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## The media and Africa: images of disaster and rebellion

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### Chronology of events

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April 1994	Plane with Hutu president of Rwanda, Habyarimana, aboard is shot down. Hutu Extremists take power with 'Interim Government'. Genocide of Tutsis and Hutu opposition begins and continues for ten weeks.
June/July 1994	Tutsi dominated army of the 'Rwanda Patriotic Front' occupies Rwanda and displaces former government, whose leaders flee with approximately one million Hutu refugees and armed Hutu militias. Cholera epidemic. Camps are established inside Zaire, close to Rwanda border.
1995-96	Hutu militias based in camps raid Rwanda.
1996	Zairean troops helped by Hutu militias from the camps attack Tutsis living in East Zaire. Fighting at Masisi.
October 1996	Border clashes between Zairean and Rwandan troops.
October-November 1996	Rwandan troops enter Zaire. Rebels from East Zaire, backed by Rwandan troops, attack camps. Hutus from camps either return to Rwanda or flee to the interior of Zaire.

the second would be the reference to the number of refugees who are moving.

In chapter 13, we identified six major areas of news coverage that related to descriptions of the crisis, its causes and prescriptions for resolving it. In the current study, the themes which we have identified in many cases parallel those of our first report (for example, the state of the refugees and the need for humanitarian aid). In some areas of news coverage, we have obviously had to develop new categories which relate to new issues and events in the crisis (such as the progress of the rebellion in Zaire, and explanations which were given for the unrest in that country). The sample of TV news programmes which we have analysed was the same for both studies (i.e. the main news bulletins broadcast in the same period on the four channels). It was therefore possible to make some very interesting comparisons between both phases of the coverage (for example, in the attention given by journalists to the background and history of these conflicts).

In the current study we have identified six key areas of coverage which again relate to descriptions of the crisis, to its causes, and to prescriptions for resolving it. Each of these areas has a number of sub-themes within it. The main areas are as follows:

1. Current political developments such as the progress of the rebellion and proposed peace-talks.
2. The refugees: movements, suffering and re-integration.
3. Western action and responses.
4. Prescriptions for resolving the crisis.
5. Explanations contextualising the crisis.
6. Reflexive coverage (i.e. reflections by journalists on the nature of media coverage or the difficulties of reporting the events).

In the following section we indicate the frequency of references to specific themes on the news, and the manner in which they occurred for each of these categories. A table of the frequency of references to major themes in the coverage is given in Appendix 12.

## Results

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### *Current political developments: progress of the rebellion*

There were a total of 259 references to the progress of the rebellion. Much of television news coverage was occupied with descriptive accounts of the military conflict and the civilian unrest, which erupted as the rebellion unfolded and the rebels took control of Zaire. In the first week of our

sample, 1–7 November 1996, references to the progress of the rebellion appeared more often than any other aspect of the crisis. Thus, it was referred to twice as often as the refugee suffering and more than five times as often as the Western response to the political and humanitarian crisis. On the first day of our sample, 1 November 1996, coverage on all four channels – BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4 – was subsumed by extended accounts of the ‘major escalation of the conflict’ that had occurred as troops from the Rwandan Patriotic Front ‘crossed the border . . . in support of Tutsi rebels based in Zaire’. ITV carried this headline and item summary.

*Headline*

Misery for thousands, as Zaire slides towards war.

*Item summary*

Diplomats are warning tonight that the fighting in Zaire and Rwanda could be close to escalating into a wider war. Rwanda troops crossed the border today in support of Tutsi rebels based in Zaire. There was fighting on the streets of Goma, but the Rwandan government denies its troops are still there. (ITV: 22<sup>00</sup>–22<sup>30</sup>, 1.11.96)

Channel 4 reported:

*Headline*

Thousands on the move again in central Africa amid reports that Rwanda has invaded Zaire. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 1.11.96)

Other reports stated that the rebels were ‘seizing vast tracts of land’ in a ‘brutal war in which civilians had been caught up in’. For example:

*Reporter:* There is now just one route into eastern Zaire. We were taken in today by the rebel forces, a young and rag-bag army, that is nevertheless seizing vast tracks of land here. The Zairean army has fled in panic, leaving the roads littered with debris. As we pushed deeper into Zaire we came across dozens of empty and abandoned villages, others had been torched in this brutal war in which civilians had been caught-up in. This is a land emptied of people, a land that has seen in the last two years, only atrocities, refugees and hunger. (ITV: 22<sup>00</sup>–22<sup>30</sup>, 1.11.96)

The language and visuals of these news reports create a vivid and pervasive image of Africa with headlines such as: ‘Misery for thousands,’ ‘thousands on the move again’; and phrases such as: ‘this is a land emptied of people, a land that has seen in the last two years, only refugees and hunger’. Without explanation these accounts convey a dominant image of Africa – that it is a place of ‘misery,’ ‘chaos’ and ‘brutality’, the recurrence of which is almost predictably systemic. As the headline states, ‘thousands on the move *again*’. The sense of confusion encasing the events is added to by the organisation of other reports on this day. Often these extended news reports of the rebel advance in Zaire were composed almost entirely of layers of description of immediate events with almost no contextualising information from which

to understand and make sense of the conflict. For example, *Newsnight* featured a very detailed report on the rebel advance and the military conflict that had ensued, but with very little explanation. The newscaster introduces the news report as follows:

*Newscaster:* In a major escalation of the conflict, the Rwandan army appears to have invaded Eastern Zaire and begun fighting alongside Tutsi rebels against the Zairean army. Heavy artillery exchanges are reported along the border, further threatening the refugees in the area. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>–23<sup>15</sup>, 1.11.96)

This summary is constructed from a series of short, descriptive statements which focus entirely on agents such as the Rwandan army, Tutsi rebels, the Zairean army and refugees. It raises obvious questions, such as: who are these rebels and what is their relationship to each other and the events that are unfolding? These are not addressed by the report that follows. Instead, another description follows with little explanation of what is happening. For example:

*Reporter:* The day began with renewed fighting between Tutsi rebel forces and the Zairean army, around the Zairean border town of Goma. At this stage the Rwandan army seemed content to observe, but in a sudden and dramatic escalation, artillery fired from deep inside Rwandan territory exploded across the border into Zairean army positions. Meanwhile, in the Rwandan town of Gisenye, a mortar landed near a local market creating *chaotic panic* . . . The Rwandans countered the incursion with an infantry assault in the Zairean town of Goma . . . tonight Zairean Prime Minister, Kendo Wa Dendo, said he could not say who had the upper hand in the area.

The report continues: 'What is clear from the *conflict and confusion* of the day is that Rwanda and Zaire may be headed towards war' (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>–23<sup>15</sup>, 1.11.96).

Why this is clear is not clear at all. The interview which follows between the newscaster and the reporter on the ground adds little to our understanding of the events. For example:

*Q: Newscaster:* So has there been any effective resistance to the Rwandan army?

*A: Reporter:* No. This conflict pits the best army, the most disciplined army in sub-Saharan Africa against the shoddiest, most ineffective army in sub-Saharan Africa. And it has been an absolute rout, the story has been the same from the very beginning. The Rwandans and the Rwandan supported militia in Zaire have got the Zairean army on the run. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>–23<sup>15</sup>, 1.11.96)

As the conflict progressed, TV news reports focused on other important events, such as the civilian anarchy, demonstrations and looting alongside the rebellion which preceded the fall of the Zairean state. For example, on November 4, 1996, Channel 4 carried this report:

*Reporter:* In the centre of Goma there is little left to loot, over the past week of war, soldiers and civilians have taken all there was to take, even aid intended for Rwandan Hutu refugees . . . local Red Cross workers have cleared the bodies of men, women and children from the streets, one Red Cross volunteer told me they buried 500 . . . (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 5.11.96)

The progress of the rebellion was accompanied by 21 other references to the unilateral cease-fire declared by the Tutsi rebels. These mainly occurred on BBC1, ITV and Channel 4 in the first two weeks of our sample and related to how the cease-fire had been implemented in order to 'allow Hutu refugees to return home if they wanted to'. For example: '*Newscaster:* Rebel Tutsis in Eastern Zaire have called a unilateral cease-fire to allow Hutu refugees to return home if they want to' (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 4.11.96).

The disintegration of the cease-fire was reported from 7 November 1996: '*Reporter:* Earlier today, a rebel leader talked about revoking his declaration of a cease-fire because of the continued attacks on Goma town itself' (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 11.11.96).

In the last week of our sample, 24 April–1 May 1997, discussion had shifted on to a more permanent resolution of the conflict and peace talks between president Mobutu of Zaire and the Zairean rebel leader, Laurent Kabila. Thus, 23 references to this theme occurred on all the main TV channels, BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4. For example:

#### *Headlines*

The president and the rebel leader agree to peace talks this week. What chance of ending the civil war? (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>–23<sup>30</sup>, 3.4.97)

### **The refugees: movements, suffering and re-integration**

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The rebel advance and the military conflict between the Tutsi rebels and the Zairean army, linked with the Hutu militia, produced thousands of 'panicked' refugees fleeing the fighting. Refugee movements accounted for 271 references in our sample. This was a main theme of the news coverage of the Zairean crisis. For example:

#### *Headlines*

The UN Secretary-General has appealed for immediate international action on Zaire tonight, as the world was seeing the first evidence of how a million refugees fled in panic. (BBC1: 21<sup>55</sup>–22<sup>10</sup>, 10.11.96)

These make the point that 'hundreds of thousands' of refugees were fleeing the fighting. Hence most of the descriptions of the refugee movements, referred to its expanse and scale. On BBC1 we hear that:

*Newscaster:* The flashpoint is Eastern Zaire where *hundreds of thousands* of refugees have been on the run from fighting between Zairean troops and well-armed Tutsi rebels. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 1.11.96)

*Newsreader:* 200,000 more refugees are said to be fleeing in panic . . .  
(Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>55</sup>, 1.11.96)

By the second week of November 1996, TV news coverage increasingly focused on the 'humanitarian catastrophe' evolving around the refugee movements.

