relations:

[MSF] has a very, very active media relations department and it gets massive coverage. You can hardly see any disaster coverage without some telegenic young French doctor with fresh stubble appearing on the television screen...ultimately it is a professional decision, and if you want the coverage you simply have to invest. If you want to carry on doing the best you can within available resources it will be hard to complain that the media is not receptive to your messages. (Reuters, 2005, Mar 10[a]:26)

It is important to fully appreciate the catch-22 nature of this. NGOs compete to keep administration costs as low as possible, so being regarded as responsible, which is essential in order to capture as much of the limited public funding as possible. But in order to raise their profile they must generate media coverage, which unavoidably involves raising their administration costs by developing larger and more professional media relations departments. This financial dilemma represents a conflict between fundraising and operational aid.

Secondly, there is the ethical dilemma. This dilemma has two components. The first component is the discord between fundraising and advocacy. At different levels, the function of media relations encompasses both fund-raising and the more problematic notion of advocacy. Advocacy itself can be either general or political. In the most simplistic terms, advocacy means speaking on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves. The fund-raising dilemma for NGOs is how to portray those being assisted in a dignified, noble and accurate manner (the general advocacy requirement) whilst still ensuring that the necessary funds for a response are raised (the fundraising requirement). This is the tension between fund-raising and advocacy functions within an NGO.

The second component of the ethical dilemma is that political advocacy is specific to the situation within which the emergency response is taking place. It involves raising general awareness (and so contributing to a more accurate perception) of the geopolitical complexities of the situation. This necessarily involves taking a stand. NGOs are, by very definition, 'non-governmental'. The second component of the ethical dilemma essentially stems from how 'non-governmental' is defined. It is fair to say that NGOs do not actively dictate policy in an emergency, but how far should their advocacy efforts go towards influencing policy? Within the narrowest

definition, ‘non-governmental’ is taken to be entirely neutral and apolitical, with the role of the NGO being one based solely on the humanitarian imperative – the sole objective of assisting those who are suffering. The problem with this is that in most complex emergencies local government policy must be changed to effect any sustainable improvement. Within this context the role of the entirely neutral and apolitical NGO becomes at best, nothing more than palliative, and at worst, complicit with the human rights abuses taking place by not exposing them.

At the other end of the scale, ‘non-governmental’ could be defined as, quite simply, not a government institution. This definition allows partisan commentary by the NGO in complex situations in terms of identifying crimes and denouncing the perpetrators.

It is critical to comprehend that, much as the media cannot be seen to be one homogenous, coordinated group, with one agreed upon agenda, neither can the NGO community. Different NGOs undertake different levels of advocacy. It has been noted that:

It is unrealistic and even undesirable for NGOs in particular to organise themselves into a monolithic mouthpiece; however, cacophony and disarray often makes them, in the eyes of the media and policymakers, their own worst enemies. (UNDP, 1997:87)

The perception of “cacophony and disarray” produced when NGOs all operate from different advocacy positions is actually a secondary issue. The primary issue is that each NGO must decide to what degree they will undertake advocacy activities on the basis of their understanding of the definition of ‘non-governmental’. This academic decision is followed by a practical decision, which becomes the third dilemma for NGOs: to what extent will advocacy activities potentially endanger operational activities?

Whilst it is understood that the media can have a huge impact on the direction of a humanitarian response, and whilst it is also understood that there is a requirement for humanitarian players to provide information regarding the situation on the ground, there is also a clear practical danger that arises when operational aid organisations

Speak publicly about the situation. Whilst advocacy is, by its nature, designed to open up the humanitarian space, there are

tensions between denouncing observed human rights abuses and enjoying the continued cooperation of the authorities. While advocacy is designed to expand the available humanitarian space, it may end up by contracting it. Assertive media relations by one agency can shrink the space enjoyed by others. (UNDP, 1997:88)

In many complex emergencies, including Darfur, assertive advocacy will at best lead to a diminished capacity to provide assistance to those in need, at worst it will lead to a physical danger to the lives of aid workers. In many complex emergencies, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, aid worker deaths have been firmly linked to public advocacy stands taken by aid organisations. The deliberate targeting of aid workers within conflict situations is a growing trend, and advocacy efforts on the part of operational humanitarian organisations are contributing to a general blurring of the notion of the NGO humanitarian imperative.

These three dilemmas comprise an NGO crisis triangle between advocacy, fundraising, and operational aid. To recap, the financial dilemma represents the conflict between fundraising and operational aid; the ethical dilemma represents the conflict between advocacy and fundraising; and the practical dilemma represents the conflict between advocacy and operational aid. This NGO crisis triangle is central to the question of perception. It is the unavoidable conflicts within the NGO crisis triangle that result in a distorted NGO depiction of the developing world and this subsequently informs media representation. Is misrepresentation an inevitable consequence of the NGO triangle, or can the perception generated be improved?

The effects of a distorted western awareness of the developing world have been discussed above on page 14 in relation to media representation. Notwithstanding the concept of universal truth, and the desirability of accuracy of perception as a goal in itself, the media focus on the dramatic and the negative perpetuates the myth that people in developing countries are helpless victims with no capacity for helping themselves, and that Africa in particular will never improve. This is compounded by a general western belief that Africa as a continent consists entirely of highly corrupt

regimes that divert aid money into their own pockets. There are many corrupt African regimes, but the western belief that all African countries are essentially corrupt is inaccurate. This perception, fed by the international media, fails to recognise the difference between, for example, Zimbabwe and Botswana – the former having an exceptionally questionable regime, the latter having a strong, democratically elected government. A 2005 report on global corruption (Transparency International, 2005) led to an article in the Kenya *Standard* headlining “Africa worst offender on world corruption list” (*Standard*, 2005, Oct 19), but the article failed to highlight that the report actually revealed that out of the top forty worst offenders, fewer than half were in Africa.

From an NGO perspective, accuracy of representation is embedded within various self-regulatory guidelines for the NGO community, including the International Committee of the Red Cross Code of Conduct that most responsible NGOs abide by. Article 10 of the Red Cross Code of Conduct states that “In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognise disaster victims as dignified humans, not helpless objects.” (ICRC, 1994:3).

The two main components within this issue are those of dignity, and local focus, and these components are inextricably linked. Most images of famines highly overemphasise the international aspect, with visuals of people helping themselves rarely shown. Experts suggest that in all disasters, ninety percent of people are saved by friends and family; ten percent by other local people; and only 0.01% by foreign aid workers. (Gidley, 2004, Jan 14). During the Asian tsunami, the media were accused of disproportionally focussing on ‘helpless victims’ and “ignoring recovery work by local people” (Gidley, 2004, Jan 14). It was all about western aid workers going to help, which is such a very, very small part of the reality.

In the UK, the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) is an umbrella organisation of various aid agencies. A critical self-evaluation of the DEC response to the 2001 earthquake in western India stated that the “DEC appeal photograph of an old man with his hands raised in supplication failed to emphasise the dignity of the people it was aimed at helping” (Gidley, 2004, Jan 14) and so contradicted the Red Cross Code of Conduct. It was, quite simply, “ignoble to portray”. (Gidley, 2004, Jan 14).

The consequences of NGO media departments failing to fully emphasise the dignity of the person or give due attention to local efforts are the same as those of mainstream media institutions. These include the perpetuation of the myth that people in developing countries are nothing more than pitiful victims, leading to a growing fatigue for donating money, particularly for Africa. The consequences also include the available funding being directed towards short-term noisy emergencies at the expense of long-term silent emergencies, and within noisy emergencies, an overabundance of funding resulting in less responsible programming.

Unlike media institutions, most responsible NGOs are signatories of the International Red Cross Code of Conduct. Whilst NGOs do have an obvious fundraising requirement, they also have a greater responsibility for accuracy of portrayal than the international media do. As most NGOs work in both noisy and silent emergencies, there is an additional self-serving interest to change the perception and so direct aid more proportionally to long-term development projects as well as short-term disasters. And if the primary responsibility for international media *should* be to inform and enlighten, but is in reality to find a newsworthy story: than the primary function of NGO media relations *has* to be to inform and enlighten, but is always complicated by the fundraising requirement.

The three original questions will be applied throughout the main body of this study specifically to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. The first question related to the factors involved in determining which emergencies become noisy, and which remain silent, and the subsequent news-story life span of noisy emergencies. According to the UNDP Disaster Management training document, there are seven defined factors in determining the newsworthiness of humanitarian stories: location, empathy, simplicity, numbers, suitability, novelty and timing. A confluence of at least some of these factors is necessary for a story to gain – and then sustain – media attention. The Darfur crisis will be examined within the context of these factors to establish which were most applicable to Darfur initially gaining attention, and subsequently retaining it for such a sustained period of time.

The second question related to media representation of noisy emergencies. Once an emergency has become noisy, how accurately do media and NGOs portray that situation? What effects does this representation have on the resulting humanitarian response and the political response?

The final question was one of perception: How distorted is the perception? Is it inevitably so, or can it be changed? And what are the consequences of a distorted perception? The three major practical consequences of a distorted perception are an increasing level of crisis fatigue; the disproportional funding for noisy emergencies at the expense of silent emergencies; and less responsible programming within noisy emergencies. These three consequences reflect the significance of a distorted perception, but the question to be considered is how strongly did they apply to Darfur?

The distorted perception is generated by both mainstream western media and NGOs. NGOs face three dilemmas within the sphere of media relations. The financial dilemma reflects a conflict between operational aid and fundraising necessities. The ethical dilemma reflects a conflict between fundraising and advocacy, and the practical dilemma reflects a conflict between advocacy and operational aid. These three dilemmas therefore represent the NGO crisis triangle. This study will consider how relevant these three dilemmas were to NGOs operational in Darfur.

CHAPTER TWO

DARFUR: A HISTORIC BACKGROUND

In order to understand the circumstances within which the Darfur crisis emerged it is necessary to provide an historical background to both the Sudan as a country, and Darfur as a region. This history of the Sudan and Darfur is intended to provide a context within which to understand the following study. It is far from a complete history and provides only the information that is considered to be directly relevant. The demographic information for the Sudan is collated predominantly from UN data systems: UNDP statistics, UN Security Council Reports, and ReliefWeb, an UN-administrated humanitarian website.

At 2.5 million square kilometres, the Sudan is the largest country in Africa with an estimated population of thirty-nine million people. Whilst the demographics can be broadly summarised as an Islamic Arabic north (70% of the whole country) and a Non-Islamic African south (Animist, 25% and Christian 5%), a multitude of tribes and more than one hundred and thirty languages ensure that the “elements that constitute national identity in the Sudan are complex.” (UN 2005, Feb 1:18) In 2005 the Sudan was ranked 141 out of 177 on the UN HDI (human development index) scale. The HDI scale is only capable of ranking countries as a whole. In the Sudan, the relatively prosperous north is taken in conjunction with the extremely poor south to result in the ranking of 141. South Sudan itself is generally believed to be one of the poorest regions on the planet.

Since gaining independence from British-Egyptian rule in 1956, the Sudan has fluctuated between democratic and military rule. Democracy prevailed in the first two years of independence, then again between 1965 and 1969, and between 1985 and 1989. At all other times, the country has been under military rule. General Ibrahim Abbud came to power through a military coup in 1958, and it was his fundamentalist Islamic rule that originally led to unrest in the (mainly non-Islamic) south. This unrest escalated and by 1963 an organised armed rebellion was occurring. The SPLM/A (the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement/Army) was formed, consisting of non-Islamic African southerners. The imposition of Sharia law on the mainly non-

Islamic population of south Sudan was the initiating cause of the rebellion, but the resulting two-decade civil war was not solely about religious differences. The rebels in south Sudan were predominantly fighting for a fairer allocation of resources within the Sudan.

In 1964 general public disorder resulted in the resignation of General Abbud, and a more secular transitional government. Another military coup in 1969, this time led by Colonel Gaafar Mohammed Al-Nimeiri, saw the Sudan revert to a strict political Islam state. In 1972 Al-Nimeiri signed a peace agreement with the rebels in the south that allowed for a degree of autonomy, and resulted in a level of peace over the following eleven years.

With the discovery of oil in the south in the late 1970s, the GoS (the Government of the Sudan) attempted to incorporate the oil rich areas of the south into the north, which coincided with the mounting influence of strictly political Islam factions within the regime in Khartoum. In September 1982 Sharia law was re-introduced. The rebellion movement in the south was re-born.

In 1985 Al-Nimeiri was overthrown in a military coup, and elections were subsequently held. In 1989 a further military coup overthrew the elected government and General Omer Hassan Al-Bashir took control. He remains the President to this day. After the 1989 military coup, political parties were banned and Sharia law was implemented more forcefully. In the 1998 elections President Bashir and his National Congress Party won 340 out of 360 seats. The democratic merit of this landslide victory was qualified by the lack of voter choice because most other major political parties boycotted the elections in protest over the increasingly militaristic style of governance. In 1999 there was an internal power struggle within the National Congress Party, following which President Bashir dissolved Parliament and declared a state of emergency.

Since 1983, the north-south civil war in the Sudan has had an enormous impact. It was the longest running recognised conflict in Africa (UN, 2005, Feb 1:20), and left an estimated two million people dead and over four million people displaced. Peace talks were initiated in 2002 between the GoS and the SPLM/A, leading relatively

quickly to the Machakos Protocol of July 2002, which established a broad framework for negotiations. The further Naivasha Protocols of 2003 and 2004 led to the conclusion of the peace process on 31st December 2004, a permanent ceasefire, and the end to twenty-one years of civil war.

On 9th January 2005 President Al-Bashir and John Garang, the leader of the SPLM/A, signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (the CPA). The CPA included all previously agreed protocols including those on wealth-sharing and power-sharing. It established a broader-based federal system of governance, including the establishment of the GoSS (Government of south Sudan). In July 2005 John Garang, under the terms of the CPA, became First Vice-President in the newly named Government of National Unity, relegating Ali Osmā Mohamed Taha, the existing Vice-President, to the position of Second Vice-President. Less than three weeks later John Garang died in a helicopter crash, an incident that rocked the peace process but did not destroy it. Salva Kir Mayardit, another former SPLM/A leader, took his place.

The Sudan has historically functioned as a gateway between Africa and the Arab world: this is “reflected by the presence in Khartoum of the Arab Bank for African Development” (US State Department, 2006). This represents a tangible significance of the Sudan to the stability of the Horn of Africa region. In addition, the Sudan has particular significance to western political and economic interests: politically because of its position as a “gateway” between Christian Africa and Islamic Arabia, and economically because of vast reserves of oil.

Darfur is an area in western Sudan (located just north of the north/south divide). Darfur borders Chad, the Central African Republic, and Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. In 1994 the extremely large region of Darfur (approximately two hundred and fifty thousand square kilometres) was divided into three administrative states: North Darfur, South Darfur, and West Darfur. The three state capitals are, respectively, El Fasher, Nyala, and El Geneina. Darfur is home to between six and eight million people.

Darfur was historically a sultanate, which fell into British hands in 1917 and was subsequently incorporated into the Sudan. The traditional tribal structure is still

evident in Darfur, but it was significantly weakened by the introduction of local government administration during Al-Nimeiri's rule.

The name 'Darfur' means 'the homeland (Dar) of the Fur', the largest of the African tribes. Other major tribes include the Baggara, the Zaghawa, the Rizeiqat, the Ma'aliya, the Masalit, and the Gimr. Conflict over scarce resources is not new in Darfur. But in recent decades the traditional tribal mechanisms for resolving conflicts have been weakened as administration has become more centralised. Colonial rule until 1956 relied exclusively on the "Idara Ahlia" – literally translated as "tribal administration" but according to Morton, more accurately translated as "civil administration" (Morton, 2004:9). Within this system judicial power was wholly in the hands of the traditional tribal leaders which enabled the resolution of disputes to occur in a manner that "lasted and that appears to have been generally accepted." (Morton, 2004:19).

Morton observed that it was perhaps "inevitable that the ad hoc, evolutionary approach to civil administration should come to be seen as old-fashioned, colonial and inappropriate" (Morton, 2004:10). After independence (particularly from al-Nimeri's rule from 1969 onwards) the Idara Ahlia was steadily weakened in favour of a more formalised, centralised structure of administration. As one example of this, land laws were changed in the 1970s; whilst, historically, land ownership was a collective tribal affair, now individual land ownership was encouraged. Within the Idara Ahlia system the state itself was always viewed as impartial and neutral, but it became a partisan force when loyalty to the state would result in individual land ownership and the related power. According to Morton, it was the very weakening of the centuries-old traditional tribal system that significantly contributed to the present conflict in Darfur.

So the population composition of Darfur consists of a multitude of different tribes; some African, and some Arabic, some sedentary pastoralists and some nomadic cattle-herders. In general, the African tribes tend towards pastoralism whilst the Arabic tribes tend towards more nomadic life-styles, but this is certainly not a clear-cut division:

Although many do so, it is false to equate Arab with nomad and Non-Arab with settled farmer. The largest Arab tribes are collectively known as Baggara, literally ‘cattlemen’. Nevertheless, the Habbanai, a major Baggara tribe, were described as principally farmers as early as 1905. More recently some Fur [the largest African tribe] have taken up nomadic cattle management (Morton, 2004:7)

Everyone in Darfur is Muslim, and has been for a very long time, with African tribes converting as early as the sixteenth century. Arabic tribes have been in Darfur for at least eight centuries. (Morton, 2004:7).

Desertification and drought during the 1970s and 1980s meant that scarce resources became scarcer, and tensions between sedentary agriculturalists and nomadic cattle-herders increased:

Corridors that were agreed upon among tribes to facilitate the movements of cattle for many years were not respected. As fertile land became scarce, settled people’s tolerance of the seasonal visitors diminished. (UN 2005, Feb 1:22)

Within this environment – one of complex and increasingly tense tribal relations, due in part to desertification, and in part to the government administration’s failure to resolve disputes as effectively as old tribal mechanisms – it became obvious that the rebellion in the south had made progress in forcing the GoS into negotiations. In this way it is necessary to view the conflict in Darfur within the context of the Sudan as a whole. Whilst the two conflicts are separate, and the issues different, ironically the resolution of one was a contributing feature in the commencement of the other. The willingness of the GoS to negotiate power and wealth sharing deals with the rebels in the south prompted the disenchanted people in the west (Darfur) to take up arms against the Government. The peace process in the south indicated that armed rebellion would ultimately force the GoS into negotiations and lead to political and economic gain. The Darfur rebels wanted similar concessions for Darfur.

So armed rebellion emerged in Darfur in 2001 and 2002, when initial signs suggested that the GoS was preparing to negotiate with the southern rebels. The two main rebel groups to emerge in Darfur at this time were the SLM/A (the Sudanese Liberation

Movement/Army) and the JEM (the Justice and Equality Movement). Neither of these groups were based on a tribal perspective but instead claimed to speak for all Darfurians. The common issue stated as the cause of the rebellion was the socio-economic and political marginalisation of the region.

The SLM/A were heavily influenced by the policies and ideology of the SPLM/A (the rebels in the south), whilst the JEM was much more influenced by the trends of political Islam. Both rebel groups were formed of Africans from various tribes (mainly the Fur, the Masalit and the Zaghawa) so giving credence to their claim that they were not speaking on behalf of only one tribe. Since 2004 other rebel groups, have emerged, including, for example, the NMRD (National Movement for Reform and Democracy), which split from the JEM. The SLM/A has also fractured and splintered. This has served to create more confusion within the politics of Darfur.

In February 2003 the SLM/A attacked the airport and a police station in El Fasher, North Darfur, destroying planes and killing a number of policemen. This was the culminating point of a growing insurgency that finally demanded serious attention from Khartoum. It is widely believed to be the starting point of the conflict: “the spark that set Darfur afire” (*Boston Review*, 2004, Oct). The GoS were faced with an inability to militarily respond to the rebellion in Darfur as the majority of their armed forces were still engaged in the south, and so they manipulated the existing friction between tribes in Darfur to their advantage:

...it is apparent that faced with a military threat from two rebel movements, combined with a serious deficit in terms of military capabilities on the ground in Darfur, the Government called upon local tribes to assist in fighting against the rebels. In this way, it exploited the existing tensions between different tribes. (UN, 2005, Feb 1:26).

This led to the emergence of the ‘Janjaweed’ (a traditional Arabic term for ‘bandit’ or ‘outlaw’ on horse or camel back). The Janjaweed consist mainly of nomadic cattle-herders and they were encouraged and allegedly armed by the GoS to fight against the rebels. The advantage of fighting for the Janjaweed was the re-securing of their traditional cattle-herding corridors. This was done through a scorched-earth campaign to displace those pastoralists with whom they would traditionally have

shared resources. It was done with the alleged direct support from the GoS (this is something the Government has always denied) and certainly with an astounding degree of official impunity thus signifying a level of Government acquiescence.

In addition to the principal issues of political and economic marginalisation, there was also a secondary grievance that Africans were overlooked in favour of Arabs for government positions. This exposes a clear ethnic element to the Darfur conflict. Yet this African/Arab division has been described as “more of a passive distinction in the past” that has “now become the reason for standing on different sides of the political divide” (UN, 2005, Feb 1:24). A 2005 NGO self-assessment in Darfur strived to understand the perspective of local staff. It concluded that whilst international staff “tended to focus on the aggressive behaviour of the ‘Arab’ Janjaweed”, by contrast, “local staff tended to see a much wider range of causes, including the marginalisation of Darfur over many years.” (Tearfund, 2005:4). The assessment determined that the:

sense of grievance among all Darfurians about neglect by the central government emerged as a clear unifying force that could play a role in the resolution of conflict. There was a surprising level of recognition that the ‘Janjaweed’ might be the villains of today but could be victims in the future. (Tearfund, 2005:5)

Local staff and local communities revealed a “very long perspective on their relationships with other tribes” (Tearfund, 2005:4), which included an historical understanding of when the Janjaweed had been the oppressed, and the Fur the oppressors. In this manner they showed a sophisticated comprehension of the cyclical nature of tribal clashes within Darfur. But they also firmly believed that the different tribes could live together in harmony as had been the case in the past and they were deeply “critical of government for creating divisions.” (Tearfund, 2005:4).

Understanding the perspective that Darfurians themselves have of their region – their tribal affiliations, their ethnicity, and their political allegiances – is tantamount to understanding the underlying causes of the conflict in Darfur. Whilst tribal affiliation is an issue, it is not the primary one. This is supported by the fact that the SLM/A and the JEM have fundamentally different political platforms, yet are formed from the

same tribal groups. The Tearfund assessment revealed that for local staff in Darfur, the aggressive behaviour of the Janjaweed was not the underlying cause of the conflict. The underlying cause of the conflict was rooted in the long-term marginalisation that initially prompted the rebellion, and resulted in a harsh government counter-insurgency campaign. The underlying cause of the conflict was the GoS – but not through the counter-insurgency campaign, rather through the years of neglect.

CHAPTER THREE

A REPRESENTATION OF DARFUR: INTRODUCTION

In late 2003 and early 2004 aid workers in the Sudan began to voice concerns about the intensifying violence and displacement in the Darfur region. Due to the lack of media interest at this time, these concerns were predominantly voiced internally within the NGO community and within the UN system. At this time the international community was unwilling to disturb the north-south Sudanese peace negotiations by making too many demands on the GoS in relation to Darfur. It has been suggested that the GoS deliberately manipulated that reluctance and prevaricated over the north-south negotiations for longer than was necessary, specifically to keep international attention away from Darfur as they attempted to quell the rebellion. Journalist Maggie Farley commented that “Sudan learned very quickly that we would not turn to the humanitarian crisis until we got the peace talks wrapped up.” (*Los Angeles Times*, 2004, Oct 28). In this way, the ongoing peace negotiations relating to the north-south civil war not only prompted rebellion in Darfur in the first place, but also significantly affected the international response to the escalating Darfur crisis.

So in January 2004 the Darfur conflict was not new. It was a crisis that had been steadily worsening since early 2003. The emergence of the SLM/A and the JEM in 2001 ensured that by January 2004 the region was already a well-established war zone. But it was only in 2004 that Darfur began to receive significant political and media attention from the international community. As this study is an examination of the representation of Darfur, it will focus on January 2004 onwards.