On 8 November 1996, BBC1 focused on the plight of the refugees who it said were 'slowly starving.'

*Reporter:* Just beyond this beautiful border an even greater humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding . . . Relief supplies are now arriving in Rwanda, for the 1.2 million Hutu refugees starving, after they were forced to flee from their camps by the fighting. The relief agencies though cannot get this aid into Zaire where it is so desperately needed. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 8.11.96)

One BBC1 report referred to them as 'the boat people of central Africa', and we are told that '15,000 have already crossed' and that health problems were now endemic as a result of the crossing (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 12.11.96). BBC1 and BBC2 featured this same report on a refugee exodus of '200,000' from Katala camp and the suffering induced by their journey. For example:

*Reporter:* They trudged into Goma in the heavy, hazy heat of mid-day. These refugees are the first we have seen from Katala camp which once held close to 200,000. Eleven days through the bush, many fell ill, others died of hunger and thirst. (BBC1: 20<sup>55</sup>–21<sup>15</sup>, 9.11.96)

Driven by the 'squalor of these camps', many of these refugees began to return home. ITN carried this report:

#### *Headline*

Exodus from the camps. Rwandan refugees head home. Up to 3/4 million Hutu refugees began walking home today . . . Returning to the border at the rate of 10,000 an hour . . . They'd been living in squalor at Mugunga camp. (ITV: 22<sup>00</sup>–22<sup>30</sup>, 15.11.96)

Indeed, the suffering of the refugees was a dominant and pervasive theme of the coverage, accounting for 389 references. By the second week of November 1996, references to this theme were almost double that on any other, such as the political rebellion or the Western response. The news focus shifted from coverage of the political crisis produced by the rebellion on to the 'humanitarian disaster' that was developing in eastern Zaire. In this way, the narratives of military confusion, political complexity and 'chaos' were subsumed by the human tale of tragedy and suffering that engulfed the refugees. This theme of the news coverage dominated bulletins with visual images and accounts of disaster, terror and suffering. Thus, on 2 November 1996, we are told how 'a million . . . face disaster'. We hear of the 'starvation' and 'disease' and how the living and the dead lay side by side in the camps.

*Headlines*

A million refugees face disaster in Zaire . . . As fighting continues for control of Goma, thousands could be at risk from starvation and disease. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–20<sup>00</sup>, 2.11.96)

Other reports referred to how refugees had to 'suck roots to get water', (BBC2: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>15</sup>, 9.11.96). In the midst of the crisis, the United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, was reported calling for immediate action and warning of a new 'genocide by starvation.' For example:

*Reporter:* At the UN, the Secretary-General was in no doubt about the urgency of the situation.

*Interviewee: Boutros Boutros-Ghali United Nations Secretary-General* Now we are confronted by a new genocide . . . by starvation, because they are dying because they are not able to receive neither food nor medicaments, nor water, or clean water . . . (BBC1: 20<sup>55</sup>–21<sup>15</sup>, 9.11.96)

Images of 'starvation', 'desperation', the 'horror' of these camps and the 'barbarity' of the conflict permeate the text of the news reports, conveying in graphic detail all the horror that is war, and the suffering of the refugees.

*Reporter:* The UN came back to a people for whom they are the only hope, but they are not miracle-workers and this place stinks of death. Those who couldn't crawl away with their fear, are still in a medical centre laying in filth. Malnourished before, many are near the end. And there's barbarity, a machete slash took away this woman's jaw . . . the Rwandan Hutus were supposed to be under international protection and that makes what happened to them so chilling.

The reporter then states:

The worst cases were taken to hospital by Red Cross Workers, among them was the woman who had been disfigured by a machete, while others got on the lorry the only way they could. This is becoming a no-frills rescue, taking place in an atmosphere of fear and hatred. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 28.4.97)

This vividly descriptive text is juxtaposed against the visual of a young boy, so disabled by wounds (presumably received from the conflict) that he has to literally crawl on his hands and knees, unaided, to get on the Red Cross van. A young woman's bandaged machete wound clearly appears to show that her lower jaw has been ripped off. Other reports went further in their description of the violence and the misery, and we are told that this, graphic and grotesque as it is, is a 'sanitised account' of the 'refugee plight'. 'Some bear the scars of machete wounds, forced into the forest by their tormentors, their wounds go septic. There are untransmittable images of people being eaten alive by maggots.' The report continues: 'So you're watching a highly sanitised view of life and death in the camps south of Kisangani today' (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 30.4.97).

The report goes on to describe how the US Special Envoy, Bill Richardson, met the first ferry load of refugees and how his 'symbolic gesture of

international concern . . . was quickly overwhelmed by the tragic reality, as he came face-to-face with a woman cradling her dead baby.' On BBC1, 1 May 1997, the news focused on the death of the children and the vulnerable.

*Item summary:* Aid agencies say they are struggling to cope with the huge numbers of sick and starving refugees, who are returning to camps near the city of Kisangani.

*Reporter:* There's so little mercy here, few can afford to be a good Samaritan. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 1.5.97)

Accompanying this statement, is an image of the emaciated frame of a young child, lying on the ground where he has collapsed from exhaustion or disease with his aid biscuits lying on the ground beside him, just beyond his outstretched hand. An older child stops, looks down and walks past.

By the last week of April 1997, coverage of the refugee movements had become inextricably inter-linked with the massacres of the Hutu refugees, as news of these began to filter out from refugees emerging from the forests. There were a total of 44 references to the massacres in the last week of our sample, 24 April–1 May 1997. These were carried on all channels, BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4. Refugees had been reported as disappearing en masse as far back as the third week in November 1996 when coverage had focused on the '700,000' Hutus who were missing in Western Zaire. For example, Channel 4 had reported:

*Newscaster:* The UNHCR has used satellite technology and reconnaissance planes to locate up to 700,000 Rwandan refugees, missing in West Zaire. The Rwandan government had claimed that most of the refugees had returned home. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>30</sup>, 21.11.96)

The massacres of the refugees by Zairean rebels, in April 1997, was presented as the impetus for at least some of these refugee movements and the further disappearance of refugees. On 24 April 1997, Channel 4 devoted an entire report to the news that:

one of the largest refugee camps in Eastern Zaire, had been found abandoned by a United Nations mission trying to locate around 80,000 . . . Rwandan Hutus. They are thought to have fled the camp situated South of Kisangani amid unconfirmed reports of massacres by Zairean rebel forces.

The report then alludes to the disappearance of the refugees, the refugee movements and the fact that they were already threatened by cholera.

*Reporter:* . . . Four days ago 50,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees were here. Today, rebel soldiers escorted a UN convoy to find a ghost camp. The people were already threatened by cholera having walked hundreds of miles over six months to get here.

The report continues:

*Reporter:* Zairean villagers insist that a gun battle took place between armed Rwandan Hutu refugees and Tutsi Zairean rebels. They also said the rebels



massacred refugees, they used the digger to bury the dead. Today, evidence of a digger, but no sign of a massacre yet.

The report concludes:

*Reporter:* The refugees could be heading for another camp, 12 miles South, but the rebels are preventing the UN investigating. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>55</sup>, 24.4.97)

Other reports were more direct in their statement of rebel involvement in the massacre. For example, a BBC1 reporter concluded that the 'exercise' had 'smacked of a merciless cynicism'.

*Reporter:* Some left children behind, she says, 'We lost everything'. This man said that he thought the sick and the old must still be there. But this was the camp yesterday, there was nobody there at all. Mose Anavgalsoo says villagers responded to aggression and there were no organised attacks. He and the Rwandan government official beside him speculate that armed elements among the refugees had evacuated the camps. But the scratches on the faces of the children suggest a panicky flight through the thick jungle . . . This has been an exercise that has smacked of a merciless cynicism. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>50</sup>, 25.4.97)

This report indicates a clear difference in the coverage between the early and later points of our sample. During the first week of November 1996, the distinction between the Hutu refugees and armed Hutu militia who controlled the camps was consistently made.

In particular, the killings of Hutus by the Zairean rebels were usually qualified with this distinction. For example: 'Under armed escort, we were driven into another rebel-held city, Bukavu . . . Among those killed here by the conquering rebels were members of the notorious Hutu militia, the Interahamwe' (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 7.11.96).

In some cases, the distinction appears almost as a legitimisation for the rebel actions, since the Hutu militias had been using the camps to stage armed raids into Rwanda. For example:

*Reporter:* Further south, fisherman on Lake Tanganyika are finding corpses washed-up on the shore, the fear is that these are Hutus from the southern camps recently killed by rebels and washed down the River Ruzizi. The Hutus had been using the refugee camps to stage armed raids into Rwanda and Burundi. The rebels say that must stop. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 4.11.96)

Even in the second week references to the Hutu militia related to their 'terroristic' control of the Hutu refugees by referring to the 1994 genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda and their attitude to the humanitarian aid mission. For example: 'The Secretary-General of the UN has been asking for an international force to disarm the Hutus since 1994 . . . The Hutu militia responsible for the genocide, terrorising the refugees' (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>–23<sup>15</sup>, 13.11.96). In the report they are then referred to by an interviewee as 'fanatics', 'real thugs' and the 'Interahamwe torturers' who 'treat the UN like dirt'.

However, with the discovery of the massacres at the end of April 1997, this distinction between Hutu militia, who were the perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the 'innocent' Hutu refugees, begins to break down as the news reports become increasingly critical of the Zairean rebel treatment of the refugees. For example, on 29 April 1997, an ITN reporter stated: 'The UN officials warn, there are 1/3 million Rwandans still displaced in Zaire, trapped in a civil war and being abused by all sides' (ITN: 22<sup>00</sup>-22<sup>30</sup>, 29.4.97). Channel 4 reported:

*Reporter:* Make no mistake, someone has been deliberately targeting children. These people couldn't possibly have played any part in any war, anywhere, now they lay discarded, dying where they fall from exhaustion, starvation, disease. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>-19<sup>30</sup>, 1.5.97)

Thus there is no longer the same attempt to distinguish the 'innocent' from the guilty, refugee from militia, or perpetrator from victim as an explanation for (and perhaps a legitimisation of) the massacres. There were a further 18 references to the killing of refugees in April 1997. Eight of these explained massacres in terms of a systematic extermination campaign by the Rwandan government and the rebels. There were a further four references to the presence of armed refugees in the camps. On 25 April 1997, a BBC2 reporter noted in an interview with the newscaster in the studio that Zairean rebels were attempting to deal with a 'hard core element' of armed refugees in the camps.

*Q: Newscaster:* So, in fact, is there any possibility that Kabila's rebel forces have moved people into the interior of Zaire systematically?

*A: Reporter:* I think that from the systematic obstruction and delay put on the UN effort... One has to look very hard at the rebels and their motive. I think that this was a particularly difficult group of people for them to handle, I think that they did represent some hard-core element, just to see these people just brought over immediately and they came up with a solution and it's a very unpleasant solution from what we're seeing. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>-23<sup>15</sup>, 25.4.97)

Four other explanations made the point that the Rwandan Hutu refugees were returning to Rwanda because of atrocities by the Zairean rebels.

### **Re-integration, political issues and the refugees**

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The refugee crisis in Zaire was not just a humanitarian emergency; it was also presented as a political one for which a political approach and solution had to be found.

There were a total of 159 references which raised political issues in relation to the refugees (such as the nature of those who had fled and the problems of re-integrating them into Rwanda). Of these references, 61 referred to

the fact that the Hutu refugees, who had fled Rwanda in 1994 as a result of the genocide there, included the Hutu militia and Interahamwe, who were armed and now controlled the camps in eastern Zaire. As the movement and suffering of the refugees increasingly permeated the text of the news reports towards the second week of November 1996, reports began to filter out of these armed refugees. On 8 November 1996, Channel 4 focused on how Rwandan Hutu militia, anticipating a rebel advance on Mugunga camp, had abducted Zairean villagers as 'human shields'. For example:

*Newsreader:* And Zaireans from a village, near the huge Mugunga Camp West of Goma, say Rwandan Hutu fighters have seized many local children to use as human shields, in event of any rebel advance on the refugee camp. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>30</sup>, 8.11.96)

Channel 4 also produced a detailed report on how some of the refugee camps had been used to train guerrillas for attacks across the border, in Rwanda.

*Headline*

... plus, the abandoned refugee camps of Eastern Zaire. We examine evidence that some were used to train guerrillas for cross-border attacks on Rwanda.

The reporter then states:

*Reporter:* ... and lying on the ground I've just found something which shows why the Rwandan government was so keen to break-up these camps. It looks like an ordinary child's school exercise book, but inside, it's a manual for guerrilla warfare. It talks of guerrilla methods, strikes, demonstrations, terrorism, insurrection. It even shows how to make bombs and at the back there's the Hutu extremist version of Rwandan history. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 12.11.96)

There were 56 calls to disarm the Hutus who took part in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, as to 'feed the Hutu militia' would only perpetuate the problem (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>, 7.11.96). A further 98 references related to the political problem of the re-integration of the Hutu refugees into the communities they had left in Rwanda after the genocide in 1994. Four of these referred to how the refugees were afraid to go home. For example, on BBC1, we are told:

*Reporter:* The international community are hoping to entice the refugees back to their homeland, by providing food for them at way-stations along safe-corridors, protected by Western troops. It sounds fine in theory, but in practice, many of the Hutus are still too terrified to return to Rwanda and would rather risk death by starvation. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 8.11.96)

Discussion of the refugees' fears of returning home and the political problem of re-integration mainly appeared on Channel 4 where we were told:

*Reporter:* Those who do return, spend just a day here (transit camp), before they are transported to the hills they left two years ago. Some are imprisoned,

but the UN High Commission for Refugees says the majority of those who've come home so far are living in peace. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>-19<sup>50</sup>, 4.11.96)

Yet, despite the political problems of repatriation, this report suggests that the refugees were now ready to return home:

*Q: Reporter:* Are you afraid of returning to Rwanda . . .

*Reporter:* Some of the refugees may be killed by survivors of the genocide when they get back to Rwanda. But, as the rebels backed by Rwanda's Tutsi army close in, those that remain in Eastern Zaire are in the greatest immediate danger. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>-19<sup>50</sup>, 12.11.96)

These references to political solutions raise a number of important issues. One is the difference between solutions raised by journalists 'on the ground' in Zaire/Rwanda and those featured by political reporters in London. We will refer to this in more detail in our discussion at the end.

## Western action and responses

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A total of 318 references related to the responses of Western governments and the UN to the crisis. As the refugee plight was highlighted in TV news reports, by the second week of November 1996, the Western response became an increasingly dominant theme of the coverage. This response was reported as characterised by 'squabbles', procrastination and indecision. For example:

### *Headline*

Refugees in Zaire scramble for meagre food supplies as Europe squabbles over what to do next. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>-19<sup>50</sup>, 7.11.96)

### *Item Summary:*

The United Nations Security Council is tonight preparing to approve a multinational force to bring aid to Eastern Zaire where thousands of refugees are facing starvation. Who will form it and when it will go isn't certain, for some refugees it may come too late. (ITN: 22<sup>00</sup>-22<sup>30</sup>, 8.11.96)

Amidst the 'indifference' and 'squabbles' there were also appeals by the UN for 'immediate action on Zaire'. For example:

### *Headline*

The UN Secretary-General has appealed for immediate international action on Zaire tonight as the world was seeing the first evidence of how a million refugees had fled in panic. (BBC1: 21<sup>55</sup>-22<sup>10</sup>, 10.11.96)

By the last week in April 1997, appeals by the UN for the rebels to allow aid into the refugees had begun to proliferate in news reports: '*Newscaster:* The UN has called on the countries of rebel troops, who control access to the refugees, to allow aid to be delivered to the starving Rwandans' (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>-21<sup>30</sup>, 24.4.97). A further 14 references in the coverage criticised the

UN aid policy that had followed the 1994 genocide and exodus of refugees. Most of these statements (12 in fact) centred around the concept that the safe-zones, the refugee camps established by the UN, had sheltered innocent and guilty alike. The point is made that the international aid mission had been responsible for feeding and sheltering those responsible for the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Some of these statements came from aid agencies on the ground.

*Interviewee: Samantha Bolton, Medecins sans Frontiers* But what we're saying as an aid agency is that we don't want aid to be used as an excuse for nobody to do anything about the political and military problems. In other words, there was in these camps, they were being used to re-arm the Hutu army so that they would invade and it was completely ignored and all the international community did was use us to throw like \$1 million a day worth of aid to that, without actually redressing the core, the root of the problem. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 4.11.96)

Other statements came from reporters on the ground. For example:

*Reporter:* The UN flag supposedly a symbol of international resolve now flutters limply over an empty and ravaged landscape. These camps were once home to half a million Rwandan Hutus. Many of them were involved in the genocide two years ago. It is a disheartening reminder of a refugee policy that failed to protect the innocent and gave free rein to the guilty. (BBC1: 21<sup>55</sup>–22<sup>10</sup>, 10.11.96)

Other criticisms of UN policy were that the refugee camps should not have been established so near to the Rwandan border, and that the only long-term political solution to the crisis was the 'secure return of refugees to their homes' (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 1.5.97).

There were two statements in opposition to a Western force delivering aid. These noted that refugee camps could end up by being a security risk to the Rwandan territory (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 4.11.96) and that aid corridors could exacerbate the problem (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 1.5.97).

### **Criticism of the West: arms and commercial interests**

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Some aspects of profiteering in the crisis were also addressed, such as the arms sales to the Rwandan Hutu regime by a British company. There were 152 references to this theme between 17 and 19 November 1996 on all channels (i.e. BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4). For example, BBC1 made the point that bank statements revealed how a British firm was involved in the shipping of Kalashnikov rifles and other munitions via Israel and Albania. Four of these revealed that these arms sales had occurred in December 1994, despite the genocide and consequent UN arms embargo of that year.

This was one of the few parts of the coverage that questioned Western involvement. Nowhere else in our sample, apart from one Channel 4 bulletin, was Western commercial interest in exploitation of the region's mineral wealth

(as opposed to the conflict exploited by the arms companies) reported on. Yet *The Guardian* published a report on this issue at the time. The report claimed that 'at the heart of the crisis is a new phase in an old power struggle for the vast riches of Zaire's mining industries'. The point is also made that the disintegration of the Zairean state had been of 'no concern to . . . outsiders' like the Belgians, French and Americans, since the 'weakness of that state allowed them to maximise profits'. The report states:

At the heart of the crisis is a new phase in an old power struggle for the vast riches of Zaire's mining industries (gold, cobalt, diamonds, copper, cadmium and germanium) and not, as the Zaireans and French believe, an attempt to impose a Tutsi, or anglophone hegemony in the region . . .

During Zaire's 30 years of independence, the wealth has been bled out of the country, courtesy of President Mobutu Sese Seko and the Western businessmen who control the mines . . .

Meanwhile, Belgian, French and United States intelligence services have used the country as a base for their attempts to control the region – most notably in the long destabilisation of Angola . . .

The disintegration of the Zairean state, the repression and looting by the army and the grotesque misery of Zaire's 39 million people were of no concern to these outsiders. In fact, the state's weakness allowed them to maximise profits . . .