By October 2003 it was estimated that half a million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in Darfur, with up to 70,000 fleeing over the border into Chad (Islamic Relief, 2004). Peace negotiations began in August 2003, leading rapidly to the Abeche Agreement of September 2003. The Agreement was almost immediately ignored by all sides: the negotiations resumed again in December 2003 after Kofi Annan voiced his concern over the “rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation” in Darfur (UN 2003, Dec 9).

Yet from an international media perspective, Darfur remained particularly silent throughout 2003, despite the assertion by the White House that the US had identified the “nascent crisis” by April 2003, and “alerted” the world to the situation. (US White House, 2004, Jun 29). There were sporadic media reports on Darfur in late 2003, such as “Disaster looms in western Sudan” (BBC, 2003, Nov 10), but this occasional attention remained extremely low-key. Why?

Even during the first three months of 2004, international media were slow to report on the crisis. The gradually increasing coverage of the emergency from January onwards reached a preliminary tipping point in April 2004, when, in speeches commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, both Kofi Annan and George Bush cited the crisis in Darfur. This was followed in June 2004 by visits to Khartoum by Kofi Annan and Colin Powell and, in the same month, the first UN Security Council Resolution on Darfur. According to Farley, this was the “tipping point for international attention” (*Los Angeles Times*, 2004, Oct 28). What came first? Did the international attention follow the UN ‘action’ or did the UN action follow the increasing media attention?

The genocide issue acted as a platform from which the international media could launch a sustained and comprehensive interest in Darfur, particularly at this time of commemorating the tenth anniversary of Rwanda within a context of ‘never again’ refrains. In many respects the legalistic arguments concerning the definition of genocide overshadowed and detracted from the actual situation on the ground in Darfur.

In July 2004 the U.S. Congressional Black Caucus sponsored a congressional resolution terming the situation genocide. In September 2004 Colin Powell, on behalf of the US Administration, formally termed the situation genocide.

The UN has never termed the situation in Darfur genocide. The UN Darfur Commission of Inquiry (UNDCI) was established in November 2004 with one of its primary objectives being to determine whether genocide had occurred. On 31st January 2005, UNDCI reported back to the UN Security Council that conclusive

evidence of genocide had not been found. The Commission Report did conclude that crimes against humanity and war crimes had occurred.

The early accusations of genocide were a significant element in both the initial and continued media interest in Darfur. Religion was another significant factor. The US congressional bill that termed the situation genocide in July 2004, sponsored by the Congressional Black Caucus, was strongly supported by the influential Christian lobby, despite there being very few, if any, Christians in Darfur. The early lack of understanding regarding the religious, ethnic and tribal composition of Darfur underscored all media reporting throughout the crisis.

So in the first six months of 2004 there was an emerging focus on Darfur by both media and policymakers. The global context of the time is significant in analysing the representation of Darfur. A major part of this global context was the war in Iraq. Throughout 2004 and 2005 the war in Iraq secured a high percentage of international media focus. The sustained interest in Iraq was due to a variety of reasons: the controversy of the war, the high-profile deaths, particularly of US soldiers, scandals such as Abu Ghraib, and the pivotal position of the war in the US-declared war-on-terror. One US television news producer commented that since the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003 there had been “three foreign news priorities...Iraq, Iraq and Iraq.” (Evans, 2005, Mar 9).

One argument asserts that the controversy of the war in Iraq contributed to the strength of US policy regarding Darfur. The progressively vocal protestation from the US public against the Iraq war was problematic for the White House, particularly during an election year. Conversely, the US government could “safely assume the moral high ground” regarding Darfur (BBC, 2004, Jul 15). There was little domestic or international opposition to strong US rhetoric on Darfur, in contrast to the high level of opposition to US action in Iraq. For the US government, redirecting even some of the news focus away from Iraq and towards Darfur had logical benefits.

By July 2004 Darfur had achieved the critical mass of media attention necessary to qualify as a noisy emergency. Between July and December 2004 barely a day passed without an update on Darfur by mainstream western media institutions.

During the second half of 2004 Darfur provided an excellent example of the complex relationship between the three players within the crisis triangle. The expanded humanitarian response was the result of both increased funding and increased humanitarian access. The joint Communiqué of July 3rd, between the UN and the GoS, further improved humanitarian access. Sudanese embassies around the world changed visa regulations and aid workers were able to obtain visas within forty-eight hours. Travel permit requirements within Sudan were also eased, as were importation requirements for humanitarian resources. This increased access was a result of political pressure on the GoS, raised by both policymakers and international media. The increased funding was also a result of both policymaker and media attention. The critical mass of media coverage of Darfur achieved by July 2004 was a result of all of the players within the crisis triangle intensifying their focus on the crisis.

At this time there was also a growing celebrity interest in Darfur. In the UK Joanna Lumley (*Absolutely Fabulous* actress) launched a Darfur appeal; Mia Farrow visited Darfur; and Danny Glover (*Lethal Weapon* star) was arrested at a protest outside the Sudanese embassy in Washington.

Concurrent with the developing international political response, the humanitarian response in Darfur escalated exponentially during 2004. The number of aid workers in Darfur rose from just two hundred in March 2004 to nearly ten thousand (including almost one thousand international staff) by the end of the year. In the same period the number of conflict-affected people rose from approximately one million to nearly 2.5 million. The number of people killed in Darfur rose from an estimated three thousand at the beginning of 2004 to an estimated seventy thousand by the end of the year.

The increase in the number of aid workers was due to various dynamics. Firstly, the increasing media coverage of the crisis generated the funds required to intensify humanitarian operations. Secondly, in May 2004 the GoS removed many bureaucratic obstacles for humanitarian access and expedited visa application and travel permit procedures. Whilst this enabled considerably increased humanitarian access to Government-held areas, there was correspondingly limited access to rebel-held areas. The access to rebel-held areas briefly improved a few months later after

the rebels signed humanitarian access and security protocols, but throughout the conflict access to rebel-held areas has been problematic.

There were also multiple dynamics involved in the increase in the number of those affected by the conflict. As the crisis continued – and progressively prevented normal planting, harvesting, and marketing activities – more people became affected. At the same time, as humanitarian access expanded, more conflict-affected communities were discovered and could be assisted. There is also a recognised ‘pull’ factor of humanitarian operations. The pull factor in itself is a paradox of humanitarian operations: there is a very fine line between the positive (and necessary) benefits of a massive humanitarian relief operation and the potential negative effects of creating problems of dependency.

The politically slanted media coverage during the second half of 2004 focused on a number of political initiatives, which served to keep the story fresh. These reports concentrated on the attention given to Darfur by powerful political individuals: “Powell delivers tough message to Sudan” (BBC, 2004, Jul 1), “Danforth moves swiftly on Sudan” (CNN, 2004, Jul 07), “Annan: Chaos looms in Darfur” (CNN, 2004, Dec 7).

There was a lot of political activity within the second half of 2004. The UN and the GoS signed the July Communiqué intended to open up humanitarian access to the region. Following on from the first UN Security Council Resolution on Darfur in June, there were two further Resolutions in July and September. In August the UN and the GoS agreed a ‘Darfur Plan of Action’ designed to secure certain ‘safe areas’ for a defined time period. The White House formally accused the GoS of genocide in September. The UN Darfur Commission of Inquiry (UNDCI) arrived in Darfur in November, with the specific objective of determining whether or not genocide had occurred. In November, the GoS and the SLA and the JEM, the two main rebel groups, signed the Abuja protocols on humanitarian access and security in Darfur.

The first death of an international aid worker occurred in October 2004. Due to the rising insecurity and the deaths of four of their staff members, Save the Children UK reluctantly withdrew from Darfur in December 2004.

In 2005 new developments contributed to how the continuing Darfur saga was represented. In the early hours of 26th December 2004, a tsunami occurred in South East Asia. An earthquake measuring 8.9 on the Richter scale occurred off the west coast of northern Sumatra and resulted in an additional fifteen earthquakes in the Andaman region within the next twelve hours (Columbia University, 2005). This precipitated a tidal wave that catastrophically devastated half a dozen Asian countries. The estimated death toll eventually levelled out at 230,000.

The Asian tsunami resulted in a number of concerns regarding whether it had “killed other aid” (Kielthy, 2005, Jan 24) and relegated previously noisy emergencies (such as Darfur) to a more silent, or forgotten status. The sheer scale of media coverage that Darfur had gained throughout 2004 ensured that it did not become silent.

There were other significant international factors applicable to Darfur during the first half of 2005. Firstly, the long-awaited UN report on genocide was made public on 31st January. This re-ignited the genocide debate. The release of the film *Hotel Rwanda* continued to focus media and public interest on the subject of genocide.

The UN report also sparked a new debate on the International Criminal Court (the ICC). Referral of Darfur to the ICC was a central recommendation of the UN report. The United States has consistently and vehemently opposed the ICC and it was unclear whether they would veto any Security Council resolution referral to the ICC. The US in fact abstained from the Security Council vote and in March 2005 Darfur became the first ever situation to be referred to the ICC by the Security Council.

Secondly, on 9th January 2005 the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (the CPA) was formally signed between the GoS and the SPLM/A in the south, officially ending twenty-one years of civil war. The international importance placed on reaching a north-south peace agreement had been perceived by many as a diluting influence on efforts to resolve the crisis in Darfur.

The signing of the CPA also introduced the southern rebels into the Sudanese government. There were high hopes that with the southern rebels – sympathetic and

empathetic to the demands of marginalized communities – integrated into the Sudanese government structure there would be more progress in peace negotiations. Sporadic Darfur peace negotiations had been in progress since 2003. Unfortunately, the September 2003 Abeche Agreement, the April 2004 N'djamena Ceasefire Agreement, the May 2004 Addis Ababa Agreement and the November 2004 Abuja Protocols did little to halt the ongoing violence in Darfur.

The conclusion of the CPA also unleashed an influx of rehabilitation and restructuring funding for southern Sudan – this was the carrot offered by the international community. The UN proposed a fund of \$2.6 billion for the 2005-2007 rehabilitation work plan in the Sudan, to embracing the war-ravaged south, and other marginalized areas including Darfur. The signing of the CPA triggered the first serious discussions within the humanitarian community about harmonizing existing and future aid work in the south and in Darfur.

In the first six months of 2005 there were several negative developments in Darfur, in particular affecting the security of aid workers. There was a sharp rise in general banditry and lawlessness that was not formally linked to particular rebel groups or organised armed militia groups. In March 2005 a USAID representative was shot in the face in south Darfur. She fortunately survived the attack, but this was the first instance of an international USAID worker being shot. It was the second case of an international aid worker being attacked in Darfur – the first being Rafe Bullick (Save the Children UK) who was killed by a landmine in October 2004. As landmines are – to an extent – indiscriminate, the USAID official was the first international aid worker to be directly targeted as a representative of the west.

In March 2005 two international staff members from the French NGO Solidarités were arrested in Darfur. In May 2005 two international staff members from the Dutch branch of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF-H) were also arrested. These incidents highlighted the ethical dilemma for NGOs between advocacy and operational aid.

This introduction is intended to provide an overview of the issues to be discussed within this paper. The representation of Darfur – whether by the international media,

policymakers, or humanitarian actors – is entangled within political developments in the Sudan and within the global context of the time. The subject is, by its very nature, messy and chaotic and the factors, perceptions and effects of the representation are all interrelated. This study attempts to extract the individual components from the confusion.

CHAPTER FOUR

DARFUR NEWSWORTHINESS: WHY DID WE CARE?

The 1st Black-White factor: Oversimplification in a post-September 11th World

What can be referred to as a 'black-white' factor – a bi-polarised world in which armed conflict is reduced to a basic fight between good and evil – is a consistent feature in recent history. The Cold War conditions post-1945 allowed a context within which this good vs. evil struggle could become embedded, with no possibility of convergence – instead only a fragile *détente* and the eventual collapse of one side and so the victory of the other.

The end of the Cold War led to a world 'disorder' in which the lack of a visibly bipolarised setting was a major dilemma, particularly for western foreign policy. The September 11th attacks and the resulting US-led war on terror (in reality, a war on fundamentalist-Islamic terrorism) resolved this dilemma by providing the western world with a new 'black-white' fight between good and evil, this time a clash couched within a religious framework. Hishaam Aidi, of the Middle East Institute at Columbia University, states that "[v]arious reports assessing the impact of the September 11 attacks on American politics argue that the attacks reordered racial divisions" (Aidi, 2005:2). The reordered racial divisions pitted Arabs against the rest of the world in a manner that did not previously exist. Aidi notes that "Richard Pryor used to joke that 'nigger' was the first word an immigrant would learn to fit in. Now the word is 'Islamic terrorist'" (Aidi, 2005:16). However irreverent, this demonstrates how quickly white Americans in particular replaced their fear of African-Americans with their fear of Arabs. Within this new global context the Sudanese situation was predictably highlighted as a setting rich in Arab/African and Islam/Christian divisions.

Even prior to September 11th, Morton believed that recent history – notably the first Gulf war – "led to a hardening of both GOS's position and of western attitudes to Sudan." (Morton, 2004:5). This hardening of attitudes, specifically against fundamentalist Islamic governments, was a growing characteristic of the world

throughout the 1990s and beyond, inexorably reinforced by the events of September 2001. Countries with strong Islamic tendencies are currently viewed by the west as, at best, worrying, and at worst, determined enemies of the global structure.

For Darfur, there was initial media confusion with the north-south civil war that became inextricably entangled with the notion of a simplistic struggle between good and evil. The result was an inaccurate media-led characterisation of the Darfur conflict as one that was between “settled farmers from African tribes” and “Arab nomads” (*Observer*, 2004, May 30).

The rebel groups in Darfur initially claimed to speak on behalf of *all* Darfurians, African and Arab alike, thereby negating any notion of a ‘clean’ division on ethnic grounds. Additionally, centuries of intermarriage and the porous nature of tribal affiliations in Darfur have resulted in many individuals being ethnically ‘blurred’. The premise that the Darfur conflict is a struggle between settled African farmers and nomadic Arabic cattlemen is dangerously simplistic. Media focus on this simplistic division served to accentuate differences that shouldn’t have been accentuated, and so failed to represent the conflict accurately.

That is not to say that tribal and ethnic differences within Darfur were not mobilised. There was both an ethnic and tribal element to the conflict, but it was neither the only nor the primary element. The fact that the “Arab-African dichotomy is historically and anthropologically bogus” does not mean that the “distinction is unreal, as long as the perpetrators subscribe to it.” (*Boston Review*, 2004, Oct). The perpetrators did both subscribe to, and manipulate, the distinction. Ethnic and tribal differences were deliberately accentuated by a variety of parties – the GoS, the rebel groups, and the international media – to make them part of the “reason for standing on different sides of the political divide” (UN 2005, Feb 1:24). The more complex underlying causes of the crisis were well understood by those who ended up standing on the different sides of the political divide – the Tearfund assessment found categorically that “local staff had extensive knowledge of the causes and factors relating to the conflict” (Tearfund, 2005:4). But little effort was made by the media to even begin to explore those more complex underlying issues.

The media oversimplification of African vs. Arabic became more insidious because it was perpetuated within the current religious global bipolarisation. All Darfurians have been Muslim for many centuries. In May 2004 a BBC online ‘have your say’ forum (BBC, 2004, May 18[a]) revealed that an overwhelming majority of the general public who responded believed Darfur to be a religious struggle, with an Islamic government oppressing a Christian minority. It is clear that in the initial period of emerging international media coverage, the western world was not receiving an accurate picture.

A May 2004 article states, in reference to the north-south civil war, that “[l]argely because it involved Muslims enslaving Christians, the war gripped the imagination of America’s influential Christian lobby.” (*Economist*, 2004, May 13). Even though only a small minority of south Sudanese are actually Christian (approximately 15%, with 85% being Animist), the influence of the American Christian lobby was a significant domestic dynamic within US involvement in the north-south peace process. Ironically, the same ‘influential Christian lobby’ was also a significant factor in the growing US concern for Darfur. Aidi comments that “[g]iven that there were no Christian victims in Darfur to mobilize the Christian right, the Darfur campaign puzzled many Africa watchers.” (Aidi, 2005:11).

Further emphasising this division between Arab and African, Muslim and Christian, a journalist reported from a peace rally in Khartoum in May 2004 that “Muslim northerners and Christian and Animist southerners mixed freely at the rally, which...[is] not common.” (BBC 2004, May 28). It is not true that this was “not common”. There are approximately two million displaced southern Sudanese living in Khartoum in the north, many of whom have been there for more than a decade, and Khartoum is a phenomenally peaceful city. Until the death of John Garang in July 2005, Khartoum itself had not witnessed any real violence for decades and it is precisely because of this that the three days of riots resulting from Garang's death had such a profound impact on the city. Garang’s death provoked a southern against northern, African against Arab, Non-Muslim against Muslim violence that was all the more striking because of its previous absence in Khartoum. What the May 2004 BBC report achieved, as with a majority of the international reporting on Darfur at this

time, was a strengthening of the stereotype of a Muslim/Christian conflict, within a fundamentalist Islamic state that must be, by its very nature, abhorrently bad.

One of the consequences of oversimplification is that it serves to reinforce a mistaken belief that conflicts are all framed within differences of religion, ethnicity or tribal affiliations. Intolerance in general is based on fear of difference. This fear – and the intolerance that it breeds – is reinforced by the misrepresentation of the causes of conflict. In this respect Darfur is a valuable example. Regardless of how the international media portrayed the conflict, it was never primarily a clash based on differences within Darfur; but rather a clash based on marginalisation from a Government that had neither the capacity nor the will to assist the region. Ethnic and tribal differences were certainly mobilised in Darfur but they were not the root cause of the crisis. Ethnic differences as a root cause were more apparent in the north-south civil war, which is why Garang's death provoked clashes in the capital.

The media polarisation of Darfur emphasised global Christian-Muslim divisions. A CNN report quoted President Bashir speaking at a public meeting south of Khartoum on July 23. It was reported that he told the gathered public that the “international concern over Darfur is actually a targeting of the Islamic state in Sudan.” (CNN, 2004, Jul 24).

A further media report on a demonstration in Khartoum on 4th August stated that the GoS was intentionally emphasising global divisions between the East and the West. Media headlines included “Sudan steps up rhetoric at anti-UN rally” (*Guardian*, 2004, Aug 5), and that “Sudan masses defiant over Darfur” (BBC, 2004, Aug 4[b]).

The GoS undoubtedly did intentionally emphasis east-west global divisions and “step-up” anti-western rhetoric at demonstrations. A subsequent Khartoum demonstration was described in an NGO situation report:

At a rally in Khartoum on 28th October, the Sudanese President is reported to have claimed that the aid agencies are the real enemy. It was reported in a Khartoum newspaper that Bashir stated that western countries are funding unrest in Darfur and that western

agencies are fuelling and exploiting the situation. (Concern Worldwide 2004, Nov 6:3)

At times of crisis a government will always try to redirect discontent towards an external enemy. Aid agencies were neither funding unrest in Darfur nor exploiting the situation; but the aggressive oratory from Sudanese leaders exposed the global tension between east and west. The rhetoric of the Sudanese government can be viewed, in part, as a reaction to the rhetoric produced by western media and western policymakers.

In August 2004 the BBC quoted from the Sudanese newspaper *Al-Ra 'I Al-Am*, which was the first to use the word “jihad” in relation to the Darfur crisis (BBC, 2004, Aug 9). Any situation within which the word ‘jihad’ is invoked is clearly a dangerous one. In the context of Darfur, jihad was mentioned as a direct result of the simplistic bipolarisation of Darfur. The GoS was in part responsible for this, in emphasising global east-west divisions as an attempt to redirect discontent to an outside enemy and so buttress support within the Sudan. Yet the international media were also partially responsible, in couching their reporting within a bipolarised east-west context in the first place. If the international media had portrayed a more multi-dimensional view of Darfur, then the rhetoric from the GoS – if it had occurred at all – would have been much less powerful. The one-dimensional representation of the Darfur conflict highlights simplicity as a primary factor in determining newsworthiness.

The 2nd Black-White factor: Good guys and bad guys, or simply bad guys and worse guys?

The representation of the role of the GoS was particularly disturbing regarding the causes of the conflict. The media portrayal of the GoS was not at all nuanced. The GoS was certainly culpable in many ways for the atrocities committed in Darfur but this did not inevitably translate into the government being composed of “genocidal killers” as the media claimed (*Observer*, 2004, May 30). The GoS was “widely portrayed as the villain in the Darfur conflict” (Reuters, 2006, May 1). It might be argued that media hyperbole is acceptable when it is clear that a Government has committed general atrocities against their own population. What harm can this do?

Many observers believe that the media depiction of the GoS damaged the Darfur peace talks because the “rebels equated condemnation of Khartoum with support for their cause, and this...has hardened their negotiating positions in Abuja.” (ICG, 2005, Mar 8:14). As time goes on, this hypothesis becomes increasingly more substantiated. As of June 2006, three out of the four current rebel groups in Darfur still refused to sign the AU-brokered peace agreement. A May 2006 *Guardian* report entitled “One-sided reporting that is delaying an end to the killing” suggested that the “[o]ne-sided international media treatment of the crisis may have emboldened the rebels to increase their demands.” (*Guardian*, 2006, May 5).

Morton argued that – despite the acknowledged unpopularity of this position – the Sudanese government is “far from being the driving force behind events in Darfur” and “is responsible only by virtue of its abject inability to do anything at all in the area, be it for good or evil.” (Morton, 2004: 5). Morton continued that the “Omar El Bashir regime deserves at least some credit for its efforts to resolve the problems of Darfur” (Morton, 2004:5). This hypothesis was originally published in 1991, before the emergence of the current conflict. It was re-published in June 2004 and Morton acknowledged that “[m]any will feel it is a hopelessly outdated perspective” (Morton, 2004:4). Yet in this time of the GoS being the only bad guys, it was a perspective that received no media consideration at all.

So in 2004 the “genocidal killers” of Khartoum were placed firmly in the camp of evil by the international media. This implied that the rebel groups who took up arms against such an oppressive totalitarian regime belonged in the opposite camp of good. In reality the rebel groups in Darfur themselves stand accused of a number of atrocities, including intentionally restricting humanitarian access within Darfur and so deliberately provoking a worse humanitarian crisis in an attempt to “internationalise” the conflict (The European-Sudanese Public Affairs Council, 2004). This accusation is supported by UN information. The October 2004 UN Darfur Humanitarian Profile reported that:

Most of the underserved areas are found to be rebel-held areas, many of which have not been accessible to UN agencies because of

a series of security incidents in these areas and a need for the SLA to agree and understand humanitarian rules and principles. (UN, 2004, Oct 1:3).

In February 2004, as a direct response to the announcement by the GoS that aid corridors would be opened up in Darfur, the JEM threatened to close all roads in Darfur to humanitarian traffic. When aid relief began to arrive in Darfur, it was rebel-held areas that remained inaccessible. It is a fact that the rebels are not without blame for the suffering of the civilian population. The NGO assessment of local staff perspective noted that there was “particularly lively debate about the question of whether violence by the ‘rebels’ is part of the cause or part of the solution.” (Tearfund, 2005:4). The strategies of the different rebels groups frequently lacked clarity but it is clear that they did deny humanitarian access, and contributed significantly to the suffering of the population. This is also supported by the fact that out of four individuals currently indicted for war crimes in Darfur, two of them are rebel commanders (BBC, 2006, Apr 26).

Therefore any attempt to simplify the conflict into ‘bad guys’ against ‘good guys’ will inevitably obscure any true comprehension. In this respect Darfur is similar to other conflicts such as those in Bosnia and Rwanda where it has been noted that there were “no good guys and bad guys, just bad guys and worse guys.” (UNDP, 1997:41).