The report concludes with the statement:

Time will tell whether Mr Kabila will be as successful as his peers. But even if he loses again this time, history will judge him part of the same political tradition of second-generation, post-independence leader who doomed old-style regimes that put the needs of foreign patrons before their own people. (*The Guardian* 28.12.96)

There was only one report in the period of our sample which criticised the nature of Western intentions in Zaire. This appeared on Channel 4 on 1 May 1997. It referred to how, hard on the heels of the rebel troops, Western industrialists were 'racing in . . . at a rate of knots to pick up the bits.' For example, the report states:

*Reporter:* Whether the war in Zaire will improve life for Tshonga (a local miner) remains to be seen, but already there are signs of change. There are troops in one corner of Lubumbashi airport preparing to be shipped to the front. In another corner, a Canadian mining company is optimistically collecting its \$5 m of drilling equipment . . . The war hasn't deterred Webb from his goal of heading-up what he hopes will be the world's biggest copper mine.

The report continues:

*Reporter:* From the air, Webb and his team eagerly survey their vast concession North-West of Lubumbashi. It's an area 50 km wide and 30 km long and packed with a very high-grade copper-ore.

The reporter then states:

*Reporter:* Tenke's initial investment is \$60 m, it is an enormous amount of money, but nowhere nearly as enormous as the value of the ore. The Funguram reserve is worth \$33 billion and there may be 4 or 5 times that amount here; so where's the risk?

The reporter concludes:

*Reporter:* A copper sky over Lubumbashi, big prospects for foreign mining companies; but for the people who dig the nation's wealth out of the ground, there's no guarantee that anything will change. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 1.5.97)

A studio discussion then follows in which the newscaster puts the view to Herman Cohen, assistant Secretary of State for Africa 1989–93, that the West is profiteering from this civil war in Zaire:

*Q: Newscaster:* Our understanding is that American mining conglomerates are racing in there at a rate of knots to pick up the bits, as soon as Mr Kabila gets through their bit of territory.

*A: Herman Cohen, Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, 1989–93* That's true. I think Kabila is making a big mistake because he's probably getting cheated by all of these companies . . . But apart from that, he doesn't have these old Marxist ideas that he had in the 1960s . . . if he's going to win the war, the idea is to try to convince him to do the right thing, using the leverage of future reconstruction and assistance.

The newscaster reiterates the question.

*Q: Newscaster:* But if there is any yardstick of modern-day American attitude, I guess it's that one should do business with the people who are perhaps serving the interests of their own countries to some extent. The worry surely is that these mining conglomerates are not particularly interested in whether any of these mining activities benefit the people of Zaire or indeed what happens environmentally to the country.

Later, the newscaster asks if the story of US involvement over the last ten years is a 'dishonourable story':

*Q: Newscaster:* And when history comes to be written, do you think that the US and the transition from Mobutu to Kabila will turn out to be an honourable story, or is this really dishonourable from the word go, from ten years ago to the present day?

*A: Interviewee: Herman Cohen* Well, from the point of view of the US, we were dealing with the Cold War, we needed Mobutu for us to bring supplies to the Unita Movement in Angola, which was the anti-communist movement, the Reagan doctrine, all of these things were much dominant in our policy compared to human rights and other

issues. And Mobutu, I think was no different from most of the one-party dictatorships that were in Africa. It's just that the left-wing in the US gave him a lot more publicity by attacking him all the time. So, I don't think that it was a shameful period in US history, it was just different requirements and now things have changed, we have to look to the future. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>-20<sup>00</sup>, 1.5.97)

This is one of the very few occasions when the view is expressed that the problems of Africa might relate in part to the requirements of Western commercial and political interests.

### Prescriptions for resolving the crisis

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As the crisis intensified in Zaire, news reports increasingly focused on prescriptions for its resolution. Calls for and concerns about Western intervention to resolve the crisis became a dominant theme of the news coverage, accounting for 676 references. The majority of these news accounts focused on the need for an international force to deliver humanitarian aid to refugees in the region. There were 223 references to this theme. These range from basic affirmations that a multi-national force was 'vital' if the aid was to get through to the refugees, to what this aid would actually consist of. For example:

*Reporter:* But even if there is international agreement, there are huge obstacles in getting aid to refugees. Zaire is one of Africa's largest countries, but its capital, Kinshasa, is over 1,000 miles away from the refugee camps. Around Goma and Bukavu, there are no through-roads. Aid routes from neighbouring countries like Rwanda are blocked by the current fighting, only a multi-national force could push safe corridors through the battle zones to deliver aid. (ITV: 22<sup>00</sup>-22<sup>30</sup>, 8.11.96)

Other references related to the composition of this force:

*Reporter:* France wants to send a three-part force, a 5,000 strong army, which would be one-third African, one-third American and one-third European. They've won support from Spain and Italy. Mr Chirac says he also found a common position with Mr Major. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>-19<sup>50</sup>, 8.11.96)

Finally, references to Western intervention related to what the humanitarian aid delivered by this multi-national force would consist of. For example:

*Reporter:* ... the UNHCR wants to set up protective corridors to bring the refugees home. These humanitarian corridors would be set-up from in eastern Zaire, they would open routes into eastern Zaire from Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania for food to be brought to the camps and corridors out in the hope of persuading refugees to return to Rwanda and Burundi. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>-23<sup>15</sup>, 7.11.96)

These humanitarian corridors were regarded as 'vital' in repatriating the Rwandan refugees.



By the last week in April 1997, the aid programme was under way and news accounts centred on the Western repatriation operation. Following the massacres, Filippo Grandi, UN Refugee Commissioner, called for a non-stop repatriation of the refugees.

*Interviewee: Filippo Grandi, UN Refugee Commissioner* We need here a non-stop repatriation from day to night, every hour the airport can be used, it has to be used to fly these people out, because not only are they sick; in fact, I think most of the sick people have died, but they are terrified. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>50</sup>, 28.4.97)

Other references related to the complicated nature of the relief operation. For example:

*Reporter:* The UN has just 60 days to find, gather and airlift 80,000 or more people, scattered across this dense rain-forest. Tonight, they're already pleading with the rebels for more time. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 28.4.97)

There were also more serious concerns regarding Western intervention. There were 90 references to opposition to a Western force in the region. These were mostly from the Rwandan government, who had serious misgivings about the French involvement. For example:

*Reporter:* And the Rwandan President was repeating the demand that France shouldn't be in any multi-national force. The French are seen as supporters of the former regime and the Hutu killers. (BBC2: 22<sup>00</sup>–23<sup>15</sup>, 8.11.96)

Much of the opposition to a Western task-force referred directly to French involvement. Regional leaders did not want French involvement, although they did want intervention. The Zairean rebels also did not want French involvement, nor did the Zairean nationals living in exile in the Montague quarter in Brussels. As the following example demonstrates:

*Reporter:* Secondly, they're going to a complex civil war, the rebels have already made it clear that they don't want to see European troops; and they certainly don't want to see the French, who are seen as very much on the side of Mobutu and on the side of the Hutus, the militias and the killers they are fighting against at the moment outside Goma. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>–23<sup>15</sup>, 8.11.96)

*Reporter:* But who should provide the troops? In Brussels . . . there is a powerful reminder of the Belgian and French colonial past in the Congo. The Montague quarter is home to 15,000 Zaireans, rubbing shoulders with Rwandan neighbours. Watching all the cruelties unfold on television, their main pre-occupation is to see a neutral force go in; with no role for the French who volunteered, and very little for Europe as a whole. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 7.11.96)

Many of the countries who objected to Western intervention did so on the grounds that they wanted the force to have an African component. For example: '*Reporter:* Germany won't send troops and wants neighbouring African countries to take the lead' (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 8.11.96). There were 127 other references to concerns from the West on military intervention. These included the British government's view: '*Reporter:* . . . that while

speed was of the essence, troops could not be sent without full preparation and awareness' (BBC2: 19<sup>00</sup>-19<sup>15</sup>, 9.11.96).

Another concern was whether host governments would 'welcome them'. For example:

*Interviewee: John Major, Prime Minister* We need to know whether the host governments will welcome them. We need to know whether the governments in the region will accept them. We need to know whether there would be an African presence among the troops. We need to know in part what the mission of the troops would be.

*Reporter:* That is crucial, the last time French troops were sent to Rwanda, their mission foundered on local misunderstandings. Britain and the US will want clear guidelines to get in and out of Zaire, if they're to follow. (ITV: 22<sup>00</sup>-22<sup>30</sup>, 8.11.96)

The history of French involvement is referred to here as involving 'local misunderstandings'. This is something of an understatement by the ITN reporter. British television had shown as early as 1995 that the French had been implicated in supplying arms to, and even fighting for, the Rwandan Hutu government against the RPF in 1990 and 1991. (BBC1: *Panorama* 'Bloody Tricolour', 20.8.95). A more perceptive account from a BBC reporter noted that this was not just a humanitarian crisis. It was also a civil war which military intervention could make worse:

*Reporter:* This is not just a humanitarian crisis, any international force would be coming into a civil war, with uprisings around Goma and further South in Bukavu . . . It is a complex, chaotic situation and if all these factors aren't considered, military intervention would make it even worse. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>-23<sup>15</sup>, 8.11.96)

These concerns also focused on past failures in other conflicts, such as Somalia. We can see here an interesting example of complex conflicts with different histories being reduced to the catch-all phrase of 'inter-tribal killing':

*Reporter:* But Mr Major will not want British troops involved in the kind of thing that happened in Somalia. *There too, a humanitarian disaster was overlaid with inter-tribal killing*, American troops found themselves trying to impose peace on feuding war-lords without clearly attainable objectives and they got nowhere. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>-23<sup>15</sup>, 8.11.96; our emphasis)

There were 98 other references to the need for international intervention for a political solution. For example:

*Q: Newscaster:* But as far as the humanitarian situation is concerned, we've been hearing in the last few days from aid agencies saying that the aid situation is fraught with difficulty unless a political and military solution is arrived at. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>-19<sup>50</sup>, 8.11.96)

By the last week of April 1997, calls for a political solution were focused on the need for a 'negotiated cease-fire' and a 'hand-over of power' from President Mobutu to Laurent Kabila. For example:

*Reporter:* Into the political chaos of Zaire, a nation split between government and rebel armies, came President Clinton's envoy, America's Ambassador to the UN, trying to negotiate a cease-fire and saying a political solution is urgently needed. (ITV: 22<sup>00</sup>-22<sup>30</sup>, 28.4.97)

Eighty-one of the references related to the need to protect the returning refugees. Fifty-two others related to the need for humanitarian aid only; as in suggestions that America would give cash support, but did not want troop involvement.

## Explanations of the crisis

In our first study of the Rwandan refugee crisis of 1994 we showed how TV news gave almost no meaningful explanations for the refugee exodus, and made little attempt to relate it to the history of Rwanda. In the later coverage which we examine here, some journalists clearly addressed this issue. The news reports in this sample contained 134 historical explanations which were used in a variety of ways to either explain the rebellion, or contextualise the refugee movements. Sixty-three of these referred to the 1994 genocide of Tutsis by the Hutu militia in Rwanda. However, although news reports of the 1996 Zairean crisis did contain explanations, the quality of these accounts varied substantially. There were 32 explanations which provided little other than a basic allusion to the 1994 genocide of the Tutsis by the Hutus in Rwanda. Some did not even provide this. For example, there were six references to the refugee exodus that had occurred in 1994, but no mention of the genocide that had produced it. This report from ITV, for example, shows no apparent awareness of the original genocide, or that the 'refugees' include the Hutu militias responsible for it. The refugee camps are presented as being attacked, without mentioning that they were being used as military bases.

*Newscaster:* The human tragedy is now centred around the border town of Goma. Refugees there are mostly Hutus crammed into camps to the North of the town. They had fled from Tutsi forces inside Rwanda and until today have been under attack from the North by Tutsi rebels based in Zaire itself. (ITN: 22<sup>00</sup>-22<sup>30</sup>, 4.11.96)

This example demonstrates the partial and insubstantial nature of some of these explanations. Other reports do little more than simply reference the genocide and 'horrific massacres'; for example:

*Reporter:* There is a new tragedy unfolding in the misty, green mountains of Eastern Zaire, even more complex and chaotic than the refugee exodus, in the aftermath of the horrific massacres in Rwanda two years ago. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>-23<sup>15</sup>, 7.11.96)

Other explanations referenced the genocide to explain the refugees' flight from the Zairean rebels. This is referred to as 'escaping the attentions of old enemies'. It would be difficult to see how viewers could make much

sense of these events beyond hearing that Hutus and Tutsis are enemies and one side is ‘paying the other back’.

*Reporter:* Fear of rebel troops has driven many of the refugees to go into hiding to escape the attentions of old enemies.

*Interviewee: Richard Dowden, The Economist* What’s happening to the refugees is not really part of the Zairean problem at the moment; it is the Rwandan problem. It is a continuation of that war from 1991–94, the genocide in 1994 and it’s spilled over into Zaire and has got up in this war in Zaire, but it is not an essential part of the Zairean war. It is because most of Kabila’s army commanders are Rwandan Tutsi from Eastern Zaire and *they’re paying back the Hutus for what happened in 1994*. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>–23<sup>00</sup>, 29.4.97; our emphasis)

In this example, the genocide is described in terms of tribal fighting:

*Newscaster:* Two years ago the ethnic tension between these two tribes erupted in the genocide of the Rwandan civil war which saw the Tutsi seize control of the country from the rival Hutus. The result was that more than 1 million Hutu refugees fled in to Zaire to escape the civil war, de-stabilising that country . . . The result, a humanitarian disaster which is still unfolding. Into this *deep-seated tribal conflict*, Western troops are stepping.

The report is accompanied by the following visual:

Tutsi	Hutus
Cattle owners	Peasant farmers
Rich Elite	Lower class
Tall	Small

(BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 1.11.96; our emphasis)

In the following example, we are told that a plane has been shot down and then Hutus unaccountably start to massacre Tutsis: ‘Genocide was triggered when Rwanda’s Hutu president was killed, his plane shot down over Kigali at night 6 April 1994. Within hours, Hutu militia and soldiers started to massacre Tutsis’ (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>, 18.11.97). However, some explanations of the genocide were more detailed. Twelve in our sample attempted to address the complexities of the event. They noted, for example that it was not only Tutsis who suffered, but that moderate Hutu had also been slaughtered in the violence. This was reported on BBC2 which carried a report on the problems of re-integrating Rwandan Hutu refugees in the villages they left two years ago.

*Reporter:* We passed mass graves at Nianzer, 2,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed in this hamlet alone on 11 April 1994. Further on an even more bleak reminder of the little church . . . left as it was after the events of 12 April 1994, when the Interahamwe attacked. Men, women and children barricaded themselves in but the walls and windows were broken in. Those inside were literally hacked to death . . . The Interahamwe responsible for this fled with other Hutu refugees to Zaire. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>–23<sup>15</sup>, 12.11.96)

Other explanations referred to how some refugees were afraid to go home in case they were punished. But, of 63 historical references to the genocide of 1994, only 13 of these could be described as offering a more comprehensive explanation of the genocide and its relationship to the current crisis. The bulk of the 'explanations' in these reports remained at the level of 'Tutsis' fighting 'Hutus' and did not go beyond the image of tribal conflict. They did not indicate the sophistication of the Rwandan state or that the genocide was part of a calculated political programme, that it was planned and instigated with an appalling efficiency and that the Hutu opposition (the 'moderates') were also killed as part of the strategy to sustain the power of the Hutu extremists.

### Explanations of the rebellion in Zaire

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There were 72 explanations for the conflict in Zaire. Twenty-three of these attributed the rebellion in Zaire to the political and economic instability that had been generated by 32 years of President Mobutu's corrupt government. Several reports on ITN, BBC1 and Channel 4 referred to this. For example, on 6 November 1996 an ITN report juxtaposed the 'super-rich' lifestyle of President Mobutu to the 'hundreds of thousands of impoverished refugees' created by the rebellion. It states:

*Reporter:* Far beyond the beaches of the Riviera, Zaire descends into chaos, while its President sits across the bay from Monte Carlo in his villa amongst the palaces of the global super-rich . . . Goma stands today in marked contrast, as on the streets they clear up bodies from the fighting. And on the road, perhaps hundreds of thousands of impoverished refugees move . . . He has ruled since 1965, since when he has amassed a huge personal fortune. His favourite drink is vintage Taittinger champagne and he has even chartered Concorde to go to the dentist.

The report continues;

*Reporter:* One source estimates his wealth at about 6 billion dollars, that is about half the size of Zaire's entire national debt. And for the rest of his life that money will probably buy him peace and security, two things denied the people of the country he has governed for the last 30 years. (ITV: 22<sup>00</sup>-22<sup>30</sup>, 6.11.96)

Channel 4 also produced a similarly extensive report on the nature of the kleptocracy which President Mobutu's government had established and how 32 years of 'rapacious greed' and Mobutism had so economically destabilised the country that the Zairean rebels walked into a 'rapturous welcome' in Lubumbashi. For example:

*Reporter:* Laurent Kabila's rebels walked into Lubumbashi to a rapturous welcome, after 32 years dictatorship under President Sese Seko. They were received as an army of liberation. Lubumbashi is Zaire's second city, its

most important economically and still the civil war swept through it in just 48 hours.

The report proceeds to focus on the giant-state-owned mining company, Gecomines, and the endemic poverty of its workforce.

*Reporter:* The region is famous for its fantastic mineral wealth, but it's well squandered. The people here are amongst the poorest on the planet. Perhaps the greatest symbol of the economic collapse of this country underneath the weight of Mobutism, stands here just behind me. This is Gecomines, the giant state-owned mining company, once a highly productive and profitable enterprise, it's literally been driven into the ground through the years of systematic corruption and looting. These miners head down the shaft every day, the journey is  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile underground. For their efforts they rarely see any pay, but if the mine isn't maintained, it will flood.

The reporter then notes:

*Reporter:* This could be one of the richest copper and zinc mines in the world; yet it stopped production in 1993, thanks to the rapacious greed of President Mobutu's executives in Kinshasa. They had diverted so much of the earnings of the mine into their own pockets, that there was nothing left for basic machinery and spare parts. They very nearly killed the goose that lays the golden egg.

The report focuses on a local miner, Mufite Tshonga, who is so impoverished that he has to steal from the mine to survive.

*Reporter:* Tshonga recalls how good life was when he started work in 1951, but his life started to deteriorate after Mobutu came to power and eventually he was forced to sell his furniture and other belongings just to buy food. Today, at the mine, Tshonga is clearing the filth out of the drainage system. He won't be paid, but he's here just to steal from the company. Mobutu's regime is described as a kleptocracy, a system of corruption and thieving that eventually penetrated the whole of society and ultimately caused a collective moral bankruptcy.

*Interviewee: Mufite Tshonga, Miner* Personally, I don't want to steal because to my religious beliefs, it is difficult for me to do it. But sometimes, I'm forced to if I've been starving for 4 days and someone comes with money asking me to steal something from the company, I can't help it. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 1.5.97)

Other reports explored the nature of the conflict. There were 27 of these which pointed out, for example, that it was more than just a Tutsi rebellion; it involved other factions as well, and 'ethnic tension' had been exploited for political gain.

*Reporter:* And the rebellion, you must remember, is not just a Tutsi rebellion though it did start as a . . . Tutsi rebellion down near Uvira. As the rebellion has spread North, it's taken in non-Tutsis and it's taken in a whole range of Zaireans who are opposed to Mobutu. (BBC2: 22<sup>30</sup>–23<sup>15</sup>, 15.11.96)

*Reporter:* ... in a country where ancient ethnic tensions have been exploited for political gain. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 15.11.96)

The composition and aims of the rebel alliance were addressed. For example, Channel 4 explored a 'coincidence of aims' between the 'ethnic Tutsi rebels in Zaire' and the RPF:

*Q: Newscaster:* What evidence have you in New York of a coincidence of aims if not of actual operation between the ethnic Tutsi rebels in Zaire and the Rwandan Patriotic Front soldiers from Rwanda in Eastern Zaire?