In April 2004 a UN press release: “welcome[d] the offer made by the GoS to the Secretary-General to send a United Nations mission to assess the situation in Darfur” (UN, 2004, Apr 5). A corresponding media report focused on the fact that “Khartoum initially refused to let the visit take place” (BBC, 2004, Apr 20[b]). The importance of this is not that the GoS were totally blameless for the restricted access; but rather that the rebels were also accountable, yet received no reproach from the media. The simplicity gained from the good guy/bad guy dichotomy, within the black-white framework resulted in media representation that was simply unbalanced.

A recurring theme throughout 2004 was that all negative actions (or reactions) by the GoS received considerable media coverage, but there was no corresponding coverage of any positive actions. Yet there were several positive actions that were highlighted by high-level humanitarian actors yet failed to find any foothold within media reports.

In August the GoS established a special committee consisting of female judges, female police officers, and female Ministry of Justice officials, specifically to investigate rape cases in Darfur. A report by the UN Secretary-General to the Security Council referred to this as a “commendable initiative”, and stated that whilst the “resources and logistical support are lacking...The United Nations is committed to providing this support, which the Government [of the Sudan] has welcomed.” (UN, 2004, Aug 30:10). There was no mention of this initiative within the international media, despite the fact that a fundamentalist Islamic country actually having female judges and female police officers would surely be a good journalistic ‘peg’ on which to hang a story.

Within an examination of media representation of Darfur it is irrelevant whether this committee initiative succeeded or failed. That the international media failed to report on a GoS development that the UN termed “commendable” reflects a preconceived selectivity about how Darfur would be represented. Additionally, the potential for success of this initiative would have been considerably enhanced had it received a media spotlight under which failure would have been more embarrassing for the GoS.

The same UN report detailed how the GoS had organised a conference of local leaders in Darfur to discuss “social reconciliation and the role of the traditional administration in the disarmament process.” This was described as adequately representing the views of all major tribes, “including leaders who are known to have political opinions at variance with those of the Government.” (UN, 2004, Aug 30:11). It shows that the GoS recognised the importance of traditional administration within Darfur and more importantly, that they were willing to hear opposing political voices. Again, the international media choose not to report on this.

A subsequent report in November by the Secretary-General referred to another “recent intertribal resolution initiative” (UN, 2004, Nov 2:6) by the GoS, whereby traditional leaders from other areas of the Sudan were invited to participate in conflict resolution discussions – again, no media coverage. Morton believed that escalating discord in Darfur primarily stemmed from the breakdown of traditional tribal mechanisms for the resolution of disputes (Morton, 1991:11). That the GoS actively

tried to engage diverse traditional leaders in resolution efforts indicates an awareness of this within the GoS.

The purpose of these few examples from UN reports is to highlight the fact that similar references were conspicuously absent from international media reports. To the contrary, the international media focussed on depicting the GoS in a wholly negative light, with headlines such as “Sudan warns Blair against sending troops” (*Guardian*, 2004, Jul 23), “Sudan hits back over sanctions” (BBC, 2004, Jul 27) and “Sudan grudgingly accepts UN vote” (BBC, 2004, Sep 20). The use of words such as “warns”, “hits back” and “grudgingly” underscore the general media attitude towards the GoS at this time. This attitude was reflective of western government attitudes towards the GoS and, in fairness, it was an attitude that had both merit and truth. But it was also a one-dimensional perspective, and the failure to portray the other side had serious consequences.

The consequences were, firstly, that the international media were unable to fulfil their primary function, which is to inform and educate. Secondly, and more insidiously, the unbalanced representation of the GoS – a fundamentalist Islamic nation-state – contributed to a growing western general public belief in a global east-west, Christian-Muslim, divide.

The most noticeable evidence of the international media’s role in this was the difference between media reports from Darfur and reports generated by humanitarian actors. The reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council were consistently even-handed, as were various NGO reports. In humanitarian reports the GoS was criticised when appropriate, but it was also praised when praise was due. Conversely, media reports chose to report the criticism without counter-balancing it with the praise.

In September 2004 the media began to catch up with the humanitarian perspective of the rebel groups and a more negative media representation of the rebels began to emerge. Prior to September 2004 there was one SABC report that stated killing “is still going on in Darfur but Sudan’s government does not appear to be responsible and is making efforts to improve security.” (SABC, 2004, Aug 23). This report quoted

Jan Pronk (UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Sudan) who said that “[a]t the moment the government [of the Sudan] is really making an effort to stop everything.” Pronk was at the time speaking to BBC radio, but this particular quote was subsequently only picked up by two media outlets: SABC News in South Africa, and the *Daily Times* in Pakistan. This suggests a purposeful intent on behalf of most mainstream news media to eschew positive representation of the GoS.

So in September the international media began to sway more towards blaming the rebel groups for the continuing crisis. In this way they caught up with UN and NGO reports that had consistently held the rebel groups as accountable as the GoS. Reports moved more towards headlines such as “New Darfur focus falls on rebels” (*Guardian*, 2004, Sep 22) and “‘Divided’ Darfur rebels blamed” (BBC, 2004, Sep 29). This could suggest that the media were simply getting to grips with the bigger picture, but in reality the media shift was too dramatic. Instead of showing how both the GoS and the rebels were at fault, the media moved towards blaming only the rebels.

In November a media report quoted Pronk as saying that there was a “unilateral violation of the agreements by SLA, not by the government” and the journalist went on to comment that it is “rare that the UN blames one party in a conflict in which it is playing a humanitarian role.” (*Guardian*, 2004, Nov 26). Pronk was only referring to specific violations of humanitarian and security agreements by the SLA within the month of November. Overall, the UN was not blaming one party. All UN reports on Darfur have consistently held both the GoS and the rebel groups accountable for the situation. Notwithstanding the fact that some months witnessed more violations by one party than the other, both sides have equally and consistently been held responsible for the conflict. The problem was that the international media required the simplicity that came from only one side being blamed, as opposed to the reality, in which both sides are equally accountable.

At the end of September a BBC report asked the question “Who are Sudan’s Darfur rebels?” (BBC, 2004, Sep 30). This was the first time that this question had been asked by the international media. Previously, the rebellion movement in Darfur was referred to as “the rebel groups”, sometimes named as JEM and SLA, but with little background information to distinguish the two groups. Yet the two groups have

considerable ideological and strategic differences. Furthermore, new rebel groups began to emerge in late 2004, the most significant of which was the NMRD (National Movement for Reform and Democracy), which split from the JEM. Limited media interest had been shown in the rebel groups until the headline focus moved away from blaming the GoS and towards blaming the rebels. Only at this point was there emerging coverage of the actual characteristics of the different rebel groups.

In direct contrast to humanitarian reports, few media reports were able to discuss the situation without allocating blame to one side or the other. The initial media characterisation of the GoS as the ‘bad guys’, followed by the switch to the rebels being the ‘bad guys’, once again highlights the factor of simplicity as a determinant of newsworthiness.

The North-South factor: International interest in the Sudanese peace process and its impact on the Darfur story

The north-south Sudanese civil war has consistently been viewed as a religious struggle – the ‘Muslim Arabic north’ oppressing the ‘Christian African south’. In reality, the majority of south Sudanese are not Christian but instead are Animist. In addition, the north-south civil war was less due to religious differences and more due to marginalisation and unfair distribution of resources, wealth and decision-making. Religion provided a valuable framework for the conflict, particularly for the southern rebels who gained more fervent support from the western international community when the struggle was depicted within a Christian-Islam context. The southern rebels “learned to characterize their plight” (Aidi, 2005:8) in simplistic and powerful religious terms that gained them huge international sympathy. Referring to the north-south Sudanese civil war, President Bush publicly enthused about the “faith-based programs that rose up in indignation about the slavery that was taking place in the Sudan” (US White House, 2006, Jan 23). These faith-based programs, and the general US political interest in the Sudan, were significantly shaped by the influential conservative Christian lobby in the US.

The US was resolutely dedicated to the north-south peace process in Sudan. In addition to the Christian lobby, there is a significant economic interest in the Sudan,

which is, unsurprisingly, oil. The Sudan currently produces over three hundred thousand barrels of oil a day and there are “indications of significant potential reserves of oil and natural gas in southern Sudan, the Kordofan region and the Red Sea province.” (US State Department, 2006). The Kordofan region and the Red Sea province are both in north Sudan. Due, in part, to the pressure exerted by the Christian lobby in the US, strict economic sanctions against the Sudan prevented US investment in these potential oil reserves. Naturally, the US would be keen to remove their current economic sanctions on the Sudan in order to gain access to some of these potential reserves and a north-south Sudanese peace agreement was seen to be a necessary prerequisite to lifting these economic sanctions. Currently, both Russia and China (both members of the UN Security Council) have significant oil drilling operations in the Sudan.

Additionally, a Sudanese north-south peace agreement was considered to be a substantial foreign policy success for the US. Politically, the Sudan has been a US-designated “state sponsor of terrorism” since 1993 (US State Department, 2006). Other epithets include ‘rogue state’ and ‘Country for Particular Concern’. One of the main concerns for the US, specifically post-September 11th, has been that “[s]olidarity with other Arab countries has been a feature of Sudan’s foreign policy” (US State Department, 2006). A US-brokered peace deal – and the resulting incorporation of non-Islamic southern rebels into a new, potentially less Islamic Sudanese government – was seen to be a key component to fighting the war on terror. Ambassador Danforth (US Ambassador to the UN) told a press conference that:

We were all set to get a U.S. government plane, fly Bashir [President of the Sudan] and Garang [south Sudan rebel leader] to Washington for the State of the Union and claim the success of the Naivasha peace talks – that was nine months ago, there is no reason why this is dragging on. (CNN, 2004, Oct 1)

Planned inclusion in the State of the Union is a measure of the value that a north-south Sudanese peace agreement held for the US.

These elements feature in the regional and international significance of the Sudan and so clarify the international interest in the Sudanese peace process. There was an

undeniable political reticence on behalf of the global community to engage the GoS in any genuine resolution of Darfur whilst all efforts were being focussed on obtaining agreement for the last three protocols of the north-south peace negotiations. US Professor and Sudan analyst Eric Reeves stated that:

In a tragic miscalculation, US diplomatic thinking has cleaved steadily to the belief that silence on Darfur will expedite the talks in Naivasha [the north-south peace negotiations] (Sudan Reeves, 2004)

Regardless of whether international inaction on Darfur was the result of GoS prevarication in the north-south peace negotiations, on 9th January 2005 the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed, formally ending 21 years of civil war between north and south Sudan. The CPA was the result of three years of negotiations. The negotiations were strongly supported and sponsored by a variety of actors within the international community, based on the understanding that peace in the Sudan was crucial to the stability of the entire Horn of Africa region. In what he described as an “historic display of wisdom” the UN Secretary General stated that he “would like to publicly recognize this exemplary case of African leadership” (UN 2005, Jan 31:1). The CPA was widely recognized as “an historic event – for Sudan, Africa, and the world. This agreement could well be the most important event in modern Sudanese history.” (UN, 2005, Apr 7:1).

The CPA had three distinct impacts on Darfur, one of which directly related to representation. Firstly, the ‘carrot’ offered to Sudan for reaching a final peace was a multi-billion dollar reconstruction and rehabilitation aid package. Within the UN system, funding appeals for Darfur became integrated into the general funding appeal for the Sudan. With funding being harmonized, the international community began to look at harmonizing the separate programmes being undertaken in south Sudan and in Darfur. The civil war had severely restricted travel between the government-controlled North and rebel-held areas in the South. For two decades, the majority of aid programmes taking place in south Sudan – generally believed to be one of the most desolate and poverty-stricken places on the planet – were administered from Nairobi, Kenya. With the end of the civil war humanitarian players began talking about eventually bringing the south Sudanese programmes under the management of the Khartoum offices.

Secondly, the CPA – despite some flaws – was perceived as a practical model that could be used to resolve the Darfur conflict. It was thought that the essential elements within the CPA – a new constitution and a federal structure – could be transferred to a sustainable resolution for Darfur as well. The CPA also allowed for the SPLM/A to be integrated into the GoS. John Garang, the former leader of the SPLM/A, officially became the First Vice President of the GoS on 9th July 2005, relegating the existing First Vice President (Taha) to the status of Second Vice President. Three weeks later John Garang tragically died in a helicopter crash and another former SPLM/A leader, Salva Kiir Mayardit, replaced him. It was hoped that the inclusion of the southern SPLM/A rebels into the government structure would serve to advance the Darfur peace negotiations.

Thirdly – and directly relating to representation – there were questions raised as to whether the signing of the CPA would re-focus attention on Darfur or, conversely, lead to reduced international interest in the Sudan. A January 2005 UN report claimed that the signing of the CPA “shifted the news on Sudan from the deteriorating Darfur situation to the positive developments in the South.” (UN 2005, Jan 1:5). This is not true. The signing of the CPA did not receive the coverage that it deserved within mainstream media reporting. From a political perspective there is strong evidence to suggest that, with the CPA ‘out of the way’, the international community turned a stronger and more focused eye towards Darfur. There is little evidence to suggest the opposite – that after the signing of the CPA less attention was given to Darfur. The first two UN Resolutions to be passed after the signing of the CPA were noticeably stronger in tone and content than all previous resolutions. The US said that they would not pledge any funds to the UN planned Multi-Donor Trust Fund for south Sudan rehabilitation until Darfur was resolved (UN, 2005, Apr 12:3).

From a humanitarian perspective the signing of the CPA opened up the possibility of harmonizing programmes across the Sudan. From a media perspective, the signing of the CPA neither detracted from nor increased attention to Darfur. The signing of the CPA was simply woven into the continuing Darfur story. If Darfur started as a sideshow to the greater north-south civil war back in early 2004, by early 2005 it had clearly surpassed it. Yet whilst the signing of the CPA did not reduce media coverage

of Darfur, it is evident that, conversely, media interest in the signing of the CPA was qualified by Darfur. The news appeal of a situation resolved is not as attractive as the news appeal of an ongoing emergency.

US political interest in the north-south Sudanese peace process contributed in part to US interest in Darfur. Other dynamics included the fact that, in the summer of 2004 – and with the upcoming November election – US military involvement in Iraq was generating a mounting degree of public discontent. The crisis in Darfur provided for the US government a less controversial focus than Iraq. Whilst media coverage of Iraq did not wane, the Darfur crisis provided the US with a morally less ambiguous foreign focus and this raised some suspicions in the media:

The United States has seemed determined to keep the crisis in Sudan's western Darfur region high on the international agenda in recent weeks...But what factors are driving its policy in the region?
(BBC, 2004, Jul 15)

The US political stance on Darfur led to accusations from both the GoS and Arabic newspapers around the world that the White House was manipulating international media attention on Darfur as part of their election campaign. These accusations were picked up by international media. In September 2004 the BBC reported that a “Sudanese parliamentary delegation has accused the US of leading a global hate campaign against the Sudanese government” (BBC, 2004, Sep 10). Humanitarian staff in the Sudan noted that “Sudanese officials accuse US politicians of overstating the situation in Darfur to detract from other issues in the run up to the election campaign and portray US concern for the plight of Africans.” (Concern Worldwide, 2004, Oct 4:2). This highlights a certain lack of clarity within US foreign policy itself: the north-south peace process resulted in the international community, including the US, sidelining Darfur for the greater good of a north-south peace agreement, but at the same time, international focus on Darfur allowed for a certain detraction of attention away from Iraq. If international political objectives lacked clarity, it is inevitable that resulting media coverage would also lack clarity.

As part of an election campaign, a deliberate US focus on Darfur had a number of benefits. It courted more black votes by portraying the US government as being

sympathetic to black African suffering (at the hands of an oppressive Arabic government). It fitted nicely into the framework of the war on terror – Sudan being a designated “state sponsor of terrorism” and also a gateway between Christian Africa and Muslim Arabia. It also provided a less controversial foreign policy focus than the war in Iraq.

When analysing media representation of Darfur and what effects, if any, this had on policy decisions, a reverse question is also raised: that is, what effects did policy decisions have on media representation? Regarding media influence on policy, the general consensus is that the capacity of the media to influence policy decisions is severely limited unless there is a certain policy vacuum. It was claimed that vague and ill-defined US policy objectives in Somalia in 1992 allowed media coverage to influence the initiation of a US response and the subsequent withdrawal of US troops (UNDP, 1997:62). Conversely, strong US objectives in Iraq have withstood any influence that the media or the US public may try to assert.

Regarding the reverse question, US-based media analyst group, CARMA International, claims that “[w]estern self-interest is the pre-condition for significant coverage of a humanitarian crisis.” (CARMA International, 2006:5) Yet this still does not fully address the question of the extent to which western policy objectives manipulate media coverage towards a situation they desire to see highlighted and, conversely, away from other silent emergencies. The international media, as an independent and non-governmental actor, should have a duty to report on crises on the basis of their intrinsic newsworthiness. Is the intrinsic newsworthiness of any given disaster *wholly* reliant on its foreign policy value to western governments? International interest – and specifically US interest – in both the north-south peace process and in Darfur certainly appear to be one of the primary factors in determining the newsworthiness of Darfur.

The ‘new crisis threat’ factor: The Asian tsunami

The December 2004 Asian tsunami generated what is widely believed to be unprecedented media and public attention for a natural disaster. It resulted in “one of the biggest relief efforts in history” (Reuters 2005, Sep 27). The reasons for this

extraordinary scale of response are varied. The number of people affected by the tsunami was both initially large and continually rising in the weeks following the tsunami, allowing for a continued interest. The people affected included both indigenous populations and tourists from a variety of different countries. The timing of the tsunami (the Christmas festive season) invoked a heightened sense of compassion. There was also a considerable 'novelty' factor – a big wave sweeping up the beach and destroying everything in its wake – that is generally missing from other, less dramatic, disasters.

The total funding received for the tsunami is estimated to be \$6.9 billion from formal government donations and \$5 billion from private donations (the general public). The UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) received an unprecedented £11 million (approximately \$20 million) from the general public within twenty-four hours. In less than a month both DEC and a variety of NGOs closed their appeals and actually asked the general public not to donate any more money to the tsunami relief, as it would not get used – again, something that has never happened before. A UN spokesperson commented that the tsunami “saw a massive response that I don’t think we will see again in our lifetime” (Apps, 2005, Oct 27).

The media coverage given to the tsunami was overwhelming. Sky News, as one example of mainstream media, admitted that whilst they only had one journalist covering the whole of Africa, they sent fifty to cover the Asian tsunami (Reuters, 2005, Mar 10[a]:21). A Reuters’ study used a database of over 200 English-language newspapers to analyse the scale of media coverage of the tsunami. It found that the tsunami received more coverage in six weeks than “all of the world’s top 10 ‘forgotten’ emergencies combined have received in the past year.” (Gidley, 2005, Mar 11). It defined forgotten emergencies on the basis of a poll conducted of humanitarian actors and these emergencies included, for 2004, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Colombia, Chechnya, Nepal and Haiti. The research also concluded that:

Looking at trends over four months up to the end of February, there is evidence that the volume of media coverage of the “forgotten” emergencies has fallen post-tsunami. (Jones, 2005, Mar 10)

The quantitative analysis of the above Reuters research is not debatable. Within the parameters of the research, it is clear that coverage of forgotten emergencies was negatively affected by the tsunami. But it is also clear from the research that forgotten emergencies received minimal coverage anyway, regardless of the tsunami. Further to this, the tsunami generated a lot more debate regarding the concept of noisy and silent emergencies than had previously occurred within mainstream media. Articles such as “World must ‘wake up to disasters’” (CNN, 2005, Jan 3) and “Africa fears tsunami may suck aid coffers dry” (SABC, 2005, Jan 5) focused on quotes from high level UN officials who took the opportunity of heightened media interest in the tsunami to try to ‘sell’ the cause of more silent emergencies. Kofi Annan referred to these as the “orphaned disasters” that are “not on the headlines, they are not on TV, and they are ignored and overlooked.” (CNN, 2005, Jan 3). A Care International representative is quoted as hoping that “we don’t hear a giant sucking sound away from our major aid programmes in Africa” because “what we don’t want to do is to rob Peter to pay Paul” (SABC, 2005, Jan 5).

There is unquestionably a difference between media coverage of, for example, northern Uganda, because of the terrible atrocities occurring there, and media coverage of northern Uganda because it qualifies as a silent emergency to be compared to the incredibly noisy tsunami. Reporting that mentions northern Uganda in its role as a silent emergency and laments the disproportional attention and resources directed towards tsunami-hit countries is not the same as reporting that specifically exposes the violence and mayhem occurring in northern Uganda on a daily basis. Coverage that detailed the activities of Joseph Kony and his Lord’s Resistance Army – a cult-like rebel group that are responsible for kidnapping up to 28,000 children as young as seven to be used as child soldiers and sex slaves – remained absent, as was any coverage of the 1.6 million displaced Ugandans. Yet even the second kind of attention (highlighting northern Uganda as a silent emergency without necessarily specifying why it is an emergency) generated by the tsunami was actually more coverage than northern Uganda had previously received. This can be seen, if not as a genuinely positive development, at least as a step in the right direction.

A series of Reuter's articles questioned whether the tsunami had "carved a news niche for disasters" (Gidley, 2005, Mar 11) or whether, conversely, "tsunami compassion has killed other aid" (Kielthy, 2005, Jan 24). Humanitarian aid workers and analysts were divided on this issue. One reporter commented that the tsunami had "lowered the bar to get development stories on TV" (Gidley, 2005, Mar 11) whilst another analyst believed that the funding generated for the tsunami was "unlikely to be new money" (Kielthy, 2005, Jan 24) and so would have a direct and negative effect on less noisy emergencies as both government and public purses are finite.

In relation to Darfur, the question raised regarding the effect of the tsunami on silent or forgotten emergencies takes a different angle. Emergencies such as the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Uganda never achieved the status of noisy emergencies. One analyst commented that "countries that were off the radar screen – and more notably, off the television screen – before the tsunami hit, still remain off the radar screen." (Kielthy, 2005, Jan 24). These countries benefited from the tsunami in that their status as silent emergencies was highlighted within the debate, although unfortunately this did not jumpstart any further or sustained interest.

Conversely, Darfur had already achieved the status of a noisy emergency in 2004 and so the effect of the tsunami and the resulting move of media focus to South Asia did not render Darfur silent. The natural progression of media coverage of a crisis should, logically, follow the progression of the crisis itself: media coverage escalates as the crisis emerges; it remains sustained whilst the crisis is in progress; and its decline is aligned to the resolution of the crisis. In reality the nature of the news cycle rarely permits this to happen, and the concern was that the tsunami would bring the coverage of Darfur to a premature end.

An Oxfam representative is quoted saying "Sudan has quickly become a forgotten emergency" (*Guardian*, 2005, Jan 28). A SABC headline, quoting Hilde Johnson, co-chair of the Sudan donor's group, stated that it would be "Immoral" if Sudan aid cut due to Asia quake" (SABC, 2005, Jan 6). There was a recorded practical shift of funding from Darfur to the tsunami at some levels. The SABC reported that in the Netherlands €100 million was to be redirected to the tsunami relief effort (SABC, 2005, Jan 5), money that had previously been assigned to the Sudan. A January

UNJLC (Joint Logistics Centre) bulletin reported that existing stocks of UNICEF blankets and plastic sheeting (stored outside of the Sudan) would not be sent to Darfur as planned as they had “been allocated to other emergencies” (UN, 2005, Jan 29:1). The other emergencies were tsunami-affected countries. Whilst UNICEF had received pledges to replace the stocks, they would have to be re-procured from suppliers and the estimated time of arrival in Darfur would be April rather than February. This was one example of “robbing Peter to pay Paul” and it had a significant effect on the NFI (non-food items) distribution operation in Darfur. The blankets, in particular, were more urgent in Darfur in February when it was still extremely cold then they would be in April once the weather became warmer. Yet this was the only practical impact detailed in Darfur humanitarian reports.

Otherwise, Darfur continued to receive a substantial amount of media coverage despite the tsunami. In some respects, the fear that the tsunami would relegate Darfur to a forgotten status in itself promoted media interest. All other political developments regarding Darfur continued to receive coverage as before. This is important as a corrective to the common perception that there can only be one disaster receiving broad media coverage at any one time. A comprehensive analysis of the theory that Darfur was ‘knocked off the top of the crisis pile’ by the tsunami reveals that it is not that simple. From the Asian tsunami of 2004 to the Pakistan earthquake of 2005 there is evidence to suggest that media reporting of disasters operates through a replacement method; but the Darfur/tsunami stories show that rather than replacement, attention could be given to both. This exposes the ability of the media and the western public to sustain interest in more than one humanitarian emergency at any one time. It suggests there is the potential for current silent emergencies to attract more attention without necessarily endangering the coverage of current noisy emergencies. In many respects this reveals a further confusion for determining newsworthiness of humanitarian crises: simplicity has been shown to be a critical factor, and the hypothesis of there only being one disaster deserving attention at any one time supports this. Yet Darfur continued to sustain media interest.

The Quantitative factor: The numbers game

In most emergencies, the number of people killed, wounded, displaced, and affected are estimated from sample counts. In the Asian tsunami, aid workers did not physically count two hundred and thirty thousand bodies. Correspondingly, in Darfur no-one ever actually counted two million displaced people. But the early estimates from Darfur varied considerably more than normal. This was partly due to an early lack of access, and partly due to the rapid expansion of a massive humanitarian response under an intensifying media spotlight. Yet there is often an early lack of access (particularly in natural disasters when there is no need to be in the location before the disaster happens) and relief responses often expand rapidly under a media spotlight. Why were the numbers from Darfur so inconsistent?

In early 2004, estimates of the number of conflict-affected people in Darfur fluctuated between one million in January (UNHCR); to three million in February (UN); back down to one million in April (UN WFP); and back up to two million in May (UN). The figures became confused within media reports because it was not always clear which population groups were included within the count. Depending on the source, the conflict-affected population included any or all of the following groups: the displaced people within Darfur; the refugees across the border in Chad; the number of people killed; and the host communities in Darfur/Chad whose lives had been disrupted and whose resources were being strained.

The estimates of the number of refugees in Chad vacillated between 95,000 and 130,000 in February (UN/Relief International); and between 100,000 and 140,000 in March (MSF/UN). By June 2004 the UN stated 200,000, whilst Save the Children UK stated only 110,000. This variance in numbers for the refugees in Chad is particularly significant as there was unqualified access to the Chadian refugee camps. A difference of nearly one hundred thousand between the UN and one of the leading international NGOs exposes the sheer complexity of the situation.

Between January and March 2004 the number of displaced people within Darfur, as quoted by humanitarian actors, fluctuated from 700,000 to 600,000; then to 800,000 and back to 600,000; then down to 500,000, all depending on who was providing the

statistics (Amnesty International/UNHCR/ Relief International/MSF/MSF). Equally, the number of dead oscillated from 3,000 in February (Amnesty International) to 30,000 in April (Crimes of War) and back down to 10,000 in June (Save the Children UK).

So the confusion was two-fold. Firstly it was difficult to determine specifically which population groups were included within the statistics being quoted. The second problem was the variance in the numbers given, depending on which organisation was providing them. Yet this confusion never became an insurmountable obstacle for the media. Media reports in general eschewed the quoting of actual numbers, preferring to report instead from the stance of ‘tens of thousands’, ‘hundreds of thousands’, and ‘millions’.

In a Reuters tip sheet article entitled “How to ‘sell’ forgotten emergencies” one of the principal tips is to “[p]ut a number on it”:

Darfur hit the headlines when the U.N. put the number of people affected at a million. The DRC made the news when the IRC released a mortality study with the jaw-dropping figure of 3.8 million dead since 1998. Ditto Colombia after estimates that violence had displaced almost 3 million. It may seem a cynical way to drum up attention, but such numbers give journalists pegs to hang their stories on. And they answer the question that so often haunts long-term emergencies: “Why write about this today?”. They also capture the public imagination, going some way towards quantifying the unimaginable. (Large, 2005, Oct 5)

Large suggests that NGO and UN-generated numbers are a primary driving force for directing attention, but the evidence does not support this. Neither the Democratic Republic of the Congo nor Colombia have been “sold” as emergencies. Both remain particularly silent to this day. It is also too simplistic to state that Darfur hit the headlines when the UN put the number of people affected at a million, particularly in light of the fact that neither the UN nor its NGO partners could even agree on the statistics. That journalists are keen for a number ‘peg’ upon which to hang a story is not disputed, but in the case of Darfur there was a wide variety of different number pegs to choose from. In general the media avoided the confusion by reverting to generalities that did nothing to harm their continued interest in the Darfur story.

There are two separate issues arising from the analysis of the Darfur numbers. First, there is the question of whether numbers are a significant factor in determining newsworthiness. Common sense tells us that they should be. A crisis in which one hundred thousand people die is surely inherently worse than a crisis in which fifty thousand people die – twice as bad, in fact. Yet the number of ongoing crises with very high death tolls and no media attention suggest that numbers are not particularly important in defining newsworthiness. This is supported by the CARMA International study. This study found that within disaster reporting in 2005 there was no direct link between the number of people who died and the amount of coverage. (CARMA International, 2006:6). The Asian tsunami, with a very high death toll and a correspondingly high level of media coverage would be the exception to the rule but conversely stands as proof that the numbers were not the primary factor in determining the newsworthiness of the tsunami.

Secondly, and specifically in relation to Darfur, there is the question of whether the confusion and variance in the numbers served to discourage media interest. This recalls the element of simplicity as a factor in determining newsworthiness. There is no evidence to suggest that the confusion surrounding the numbers in Darfur reduced its media appeal, which implies that simplicity is not necessarily a requirement in all aspects of media reporting.

Once Darfur became noisy in June 2004 media interest in the numbers waned. An October 2004 WHO report stated that approximately 70,000 people had died in Darfur since April 2004 (UN, 2004, Oct 15:1). This figure was the widely quoted number until February 2005, when media interest in the numbers began to re-emerge.

There was a much sharper increase of the affected population between June 2004 and December 2004 then either previously or afterwards. From June to December 2004 the estimated affected population rose from 1 million to 2.4 million (UN 2005, Jan 1:4), a 140% rise. Between January and June 2005 the estimated affected population rose from 2.4 million to 2.9 million (UN 2005, Jun 1:2), a 21% rise. Yet there was little interest in the numbers from the media at the time that they were increasing most

dramatically – i.e. June to December 2004. The reasons for this are fundamental to the nature of a crisis news-cycle.

In January 2005 the BBC quoted a WHO representative as saying that the death rate in Darfur was probably considerably lower than the previously estimated figure of 10,000 a month (BBC, 2005, Jan 26). This was due to the success of the humanitarian aid operation. At a time when the tsunami already threatened to draw attention and funding away from Darfur, acknowledging that conditions were improving in Darfur should logically have been a dangerous move. Yet rather than lead to reduced media coverage of Darfur it instead sparked a new interest in the numbers. A February BBC reports questions “How many have died in Darfur?” (BBC, 2005, Feb 16). The article noted that the figure of seventy thousand (killed) was undoubtedly wrong, partly as it was based on a study of only April to September 2004, and partly as it did not include those killed by violence, only those who died from disease and malnutrition. The article quoted a number of different estimates of deaths from violence, ranging from an Amnesty International estimate of 50,000, to an estimate by American Sudan scholar Eric Reeves of 340,000. These figures were in addition to the UN-quoted 70,000 deaths from disease and malnutrition from the period April to September and then the further post-September disease and malnutrition deaths at a rate lower than 10,000 per month.

The same WHO representative who said in January that the death rate had significantly dropped was quoted as saying “Numbers are always difficult – but what is so unusual [for Darfur] is that there is so much interest.” (BBC, 2005, Feb 16). In reality there was a notable lack of interest throughout the second half of 2004, but then a renewed interest in early 2005.

In March 2005 Jan Egeland, UN Emergency Humanitarian Coordinator, said that many more people had died than the widely quoted figure of 70,000. His question – “Is it three times that? Is it five times?” (BBC, 2005, Mar 10) was subsequently quoted in a plethora of reports stating that the death toll in Darfur had rocketed, such as “UN’s Darfur death estimate soars” (BBC, 2005, Mar 15). The estimated 10,000 deaths a month was converted into – over an eighteen month period from October 2003 – “at least 180,000” (BBC, 2005, Mar 15). A UK parliamentary committee

report estimated that at least 300,000 people had died in Darfur, resulting in reports such as “MP’s rap UN over death toll” (BBC, 2005, Mar 30).

The noteworthy aspect of the Darfur numbers game is the fluctuating nature of the media attention given to the numbers. It was not a primary factor in originally attracting interest in Darfur, but as Darfur was achieving noise the numbers were an important characteristic of the story. During the period when the number of affected people increased the most dramatically (June to December 2004), there was a noticeable lack of interest. Then in early 2005 the interest was renewed.

A significant element of this fluctuation is that when Darfur secured the media limelight from June 2004 onwards there was no competing story until the Asian tsunami. Post-tsunami, media coverage of Darfur was no longer so assured. High-level UN officials restating the Darfur numbers served to retain media interest. The numbers were also a means of comparing the two situations – 230,000 killed in the tsunami, and “at least” 180,000 killed in Darfur, therefore quantitatively establishing that Darfur remained worthy of attention. This still does not indicate that numbers are the prime factor in either attracting or retaining media attention: situations such as the DRC which have a ‘tsunami’ number of preventable deaths every four months (CNN, 2005, Jan 3) are testament to this. But it does indicate that numbers should not be easily dismissed as a secondary factor – and a useful tool – once other factors have created the initial noise.

This also raises interesting questions about comparative suffering. Regardless of newsworthiness, is it even possible to quantify and compare the inherent level of ‘suffering’ in different emergencies? Is there a basic measure that can be used to state, absolutely and definitely, that Darfur is a worse crisis than Northern Uganda, or that the Asian tsunami was a worse disaster than the Pakistani earthquake? Are numbers the way to do that?

The numbers game is complex, and statistics in general are easily manipulated to prove whatever it is that one desires to prove. In the 2005 Asian tsunami it was estimated that approximately 230,000 people were killed immediately. This is the same number as conflict-related deaths in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

every four months (CNN, 2005, Jan 3). In Darfur it was March 2005 before the death toll was estimated to have reached the 200,000 mark – over two years after the conflict first began.

In Darfur, the number of people internally displaced rose from 700,000 in March 2004 to 1.8 million in March 2005. In northern Uganda it was estimated that there were 1.6 million internally displaced people in March 2005 (Reuters, 2005, Mar 10[b]): a comparable figure. Yet the 1.6 million internally displaced people in northern Uganda represent 80% of the Acholi population that live in northern Uganda. 1.8 million internally displaced people within Darfur represents only between 22 and 30% of the estimated Darfuri population. How do we measure suffering? Is it on an individual level or is it on a population group level? If the Darfuri 1.8 million displaced people is worse than the northern Uganda 1.6 million displaced people, then why is the Colombian 3 million (IDMC, 2005, May) not even worse still?

What if we compare GAM and SAM rates, CMR or U5-CMR (global acute malnutrition, severe acute malnutrition, crude mortality rate and Under-5 crude mortality rate respectively) from Darfur, northern Uganda, the DRC, Niger, and Pakistan? Do we find that Darfur is definitively and decisively the ‘worst humanitarian crisis in the world’. No, we don’t. Yet, again, statistics are notoriously easy to manipulate, and when it comes to quantifying suffering there are so many different statistics to use – death, wounded, malnourished, raped, kidnapped, internally displaced and externally displaced to name but a few.

One of the problems is that these basic statistics, however they are manipulated, do not give us a rounded and nuanced view of the situation, which is necessary in order to truly determine suffering. That comes more from the unquantifiable facts. Such as in Darfur, most of the women living in the IDP camps have been raped at least once. Such as in northern Uganda, the estimated 28,000 children who have been kidnapped since 2002 are as young as seven. (Reuters, 2005, March 10[b]). The girls become ‘wives’ to rebel commanders, the boys become child soldiers, and they are as young as seven.

Measuring suffering is potentially impossible, and the quantitative tool is not necessarily the correct one. But Darfur shows that even if it were, numbers are not a primary factor in determining newsworthiness.

The Hollywood factor: Celebrity involvement

Celebrities have been involved in raising awareness for humanitarian crises since Live Aid in the 1980s. In recent years, there has been a growing level of celebrity involvement in various humanitarian causes. The CARMA International study of disaster reporting concluded that in some cases there was less coverage of crises involving celebrities than those without. (CARMA International, 2006:10). But in general, celebrity involvement can only serve to raise the profile of issues. The important question is whether the profile is raised in a positive or negative manner.

In July 2004 the BBC headlined “TV actress backs Sudanese appeal” (BBC, 2004, Jul 20). Joanna Lumley, star of British sitcom *Absolutely Fabulous*, launched a DEC (Disasters Emergency Committee) appeal for Darfur in the UK and urged people to donate generously. This appeal raised £2.5 million in the first night. This was referred to by the DEC as a “tremendous response”. (BBC, 2004, Jul 21). Within a few days the BBC were headlining that “Sudan web appeal hits record high” (BBC, 2004, Jul 26[b]). For Darfur, in the UK, celebrity involvement raised the profile in a manner that increased donations.

Jesse Jackson visited Darfur in July 2004. In August, it was reported that Danny Glover (star of the *Lethal Weapon* films) was arrested outside the Sudanese embassy in Washington D.C protesting over the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. (BBC, 2004, Aug 26). It is noteworthy that some of the initial celebrity involvement was from African-American stars. In November Mia Farrow visited Darfur.

Was the celebrity involvement in the Darfur crisis positive or negative? There were both positive and negative consequences. From a positive perspective, celebrity involvement contributed to retaining media interest and, particularly in the UK, served to increase public donations. The negative consequences are more difficult to evaluate.

In an interview in the US Mia Farrow suggested an 'Operation Firewood', exclaiming "For God's sake, could we not get some trucks from Chad and get the firewood to the women in the camps" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2004, Nov 22). If this idea had been proposed to aid workers in Darfur, then the logistical, environmental, cultural, financial and physical impossibilities of delivering daily firewood to over a million people would have been clarified. Farrow then explained that "non-food supplies are desperately needed: blankets, medicines, clothes". Whilst this was true, within the context of the interview Farrow seemed to suggest that people should donate these goods to aid agencies. Material donations in western countries are rarely welcomed by NGOs. This is due to the logistical costs of transportation, the cultural inappropriateness of the goods donated, and the fact that all NGOs strive to support the economy of the country within which they are working by purchasing as much as possible locally.

Farrow then suggested that perhaps newspapers like the *Inquirer* could "exert some influence" in getting the African Union to change the mandate of their peace-observing force in Darfur. The notion that a US newspaper either could or *should* try to influence a 53-country African inter-governmental organisation shows little understanding of the complexities of the situation or the complexities of global inter-governmental organisations.

Mia Farrow is certainly to be commended for her interest and her humanity. Generally speaking, the benefits of celebrity involvement in a crisis in raising the profile outweigh the negative consequences. If celebrities were to communicate more effectively with aid workers on the ground regarding how and why things happen in a particular way, then their involvement could be significantly more positive by using their considerable voice to raise the profile of a crisis and also providing more accurate information to a captive western audience. Given the examples indicated above, it would appear that there could have been better communication between Farrow and humanitarian actors in Darfur regarding programmes.

Darfur's 'X-factor': The genocide effect

Darfur first began to gain mass mainstream media coverage in April 2004. This month marked the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in which an estimated eight hundred thousand Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred in just over three months. The failure of the United Nations and the international community at large to prevent this genocide was endlessly discussed, frequently within the context of 'never again' refrains such as "Rwanda's lesson: 'Never again'" (Page, 2004, Apr 10) and "Annan: Never again like Rwanda" (News24, 2004, Apr 8).

The international crime of genocide is the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a group of people. A 'group' of people is defined within a national, tribal, ethnic or religious framework. There is almost universal consensus today that in early 1994, the Hutu government had a clear intent to destroy the Tutsi population, and so the crime of genocide was committed – even though it was not formally recognised as such until it was too late.

Genocide is seen as the most heinous of crimes, and an accusation of genocide is therefore likely to generate extensive media coverage. The 'lesser' offences – crimes against humanity, and war crimes – that are widely occurring in many current silent emergencies, from Chechnya to Colombia, do not generate such international media coverage.

The first mention of genocide in Darfur came in February 2004 from a US Professor, Eric Reeves, in an article entitled "Unnoticed Genocide" (*Washington Post*, 2004, Feb 25). This is noteworthy not so much because a Sudan researcher and analyst drew an early and unsubstantiated genocide conclusion, but because of the prominence that the *Washington Post* gave to this position by publishing it. The next public genocide comment was from a UN source. The UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the Sudan in early 2004 was Mukesh Kapila. In March 2004 Kapila stated publicly that Darfur was "comparable in character, if not scale, to the Rwanda genocide" (UN, 2004, Mar 29). Soon after making this remark Kapila resigned from his post, less than halfway through a two-year contract. According to Reeves his resignation was due to pressure from Khartoum following his genocide remarks (Sudan Reeves, 2005, Jul 22). In

February and March 2004 both these genocide accusations received limited media coverage, although Kapila's comments undoubtedly influenced the subsequent April genocide implications by Annan and Bush in speeches commemorating the Rwandan genocide.

So from the platform of these first, relatively quiet, genocide accusations, mass media interest in Darfur erupted in April 2004, ensnared within a plethora of media articles relating to the Rwandan genocide. Both Kofi Annan and George Bush made speeches on April 7th 2004 commemorating the International Day of Reflection for Rwanda and in both speeches reference was made to the crisis in Darfur.

The reasons for the genocide theme so rapidly becoming the Darfur buzz-word are complex. The anniversary of Rwanda highlighted a collective global guilt for failing to prevent that genocide at the same time that there was a unmistakeable humanitarian crisis occurring in Darfur. Kofi Annan was the Head of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Rwanda in 1994 and bears personal responsibility for the failure of the UN to prevent or halt the Rwandan genocide. It has been noted that he is particularly "sensitive to the analogy about delays" (BBC, 2004, Jun 10). For President Bush, US foreign policy at the time was moving towards a high-profile response to Darfur, which likely contributed to the objective of inferring genocide in Darfur by implicitly comparing Darfur to Rwanda, despite this potentially endangering the north-south peace process.

Hence it wasn't the international media that spontaneously picked up on the theme of genocide and attributed it to Darfur. Instead, policymakers at the highest level themselves suggested the link between Rwanda and Darfur, so supplying the international media with a platform from which to highlight the situation in Darfur. This certainly suggests that political agenda-setters have a significant influence on the direction of media coverage – the other side of the fence, perhaps, to the notion that national self-interest is a "pre-condition" (CARMA International, 2006:5) for attracting media attention.

The media focus from April 2004 onwards concentrated on the question of genocide. After the Rwandan commemoration speeches, the question of genocide in Darfur was

then amplified by a ‘warning’ of genocide from the Committee on Conscience of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (CNN, 2004, May 3). This served to stimulate the escalating media and public intrigue with the genocide question.

In reality, although the Darfur situation was formally labelled genocide by the US Congress in July 2004 and then by the US Administration in September 2004, the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union and all other western governments have persistently rejected this claim.

Genocide is a legal term and should only be determined within the context of the legal definition. An ongoing debate questions whether genocide is in fact definitively more heinous than all other crimes. If genocide is deemed to be the most heinous of all crimes then accusations of genocide should not be made lightly, but instead should be irrefutably substantiated. Some analysts argue that the term ‘genocide’ is “devalued by misuse” (BBC, 2005, Feb 1[a]), whilst others argue that the current legal definition is too narrow and should be broadened to encompass more situations. The argument that the definition is too narrow centres around the fact that genocide was defined after the Holocaust in 1948 and that the world is now a very different place. This position asserts that the definition does not include politically or socially targeted groups (it only includes groups on the basis of ethnicity, race, tribal or religious affiliation) and also that the critical element of genocidal intent is generally extremely difficult to prove beyond reasonable doubt.

The counter argument is that the current narrow definition of genocide remains the correct one unless we want to ‘devalue’ the crime by applying it to wider and broader conditions. This stance holds that “genocide is distinguishable from all other crimes by the motivation behind it” (BBC, 2005, Feb 1[a]). Intent is the most critical element – the original and predetermined intent to wipe out a group of people purely on the grounds of ethnicity or race or tribe. It is a graver crime than a government policy of politically or economically motivated mass murder on the grounds that it is the motivation itself that is the most heinous. The International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia Appeals Chamber stated that:

the crime of genocide is singled out for special condemnation and opprobrium. The crime is horrific in its scope: its perpetrators identify entire human groups for extinction...This is a crime against all of humankind, its harm being felt not only by the group targeted for destruction, but by all of humanity. (UN, 2005, Feb 1:137)

From a legal perspective, the issue of intent is the crucial element in determining genocide. The above comment suggests that even from a broader, more philosophical perspective, it is still the intent – the motivation – that makes genocide the crime of all crimes and gives it a “special stigma” (UN, 2005, Feb 1:137). The opposing argument is that if one hundred thousand people are killed, regardless of the motivation behind it, one hundred thousand people are still dead and whether it is genocide or not is largely academic. Given the sheer scope of fascination with the question of genocide in Darfur – and the corresponding lack of interest in other emergencies where ‘lesser’ crimes against humanity are being perpetrated – it appears that the world in general, and the media in particular, concur that genocide is the most heinous of crimes.

Regarding Darfur in early 2004 the GoS were referred to as “genocidal killers” (*Observer*, 2004, May 30). Journalist Nicholas Kristof commented that:

Sudan’s leaders should not be able to get away with mass murder just because they are shrewd enough to choose victims who inhabit a poor region without airports, electricity or paved roads (*New York Times*, 2004, Mar 24)

This opinion disregards the fact that the GoS did not proactively and with intent and aforethought march into Darfur to begin a campaign of mass slaughter and displacement. On the contrary, the region of Darfur was generally ignored by the GoS until the rebel movement forced their attention and (re)action. It is universally acknowledged that the reaction of the GoS against the insurgency was both harsh and disproportionate, and showed an absolute lack of concern for civilian casualties. This potentially constituted crimes against humanity and war crimes, but it does not constitute genocide if the original intent to destroy a group of people as defined by the above criteria did not exist. After a three month investigation, the UN concluded that genocide did not occur, on this basis that the crucial element of genocidal intent was missing. The notion of genocidal intent:

must not be confused with motive, namely, the particular reason that may induce a person to engage in criminal conduct...From the viewpoint of criminal law, what matters is not the motive, but rather whether or not there exists the requisite special intent to destroy a group. (UN, 2005, Feb1:133)

The UN investigation found evidence in Darfur that “could be indicative of the genocidal intent” (UN, 2005, Feb 1:139) but crucially, there were “other more indicative elements that show a lack of genocidal intent” (UN 2005, Feb 1:139). One of these elements noted within the report is that, whilst villages were attacked on a whole-scale basis, only young men (perceived as either rebels or potential rebels) were killed; old men, women and children generally survived the raids so ending up in displaced persons camps. Furthermore, the displaced camps, “although open to strong criticism on many grounds, do not seem to be calculated to bring about the extinction of the ethnic group to which the internally displaced persons belong.” (UN, 2005, Feb 1:140).

The genocide issue was a constant crucial component of the Darfur story throughout 2004 and 2005. There is considerable disagreement between analysts and even governments as to whether genocide occurred, but regardless of the accuracy of the initial accusations, it was these allegations themselves in early 2004 that precipitated the media coverage that was crucial for ‘tipping’ Darfur from a silent emergency to a noisy one.

In June 2004 Colin Powell said that there were “indicators and elements that would start to move you towards a genocide conclusion but we’re not there yet.” (BBC, 2004, Jun 30). The US Congress disagreed and in July 2004 passed a resolution stating categorically that genocide had occurred in Darfur. Regardless of the validity of this conclusion, it was sufficient to retain media interest in the genocide question throughout July and August. There was considerable media focus on this: “US house calls Darfur ‘genocide’ (BBC, 2004, Jul 23), “Sudan says conflict ‘not genocide’” (CNN, 2004, Jul 24), and “Darfur: A repeat of Rwanda?” (BBC, 2004, Aug 23[b]).