*A: Interviewee: Marrack Goulding, UN Under Secretary-General* There is no hard evidence, there is a lot of circumstantial evidence, there is a lot of, I think, well-founded speculation that there is a linkage between the international conflict in Rwanda, the international conflict in Burundi, the action in the Zairean government against people of Tutsi origin who have lived in Eastern Zaire for several centuries now. All these things seem to be linked, but it is not easy in the confusion that reigns at present to identify, who is doing what to whom. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>30</sup>, 1.11.96)

The point was made in several reports that the 'coincidence of aims' was a common aim of both Tutsi rebels and RPF, to expel the Hutu militia from the camps. For example:

*Reporter:* Mugunga is sealed off controlled by Hutu militia. The theory is the Zairean rebels want to eliminate them before an international force arrives. (ITV: 22<sup>00</sup>–22<sup>30</sup>, 14.11.96)

*Reporter:* These are the Zairean victims of Rwanda's unsettled scores. The Zairean rebels who control Goma are a mask for Rwanda's Tutsi-dominated army, trying to defeat (once and for all) the Hutu militia and army which carried out the genocide 2 years ago. (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>50</sup>, 7.11.96)

The political strategy was reported as being not only to expel the Hutu militias from the camps, but also to obstruct humanitarian aid. For example: '*Reporter:* The UN Secretary-General says, the rebel-alliance is forcibly starving the refugees to death' (Channel 4: 19<sup>00</sup>–19<sup>55</sup>, 24.4.97).

Other accounts fell back on the well trodden path of 'tribalism' and ethnic conflicts in Africa. Fourteen references explained it as an 'ethnic war', 'ethnic tensions' and a combination of 'tribal conflict and the ghost of notorious colonial failure.' For example:

*Reporter:* Now its troops are poised to intervene in a land where there's not just a *maze of tribal conflict* but the ghost of notorious colonial failure. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 14.11.96; our emphasis)

*Reporter:* Yet, the cost of doing nothing mounts every day, corpses have been found on the idyllic shores of Lake Tanganyika, victims of the *ethnic tensions that lie at the heart of this conflict*. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 4.11.96; our emphasis)

*Reporter:* In the hospitals, we saw the injuries of the children, the innocent caught-up in the mix of an ethnic war and a refugee crisis, that is threatening Eastern Zaire with anarchy. (ITV: 22<sup>00</sup>–22<sup>30</sup>, 7.11.96)

*Reporter:* This is the insanity that has accompanied the collapse of civil and military authority in Eastern Zaire. The *wild men* of the murderous Interahamwe militia ... (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 1.11.96; our emphasis)

BBC1 later carried this report:

*Reporter:* This was the map of central Africa in 1960, dominated in geographical terms by the Belgian Congo. Belgium pulled out, leaving a country the size of Western Europe, *racked by tribal rivalries* and ruined by attempts by different regions to break away. Into this quagmire in July 1960, went an early UN peace-keeping force, it found itself in the middle of a civil war and there was no easy way out ... Zaire was never far from disintegration. In 1978, France and Belgium sent paratroopers, after the mining town Kolwezi was seized by invaders and European workers were massacred. Today, the situation is a million or so people from the Hutu tribe poured into Zaire to escape the civil war in Rwanda. The Hutu refugees have been accused of attacking their old *tribal enemies*, the Tutsis, both in Zaire and back across the border in Rwanda. The Tutsis have retaliated by taking-on the Hutu-dominated Zairean army. The net result chaos and a humanitarian crisis to which the world is unsure how to respond. (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 8.11.96; our emphasis)

Africa is defined as a place of 'tribal conflict', 'tribal enemies', 'ethnic war', 'insanity', 'chaos' and 'anarchy', inhabited by 'wild men'. Against these descriptions are put explanations of why the West is concerned about military intervention in the region. For example: '*Reporter:* ... there remained extreme caution about being sucked into the region's blood-thirsty politics' (BBC1: 21<sup>00</sup>–21<sup>30</sup>, 13.11.96).

The people of Africa are compared to the topography of the landscape they inhabit. Thus, the volcanoes are described as being 'far more predictable than the people they watch over.' For example:

*Reporter:* The volcanoes of Rwanda are as old as time and they still have the power to destroy. But they're unlikely to erupt, most have been dormant for years. In fact, they're far more predictable than the people they watch over, now coming back home, and those they ran away from. (ITV: 22<sup>00</sup>–22<sup>30</sup>, 18.11.96)

The temperament of the people is characterised as unpredictable and because of this Africa is a place that could erupt at any moment. Thus, violence happens in Africa because it is Africa. In such a simplistic account there is no room for a serious analysis of the complex political histories of states and their peoples.

## Press coverage

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There was a marked difference between the two tabloid papers which we examined in their coverage of Rwanda. The first key difference was in the amount and prominence of the coverage. *The Mirror* published 24 separate



items during our sample including one three-page report (starting with a full page front-page story), one double page photo spread and a full page of reports, five editorials and two letters. *The Sun*, by contrast, published seven items including one editorial. The longest item contained nine sentences (with one at seven sentences, two at five, two at three and one at two). The editorial view on the crisis was also quite different.

The lack of interest from *The Sun* was indicated by the small amount of coverage which it gave to the issue. The paper also tended to reflect British government concerns about getting sucked into the conflict. Of 32 separate statements in *The Sun*, eight referred to Western (mostly UK) responses, one to the rebellion, five to refugee movements, seven to refugee suffering, eight to Western concerns about military intervention, two for the need to send aid and finally one minor explanatory statement. By contrast *The Mirror* included 283 different statements. Five referred to the progress of the rebellion, six to Western arms sales, 18 to Western responses, 20 to refugee movements, 104 to refugee suffering, seven to the problems of refugee integration, 15 to attacks on refugees (ten by Tutsis, none by Hutus, one on attacks in general, three to fear of the militias in the camps and one to fear of the Rwanda government among returning refugees). There was one reference to opposition to Western military/colonial involvement, two to Western concerns about interventions, one to political solutions, one to the need to track down arms suppliers and 65 which recommended giving aid. One statement mentioned protecting returning refugees while two reported sentiments against giving aid. There were also a total of fifteen statements which provided a critique of media coverage of the crisis.

*The Mirror*'s main response to the crisis was to emphasise the appalling conditions the refugees faced and recommend that aid be sent. Indeed the biggest story in *The Mirror* in our sample was the front page launch of an appeal for donations from readers. 'Please Save Me' read the headline under a photo taking up most of the front page of a refugee child captioned 'the frightened eyes of a child beg for help'. On page three the paper included an item on 'how you can help' and printed the phone numbers and contact details of the leading aid agencies. *The Mirror* appeal became a focus for continued coverage of the crisis and on each occasion the details of the aid agencies were printed. Headlines included:

- 'Readers' caring hearts' (11 November 1996)
- 'Readers' £100,000 for Zaire' (12 November 1996)
- 'Zaire appeal tops £130,000' (13 November 1996)
- 'Saved by Readers' (18 November 1996)

Overall, *The Mirror* framed the crisis as a humanitarian disaster using words such as 'apocalypse', though giving little indication of why the problem had come about. There were some explanations in the two tabloids but these were extremely limited. *The Sun* included one fragment which helped to locate the refugee problem, describing the refugees as 'Hutus who fled

Rwanda when rival Tutsis seized power' (15 November 1996). *The Mirror* included more, but still extremely limited, explanation in its coverage

Under the heading 'The tribes at War' *The Mirror* included a question and answer item which is worth treating at length:

Q: Who is fighting?

A: Rebel Zaireans of the Tutsi tribe, aided by the Tutsi governments in Rwanda and Burundi, are resisting a policy of 'ethnic cleansing' by rival Hutus to throw them out of Zaire. It threatens to repeat the 1994 massacre of 850,000 Tutsis by Hutus. There are already reports of hundreds being butchered in Zaire.

Q: Who are the refugees?

A: Up to a million Hutus who have been living in camps on the Zaire border since the Tutsis re-took power in Rwanda. They are too scared to go home for fear of revenge. An estimated 600,000 have taken to the bush to get away from the fighting . . .

Q: What's at stake?

A: If the fighting causes Zaire to disintegrate, the whole of Central Africa, including Uganda, Tanzania and Angola, could go up in flames

Q: Who is president of Zaire?

A: Mobuto Sese Seko, 66, has been in power 31 years during which time he has salted away £40 billion in Swiss accounts. (*The Mirror*, 9 November 1996)

The coverage largely emphasised suffering and the need for aid. The explanations which were offered were largely tribal in nature. They suggested it was an ethnic conflict and gave no hint that Hutu opposition, as well as Tutsis, had been slaughtered by the former Rwandan government in 1994, or that the rebellion in Zaire was not simply an ethnic revolt. There was also no commentary on the responsibility of Western governments for the crisis either in terms of the colonial past, or to the contemporary role of the French government, or to the interests of Western governments and large corporations in backing sides in the conflict. There was one brief reference in *The Mirror* (but nothing in *The Sun*) to the role of Mil-Tech in arming the side responsible for the genocide. Significantly *The Mirror* included very little, and *The Sun* nothing at all, about possible political solutions or their desirability. The closest *The Mirror* came was a reference to refugee survival being dependent on aid and the 'political will for a solution' (12 November 1996), though what such a solution might be was not specified.

There was little in these tabloids which explicitly noted what the fighting was about. Instead for both papers the implicit theme was that this was an inexplicable tribal, or simply hopeless, situation.

*The Sun's* main preoccupation with the story was the Western response and the potential problems of intervention. Together these accounted for 16 statements, more than the total given to describing the plight of the refugees and the need for aid (9 statements). By contrast *The Mirror* included only 20

statements on Western responses and worries about being dragged into conflict, some of which were denounced as 'hand-wringing'. This compares with 169 statements detailing refugee suffering and the need for aid.

## Racism, colonialism and Western responses

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*The Mirror* did also publish a very extensive piece which denounced the coverage of the crisis in other tabloid newspapers. It argued that the 'Tory press' was 'attacking the starving people of Zaire':

They said nothing while the warring madness drove millions towards death. But as soon as Britain agreed to join the United Nations force to that stricken land they launched in with sickening gusto.

As we have seen *The Sun* did in fact report very little on the crisis; when it did it concentrated heavily on British responses in headlines such as 'Premier vows to help Zaire' (9 November 1996), 'British troops to Zaire' (14 November 1996), 'Squaddies get OK to open fire in Zaire' (15 November 1996). *The Mirror* went on to single out the *Daily Mail* columnist Paul Johnson. Over a photograph of refugees returning to Rwanda, the headline read 'Racist who wants these people back in chains':

Ranting right-wing columnist Paul Johnson provoked a storm of outrage yesterday when he called for the relief mission to Zaire to be scrapped. Johnson was branded a racist after telling *Daily Mail* readers that rival African factions had been 'chopping each other to pieces, on a strictly tribal basis, and occasionally eating each other'. He wrote of 'blacks slicing each other up' and demanded a return to the days of the British Empire when central Africa was colonised by Europeans. Colonialism, he said, was 'a good idea. The alternative was chaos and misery'. And he declared that humanitarian relief expeditions merely prolong the necessary agonies of nation building. (*The Mirror*, 16 November 1996)

Humanitarian aid was a central theme of *The Mirror* and the rest of the piece is made up of denunciations of Johnson by aid agencies, MPs and celebrities such as Lenny Henry, Richard Wilson and Nick Hancock. The long editorial on the same page concludes by contrasting Johnson with the British public:

He sees the people of Zaire in the same way that the cruel colonialists and harsh slavers did. Not as human beings but as objects. It does not matter to him if they are massacred, starved or condemned to die of disease. None of them reads the *Daily Mail*, after all . . . but the British people are not like that. We are still a compassionate nation. We still care about the world's real sufferers. That is what makes this country truly great. Not the feeble posturing of a handful of cruel racists like Paul Johnson.

The ringing denunciation of Johnson provides a very clear critique of colonialist and racist views on Zaire, in the name of humanitarianism which

sees the giving of aid as the appropriate response to the crisis. It is important to note the differences between these sentiments and those found in *The Sun*. However, we should note that *The Mirror* had also a very limited account of the origins of this conflict in Africa. Tribalism and animal passions were implicitly or explicitly used in its own explanations. A feature attacking the corrupt rule of Mobutu in Zaire was headed 'Beast of the Jungle' (30.10.96). As we will show, there is a strong strand of press and television journalism which tends to explain African events in such terms.

## Discussion

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In our study of the 1994 refugee crisis, the main conclusion had been the low level of explanations in news reporting of the events. The origins and causes of the crisis were lost in the news focus on the 'biggest refugee movement in history'. As we have seen, the present study shows that the later phases of the news story contained many more references to the genocide in Rwanda and its link to the refugee exodus. In November 1996, it was quite frequently stated on the news that Hutu militias had perpetrated massacres upon the Tutsi population. However, we should note that an explanation at this level is still very limited. To state simply that Hutus have massacred Tutsis does not move far beyond explaining the events as a 'tribal conflict' between what may be assumed to be 'primitive' peoples of Africa. This is far from the truth as a description of Rwanda. As Lindsey Hilsum has shown, Rwanda was a highly organised and disciplined society. In her account of the genocide she describes the hierarchies and the social structure of the country:

A group of households comprised a cellule; every cellule has a spokesman who reported to the conseiller who was in charge of the next administrative unit up the ladder, the secteur. He, in turn, reported to the bourgemestre, who was in charge of the commune. And the bourgemestre reported to the prefect in charge of the prefecture . . . and so on, to the highest reaches of the government. If a Rwandan wanted to leave his hill, he first asked the authorities for permission. Unlike most African capitals, Kigali remained small and largely immune to urban drift; Rwanda had passed laws stricter than those of South Africa. (Hilsum, 1995: 165–166)

As she notes, the Swiss government had given more money to Rwanda than to any other country in Africa, because they saw a society which was as disciplined as their own. There was very little corruption. If money for clinics was given, then the clinics were built. The genocide, which she describes in detail, was implemented when the 'interim government' seized power in April 1994. The new government was determined to annihilate all opposition to itself, which certainly included Hutu opposition groups as well as the Tutsi population. In Butare, a city in the south of the country which was known for its tolerance and liberalism, thousands of Tutsis were slaughtered, but

so were Hutu students and lecturers at the university. Belgian nationals and soldiers (with the UN) were also killed because they were seen as potential supporters of the RPF. Lindsey Hilsum described the efficiency with which the orders to kill were obeyed:

The same efficiency – the discipline and order so admired by the foreign aid workers – meant that when the orders came on 7 April for the killing to begin they were usually obeyed. Numerous witnesses have told how the bourgemestres in conjunction with local military or police instructed people to kill. Fear drove the killers on – fear of the invading enemy, fear of their neighbours, fear of execution if they refused to obey orders. (Hilsum, 1995: 170)

A highly disciplined society in which people kill because they are obeying orders has echoes, less of 'tribal passions' than of another holocaust in Europe.

Rwanda was an extremely complex society; it is not easy to understand the events of the genocide without a knowledge of its history. There is an important point to be made here, about how journalists can adequately express such complexities in routine news coverage. A detailed account of Rwanda could not be included in every news bulletin. It would also be unlikely that most viewers would retain a high level of detail on this, or on other stories from the developing world. Yet there is still an important issue, which is that the working assumption for journalists should be that actions and events do have complex political and economic histories. This is certainly a key assumption for both journalists and viewers when discussing events in the developed world. For example, viewers may not understand the intricacies of the 'Cod War' which Britain once had with Iceland – but they do not believe it arose because of the tribal fury of the Norsemen. Equally, they may have little knowledge of the Weimar Republic or the rise of Fascism in Europe, but they are not told that the holocaust occurred because of the essentially volatile and primitive nature of the Germans. Even the most violent and cruel conflicts in Europe are nonetheless shown as emerging from organised political interests and strategies. This is important because political conflicts can in the end have political solutions. After the Second World War, for Germany to be rehabilitated in Europe, it was required that it be 'de-Nazified'. This included the public trial of its political leadership, who were either executed or imprisoned, followed by a major programme of cultural transformation. Whatever the solutions to problems in Africa they cannot begin to be discussed if the working assumptions of journalists, and the information which we receive, does not go beyond post-colonial clichés. Of course, not all journalism on Africa could be described in this way, but it is a not unreasonable description of some of the material in our sample of the Rwanda/Zaire crisis. As Lindsey Hilsum argues, some journalists reporting on Rwanda simply could not believe that Africans could be so organised. They could not therefore see the genocide for what it was:

There is a fundamental misconception about Africa – that it is all the same. Journalists used their view of places such as Somalia where there was no strong nation state – where people dribbled over borders. But in Rwanda, the nation state was incredibly strong. Most journalists couldn't believe that Africans could be so organised – they couldn't recognise the genocide for what it was . . . Rwanda was more similar to Nazi Germany in that there was a group with an extremist, racist ideology. They defined other groups as the enemy because of the historical relationships between the ethnic groups, in the way that there were reasons for the Jews being chosen. Politicians manipulate relations between the different ethnic groups and turn them into ideology. In Rwanda to stay in power, they exterminated the other group. (Interview: 24.4.98)

Yet some years after the genocide, journalists can still refer to 'tribal massacres'. As for example in this *Guardian* report on the role of the French at the time:

The Prime Minister at the height of the Rwandan *tribal massacres* by Hutus and his foreign minister . . . both refused to criticise French intervention . . . the Rwanda affair in which hundreds of thousands of people died in *tribal executions*, was the first of several French political setbacks in the African Great Lakes region. (*The Guardian*, 22.4.98; emphasis added)

There are other references in popular journalism which suggests the 'primitive nature of Africa' as the 'dark continent' – for example, images of animals and 'beasts in the jungle'. As we saw above, *The Mirror* criticised the *Daily Mail* for its coverage, but one of its own headlines was 'Beast of the Jungle' (30.10.96). In April 1998, *The Guardian* reported on people in Rwanda travelling to witness the executions of those accused of participating in the genocide. Here again, the images are of pack animals: 'They were driven by that atavistic fury that goes back to the times when human beings moved in packs and ate raw meat' (25.4.98).

In our sample, as we have shown, most explanations of the conflict did little more than reduce it to fighting between two different groups of 'tribes', and some spoke directly of the 'wild', 'volatile' and 'mad' nature of the people.

Not all coverage in our sample was limited to such assumptions. There were some journalists who attempted to explain the rebellion in Zaire as being more than simply an ethnic conflict. It must be said that the number of such references was relatively small. In the period of our sample there were some references which stated that the rebellion in Eastern Zaire was not simply an 'ethnic conflict'. All of them were contributed to by reporters on the ground, as in this one from Robin Denselow:

And the rebellion you must remember is not just a Tutsi rebellion, though it did start as a Tutsi . . . rebellion . . . As the rebellion has spread north, it's taken in non-Tutsi's and it's taken in a whole range of Zaireans who are opposed to Mobutu. (BBC2: *Newsnight*, 15.11.96)

One of the other references was briefer and featured on the same edition of *Newsnight* (quoted above). A third had come two weeks previously, featuring one of the very rare examples of journalists reflecting on previous coverage. George Alagiah argues:

Well, who are these rebels, I mean for a long time now we've been talking about ethnic Tutsi rebels, but I've just been travelling around the country further South and talking to Rwandan commanders there. One gets the impression that what started off as an ethnic Tutsi rebellion is something quite different now. Certainly the rebel forces have in them Tutsis, but they are outnumbered by other ethnic groups. So it rather suggests that something that started off as a narrow uprising, a resistance movement if you like, is now something of an organised rebellion. (BBC1: *Nine O'Clock News*, 1.11.96)

From such references viewers could have begun to develop more sophisticated accounts of the conflict in Zaire. But if they had missed the reports which contained these statements, the information to take them beyond a model based on ethnic conflict would simply not have been available in the large number of other bulletins which we examined. We can see from this that there was some variation in the reporting by different journalists and news organisation of the same events.