At this time there was limited media coverage of those who disagreed with the congressional genocide conclusion, although this camp included the UN Security Council, the White House, all other western governments, the African Union, the European Union, and the majority of NGOs and advocacy groups.

The US Congress conclusion was welcomed by some who disagreed with the actual judgement but believed it would serve as an advocacy tool to pressurise the GoS:

Amnesty International...has not used the term “genocide” but welcomed the Congressional initiative as a way to raise awareness and persuade other governments, especially those in Africa, to put more pressure on the Sudanese government.” (CNN, 2004, Jul 24)

This raises grave questions. Accusing a government of genocide – the most heinous of all crimes – is a particularly harsh means of ‘raising awareness’. For Darfur, the tactic succeeded, and the genocide accusation became a platform from which media interest could be sustained. Yet whilst the international media covered the accusations and counter-accusations that flew back and forth regarding the genocide question, there was no discussion as to whether using an accusation of genocide as a method of increasing political pressure and ‘raising awareness’ was either appropriate or ethical.

Within the international media, the genocide debate began to scale down towards the end of August 2004. Then on 9th September 2004, Powell stated before a US Foreign Affairs Committee that the State Department and the White House had concluded that a policy of genocide had occurred in Darfur. This conclusion was based on a US evaluation of over one thousand Sudanese refugees across the border in Chad. Other evaluations, for instance, by the European Union, had found no conclusive evidence of genocide (BBC, 2004, Aug 10). The US allegation came precisely at the time that the UN Security Council was debating a third Resolution on Darfur. The allegation served to re-engage media focus on the genocide question at this crucial time. The timing was not lost on commentators. Joanne Mariner argued that Powell’s statement was more significant than he publicly acknowledged:

The timing of Powell's statement – precisely as the Security Council is debating Darfur – increases the pressure for U.N. action...Even Powell, moreover, lessened the impact of his genocide statement by explicitly downplaying its significance. (CNN, 2004, Sep 13)

Mariner discussed the apprehension involved in invoking the “g-word” due to the legal – and moral – obligations it infers. She also suggested that the Sudan benefited from the war in Iraq because preoccupation with “Iraq and other crises” resulted in the west being “little inclined to worry about Africa” (CNN, 2004, Sep 13). Notwithstanding the fact that there weren't ‘other crises’ with which the west was preoccupied - the “three foreign news priorities” being “Iraq, Iraq, Iraq” (Evans, 2005, Mar 9) – it was not only Iraq, but also the north-south Sudanese peace process that suppressed genuine policymaking attention on Darfur.

The US Congress accusation of genocide was welcomed as a means to ‘raise awareness’. The conclusion of genocide by Colin Powell on behalf of the White House can be viewed – as the above opinion proposed – as a means to put pressure on the Security Council for more forceful UN action. That Powell deliberately “downplayed” the importance of his genocide statement would lend credence to this idea. Again, the issue as to the morality of accusing a government of genocide in order to either raise awareness or apply political pressure is a crucial one, yet one that received no media attention.

Furthermore, the theory that the US deliberately drove the genocide claims for its own political gain received little media attention. In 1994 the US, and the international community at large, were so cautious about applying the word genocide to Rwanda that they didn't do so until it was far too late. In 2004, first the US Congress and then the US Administration were almost eager to proclaim that genocide had occurred in Darfur, months before any other international institution were able to reach any conclusion: and when they did, all other conclusions were that genocide had not occurred. Peter Beaumont reported that:

American warnings that Darfur is heading for an apocalyptic humanitarian catastrophe have been widely exaggerated by administration officials, it is alleged by international aid workers in Sudan. (*Observer*, 2004, Oct 3)

All other western international institutions agreed that the situation in Darfur undoubtedly amounted to crimes against humanity and possibly ethnic cleansing. The term ethnic cleansing derives from the Bosnia/Herzegovina conflict and is a literal translation from the Serbo-Croatian 'etnicko ciscenje'. Its precise origins are difficult to establish, but it is a phrase that is now ensconced within media and policymaker language. Drazen Petrovic, of the Sarajevo University Law School, defined ethnic cleansing as having three essential characteristics: a systematic policy, with support (through participation, instigation or acquiescence) of the authorities, and directed towards a defined civilian population. (Petrovic, 1994:12). These three characteristics were evident in Darfur: the scorched-earth campaign of destroying villages represented a systematic policy directed against the civilian population, and the unwillingness or inability of the GoS to reign in the Janjaweed who executed the attacks represented support from the authorities.

The UN Special Rapporteur for Bosnia/Herzegovina also added that ethnic cleansing is not a "consequence of war but rather its goal." (Petrovic, 1994:8). This was more difficult to establish in Darfur, and it is furthermore unclear whose goal is significant: whilst ethnic cleansing was quite possibly a 'goal' of the Janjaweed, it was not clear that it was a 'goal' of the GoS rather than a 'consequence' of a counter-insurgency campaign. Whilst the GoS created and gave licence to the Janjaweed, if it cannot be proven that ethnic cleansing was an original intent of the GoS (and instead, once created, the Janjaweed simply ran amok) then it is difficult to legally charge the GoS with ethnic cleansing.

The fundamental difference between genocide and ethnic cleansing in current international language is that genocide is a policy of extermination, whilst ethnic cleansing is not. Genocide also requires the special intent to destroy a group of people based on nothing more than their tribal, ethnic or religious affiliations. The enduring goal of ethnic cleansing is the "creation of living conditions that would make the return of the displaced community impossible" (Petrovic, 1994:9). It is logical that extreme cases of ethnic cleansing could constitute genocide; but in Darfur the lack of systematic extermination (evidenced by the comparatively minor number

of deaths and extremely high number of displaced people) together with no evidence of special intent does not allow for a conclusion of genocide.

Yet in September 2004 the US Administration determined that a policy of genocide had occurred in Darfur. Either the White House had learnt from their predecessors' mistake during the Rwandan genocide, and resolved to be the first brave nation to publicly employ the dreaded 'g-word' or there was political gain in singling out the Sudan for the "special condemnation and opprobrium" that is innate to a finding of genocide (UN, 2005, Feb 1:137). The deaths of up to four million people in the DRC since 1998 have not been labelled genocide; neither has the displacement of up to three million people in Colombia.

Politically, the US accusation of genocide did nothing to pressure either the United Nations or the GoS into more forceful action to halt the conflict. Significantly, neither did it lead to any conclusive military or political action by the US.

Powell's genocide statement did renew, once again, the media fascination with genocide. At this point more detailed legalistic wrangling began, regarding specifically the legal obligations upon the US now that the White House (rather than just Congress) had formally concluded genocide. The BBC argued that the use of the word did not legally oblige the US to act (BBC, 2004, Sep 9[a]) whilst at the same time the *Guardian* argued that the US "now has an obligation under international law to act" (*Guardian*, 2004, Sep 10).

The media attention at this time was on the US call of genocide. It rarely highlighted the contrary position, which was that the UN, the European Union, the African Union and all other governments had not reached a genocide conclusion. Where this was highlighted, it was only done so through commentary by Sudanese officials, within the context of reports such as "Sudan rebuffs U.S. 'genocide' call" (CNN, 2004, Sep 10[a]) or "Sudan anger over genocide claim" (BBC, 2004, Sep 10). When emphasising that it was only the US that had reached a genocide conclusion, Sudanese officials were factually correct, but as theirs were the only voices raising this point, the argument became somewhat invalidated.

On 25th January 2005 UNDCI (the Darfur Commission of Inquiry) reported back to the Secretary General, following a three month long investigation into the Darfur crisis. The Commission had four key tasks: to investigate possible violations of international humanitarian law; to determine if genocide or acts of genocide had occurred; to identify suspected perpetrators of violations; and to recommend an accountability mechanism.

In 1994 the US famously applied the formulation ‘acts of genocide’ to the situation in Rwanda rather than actual genocide (US State Department, 1994). Whilst this is pedantic in the extreme, it set an international precedent and so it was important that the genocide-focused task of UNDCI included both acts of genocide and genocide itself – both of which constitute crimes against humanity.

The Commission, firstly, determined that “the GoS and the Janjaweed are responsible for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law amounting to crimes under international law.” (UN 2005, Feb 1:3). The Commission found – despite the claim of the GoS that all force from their side was for counter-insurgency purposes only – that “most attacks were deliberately and indiscriminately directed against civilians...the use of military force was manifestly disproportionate to any threat posed by the rebels” (UN 2005, Feb 1:3).

The Commission found “credible evidence” that the rebel forces, in particular JEM and SLA were also responsible for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. The Commission did not find evidence that there was either a widespread or systematic nature to the violations by the rebel groups, as there was with Government and Janjaweed militia violations.

In answer to the million-dollar genocide question, the Commission “concluded that the GoS has not pursued a policy of genocide.” (UN 2005, Feb 1:4). This conclusion was on the basis that the “crucial element of genocidal intent” was not found. The conclusion was qualified in two ways. Firstly, the Commission acknowledged that some individuals (including Government officials) might have committed acts “with genocidal intent”. Secondly, and more importantly, the Commission stated firmly that:

The conclusion that no genocidal policy has been pursued and implemented in Darfur by the Government authorities...should not be taken in any way as detracting from the gravity of the crimes perpetrated in the region. International offences such as the crimes against humanity and war crimes that have been committed in Darfur may be no less serious and heinous than genocide. (UN 2005, Feb 1:4).

The Sudanese ambassador to the UK is quoted in as saying “We are grateful to this international commission for exonerating the Sudanese government of genocide. This was the main issue.” (*Guardian*, 2005, Feb 1). This is important, for even though the Commission found the Sudanese Government to be potentially guilty of serious crimes against humanity, the Sudanese Government welcomed the report simply because genocide was not concluded.

The release of the UNDCI report led to a plethora of articles confirming that the US was resolutely standing by its genocide conclusion, such as “US convinced of Darfur ‘genocide’” (BBC, 2005, Feb 1[b]). Yet, interestingly, in January 2006 President Bush, whilst addressing an audience at Kansas State University, claimed that in September 2004 Colin Powell had declared “our deep concern that we are headed towards genocide.” (US White House, 2006, Jan 23). In reality, Colin Powell did not declare a “deep concern that we are headed towards genocide”. Colin Powell testified before a US Foreign Affairs Committee that genocide had occurred in Darfur. President Bush himself followed this in a speech to the United Nations stating categorically that the crimes occurring in Darfur; “my government has concluded are genocide” (US White House, 2004, Sep 21). Despite the US insistence that they stood by their genocide finding in the immediate aftermath of the UN report that contradicted that finding, it would appear that a year later President Bush was willing to backtrack.

Another dimension to the 2005 genocide debate was the release of the film *Hotel Rwanda* – a powerful and moving account of Paul Rusesabagina who saved countless Rwandans during the 1994 genocide. The release of this film, concurrent with the release of the UN Darfur Commission of Inquiry Report (predictably) led to articles such as “How to stop Hotel Darfur” (*Guardian*, 2005, Mar 30[b]) and – referring back

to previous genocide-film combinations – “The Schindler of Rwanda” (CNN, 2005, Jan 6).

The general media and policymaking attention given to the question of genocide as pertaining – or not – to Darfur led to an increased public interest in the subject. In May 2005, a lecturer in comparative genocide at Kingston College (Kingston Town, London, UK) wrote that “this term there have been queues outside my office to discuss reading, to show me plans of their assessments and, even rarer, just to ask questions.” (*Guardian*, 2005, May 3). The lecturer comments that “Kingston is a very apolitical town, yet this year it seems to have noticed that the rest of the world exists. Is something happening?”

It would seem that something was happening. The scale of both media and public interest in the topic of genocide has intensified since early 2004. The tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide in 2004, together with the 2005 release of *Hotel Rwanda* (which for the first time, brought the Rwandan genocide to a mass western audience), affected the subject of genocide in Darfur and in general. This genocide question was a major characteristic of the original escalation of media interest and it has remained so throughout the news life span of Darfur.

A further issue related to genocide that kept Darfur in the spotlight in early 2005 was referral to the International Criminal Court. The role of the ICC is to prosecute individuals for crimes against humanity and war crimes (including, but not limited to, genocide). It is an international institution with the mandate to act only when national legal structures are either unable or unwilling to act themselves. It was established with the intention of being a permanent, more transparent, more economical, and essentially better alternative to ad-hoc war crimes tribunals such as those established for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. It has strong support from a variety of players, including most European countries. It is fervently opposed by the US, who believes that US citizens could be targeted for political reasons. One US diplomat was quoted as saying that “No US citizen is going to be tried by a Belgian” (*Guardian*, 2005, Feb 11) – although, for the record, the ICC is based at The Hague in the Netherlands, rather than in Belgium. It is difficult – although evidently not impossible – for a country to support international justice for others to which they

themselves are unwilling to submit. US opposition to the ICC was therefore unrelated to Darfur *per se*, but was a more general opposition that had been their highly vocal and unfaltering stance since the inception of the ICC.

Even before the UN report was finalised, it was recognised that regardless of a genocide conclusion, referral of the situation to the ICC would probably be recommended and that this would precipitate an historic debate over the court within the international community. In December 2004 a *Financial Times* article reported that:

European and US United Nations ambassadors are struggling to head off what could be their most pointed battle yet over the International Criminal Court, as a UN commission of inquiry prepares to report in January on alleged genocide in Sudan's Darfur region. (*Financial Times*, 2004, Dec 16)

This article quoted an unnamed UN diplomat who believed “the crunch [over the ICC] is going to come on Sudan”.

After publication of the UN genocide report, that did “strongly” recommend referral of Darfur to the ICC (UN 2005, Feb 1:5) there was a plethora of articles on the imminent “showdown” (BBC, 2005, Mar 24) within the Security Council. The UK, whilst generally in favour of the ICC, was wary of upsetting the US. Other European states felt less compunction and staunchly supported a referral to the ICC. It was clear that if Darfur – as a situation tailor-made for the ICC – was not referred to the ICC then it would significantly damage the credibility of the institution. The US was placed in the somewhat embarrassing position of either “abandoning its position, or vetoing international justice for Sudan” (*Financial Times*, 2004, Dec 16). This created a highly discomforting dilemma for the US. Absolute and unwavering opposition to the ICC had always been their official position. Yet at the same time, referral to the ICC was one of the cornerstone recommendations of the UN commission tasked with directing justice for Darfur, of which the US was the most strident proponent.

On 31st March 2005 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1593 (UN 2005, Mar 30) which referred the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court. Out of

the fifteen members of the Security Council, the resolution was passed with eleven in favour and four abstentions. The abstentions came from Algeria, China, Russia and the US. Russia and China both have oil interests in the Sudan. The US abstained from the vote only after receiving guarantees that no US citizen involved in peacekeeping operations within Darfur would be prosecuted. (BBC, 2005 Apr 1).

The suggestion that imminent referral of Darfur to the ICC “caused greater consternation in Washington than in Sudan” (*Guardian*, 2005, Feb 11) is untrue. It did cause a great deal of consternation within Washington. But it also caused more public outcry in Sudan than any other UN political initiative taken throughout the duration of the Darfur crisis.

The first 2005 Security Council Resolution on Darfur was Resolution 1591, adopted on 29th March. It called for an international asset freeze on Sudanese government-owned resources and a travel ban on certain Sudanese officials. The second was Resolution 1593, adopted on 31st March. This referred the Darfur crisis to the ICC. These Resolutions came after the release of the UN Commission of Inquiry Report (on 25th January) and after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between north and south Sudan (on 9th January). These Resolutions were entirely different in tone and in content from any Resolutions on Darfur that had previously been passed.

Different analysts have attributed the newly found political will of the international community with regard to Darfur in 2005 to different factors. One suggestion is that, after two years, the international community simply became tired of the continuing conflict. In March 2005, a British government source is quoted as saying “We have run out of patience. It would be incredible if the international community continued to just wave a finger.” (*Guardian*, 2005, Mar 8). Another suggestion is that the UN Commission of Inquiry Report – despite not concluding genocide – was the “impetus for the present burst of Security Council activity” (CNN, 2005, Apr 1). A third possible cause for the stronger tone taken by the Security Council was that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) had finally been signed. A report by British MPs accused the international community of being “too engrossed in securing an end to the Sudanese civil war” (*Guardian*, 2005, Mar 30[a]) resulting in a failure to take

the situation in Darfur seriously. Once the CPA had officially been signed, sealed and delivered, the pressure to not jeopardize that agreement by reacting too harshly to Darfur was relieved.

Following the March resolutions there were several anti-UN demonstrations throughout Sudan. An April report headlined that “Sudan stages ‘million-man’ march against UN war crimes trial demands” (AFP, 2005, Apr 5), stating that the demonstrations were the “strongest show of defiance by the Khartoum regime so far against Thursday’s Security Council resolution”. In reality, the demonstrations were the strongest show of defiance against the international community (and the UN in particular) since the conflict in Darfur began. Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese took to the streets in Khartoum alone, after President Bashir had sworn “thrice in the name of Almighty Allah” (BBC, 2005, Apr 5) that no Sudanese citizen would ever be handed over to a foreign court. Within Islam, invoking Allah’s name thrice (wa Allah, wa Allah, wa Allah) denotes an absolute stand with no possibility for negotiation.

The ICC referral generated a backlash in both Washington and Sudan. Within the international media, there was more discussion of the US opposition than of the Sudanese opposition. The US opposition had broader implications, specifically for the future of the ICC, and also for international institutions in general, and their ability to retain credibility without US support. Considerable media interest in this subject was expected and duly occurred with reports such as “Darfur inquiry threatens fresh controversy over international court” (*Financial Times*, 2004, Dec 16), “If not in Darfur, then where?” (*Guardian*, 2005, Feb 11) and “Sudan atrocities strain US relations” (BBC, 2005, Feb 1[c]).

The Sudanese opposition, conversely, received less coverage than it deserved. The anti-UN marches in April 2005 were unprecedented in the Sudan. They precipitated an increased anti-UN and anti-western atmosphere that never subsided. Additionally, the fact that it was only Resolution 1593 and not 1591 that provoked the demonstrations was not discussed within the international media. Resolution 1591 (asset freezes and travel bans) affected top Sudanese officials rather than the general Sudanese public. Resolution 1593 – referral to the ICC – also would not affect the

Sudanese public; rather it was aimed specifically at a list of 51 individuals identified by the UN Commission of Inquiry as being suspects of international crimes. Yet the notion of foreign courts trying Sudanese citizens was sufficient to produce a backlash against the international community that did not ever completely die down.

The ICC debate was a subsidiary factor to the genocide question. What was startling about the Darfur genocide question was the sheer degree of media and public interest that it sustained throughout 2004 and into 2005. Also, paradoxically, whilst both the genocide and the ICC debates allowed for a continued media interest in Darfur, conversely, Darfur allowed for an increased media and public interest in those topics in general. In this way genocide can be seen as Darfur's 'X-factor' of newsworthiness.

CHAPTER FIVE

REPRESENTATION OF THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The humanitarian response, media themes and confusion

From a humanitarian (as opposed to political) perspective the international media predominantly concentrated on the thematic subjects of rape, starvation and insecurity. These themes constituted the main sectoral (i.e. programme-focussed) reporting from Darfur.

One of the results of the blinkered media focus on hunger, rape and insecurity alone was that, by neglecting to report on other areas of humanitarian assistance, significant accomplishments and achievements were ignored. This inevitably raised questions as to how funds were being utilised and why the aid ‘wasn’t helping’. Many of the positive achievements in Darfur during the initial six-month period never appeared in mainstream media. A case in point was the comprehensive measles vaccination campaign undertaken in Darfur in April 2004, which successfully vaccinated over two million children (UN 2004, Jun 25:1) through coordination between WHO, UNICEF, Save the Children UK and the Sudanese Ministry of Health. The only media acknowledgement of this was in a June BBC report that documented the diary of a Cafod aid worker (BBC, 2004, Jun 23). A recognised paradox of aid work is that early reports of how successful the response is could potentially reduce future funding, yet at the same time, a lack of early positive reports serves to generate criticism about how conditions can remain so bad despite the huge amounts of funding made available.

Regarding humanitarian-determined priorities, a provisional report from the UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) emphasised that Darfur was a “crisis of protection, rather than a classic food security or public health emergency” (Concern Worldwide, 2004, Dec 4:2). One of the biggest characteristics of the protection issue was gender-based violence (GBV) – i.e. rape. This was a rather new situation for the humanitarian community, for in the past displaced or refugee populations did not normally encounter a still present daily threat around the camp areas. All

humanitarian agencies started to consider the notion of mainstreaming protection into all other classic sectoral areas such as nutrition, and water and sanitation. Mainstreaming involves the consideration of protection in the design of all programmes.

Protection remained a big issue throughout 2004 and 2005 and numerous programme initiatives were designed with protection in mind. For instance, in July 2004 a coordinated inter-agency initiative was launched for the production of fuel-efficient stoves. Fuel-efficient stoves are handmade locally, using only local materials. The programme was one primarily of training and information dissemination within a pyramid style 'train the trainer' approach. Fuel-efficient stoves consume up to 60% less fuel than traditional stoves. From an environmental perspective, the short, medium and long-term impact of two million people congregating in central areas was seen to be both enormous and irreversible. But, notwithstanding the fact that there were significant environmental benefits, the primary aim of this project was to reduce the burden on women leaving the safety of the camp to collect firewood and thus being exposed to the risk of rape. The fuel-efficient stove project was designed more from a protection perspective than from an environmental one. It was a more pragmatic solution to the rape issue than, for example, the 'Operation Firewood' proposed by Mia Farrow.

Protection (within the context of rape) quickly became one of the media's favourite themes. The rape issue became a peg, or a hook – a novelty factor in this particular story of African misery – that allowed for continued media interest. Headlines such as "Rape 'a weapon' in Sudan" (BBC, 2004, Jul 19), "The war crime of rape in Darfur" (CNN, 2004, Oct 27) and "Darfur families pledge to care for rape babies" (*Observer*, 2004, Dec 5) all focussed on the issue of rape. In this way media focus on rape correlated with the humanitarian focus on protection but it would seem that the media focus was not directly as a result of the humanitarian focus, but rather as a novelty factor – the correlation was a fortunate coincidence.

One of the other primary media thematic focus was that of starvation. Various reports headlined "Sudan's cruel and slow starvation" (BBC, 2004, Jul 24) and "Starvation stalks youngest in Darfur" (CNN, 2004, Aug 11). The media emphasis on "Sudanese

children dying of hunger” (BBC, 2004, Jun 9) is inconsistent with the actual information that was generated by actors on the ground. A much bigger concern for the humanitarian community was water and sanitation. A March 2004 MSF report stated that “for the moment, there is no severe malnutrition...but the problem is water.” (MSF, 2004, Mar 3). A further MSF report in May reiterated the concern with water, emphasising that there were rising numbers of people with bloody diarrhoea and that the problem was “exacerbated by the fact that the sanitation facilities are currently totally inadequate in most of the refugee camps.” (MSF, 2004, May 11). A UN News report in April 2004 highlighted the concern regarding escalating outbreaks of “communicable disease” (UN, 2004, Apr 9) because of the lack of sanitation.

The actual situation was much more complex than any media reports acknowledged. By October 2004, there had been seventeen nutrition and mortality surveys conducted in Darfur since the beginning of the year. The results produced varied enormously depending on the timing, the area, and the agency conducting the survey.

Crude mortality rates (CMR) varied between 0.5/10,000/day and 2.9/10,000/day (World Relief and WHO). The emergency-level figure for CMR is 1/10,000/day (that is, 1 person per 10,000 people per day). General acute malnutrition rates (GAM) varied between 6% and 22% (World Relief and WHO). The emergency-level figures for GAM are 10% for a serious situation, and 15% for a critical situation.

Interestingly, the World Relief survey concluded that there was actually no difference in the wasting (a sign of malnutrition) between resident children and IDP children, concluding that the children in IDP camps were no worse off than the children who remained in their village areas. More interesting still, is that a survey conducted by UNICEF in 2000 (3 years before the conflict began) found GAM rates of 22% in Darfur. This serves to reinforce the notion that the actual, tangible, measurable characteristics of the Darfur crisis did not in themselves result in Darfur being the ‘worst humanitarian crisis in the world’ in 2004. Malnutrition rates – whilst appalling – had firstly, not dramatically worsened specifically due to the conflict, and, secondly, were no higher than a number of other African crises that receive little attention and little funding. In the summer of 2004 there were GAM rates of over 30% in some

areas of Kenya (Fewsnet, 2004, Sep 7), and of nearly 20% in Eritrea (Fewsnet, 2004, Sep 20) but these countries received negligible media coverage. The notion of normal – or acceptable – levels of starvation cannot be applied to Darfur in a vacuum, but rather must be globally applicable.

In Darfur the general humanitarian consensus was that “public health is more of a threat than nutrition” (Concern Worldwide, 2004, Oct 4:7). The people of Darfur have essentially always managed to survive in a harsh desert environment and so have advance coping mechanisms in relation to food security. Sanitation (and thus public health) was considerably more difficult to manage due to the sheer size of the IDP camps. In any humanitarian disaster, when hundreds of thousands of people are forced to congregate in restricted central areas, the lack of clean water supplies and the lack of adequate sanitation facilities create conditions where disease rapidly proliferates. By September 2004 there had been recorded over 7000 cases of Hepatitis E (caused by inadequate sanitation). By the end of the year this increased to 17,720 cases. WHO concluded that malaria and Hepatitis E together produced the highest proportion of deaths in Darfur (UN, 2005, Jan 1:4).

So, considerable humanitarian focus was on public health initiatives, including the digging of latrines, soap distribution, public hygiene campaigns, and animal carcass removal. There was little mention of these programme initiatives within mainstream media reporting. A July CNN report based on the experiences of an IRC aid worker referred to the IRC carcass disposal team whose “rather unpleasant job is to prevent the outbreak of disease by collecting as many dead animals as possible” (CNN, 2004, Jul 22). The only other exception was an August BBC report quoting a Christian Aid humanitarian aid worker as saying “I met someone from the UN and they said ‘sanitation, sanitation, sanitation’. It’s an absolute priority.” (BBC, 2004, Aug 4[a]). As an “absolute priority” this sectoral area received an inexcusably inadequate level of attention from the international media.

The tangible effects of distorted media coverage on funding were quite low. Most NGO public funds are restricted by country rather than sector. So public donations received by NGOs through fundraising activities are generally restricted to the country being advertised, but can be used within any sectoral area. Formal donations

– from governments – are influenced less by media representation than public donations are. By October 2004 57% of the UN's consolidated appeal of \$368 million had been received from various governments. The allocation of this money showed 'watsan' (water and sanitation) as being the proportionally highest funded at 69%, with health at 62%, and food at 61%. The UN consolidated appeal process (CAP) is based on estimated needs for a defined time-period per sector, based on sector costs. So, for example, distributing food to one million people, on a monthly basis, over the course of a year, will cost significantly more than digging latrines for one million people (which only needs to be done once). The percentage of funding allocated to each sector by the UN against estimated costs for that sector reflect the humanitarian-determined priority of water and sanitation as being the most urgent area.

So the perception generated by the international media was that food and rape were the two primary humanitarian concerns in Darfur and this was half accurate and half not. Given the lack of correlation between media reports and humanitarian reports in relation to water, sanitation and public health it seems likely that media focus on rape was not the direct result of the humanitarian focus on protection. The other main media theme was that of insecurity.

It was clear that the media gave little indication as to how the Darfur humanitarian response operated. An unrealistic western public perception of aid work became obvious through the BBC have your say forum, following the withdrawal of Save the Children UK from Darfur in December 2004. The comment – "I think [NGOs] can keep themselves away from the danger of the civil war by asking for Sudanese and UN protection...they also can change their locations for safer areas" (BBC, 2004, Dec 24) – reveals the pervasive lack of understanding, produced in part by media representation. The only way in which aid workers could "change their locations for safer areas" would have been to move out of Darfur.

In September 2004 it was recorded that 78% of Darfur was considered a UN 'go' zone (i.e. secure). In November 2004 the GoS and the two main rebel parties signed two protocols in Abuja, relating to humanitarian access and security. Within weeks of these protocols being signed there were gross violations by all parties, including the

newly formed rebel group NMRD that, due to being newly formed, was not a signatory to these protocols. The security situation rapidly deteriorated from this point onwards.

Even before the signing of the Abuja protocols, in October 2004 two Save the Children UK staff members were killed in a landmine incident. Rafe Bullick, a Scottish programme manager and Nourredine Issa Tayeb, a Sudanese water engineer, were killed when their vehicle hit a landmine outside of Um Barro in north Darfur. The driver of the vehicle, although badly injured, survived. This incident represented the first death of a western aid worker and led to a plethora of reports in mainstream media reporting. Following on from these deaths, the BBC headlined “Darfur ‘too unsafe’ for food aid” (BBC, 2004, Oct 13) as WFP temporarily suspended their operations in the area of the landmine incident whilst AU and UN Security investigations were conducted.

In December 2004 the deaths of two more (local) staff led to Save the Children UK withdrawing from Darfur. Their press release stated that:

It is with deep regret that Save the Children UK announces that we are unable to continue our humanitarian operations in Darfur...we just cannot continue to expose our staff to the unacceptable risks they face as they go about their humanitarian duties in Darfur. (Save the Children UK, 2004, Dec 21)

The withdrawal of Save the Children UK resulted in media reports such as “British aid charity quits Sudan’s troubled Darfur” (SABC, 2004, Dec 21). On the BBC have your say forum one comment offered regarding the withdrawal of Save the Children UK was that “instead of dribbling in support and protection in small numbers which are proving to be vulnerable and ineffective, it would be best to flood Darfur with charities.” (BBC, 2004, Dec 24). Over seventy NGO and UN agencies operational in the region, with a total of nearly 10,000 staff, cannot be viewed as “small numbers” and the truth is that Darfur had been “flooded with charities” but this did not improve security situation.

Another comment assumed that “those staff [who were killed] were of foreign nationality, of course...I believe that rather than a total shut-down of operations, the aid agencies might look at training Darfur nationals to carry out their humanitarian work.”. Only one international staff member has been killed in Darfur; all the other deaths were of local staff. In all crisis or emergency situations, approximately 95% of aid workers *are* national staff.

So the media representation of Darfur was based on a limited number of themes: rape, starvation and insecurity. All of these chosen themes were inaccurately portrayed. It is inevitable that any media or NGO representation of a situation such as Darfur will be simplified. The inherent complexities and chaos are not conducive to two-minute headline news reports, or even two-page newspaper editorials. Yet the themes that were chosen as media favourites for Darfur did not precisely correspond to the priorities established by humanitarian actors and this in itself resulted in an inaccurate representation of the situation. Furthermore, it wasn't simply a limited choice of programme themes that resulted in inaccuracy. There were other dynamics that existed that served to create confusion.

From a media perspective, the early notion of Darfur as a side-show to the north-south civil war served to create conditions within which confusion was always going to be problematic. Whilst the two Sudanese conflicts are connected – the progressing north-south peace process initially encouraged the Darfur rebels to take up arms in the hope of attaining a similar negotiation process – they are also independent disputes that must be viewed as such. Policymakers themselves contributed to this media confusion between the two separate conflicts by initially only commenting on Darfur whilst also referring to the progress being made within the north-south peace process. This led to media reporting on Darfur also being couched wholly within the context of the north-south conflict, resulting in an inaccurate representation of the root causes of the issues in Darfur, particularly with regard to religion.

An illustration of the general confusion between the two Sudanese conflicts becomes apparent in a April 2004 CNN report in which President Bush is quoted as stating that the “government of the Sudan must not remain complicit in the brutalisation of Darfur. This civil war is one of the worst humanitarian tragedies of our time,

responsible for the deaths of two million people over two decades.” (CNN, 2004, Apr 7). The reporting here places a statement regarding Darfur directly next to a statement referring to the north-south conflict, so inaccurately suggesting that two million people have died in Darfur over twenty years.

An April BBC report states that “Some 670,000 people, mostly blacks, have fled the region but remain in Sudan” (BBC, 2004, Apr 21). This confuses the internally displaced people who, over the years, fled from south Sudan but remained in the Sudan, with those internally displaced people in Darfur who are internally displaced within Darfur – they did not ‘flee’ the region.

This confusion between the north-south civil war and the relatively ‘new’ conflict in Darfur became a consistent characteristic of the Darfur story. It led to a generalisation that, at best, failed to highlight the specific root causes of the Darfur conflict and, at worst, provided information that was factually inaccurate – so distorting the representation of the conflict in the west and relegating subsequent discussions of Darfur to issues that lacked any real relevance to the crisis. More insidious than lack of media accuracy in reporting from Darfur was the lack of accuracy in some of the information being generated by humanitarian actors on the ground.

Some of this information can be viewed as somewhere on a sliding scale between oversimplification and actual inaccuracy. A UN Press Release (UN, 2004, Mar 29) referred to the “Fur ethnic communities of the Masalit, Dajo, Tunjur, Tama and Zaghawas...”, failing to recognise that these aforementioned tribes are not ethnic sub-sections of the Fur tribe, but are in fact different tribes. An understanding of the tribal framework of the region is fundamental to an understanding of Darfur; if information produced by UN sources was inaccurate then it would appear that this prerequisite understanding was lacking.

IRIN (the United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network), reported in February 2004 that there is “absolutely no access to any place, no humanitarian access” (UN, 2004, Feb 26). This directly contradicted reports that in February 2004 aid workers had access to between 15% and 25% of the population of Darfur (UN,

2004, Feb 13) and (UN, 2004, Feb 27). Whilst far from being comprehensive, this did not constitute ‘no access at all’.

Many of the media-led misconceptions that abounded during this initial period were based on oversimplification, and this was propagated by the confusion between Darfur and the north-south civil war. Another theme worthy of discussion relates to the vocabulary used that suggested that in early 2004 Darfur was a new crisis. ‘New’ is a relative term, and in comparison to the north-south civil war the Darfur conflict was undoubtedly new.

Yet the conflict started in Darfur in early 2003. By December 2003 it was estimated that half a million people had already been displaced. Both policymakers and mainstream international media contributed to the notion that the crisis in Darfur started in early 2004, through the use of such phrases as a “disaster brewing” (US White House, 2004, May 26); a “crisis unfolding” (US White House, 2004, May 27), a crisis that is “gaining momentum” (SABC, 2004, Apr 7), and a situation that is “stark and mounting” (BBC, 2004, May 26).

From a policy-making perspective and a humanitarian perspective, the unwillingness to highlight that the Darfur crisis had been continuing for over a year is rational. The international community deliberately choose to politically sideline Darfur due to the more pressing imperative of the north-south peace process. This is not something that political or humanitarian actors would wish to highlight. Whether conscious or not at various levels, a decision was made to ignore Darfur whilst working towards the greater good of reaching a north-south peace agreement. From a media perspective (the third side of the crisis triangle) the benefit of collusion is less obvious.

In 2003 there was a lack of access to Darfur itself, but there were also over 50,000 Darfur refugees across the border in Chad. News media agencies such as Reuters and AFP have correspondents across Africa and the growing refugee population in Chad was creating noise in both Khartoum and the Chadian capital of N’jamena. All of these refugees, easily accessible to journalists, had horrifying stories of rampaging Janjaweed looting and burning their way through villages. Yet their stories remained, for the most part, unspoken.

The function of news journalism is to inform and enlighten, but in practice this is generally only applicable to situations that have a value of newsworthiness. So there was either no intrinsic news value in Darfur until policymakers became interested or the situation was overlooked by the international media who then subsequently complied with the policymakers' position in 2004 that the crisis was 'new'. Due to the growing noise created by the refugee population in Khartoum and N'djamena it seems unlikely that the situation was simply 'overlooked'. Therefore 50,000 Sudanese refugees in Chad, and a further half a million internally displaced people in Darfur, were not considered to be newsworthy until the policymaking spotlight moved in that direction. Terminology such as 'escalating', 'unfolding' and 'brewing' in the spring of 2004 failed to acknowledge the suffering of hundreds of thousands of people for well over a year.

Therefore media inaccuracy in representing Darfur stemmed from a number of different sources. Firstly, the thematic concentration on sensationalist sectors such as rape, starvation and insecurity disqualified reporting on other areas that humanitarian actors considered to be more important. Secondly, general confusion with the north-south civil war resulted in incorrect information inadvertently being offered by policymakers and the media about Darfur. Thirdly, the notion of Darfur as a 'new' crisis in early 2004 disregarded the suffering of hundreds of thousands of people for well over a year. Some of this inaccuracy was based on a media requirement for simplicity, yet some of it was fed to the media directly from policymakers and humanitarian actors – thus, exposing once again, the complex relationship between the three sides of the crisis triangle.

CHAPTER SIX

THE QUESTION OF PERCEPTION

The Red Cross Code of Conduct

As the Darfur crisis escalated and attracted more attention, media coverage was given to both the political and the humanitarian response. The coverage of the humanitarian response focused almost exclusively on the international effort. This is quite typical of international media disaster reporting. There is always a disproportionate emphasis on the international ‘rescue’ part and – conversely – a lack of emphasis on the efforts of local people to assist themselves. Even in the countries affected by the 2004 Asian tsunami, the media were criticised for concentrating on the “victims, as opposed to survivors”. The news stories were all about “mainly white...aid workers helping those victims” (Reuters, 2005, Mar 10[a]:3).

Sri Lanka and Indonesia are drastically more developed than the Darfur region of the Sudan. Superior education, communication systems and infrastructure in Sri Lanka and Indonesia would have facilitated an appreciably more accurate representation than was perhaps possible in Darfur. It would have been easier in Sri Lanka and Indonesia for the media to show more accurately the strengths and capabilities of the local populations. But this didn’t happen. If the representation remains distorted in the best of conditions then there seems to be little hope in the worst of conditions.

A June 2004 BBC report followed a WFP aid worker through a typical day in Darfur. In Birdageig IDP (internally displaced persons) camp he remarked that the “inhabitants of the camp have set up a security committee and as a result people are safe to cultivate fields within a 10km radius.” (BBC, 2004, Jun 28). This acknowledgement of IDP initiatives is highly unusual within media reports. This report is similar to that documenting the diary of a Cafod aid worker referred to on page 78 (BBC, 2004, Jun 23) in that news information through the forum of, in this instance, aid worker ‘diaries’, provides a more comprehensive picture – and specifically a more positive representation – than reports collated by journalists. Even though both aid workers’ diaries referred to Darfur as the worst humanitarian

crisis they had personally witnessed, they exposed, possibly even unintentionally, positive as well as negative elements.

In direct contrast to the media focus on the international aspect of the response, UN and NGO press releases consistently emphasised the efforts of the local community to assist and support the displaced population, both in Darfur and in Chad. Examples include the January 2004 UN report, which emphasised that most of the refugees in Chad “rely on the generosity of host communities” (UN, 2004, Jan 13) and the February UN report that discussed how the local communities were “supporting” the refugees in Chad (UN, 2004, Feb 13).

Additional examples include the March 2004 MSF article stating that “the Chadian population continues to be supportive of the refugees in general” (MSF, 2004, Mar 3). A further MSF press release that same month referred again to how the “host community is assisting as far as they are able” (MSF, 2004, Mar 10). Similarly, a May Oxfam press release affirmed that “Most of the displaced people are dependent on the generosity and support of local communities.” (Oxfam, 2004, May 25). A June Save the Children UK press release commented that “Existing mechanisms have already broken down” (Save the Children UK, 2004, Jun 17) – thereby acknowledging that the people in Darfur are capable human beings who do have a variety of coping mechanisms, even if they were no longer functional.

The brief reference in the June 2004 BBC report to the security committee established by the inhabitants of the camp was an inadequately fleeting allusion to an entire aspect of the humanitarian response in Darfur that received almost no coverage. All of the IDP camps in Darfur – and their sister refugee camps in Chad – had security and other committees established by the inhabitants of the camp. The inhabitants of all camps were highly involved in the running of the camp – the dissemination of information, the organisation of distributions, the planning of vaccination, sanitation and health campaigns and so forth.

In 2001 ITDG Practical Action (an NGO specialising in capacity-building, sustainable development projects in Sudan) helped to establish the Kafuat Women’s Development Association in north Darfur (ITDG, 2004, Jan). By 2003 this Association had a

membership of 432 women from nine different villages. When the conflict began, they used the Women's Development Centre (which they themselves had built) to provide shelter to 113 displaced families from Kutum. They gathered food through the Naffir system of group collaboration, with each woman returning to her home village to request contributions. They also provided accommodation for Government officials who arrived to assess conditions.

The women from the KWDA were (and still are) recognised as important humanitarian actors by both international NGOs and UN agencies operating in Darfur and by the GoS. They have even travelled to Khartoum to attend country-level meetings.

The KWDA is neither unique within Darfur or within emergencies in general. Other local organisations existed in Darfur, and their contribution to the response was invaluable and also mirrored the efforts of individuals and communities within the region.

The lack of coverage of this local aspect of the humanitarian response in Darfur is significant in two ways. Firstly, it is evident that an entire area of the humanitarian response to the crisis was largely ignored by the international media. If the function of the media is to inform and enlighten, and accuracy of representation is a goal in itself, then an entire facet of the humanitarian response being ignored clearly constitutes a failure of this function.

Secondly, the consequences of the media wholly neglecting local efforts to stabilise the situation contribute to the failure to portray the people of Darfur as dignified human beings rather than feeble victims. This contravenes the Red Cross Code of Conduct, which, of course, media organisations are not a party to. More insidiously, it perpetuates the myth of 'helpless' Africans to a western general public that already believes too many resources are directed towards a doomed Africa.

In July 2004 the BBC published a series of diary entries from a UNICEF aid worker in Nyala, south Darfur. One such diary entry referred to how the "IDP community

plays an important role in the construction and maintenance of the latrines” (BBC, 2004, Jul 15[b]). A further July report quoted an Oxfam aid worker:

There was lots of community participation as people worked together with us to dig the pits... Such united efforts give people in this newly formed community a sense of ownership and control over their lives” (BBC, 2004, Aug 14)

This is an aspect that was overlooked by general journalistic reporting unless it was directly through the forum of an aid worker’s diary or interview. The humanitarian-focused reports (as opposed to the politically-focused reports) by journalists instead tended to concentrate on portraying the stereotypical image of the feeble, pitiful, helpless African. This was portrayed through both visual images and through phrases such as “[a]mong the stench and flies, the children lie wasted...” (BBC, 2004, Jul 24). These reports were not entirely inaccurate, but a counter-balancing representation of the dignity and strength of the people of Darfur was notably lacking.

The author of an NGO education assessment report declared “I had not been to Darfur for fourteen years and it was wonderful to find the people as friendly, patient, attentive and civilised as I had remembered them to be.” (Concern Worldwide, 2004, Oct 1:2). The difference in language is both striking and typical of the differences between humanitarian and media reports: ‘children lying wasted amongst the stench and the flies’ as compared to people who are ‘friendly, patient, attentive and civilised’. The author of the NGO report recognised and acknowledged the people of Darfur as human beings rather than as victims in a way that few mainstream media articles did. The education assessment itself examined both schools established by international NGOs (INGOs) and those established through local efforts, and concluded that:

The contrasts between these [INGO] schools and the IDP-initiated schools...could not have been greater...the simple fact is that, for the moment at least, the schools set up with international support do not work. Little teaching or learning appears to be going on in them. (Concern Worldwide, 2004, Oct 1:12)

This education assessment concluded that, not only were local efforts as important as international or foreign efforts, but in this particular sector (being education) the local

efforts were *better* than international efforts. The strength, resourcefulness and aptitude of the displaced people as highlighted by the education assessment are rarely portrayed to the western world through mainstream media reporting.

It is also important to recognise that within a situation such as Darfur people still must continue with their daily lives. Whilst life within an IDP camp is abnormal, harsh, and (hopefully) temporary, the media representation of absolute abject misery is not a true reflection. The UNICEF aid worker tells the story of Aisha, who is:

excited as today is her first day at school...The girls laugh and make fun...For a moment I completely forget that I'm in an IDP camp...Aisha tells me that she is an orphan...Aisha looks rather cheerful – she is still excited about her first school day in the camp.
(BBC, 2004, Jul 8)

Media reports that concentrate solely on absolute abject misery do not truly reflect the reality of life in a refugee or IDP camp. This fails to portray the people in Darfur with the dignity that is both required by the International Red Cross Code of Conduct, and is their right. An Oxfam Press Release regarding the distribution of water buckets in Kalma Camp in south Darfur reiterated the Red Cross Code of Conduct, stating that Oxfam is “committed to treating those affected by disasters not as helpless victims in need of what we see fit to give them, but as human beings like any other.” (Oxfam, 2004, Oct 7).

In contrast, media representation of Darfur contributed to the perpetuation of the myth of people in developing countries being pitiful, feeble, helpless victims. In general, this leads to an increasing fatigue within the western public in terms of donating money for yet another African crisis. But conversely, who in the western world would be compelled to donate money to cheerful, resourceful people who are helping themselves? The fragile balance of portrayal unequivocally demonstrates the ethical dilemma within the NGO crisis triangle: the most accurate representation of the developing world, required by the advocacy function, impairs the fundraising function.

In general, media representation of feeble victims affects the funding generated for humanitarian response operations in two ways. Firstly, the UN usually receives no more than three quarters of any of its appeal. For democratic western governments, money is frequently given (or withheld) on the basis of general public opinion and so crisis fatigue as emphasised by media reporting puts public pressure on western governments to stop hard-earned tax dollars going into the African 'black-hole'.

Secondly, NGOs receive funding from both formal government sources and from the general public. The crisis fatigue also leads to less money being donated directly to NGOs by the public. One particular comment offered in relation to Darfur on the BBC have your say forum was that:

the crisis taking place in Sudan will not be the last. Many African countries are destined to implode in a similar manner. As a continent, Africa can do nothing. Africa has only been good at incubating problems and watch them explode. (BBC, 2004, Jul 30)

Sadly, this is not a minority view. This cynicism is of course mixed with a degree of human sympathy that compels people to donate money to humanitarian causes. The cynicism, or fatigue, that exists would be less prevalent if the media were better at portraying some of the strength, innovation and dignity that exists within African communities. This raises the catch-22 nature of the ethical dilemma again.

In November 2004 a couple of media reports covered an exhibition of Sudanese history at the British Museum. This exhibition was only worthy of media attention because of the crisis in Darfur, and it produced a 'heated debate on Sudan and the Darfur crisis' (*Guardian*, 2004, Nov 11). The exhibition's curator explained that:

Most people don't know anything except the bad news about Sudan. We want to show the other side of the story. This is a country of rich history and vast potential. We wanted to give a sense of the complexity of cultures which have gone to make up present day Sudan. (CNN, 2004, Nov 5)

In the summer of 2005, the BBC launched an 'Africa is live on the BBC' season, with programmes focussing on music, art and culture, as opposed to famine, strife and war. These kinds of initiatives offer an excellent counter-balancing view to the negative

images usually generated from Africa and so go towards alleviating some of the donor fatigue that exists. They do not increase funding for any specific situation but instead serve perhaps a more profound function: that of raising awareness. Additionally, they subscribe to the sentiment of the Red Cross code by highlighting the “capacities and aspirations” of people in the developing world rather than just their “vulnerabilities and fears” (ICRC, 1994:3).

The NGO crisis triangle

All NGOs struggle with the dilemmas inherent within the NGO crisis triangle. The ethical conflict between fundraising and advocacy is that dramatic and heart wrenching tales of abject misery and hopelessness are more likely to generate funding than bland, dry educational material. Yet general advocacy requires a commitment to showing the most realistic picture possible. Fundraising and operational aid clash when some of the funds generated must be diverted from the aid on the ground to be used for fundraising activities. Many NGOs are reluctant to use vast amounts of public funds for the more peripheral activity of media relations, but paradoxically, the more invested in media relations, the more funds will be raised to direct overseas. This constitutes the financial dilemma. The practical dilemma exists when a political advocacy stand endangers the operation on the ground.

In relation to the first, ethical dilemma, fundraising efforts are directed towards a western public that receives its perception from the international media. So, in order to be successful, NGO fundraising efforts must be made within that perception. This re-visits the issue of starvation being a favourite media theme: was it just because visuals of starving children are heart-wrenching and dramatic and so sell newspapers, or was it perhaps that visuals of starving children are heart-wrenching and dramatic and therefore promote NGO fundraising efforts? Did NGOs deliberately encourage the media misrepresentation?

The notion that starvation was one of the biggest problems in Darfur was not vehemently denied by all NGO media departments. A July 2004 report stated that “Mercy Corps believes that unless these people receive immediate aid, more than 350,000 men, women and children will die from hunger, exposure and disease within

the next few months.” (BBC, 2004, Jul 26[a]). In September MSF are quoted as saying that “still people are dying because of disease and malnutrition.” (SABC, 2004, Sep 29). An October report stated that “The ICRC [International Red Cross] believes that these communities could be facing an even worse hunger crisis than the famines of 20 years ago.” (BBC, 2004, Oct 19).

In 2004 there was a degree of concern within the humanitarian community that the food security situation would continue to deteriorate and so precipitate a significant food crisis. Yet at the time nutrition was far from the top priority, although as a programme area in which the media had a disproportionately high interest, it became an efficient tool for NGO profile-raising and fundraising. This constitutes a circular issue, as the statements issued by NGOs regarding the malnutrition problem then became inserted in subsequent news reports so perpetuating the cycle.

General advocacy requires portraying a broader and more multi-dimensional story that includes the complexities. One argument holds that the inclusion of all complexities reduces the power of a particular position. This argument is supported by the notion that simplicity is possibly the most powerful factor in determining newsworthiness. The more a discussion is ‘nuanced’, the “less possible it is to mainstream the issue” (Aidi, 2005:11). The role of advocacy is to raise awareness, and the more simplistic the case that is proposed, the easier it will be to raise the awareness. Yet this argument reflects a certain degree of ‘justifying the means by the end’: an example of which might be an advocate in a law of court who certainly has a defined ultimate goal and is not above distorting the truth to obtain it.

Yet the role of advocacy is also to speak on behalf of those who do not have a voice. Genuine advocacy must include all the complexities involved in the lives of the people for whom one is advocating. Realistically this must be balanced with the difficulties of trying to mainstream an issue that is highly and intricately nuanced and so it is clear that trade-offs will be made. But the definitive aim of advocacy must be to raise awareness for an issue including all of its complexities. The most persuasive position is one in which different perspectives are acknowledged yet the power of the position is still clear. In Darfur the simplistic Arab-African dichotomy, portrayed within the context of a poor and vulnerable African population being oppressed by an

evil Arabic government, was one of the factors that determined the newsworthiness of the situation in the first place, thus allowing mass mainstream media coverage which in itself contributed to fundraising. To insist on a more nuanced depiction would undoubtedly lead to a reduction of donations from a general public who are now confused as to who are the good guys and who are the bad guys. This becomes even more problematic if the portrayal also includes happy, healthy people who are helping themselves. This is the essence of the NGO ethical dilemma. That NGOs, at best, did not deny the media simplification and, at worst, encouraged it, would suggest that in Darfur the fundraising requirement triumphed over the general advocacy requirement.

One of the other internal conflicts within the NGO triangle is the practical dilemma between advocacy and operational aid. This is a conflict that has become more and more significant in recent years. With an expanding degree of humanitarian work being carried out by military players in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq there has been a gradual clouding of the line between humanitarian and military/political operations. In 2004 MSF withdrew from Afghanistan on the basis that it had become too dangerous for their staff to continue working there. They blamed the “blurring of lines between military and humanitarian activities in conflict zones” which damaged the neutrality of aid organisations (Holmes, 2004, Jul 29). In its 2003 annual report, the International Committee of the Red Cross concurred that there is a rising tendency for military operations to become involved in humanitarian work and this makes life more dangerous for humanitarian aid workers. (Holmes 2004, Jul 29).

This becomes an even more important issue when viewed within the Christian/Muslim context. Adele Harmer of the UK Overseas Development Institute suggested that “post 9/11 we’re living in an increasingly polarised world”. (Gidley, 2005, Nov 23). The eroding of the lines between military/political operations and humanitarian operations, combined with the conviction that aid is predominantly a “western enterprise” (Gidley 2005, Nov 23), results in a more dangerous environment for aid workers. In Darfur, an NGO safety and security brief expressed the concern that NGOs are frequently perceived as part of an “international machine” – in essence a western machine – that often directly leads to increased rhetoric and actual attacks (Darfur INGO, 2005, Feb:1).

Regarding this practical dilemma, an insightful comment from an aid worker in the Sudan appeared on the December 2004 BBC have your say forum:

Aid agencies have a tough decision to make concerning Darfur. They can either be present in the region and provide assistance for populations in need or they can choose to speak out about the serious violations of human rights taking place here, hence compromising (even unofficially) the safety of their field staff. Unfortunately Save the Children tried to do both and they have experienced the unjustified consequences. (BBC, 2004, Dec 24)

The official investigations into the deaths of the Save the Children aid workers did not directly link the deaths to any political advocacy statements made by the organisation, and so the fact that Save the Children “tried to do both” (i.e. advocacy and operational aid) was not the direct cause of the deaths that ultimately led to their withdrawal from Darfur. The above comment still raises an important issue.

In late November 2004 the Country Directors of both Save the Children UK and Oxfam were given forty-eight hours to leave the Sudan after being accused of making political statements about Darfur. The month of November was, according to one NGO report, in general:

marked by the NGO community being told in no uncertain terms at a central level that they must desist from anything of a ‘political’ nature, either making statements or taking action considered political by the GoS and must stick only to the humanitarian tasks at hand and an attempt on the back of this to expel the country representatives of Oxfam and SC-UK. (Concern Worldwide, 2004, Dec 4:1)

The Sudanese Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs perceived statements issued by Oxfam and Save the Children UK as “sending signals of support to the outlaws and rebels for continuation of the war” and “violating Sudanese law on non-intervention in the country’s political, ethnic or sectarian issues.” (Fox News, 2004, Nov 30). The statements issued by Oxfam and Save the Children UK had deplored the rise in violence during the month of November and, according to the GoS, blamed the Government thereby ‘intervening in the country’s political issues’. The expulsions

were eventually overturned due to international pressure. The Country Director of Oxfam was deported a month later anyway on visa violation charges.

This is one Darfur example of the practical dilemma between political advocacy and operational aid. A humanitarian emergency response to a crisis such as Darfur is a temporary reaction with the sole purpose of sustaining life until a more enduring solution can be achieved. Advocacy efforts by NGOs are an important facet in pushing for the more sustainable, long-term solution, not least by raising awareness of the situation and creating pressure for political resolution. As Darfur revealed, it is becoming increasingly difficult for NGOs to undertake that advocacy whilst also undertaking operational activities.

In December 2004 Save the Children UK withdrew from Darfur anyway after four staff members (three national and one international) had been killed. Other organisations, including MSF, had national staff members killed. In March 2005 a USAID (the US government department of aid and international development) staff member was shot in South Darfur. She was travelling in a four-vehicle convoy, consisting of two ICRC vehicles, one each at the front and the back of the convoy, and two USAID vehicles in the middle of the convoy. It was only the two USAID vehicles that were fired upon, suggesting a deliberate targeting of the US. The subsequent UN investigation into the incident was unable to determine who was behind the ambush.

The attacks and deaths highlighted the growing hostility towards international NGOs within Darfur. The January 2005 UN Darfur Humanitarian Profile (DHP) noted this “disturbing trend” as a “growing harassment of international NGOs by local authorities” (UN, 2005, Jan 1:3). It stated that “accusations [from the GoS] range from evangelisation, to providing the ‘rebels’ with precious supplies (i.e. fuel), to the production of material accusing the government of genocide.” (UN, 2005, Jan 1:3). This concern was reiterated in the April DHP where it was stated that “systematic arrests, false and hostile accusations against humanitarian workers through national media outlets and outright attacks may very well set back some of the humanitarian achievements thus far.” (UN, 2005 Apr 1:3). These various incidents raised a number of questions regarding the NGO crisis triangle.

Firstly, there is a clear and present danger to the lives of aid workers. The shooting of the USAID official in March 2005 represented the first definitive direct targeting of an international staff member in Darfur. USAID is not an NGO. It is a US government department and as such it neither claims to be neutral nor non-political. USAID were present in Darfur in a humanitarian capacity but the targeting of USAID personnel still represented a targeting of the US government. The targeting of international aid staff working for non-governmental, non-political, non-partisan organisations is considerably different.

The physical danger of death and injury to aid workers is not the only risk. In the first six months of 2005, four international staff members were arrested by the GoS. The arrests were directly connected to advocacy efforts on behalf of the two different organisations. In March 2005 two international staff members from the French organisation Solidarités were arrested and imprisoned for several days. They were charged with crimes against the state that carried sentences of either life imprisonment or death. They were subsequently released and the charges dropped after intervention from the UN. In May 2005 two international staff members from Médecins sans Frontières – Holland (MSF-H) were arrested and also charged with crimes against the state. They were also subsequently released after intervention from the UN.

The two MSF-H staff members were arrested following the publication of a report entitled 'The Burden of Rape'. When questioned by the Sudanese authorities, MSF-H declined to provide the evidence upon which their report was based, on the grounds that there was a credible fear that those who had been interviewed would subsequently be harassed by the authorities. Rape is a particularly sensitive issue within an Islamic culture and MSF-H was accused of fabricating the report and exaggerating the problem of rape in Darfur. In February 2005 the *New York Times* quoted a Sudanese government spokesperson as saying "Human rights organizations and aid groups have to justify their work somehow, so they make these fictions...If it [rape] has happened it is in isolated cases. This kind of thing is not part of our culture." (*New York Times*, 2005, Feb 11).

MSF-H is a highly respectable NGO and the accuracy of their findings was not debated anywhere other than within the GoS. The question at hand is the advisability of producing such a controversial report whilst also undertaking a large-scale operation on the ground. The argument in favour of operational NGOs also having a strong advocacy voice is that the information generated is more credible if coming from an organisation that is also operational, as opposed to a non-operational NGO such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch.

The counter-argument is that a political advocacy function will always, to a greater or lesser extent, affect the practical operation on the ground. The impact will vary depending on the country of operation and the advocacy position taken. In the Sudan, the impact could be anything from experiencing more bureaucratic obstacles when trying to get personnel and resources into (and around) the country, to the threat of expulsion, the arrest of members of staff, through to the physical danger of injury or death.

Most NGOs have some degree of advocacy function. Reports are written, and consequently published, or media press releases generated. The arrest of the MSF-H international staff members ironically served to attract more attention to the ‘Burden of Rape’ report than it would otherwise have received, which suggests that the GoS did not fully anticipate the consequences of their actions when arresting the MSF-H staff and inadvertently creating a story of interest for the international media. The arrest and the subsequent release and dropping of charges received sustained mainstream coverage across the globe – “Sudan charges MSF man over report” (BBC, 2005, May 30), “Sudan holds second aid worker” (*Guardian*, 2005, Jun 1) and “Sudan drops spying charges against aid workers” (SABC, 2005, Jun 20). All of these reports highlighted the ‘Burden of Rape’ report as the reason for the arrest.

Conversely, the arrest and subsequent release of the two Solidarités staff members two months earlier had received no mainstream media coverage. As previously noted on page 12, MSF have a large and extremely professional media relations department. The comparison of the two sets of arrests highlighted the ability of MSF to harness media attention. The rape report produced by MSF-H received considerably more mainstream coverage after the arrest of the MSF-H international staff members than it

did before. Whilst the arrests were unfortunate, the MSF media expertise capitalised on the situation in a way that Solidarités had failed to do. Given the lack of media interest in the Solidarités arrests in March 2005, it is possible that the GoS did not foresee the degree of international media coverage that they would inadvertently gain for the MSF rape report by arresting the MSF international staff in May 2005.

Another facet of this same theme relates to staff members of national NGOs. SUDO is one of the largest national NGOs in Sudan. Through a series of press releases they kept the humanitarian community in the Sudan informed of the situation with one of their staff members, Dr Mudawi Ibrahim Adam. Dr Mudawi was originally arrested in December 2003 (before Darfur appeared on the international radar) on the grounds that he possessed documentation from Amnesty International. Amnesty International adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and subsequently all charges against him were dropped in August 2004.

Dr Mudawi was re-arrested in January 2005. He was released in March 2005, although the charges against him were not dropped and he was further charged with attempting to commit suicide (which is an offence under Sudanese law) after going on hunger strike whilst in detention. He was re-arrested in May, just before he was due to go to Ireland to receive a human rights award. Dr Mudawi's arrest in January 2005 was briefly mentioned in mainstream media (BBC, 2005, Jan 26) but no follow-up occurred.

The arrests of the international staff members of INGOs (International NGOs) were managed through the use of pressure from the UN and foreign governments on the GoS. With regard to the arrest of the two Solidarités staff, the UN stated that they had been "released under political pressure from the UN and the French government" and that generally "such situations are addressed by applying political pressure." (Darfur INGO, 2005, Mar 28:3). In the case of Dr Mudawi – a Sudanese citizen working for a Sudanese NGO that does not automatically receive protection from either the UN or another foreign government – the position is less clear. In this case, the international media and advocacy groups such as Amnesty International play a much more important role as they are the only means through which pressure can be applied.

In April 2005 Concern Worldwide stated that its own “advocacy voice remains quiet” and it “seems to lag behind its peers” in successful political advocacy (Concern Worldwide, 2005, Apr:7). This would seem to indicate a desire to improve the function of advocacy within Concern, yet a strategic planning workshop in Darfur a month previously had acknowledged that:

Advocacy can be confrontational, and can also give rise to security and political problems....Before using advocacy as a tool Concern will therefore always consider the risks of involvement in advocacy, and analyse the trade-off between potential gains and short term disruption to meeting needs, the threat of being expelled and security of both staff and beneficiaries. (Concern Worldwide, 2005, Mar:28)

This illustrates the uncertainty within NGOs as to the correct position to take with regard to political advocacy and operational aid. It is an ethical dilemma, and one that most NGOs have not satisfactorily resolved.

Another issue raised is that of neutrality and impartiality. It is clear that political advocacy positions can easily bring about a direct threat to operations on the ground. But even without that danger, advocacy positions inherently threaten the principle of non-intervention in the political situation. This relates back to the concept of the humanitarian imperative and how ‘non-governmental’ is defined. If ‘non-governmental’ is defined as, quite simply, ‘not a government’, then the principle of non-intervention is not an ethically binding rule. Alternatively, if a ‘non-governmental organisation’ is defined as a strictly apolitical and non-partisan institution with the solitary goal of helping those who suffer (the humanitarian imperative) then non-intervention in political affairs is obligatory. Different NGOs undertake different levels of advocacy, some of which definitely constitutes a degree of political infringement if not intervention. This reveals the differing definitions of ‘non-governmental’ that exist amongst humanitarian players. It is impossible to produce reports such as the MSF ‘Burden of Rape’ report without documenting the perpetrators of the crimes thus voicing a political position. In Darfur the perpetrators of rape were generally GoS soldiers and Janjaweed allegedly aligned with the GoS. Even if this weren’t the case, the report would still have been considered political by

the GoS because rape is such a particularly sensitive subject within an Islamic culture. It was zealously denied by the Sudanese authorities that rape was a problem in Darfur.

The issue of neutrality and impartiality became an ongoing debate within the humanitarian community in the Sudan. The deteriorating security situation led to an initiative to establish an NGO security team that would operate independently from, but in coordination with, the UN Security Office. The idea proposed was to establish this team in the form of a project, funded by a donor, which would provide support to all NGOs. A similar team had been established in Afghanistan with good results. The opposition to this initiative, vocalized mainly by MSF, was on the basis of neutrality and the humanitarian imperative. Firstly, MSF stated that if such an initiative were to go ahead, it should ideally be led by either an Irish or a Swiss NGO, rather than an American or a British one, or one that had “previously deployed a strong advocacy agenda” (Darfur INGO, 2005, Apr). MSF further commented that neutrality is “part mandate and part perception” and that if a US organisation were to take the lead with this initiative then it would be viewed by the GoS as “part of an American spying conspiracy.” The lack of support for this initiative from the MSF family in particular was the fundamental reason why it did not go ahead. MSF had a number of branches operating in Darfur (Holland, France, Belgium, Spain, and Switzerland) who between them constituted a significant proportion of the NGO humanitarian community.

A further neutrality issue emerged somewhat later with regard to improved formal coordination between the humanitarian community and the African Union. The contentious issue was whether an AU representative should be present at the main Khartoum UN-INGO forum meetings. One suggestion put forward was that the AU should send a civil representative to the UN-INGO forum meetings, allowing for greater cooperation without bringing military personnel into a humanitarian arena.

As far as neutrality is “part mandate and part perception”, the issue of an AU presence at the UN-INGO meetings had less to do with perception and more to do with mandate. There was no media relations or public relations slant to the issue: NGOs were not concerned with how a military presence in humanitarian meetings would look, they were more concerned with how it would affect the essential humanitarian

neutrality of the forum. The AU Mission in the Sudan was in Darfur in a humanitarian capacity, but it was still fundamentally a military body formed of trained, armed soldiers following the regulations of military chain of command and the rules of military engagement. The neutrality of NGOs and humanitarian UN agencies is based fundamentally on a non-armed status and therefore the distinction between armed military peacekeepers (either UN or AU) and non-armed humanitarian aid workers is paramount.

There are clear and effective communication and coordination lines between the UN and the AU. There are also clear communication lines between the UN and NGOs. Part of the role of the UN in a conflict situation is to act as the link between humanitarian and military players.

The way in which this relates to the NGO crisis triangle is explained by a February 2005 interagency evaluation of the Darfur response. The evaluation states that:

Operational NGOs can risk their programmes if they speak out on issues that may be deemed ‘political’. This is inhibiting. It is for their UN partners, therefore, to use their position, mandate and relative strength to support the operational organizations by engaging in high-level, public advocacy where needed (Darfur INGO, 2005, Feb 28:25)

Advocacy is easier and less dangerous for the UN than it is for NGOs. Various agencies within the UN system – WHO, WFP, UNICEF – have a strict humanitarian focus. But the UN itself is not a non-governmental organization; it is an inter-governmental organization and as such has a political role to play in addition to a humanitarian one.

Yet NGOs continue to pursue advocacy roles, despite the myriad complexities and problems this entails. Why? Partly because whilst the UN could “use their position, mandate and relative strength” to pursue high-level advocacy positions they do not always do this to the satisfaction of NGOs. More importantly, high-level public advocacy is an awareness-raising tool both for the emergency at hand and for the NGO undertaking the advocacy. A high-profile NGO can more easily raise public funds than their lesser-known counterpart and in this way advocacy functions feed

into fundraising functions in the long-term. This in fact simply serves to complicate the ethical dilemma between advocacy and fundraising because in addition to the conflict that exists between the two there is also an innate connection.

The NGO crisis triangle is therefore messy and chaotic. Yet the NGO crisis triangle itself deals only with internal conflicts that all NGOs struggle with – it becomes even more complicated still when NGOs strive to coordinate with each other and each individual NGO triangle becomes entangled with all others. Coordination and cooperation requires time, effort, resources, and organisation. It requires frequent and lengthy meetings between the humanitarian actors on the ground. In 2004 in Darfur, after months of lack of access, and with an intensifying level of media attention, humanitarian players directed their available resources into implementation of provisional, but immediate – and visible – distributions.

The need for media visibility in major disasters is paramount for an NGO to successfully survive in what is becoming an increasingly competitive industry. In 1994, the Rwandan genocide resulted in hundreds of thousands of Rwandans fleeing to the Great Lakes region, precipitating a refugee crisis on a vast scale. In reference to this crisis one unnamed journalist commented with disgust that the humanitarian effort there was the “battle of the numbers and the T-shirts” (UNDP, 1997:78). In Darfur in early 2004 there was unquestionably a ‘battle of the T-shirts’.

That MSF have a particularly media-savvy public relations department was clearly reflected within media reporting from Darfur at this time, most notably the number of times that MSF was mentioned, usually with commentary such as “[b]rave charities such as Médecins Sans Frontières have ignored the occasional aid raid” (*Economist*, 2004, May 13).

MSF consciously choose to allocate significant financial resources to public relation activities and they should benefit from what is, quite simply, a sensible business decision. The NGO industry is a highly competitive one, and media relations and fundraising are areas within which this competition is predictably paramount. MSF court the media in a more professional and advantageous manner than most other NGOs do, and they rightly benefit enormously from this. Yet there is a fine line

between benefiting from courted media coverage and damaging the credibility of other NGOs. In an April 2004 interview an MSF doctor recently returned from west Darfur was asked why other agencies did not have access to Darfur when MSF did. Rather than replying, factually, that there were at least half a dozen other agencies operational in west Darfur alone, the MSF doctor replied, "That's a good question, but I don't have the right answer...Actually, I would like to ask it to the other agencies." (*Voice of America*, 2004, Apr 2). There is a fundamental difference between allowing the media to believe that MSF were the only NGO in Darfur and deliberately stating that this was so.

The benefit of fair and healthy competition between NGOs is that it stimulates a self-control mechanism within the humanitarian aid sphere, promoting transparency of activities. All organisations compete to utilise resources in the most efficient manner. When this competition moves into the realm of deliberately using the international media to enhance the exposure of one agency at the expense of the others, the waters become much more clouded.

It has been noted that the "cacophony and disarray" (UNDP, 1997: 87) of NGOs is detrimental to their common goal of providing humanitarian assistance. Whilst this is true, the media are also at fault for their enthusiasm in promoting the disarray. In Darfur, the criticism that humanitarian players levelled at each other was eagerly embraced by mass media. International news became increasingly replete with reports casting blame and criticism on a plethora of different actors. MSF were quoted as criticising UNHCR for being "painfully slow" (BBC, 2004, May 12) whilst in turn UNHCR laid the blame firmly at the door of the donors (BBC, 2004, May 18[b]). A May editorial in the UK stated that "The UN has been as useless as it was in Rwanda" (*Observer*, 2004, May 16). By June the BBC were headlining that "Annan seeks to evade Sudan blame" (BBC, 2004, Jun 22).

The media prominence given to stories of criticism served to divert attention away from the accomplishments achieved in Darfur. It is the nature of humanity to enjoy scandalous stories that involve a considerable amount of mud throwing. It is also the nature of humanity to want to apportion blame. The UN generally (and often with good cause) is an easy target for this. The international media do not bear sole

responsibility for this 'blame' culture, for if there was no bickering between humanitarian actors and policymakers in the first place then there would not be any story to report. But the extent of the media focus on discontent between humanitarian actors was disproportional to the reality. This focus was highly influential in shaping an increasingly negative perception of the humanitarian response to Darfur.

Therefore Darfur provided an excellent example of all of the dilemmas inherent within the NGO crisis triangle that are internal to each NGO, and also how these dilemmas often led to competition and criticism rather than coordination and cooperation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

There were three initial questions to be applied to Darfur. The first question related to the ‘noise’ graph of emergencies. What factors – and what actors – were involved in determining the newsworthiness of Darfur? The second question related to how the media represented Darfur. How accurate was the representation and what were some of the effects of the inaccuracy? The final question was that of perception. To what extent was Darfur misperceived; who was primarily responsible for generating that misperception; and is a degree of misperception inevitable? This question encompassed both the representation offered by the international media and that offered by NGO media relation functions. It also encompassed the notion of the NGO crisis triangle and whether the paradoxes inherent within this triangle mean that misrepresentation and misperception are inevitable.

The topic is, by its very nature, complex. The three stated questions are all interrelated and therefore it is inevitable that the conclusions are also interrelated. Furthermore, from a personal point of view as an aid worker, I originally undertook this study with the supposition that inaccuracy of representation and all it entails is primarily the fault of the international media. Throughout the course of the study, it became clear that this is not the case, and that NGOs themselves significantly contribute to misrepresentation.

There were originally seven defined factors that were recognised as determinants of newsworthiness. These were location, empathy, simplicity, numbers, suitability, novelty and timing.

Farley states that an “unusual constellation of interests aligned” to result in Darfur winning the “lottery of world attention” (*Los Angeles Times*, 2004, Oct 28). This original “constellation of interests” in the US included Christian evangelicals, African-Americans and Jewish-Americans (as represented by the Committee on Conscience of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum) and can be viewed as part of the empathy factor, however misplaced. The Congressional Black Caucus had empathy

for black African brethren who were being oppressed by Arabs, even though this was not the reality. Even more misplaced was the empathy that the Christian lobby had for the oppressed people within Darfur, for very few if any of them were Christian. The Jewish community were first brought on board by the mere hint of a genocide accusation.

The growing interest in Darfur from these three powerful American groups occurred during an international context of the upcoming US election in November 2004, the war in Iraq, and the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. These three things constitute the timing of the situation, which has long been perceived as a crucial factor in determining newsworthiness.

The Darfur story shows that numbers had little significance for the initial newsworthiness of Darfur. The number of displaced, affected, and killed persons in Darfur early 2004 was no more than that in half a dozen other major crises, and significantly less than the comparative numbers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, northern Uganda, Colombia and Chechnya. Yet Darfur won the ‘attention lottery’.

So numbers were not the primary factor in elevating Darfur to its status as the world’s noisiest emergency, but as a secondary factor they were a useful tool for media reporting within the stage of emerging media attention. Once media coverage had reached a level of critical mass in June 2004, the numbers became unimportant, even though it was at this time that they were genuinely rising the fastest. When Darfur was threatened by a new contender for the title of ‘worst humanitarian crisis in the world’ – the Asian tsunami – then the numbers once again became important for retaining interest. The very fact that newsworthiness is not defined by quantifiable statistics is what leaves the door open for other factors to come into play – empathy, simplicity, novelty and so forth.

Within the study of Darfur it can be seen, surprisingly, that one of the most important factors was simplicity. The “stripping away of all complexities” (UNDP, 1997:76) and so leaving a Darfur story about oppressed African farmers being persecuted by malevolent Arabic authorities allowed sustained media interest for considerably

longer than most crises enjoy. The Darfur story indicates that this is perhaps the most important factor in creating noise for a situation. The more simplistic the story is in the telling, the more noise will be made. It must also be acknowledged that the Darfur rebels themselves recognised that the best means of gaining international attention was by reducing the story to the simplest, most powerful terms. The SPLM in the south had long ago “learned to characterize their plight” (Aidi, 2005:8) in simplistic and powerful terms that gained them huge sympathy from the west (particularly the US evangelical lobby). The less-experienced rebels in Darfur never completely succeeded in doing the same in quite such a professional and compelling manner, but it would seem that the international media were happy to do it for them.

Yet the simplicity factor explains how media interest was retained, but not necessarily why it was originally engaged. The ongoing emergencies in northern Uganda or the Democratic Republic of the Congo could surely have been stripped of complexity in much the same manner?

The CARMA International study concluded that the primary factor in disaster reporting was the national self-interest of western governments (CARMA International, 2006:5). The national self-interest of the US and how it applied to the crisis in Darfur during 2004 was complex and involved a fusion of various elements. The US had both an economic and a political interest in the Sudan, unrelated to the crisis in Darfur. The economic interest involved, unsurprisingly, oil, of which there are vast untapped potential reserves in the Sudan. The political interest centred around the position of the Sudan as a fundamentalist Islamic state within the context of the war on terror.

Additionally, the war in Iraq was creating a substantial measure of discontent within the US and 2004 was an election year. Maximising coverage of Darfur – and so reducing coverage of Iraq – had significant benefits for the US at this time. The US were accused of “hyping” genocide claims for their own self-interest in both western media and in Arabic newspapers (*Observer*, 2004, Oct 3). Yet for the US, “hyping” genocide claims in Darfur may have detracted attention from Iraq but also served to jeopardise the north-south peace agreement which presents a paradox in terms of US foreign policy.

Genocide was the novelty factor in Darfur. There was an outstanding media and public interest in the genocide question and it is the primary unique characteristic of the Darfur story that differentiates it from other silent emergencies. Yet a fascinating component of the Darfur story is that, whilst the initial (predominantly US-led) accusations of genocide served to engage media interest in Darfur, Darfur then also conversely sustained interest in genocide as a topic. In all probability it was a constellation of events – the tenth anniversary of Rwanda, Darfur and the release of *Hotel Rwanda* – that led to an increased interest in the general topic of genocide. But it is clear that the relationship between the theme of genocide and Darfur is not one-directional.

The relationship between genocide as a subject and Darfur is similar to that between the ICC as a subject and Darfur. In both cases Darfur acted as a practical setting within which abstract discussions could take shape. Darfur was the platform from which the genocide and ICC debates were launched, but the more global implications of those debates then upheld the interest in Darfur.

A subsidiary question regarding factors related to who controls them. Does any one player within the crisis triangle have the ability to manipulate the newsworthiness of a situation? The evidence from Darfur suggests not. The US government (as a prime policymaker within the international community) could no more control the timing of the anniversary of the Rwandan genocide anymore than the international media could control the Christian lobby groups in the US that took up Darfur as a cause despite the lack of Christians there. Thus the “constellation of interests” that aligned did so under no particular direction of any one player. The interests simply aligned, and the lottery jackpot went to Darfur.

The second question related to the accuracy of representation of Darfur as a noisy emergency. The inaccuracy of media representation of Darfur stemmed from a number of different sources. Firstly, the thematic concentration on the sensationalist sectors of rape and starvation prohibited reporting on other areas that humanitarian actors considered more important. Yet this blinkered reporting did not particularly influence the direction of the humanitarian response. Water and sanitation was the

proportionally highest funded sector and this was faithful to humanitarian-determined priorities. This indicates that the direction of media coverage within a noisy emergency has little impact on the direction of the humanitarian response in any practical sense.

Secondly, the terminology used by the international media emphasised a simplicity that essentially did not exist. The Christian-Muslim dichotomy, although entirely inapplicable to the Darfur region, was nevertheless allowed to become a factor through the doorway of confusion between Darfur and the north-south civil war. There was either an innate inability, a common unwillingness, or a general lackadaisical attitude on the part of the international media in correcting this misperception of Darfur.

Yet this did not harm the humanitarian response: to the contrary, simplicity was one of the factors that allowed media engagement in the first place. This reveals one of the fundamental paradoxes central to this paper: inaccuracy of representation may well be essential to providing a humanitarian response.

Within the political sphere, the effects of media representation of Darfur were undeniably limited, as evidenced by the lack of resolution to the crisis even three years down the line. Yet the lack of current resolution is attributed to the reluctant position of the rebel groups to participate sincerely in the negotiations. This in itself is partially due to the rebels' conviction of international approbation for their position, which has been highly influenced by the bipolarised representation of the conflict by the international media, specifically with regard to the portrayal of the GoS as the 'bad guys'.

Within this area, the impact of the media cannot be absolutely disentangled from other factors that exist outside the sphere of media influence, such as the comparative lack of experience of the rebels in high-profile international negotiations. It is impossible to determine definitely how the negotiations would have progressed even if media representation of Darfur had been more multi-dimensional. It could convincingly be argued that the inexperience of the rebel groups would have resulted in their current unrealistic demands even without media influence. The fact that two out of the four

individuals currently indicted for war crimes in Darfur are rebels would rationally indicate that the international community is sending the message loud and clear: the rebels are held fully accountable for their actions. Yet the very inexperience of the rebel groups would also logically suggest that they would be relatively susceptible to the view depicted by the international media. Even if the international media were not the cause of the rebels' current unwavering stance in Abuja, they were undoubtedly a determinant in it. Therefore the effect of media representation on the political direction of the Darfur crisis is evident, although media representation is not necessarily the primary impetus for the intractable lack of genuine willingness on the part of the rebels to negotiate at the Abuja peace talks.

Within the humanitarian sphere, the effects of media representation on the crisis in Darfur are more pronounced, although still without any definitive clarity. Darfur sustained a high and relentless level of media attention over a comparatively long time. This led to a high-profile humanitarian response unequalled in silent humanitarian emergencies. As discussed throughout the body of this study, the dynamics between policymakers and media coverage are complex and involve a variety of different factors. Disentangling these factors to establish what led and what followed is all but impossible. Yet some of the evidence speaks for itself. The 2005 UN Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) for 1.6 million displaced people in northern Uganda was \$158 million. The 2004 UN CAP for 1.6 million displaced people in Darfur was \$368 million. (Reuters, 2005, Mar 10[b]). These figures do not represent the amount that is given: they represent the amount that the UN has requested.

The UN Consolidated Appeal Process is not directly reflective of general western public awareness of a crisis. It is predominantly reflective of the political will of the UN to respond to a crisis. Yet the political will of the UN is based on the importance that western nation states bestow upon a crisis, and this in itself is partially reflective of public opinion. Government priorities within a democracy are highly swayed by public opinion, and public opinion is swayed by the media.

Inaccuracy – or otherwise – of media representation obviously shaped the perception of Darfur, which is the third question. Is a distorted perception inevitable? Samantha Powers has argued that the “more you nuance the discussion of Darfur, the less

possible it is to mainstream the issue” (Aidi, 2005:11). This adheres to the conclusion that simplicity was one of the primary factors in determining the newsworthiness of Darfur. If this is an absolute requirement of the news cycle then a distorted perception is, at least to some degree, inevitable.

The first issue with regard to perception relates to the International Red Cross Code of Conduct and the notion of dignity. The media depiction of Darfur was predominantly one of abject hopelessness, which is incongruous with the information generated by humanitarian actors and in fact, with reality. The media portrayal of the people of Darfur as pitiful, helpless victims contravenes the Red Cross Code of Conduct, of which media institutions are not signatories. But perhaps they should be.

From an NGO perspective the depiction of pitiful and feeble victims is a direct contravention of a Code to which they are signatories, but it also highlights one of the fundamental dilemmas constituting the NGO crisis triangle. NGOs understandably use the media-generated perception of abject misery as a fundraising tool. To deny or reject this perception would result in a loss of funds, which would in turn result in an inability to perform the role that is their very reason for existence. It is possible that this dilemma symbolises the inevitability of misrepresentation.

Yet it can also be seen that initiatives such as the British Museum exhibition on Sudanese history could contribute to raising a general global awareness in which a portrayal of absolute hopelessness is not the only way to generate compassion. In the summer of 2005 the Live 8 concert was timed to coincide with the G-8 summit: the tickets for the London Live 8 concert were free, precisely to highlight that the purpose was not to raise funds, but rather to raise awareness. Perhaps the ethical dilemma for NGOs between advocacy and fundraising could be resolved through a combination of heightening general global awareness of development issues and a realisation on the part of NGOs that a transitory decline in fundraising might be an acceptable price to pay for a heightened awareness that in the long term could lead to more sustainable funding.

The paradox of humanitarian aid work runs deeper than representation: many question whether aid itself actually does a disservice to those it is aimed at helping.

Humanitarian aid responses in a number of emergencies could be viewed as inadvertently thwarting local capacity to effect sustainable change. Sustainable development is not a gift, it is a lengthy and extensive process and it is something that comes from within. Yet this is a paradox of aid itself, not a paradox of the representation of aid.

In general, the distortion of perception is multifaceted. The simplicity with which a situation is depicted is a primary component and, particularly in a post-September 11th world, this simplicity serves to highlight divisions that ironically both stem from and lead to a growing western conviction of a dangerously bipolarised world. Within the NGO crisis triangle it is evident that whilst complexity is a necessity for advocacy, simplicity is a necessity for fundraising.

With Darfur there were a two major negative consequences of the simplification. Firstly, the representation of the GoS as the ‘bad guys’ and therefore the rebels as the ‘good guys’ contributed to the current lack of will to negotiate on the part of some of the rebel groups. Secondly, the emphasis on religious divisions between Christianity and Islam has contributed to the call from Osama Bin Laden for a Darfur jihad against all foreign troops. These two facts exist, yet it is impossible to determine conclusively if the benefit of mass media coverage for Darfur by simplifying the story outweighed these negative consequences of that simplification, or vice versa.

The second facet of media misrepresentation relates to the international emphasis and the concurrent lack of representation of the people of Darfur as dignified human beings rather than as feeble victims. A stark difference between NGO reports and media reports was plainly visible; a difference in language, tone and content. This is despite the limitations that NGOs themselves struggle with.

In this area the international media could clearly learn from NGOs and a good starting place would be for media institutions to recognise and voluntarily agree to abide by Article 10 of the Red Cross Code of Conduct when reporting from disasters. To recap, this article states that “[i]n our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognise disaster victims as dignified humans, not helpless objects.”. It is further defined as portraying “an objective image of the disaster situation where the

capacities and aspirations of disaster victims are highlighted, and not just their vulnerabilities and fears” (ICRC, 1994:3). Darfur revealed very clearly that the international media could significantly improve their representation in this regard. Another practical method in which the media could significantly improve is to utilise more frequently the forum of aid worker diaries. Information given about IDP security committees, the measles vaccination campaign, and general inclusion of Sudanese institutions and communities taking an active role within the humanitarian response reflected the experiences of those aid workers on the ground. Aid worker diaries exposed a much more nuanced and multi-dimensional depiction of the situation.

Yet it is also clear that NGOs could improve their representation. Eva Von Oelrich, former ICRC Director, stated that NGOs have “spent a lot of time building up financial and legal accountability towards our donors, including the general public, but it’s much more difficult to find an appropriate way of being accountable to the people who are affected by a disaster.” (Gidley, 2004 Jan 14). And this perhaps is the crux of the matter. NGOs are accountable to their donors, but they also state publicly, within their core values, vision statements and mission statements, the desire to be accountable to those they are trying to assist. Yet if NGOs often get it wrong, is it not inevitable that the media – without even the stated desire to be accountable to those they are reporting about – will be unable to portray any sense of dignity?

The NGO crisis triangle provides a framework within which to define the internal conflicts for NGOs. The conflict between fundraising and advocacy is exemplified by Article 10 of the Red Cross Code. NGOs are ethically obliged to portray people as dignified humans rather than as helpless victims, but NGOs also need to raise funds and this is significantly more difficult if your message comes across as ‘actually they’re doing great on their own’ rather than ‘they desperately need your help’. This suggests a need for NGOs to work harder at raising funds whilst giving a more realistic picture of a situation complete with the complex issues.

Von Oelrich says that it is “our fault as humanitarians that we can’t make this understood to people in simple terms, so we keep them ignorant, in a sense...”

(Gidley, 2004, Jan 14). The trick, therefore, is to make complex issues understood in simple terms, which doesn't sound particularly easy.

In conclusion, Darfur provided an excellent case study for the questions outlined in the Introduction. As far as perception is concerned, it is significantly distorted and this distortion is inevitable due to the fact that one of the primary factors for determining newsworthiness is simplicity. However, improvements could still be made: NGOs would need to recognise that the long-term goal of improving the representation of the developing world is perhaps more important than the short-term goal of fundraising. This would in turn gradually inform and influence media reporting which, whilst probably always requiring a degree of simplicity, would be reporting to a more informed audience and therefore would automatically adjust reporting techniques to balance this.

Darfur reveals beyond doubt that the factors involved in determining newsworthiness are complex and, furthermore, not necessarily controllable by any one actor or side of the crisis triangle. US interests were highly responsible for the rise of Darfur to the status of 'worst humanitarian crisis in the world', but equally so was the "constellation of interests" that aligned and the genocide question.

The media influenced the political will of the international community towards Darfur only indirectly, although it could just as convincingly be argued that the political will of the international community was one of the primary factors influencing the media. Darfur does, definitively, prove an observation made in 1997: "Any attempt to capture the vigour, complexity, and idiosyncrasies of interaction among humanitarian organisations and the media will suffer from oversimplification." (UNDP, 1997:11).

Yet if some of the practical lessons learnt from Darfur – for NGOs to accept a short-term fall in funding for the longer term benefit of raised awareness, and for media institutions to try to adhere to the Red Cross code of conduct in reporting – then maybe the necessary illusions of disaster reporting would stop being quite so necessary.

POSTSCRIPT

Between June and December 2005 Darfur was overshadowed by the food crisis in Niger, the New Orleans hurricane, and then the Pakistani earthquake. It recovered a degree of political attention towards the end of 2005 due to the impending January 2006 AU summit that included the Sudan as a contender for the Chairman position. International and internal African pressure regarding Darfur prevented this from happening and the position instead went to the Congolese Republic.

In this same month, January 2006, UN agencies escalated to security level 4 in parts of Darfur for the first time since the conflict began. UN security phases run from 1 to 5, with 5 representing total evacuation of all but military personnel. Security level 4 reflects the increasing lawlessness of Darfur.

This increasing lawlessness also led to UN Security Council discussions about replacing the current 7,000 AU troops with UN troops. This idea was met with absolute and unbending hostility from the Sudan. President Bashir claimed that if the UN were to send troops to Darfur without the permission of Khartoum then Darfur would be the “UN’s graveyard”. (Sudan Tribune, 2006, Feb 6). In March 2006, mass demonstrations occurred in the Sudan regarding the proposed UN peacekeeper deployment. In April, Osama Bin Laden called for a Darfur jihad against all foreign “invaders”. (Reuters, 2006, Apr 24)

Jan Egeland, the UN Emergency Humanitarian Coordinator, was denied a visa to visit Darfur in April 2006. During this same month the UN applied sanctions to four individuals in Darfur accused of war crimes, as per Security Council Resolution 1593 of March 2005. These four individuals included Musa Hilal, a notorious Janjaweed leader, an ex-commander of GoS forces, and two rebel field commanders – one from the SLA and one from the NMRD. The 30th April midnight deadline to conclude the Abuja peace negotiations passed without agreement.

On May 5th 2006 the AU brokered Abuja peace agreement was signed by Minni Arcua Minnawi, the leader of the faction of the SLA that is strongest in a military

sense. The other SLA faction, led by Abdel Wahed Mohammed al-Nur, is militarily weaker, but their consent to the agreement is considered crucial. This is because al-Nur is a Fur – the largest African tribe in Darfur – whilst Minnawi is Zaghawa. Al-Nur is seen to represent a much larger community. To date the peace agreement has not been signed by either Al-Nur, or by the JEM or NRMD. Neither the JEM nor NRMD are considered to be particularly crucial to a peace agreement as they represent a smaller power base in terms of both tribal affiliation and geographical coverage. If the GoS were to allow either an expanded AU peacekeeping force or a UN peacekeeping force into Darfur after a peace agreement has been finalised then it is expected that the insecurity threatened by JEM and NRMD can be contained. Either way, it is clear that the Darfur conflict is far from over.

APPENDIX ONE

Acronyms

AMIS	African Union Mission in Sudan
AU	African Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CNN	Cable News Network
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CRS	Catholic Relief Services (NGO)
DFID	(UK) Department of Foreign and International Development
ECHO	European Union (formerly Community) Humanitarian Office
EU	European Union
FAO	(UN) Food and Agricultural Organisation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GoS	Government of the Sudan
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IGO	Intergovernmental organisation
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IOM	(UN) International Organisation for Migration
Janjaweed	Arabic militia – nomadic cattle-herders in the Darfur region
JEM	Justice and Equity Movement (Darfur rebel group)
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders)
NFI's	Non-food items
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NMRD	National Movement for Reform and Democracy (Darfur rebel group)
OFDA	(US) Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance
SCUK	Save the Children, UK
SCUS	Save the Children, US
SLA/M	Sudanese Liberation Army/Movement (Darfur rebel group)

SPLA/M	Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement (southern rebel group)
UN	United Nations
UNDCI	United Nations Darfur Commission of Inquiry
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHDI	United Nations Human Development Index
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNJLC	United Nations Joint Logistics Centre
USAID	(US) Agency for International Development
WFP	(UN) World Food Programme
WHO	(UN) World Health Organisation

APPENDIX TWO

Events Time Line

North-South Sudanese Conflict

20 July 2002	Machakos Protocol (Machakos, Kenya)
25 September 2003	Naivasha Agreement (Naivasha, Kenya)
5 June 2004	Nairobi Declaration (Nairobi, Kenya)
31 December 2004	Conclusion of peace process
9 January 2005	Comprehensive Peace Agreement

Darfur Conflict

August 2003	Negotiations begin in Abeche (Chad)
3 September 2003	Abeche Agreement
7 April 2004	Tenth Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide
8 April 2004	N'djamena Ceasefire Agreement (N'djamena, Chad)
28 May 2004	Addis Ababa Agreement (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)
7 June 2004	UN report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council S/2004/452
11 June 2004	UN Security Council Resolution 1547
3 July 2004	Joint Communiqué between the GoS and the UN Secretary-General
27 July 2004	Communiqué of the AU Peace and Security Council S/2004/603
30 July 2004	UN Security Council Resolution 1556
22 July 2004	US House Congressional Resolution 467, <i>Declaration of Genocide in Darfur</i> , passes the US House of Representatives
30 August 2004	UN report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council S/2004/703
9 September 2004	US Administration calls Darfur genocide
18 September 2004	UN Security Council Resolution 1564

28 September 2004	UN report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council S/2004/763
10 October 2004	Two SCUk aid workers are killed
2 November 2004	UN report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council S/2004/881
9 November 2004	Abuja Humanitarian Access and Security Protocols (Abuja, Nigeria)
19 November 2004	UN Security Council Resolution 1574
3 December 2004	UN report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council S/2004/947
21 December 2004	SCUK withdraw from Darfur
26 December 2004	Asian tsunami
25 January 2005	UN DCI (Darfur Commission of Inquiry) Report S/2005/60
31 January 2005	UN report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council S/2005/5/7
4 February 2005	UN report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council S/2005/68
4 March 2005	UN report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council 2/2005/140
10 March 2005	UN Security Council Resolution 1585
17 March 2005	UN Security Council Resolution 1588
24 March 2005	UN Security Council Resolution 1590
29 March 2005	UN Security Council Resolution 1591
31 March 2005	UN Security Council Resolution 1593

APPENDIX THREE

Numbers Time Line

Darfur Conflict

Note: Numbers from UN sources only

	Affected	IDP	In Chad	Dead
Jan 2004	1,000,000	600,000	100,000	
Feb 2004	1,000,000	700,000	110,000	3,000
Mar 2004	1,000,000	700,000	140,000	
Apr 2004	1,000,000	1,000,000		30,000
May 2004	2,000,000	1,000,000	210,000	
Aug 2004		1,200,000	210,000	
Sep 2004				50,000
Oct 2004		1,600,000	210,000	70,000
Dec 2004	2,400,000	1,800,000	210,000	
Jan 2005	2,400,000	1,840,000		70,000
Mar 2005	2,450,000	1,860,000		> 100,000
				At least 180,000
				Maybe 300,000
Apr 2005	2,620,000	1,960,000		

Number of Aid Workers in Darfur

Mar 2004	200
Apr 2004	
May 2004	
Jun 2004	
Jul 2004	320
Aug 2004	5000
Sep 2004	6000
Oct 2004	6100
Nov 2004	6500
Dec 2004	9100
Mar 2005	10,400

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The references are divided into three sections. Whilst this is unusual, the sources used for this study are such that this structure provides a more logical reference point than any other. The majority of information available on the general topic of media and humanitarianism is available electronically, as it is mainly generated by NGOs and policy think tanks. The media articles used as the basis for this study have all been obtained through official media institution website archives. The humanitarian information used as the basis for this study was collected whilst working in Sudan. Some of it is publicly available and where this is the case the URL reference is provided. Some of it is not publicly available.

Section One includes all general background information that is not specific to Darfur and it is organised alphabetically by accredited author where possible, or accredited institution. Section Two includes all media reports relating directly to Darfur – for ease of reference, this section is organised alphabetically by institution only. Where there is an accredited author, this is acknowledged within the reference. Section Three includes all humanitarian information, including NGO and UN press releases. This section is also organised alphabetically by institution only.

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