## Variations in coverage

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There was often a marked variation in the reporting of the same event by different channels. In the following examples we contrast different reports from journalists on the ground. We also compare these with reports emanating from London. Those reporters on the ground who attempt to paint a more complex picture, and to explain the events in political terms, can be contrasted with those whose reports simplified the conflict into variations on the themes of 'African disaster', or 'tribal conflict', or 'wild men'. First we will examine variation between reporters on the ground.

Sometimes the same clips of film were used to illustrate markedly different reports. These were transmitted in news of Rwanda/Zaire on the same day. We can consider two examples of this here. These descriptions were of the same film footage:

This is the insanity that has accompanied the collapse of civil and military authority in Eastern Zaire. The wild men of the murderous Interahamwe militia came from their hiding places to the border at dawn to taunt the vastly superior Rwandan army. Those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. (BBC1: *Nine O'Clock News*, 1.11.96)

On ITN, however, there are no 'mad', 'wild men', but instead an army in disarray:

Zairean border guards, part of an army now seemingly in disarray, resort to ritual taunts directed at nearby Rwandan soldiers. (ITN: *News at Ten*, 1.11.96)

Such is the chaos on the Zairean side that soldiers have resorted to ritual chants and insults to taunt their Rwandan foes across the border. (*Channel 4: News*, 1.11.96)

In the second example, footage of refugees in Goma fighting for food at the UN compound is used to illustrate the need for Western intervention. Some journalists endorsed Western intervention not only for humanitarian reasons but to restore 'order' or 'stability', because of the 'volatile' nature of the population:

Rioting broke out in Goma as people tried to storm the UN compound to get food. Nothing could better demonstrate the need for troops to stabilise the region and the dangers of putting them among a starving and volatile population. But with estimates of a million and a half displaced and desperate people, governments around the world felt they could no longer hold back. (BBC1: *Nine O'Clock News*, 13.11.96)

The footage of the 'riot' was evidently regarded as high in news value inside the ITN news room, because their reporter decided to use it again the following day, although contemporaneous footage was available and was used in the bulletin: 'So little food has reached them that where any does it causes a riot as people try to grab it' (ITN: *News at Ten*, 14.11.96).

But not all journalists present felt the need to emphasise the necessity of Western military intervention to restore order, or described the hungry as in some way unbalanced and emotional. Over the same footage Mark Urban gave this account: 'In Eastern Zaire there was further evidence today of the desperation of hundreds of thousands of hungry people driven from their homes by recent fighting' (BBC2: *Newsnight*, 13.11.96).

These variations in reporting amongst reporters on the ground indicate the input that can be made into television news by individual reporters. One journalist, who was actually there at the time, told us that there was no 'riot' as presented. The people scrambled for free food, but they were not desperate. They were not in fact refugees; they were the Zairean residents of Goma town. The problem had been that the journalists could not actually reach the refugee camps. They had a story to tell but no pictures to fit it.

We should also note that the reports of those correspondents in the field who tried to explain the political dynamics of the situation often ran parallel with reports from London (by political, diplomatic or defence correspondents) which gave a quite different picture. Reporters from London were much more likely to endorse the policy prescriptions and concerns of the British government ministries who were their major sources than were journalists in the field. For example, the overwhelming majority (two-thirds) of



statements which endorsed the policy of disarming of the Hutu militias among the refugees were from reporters, aid agencies and African officials in Rwanda/Zaire. By contrast such sentiments were referred to on just nine occasions by newscasters and on no occasion did any journalist reporting from London endorse the view or discuss the issue. Instead, the reports of political correspondents were more likely to be oriented to British governmental announcements; Political, Diplomatic or Defence correspondents being seen outside the Ministries which had recently briefed them. In some of these examples, the journalist's statements were little different from those of the government ministers whose attempts to promote their policy were also heard in the bulletin. In the example that follows, we can compare the words of Defence Secretary Michael Portillo with the report of 'government thinking' given by a BBC political correspondent from Downing Street. In the House of Commons, Portillo claimed that the reason for intervention was:

because we are a civilised nation, we can see people about to die in their thousands and we are one of the few nations on earth to have the military capability to help at least some of them. We recognise our humanitarian obligations. (BBC1: *Nine O'Clock News*, 14.11.96)

Later, live from Downing Street, a BBC journalist reported Portillo's remarks and gave them a ringing endorsement:

When MPs raised their fears he said there wasn't a person in the House without worries or reservations. The government could think of a hundred reasons for not acting. But they are acting, and they're acting with the support of all parties simply because – for once in politics – the simple straightforward reason that it's the decent thing to do, that Britain has got the troops who can cope with a situation like this and that if they don't get involved something like 20,000 people a day will soon be dying. (BBC1: *Nine O'Clock News*, 14.11.96)

Some reporters did not therefore indicate the complexity of the story as it was being reported by journalists on the ground. One marked example was a *Newsnight* anchor who seemed to advocate a Western military role in contrast to the reporter on the ground with whom he was discussing the problem. Should the Western intervention force, he asked the BBC reporter in Rwanda, 'bang heads together'. 'I don't see it that way' said Robin Denselow, who then proceeded to demolish the assumptions behind the question:

There is enormous fear among Rwandans that the force could prove to be a Trojan horse – particularly with the French involved, who are much mistrusted here – to allow Mobutu to get control back over the rebellious Eastern province. (BBC2: *Newsnight*, 15.11.96)

The most important factor here is the difference between reports from the field and those emanating from London. It does raise the question of which has the greater authority in establishing what the news account should be.

## Confusion in coverage

The story of the Rwandan genocide, the flight of the refugees, the rebellion in Zaire, the return of the refugees and the fall of Mobutu was indeed very complex. This complexity seemed to result in some news reports which were themselves confused. In mid-November, for example, as rebels in Zaire drove the Interahamwe militia from Mugunga, the Tutsi-dominated rebels massacred around thirty women in the camp. *The Mirror* report, filed by a general news reporter in London, described the massacre as if it had been carried out by the Hutu militia; even though the eyewitness quoted in the report makes it clear that the Tutsis were being blamed.

More than 100,000 starving men, women and children fled the huge Mugunga refugee camp after their heavily armed militiamen captors let them go – but not before inflicting further terror. One witness described how at least 30 Rwandan Hutu women and children were killed when a soldier lobbed a grenade into the cowering group. She said the victims . . . had pleaded for their lives. But a soldier told them: 'you have killed so many of our people, why should we pardon you now'. (*The Mirror*, 16 November 1996)

Later when it was revealed that British arms companies had supplied weapons to one side in the conflict, *The Mirror* reported that, 'Rebels involved in the massacre of over a million people were said to have been armed by Mil-Tech Corporation' (20 November 1996). Yet it was not rebels in Zaire or Rwanda who either received the arms or engaged in the genocide in 1994. In fact the arms went to the original Hutu regime in Rwanda. Such confusion became almost farcical when *The Mirror* invented an entirely new ethnic group by merging the names Hutu and Tutsi to create the non-existent 'Tutu' people (*The Mirror*, 18 November 1996).

Although TV news didn't ever get things quite so wrong, there was a good deal of confusion evident here as well. One key example is the treatment of the numbers of refugees in Zaire returning to Rwanda. Aid officials, government spokespersons and television journalists all gave dramatically differing figures both on the number of refugees returning over the border and on the numbers left in Zaire. The list set out below shows a selection of the different statements on the news about the numbers.

### *Number of refugees who have returned/are returning*

UN estimates up to 400,000 have fled

Mugunga camp

ITN: *Channel 4 News*, 15.11.96

at least 60,000 have arrived

ITN: *Channel 4 News*, 15.11.96

UN expects up to 100,000 today

ITN: *Channel 4 News*, 15.11.96

hundreds crossing the border

every minute

BBC1: *Nine O'Clock News*, 15.11.96

UN says refugees returning at 160

a minute

BBC1: *Nine O'Clock News*, 15.11.96

hundreds of thousands	BBC1: <i>Nine O'Clock News</i> , 15.11.96
estimated half million refugees	
passing through Goma	BBC1: <i>Nine O'Clock News</i> , 15.11.96
at least a million refugees accounted	
for (aid worker)	BBC1: <i>Nine O'Clock News</i> , 15.11.96
up to three quarters of a million	
began walking home	ITN: <i>News at Ten</i> , 15.11.96
returning at rate of 10,000 per hour	ITN: <i>News at Ten</i> , 15.11.96
hundreds of thousands of refugees	BBC2: <i>Newsnight</i> , 15.11.96
thousands	BBC2: <i>Newsnight</i> , 15.11.96
tens of thousands	BBC2: <i>Newsnight</i> , 15.11.96
400,000 people (UN)	BBC2: <i>Newsnight</i> , 15.11.96
400,000	<i>The Mirror</i> 16.11.96
200,000	ITN: 20 <sup>15</sup> , 16.11.96
more than 200,000	BBC1: 20 <sup>55</sup> , 16.11.96
up to three-quarters of a million	BBC1: 20 <sup>55</sup> , 16.11.96
aid workers say most of the three	
quarters of a million	BBC1: 21 <sup>25</sup> , 17.11.96
200,000 people passing us	<i>The Mirror</i> 18.11.96
15,000 crossing every hour	<i>The Mirror</i> 18.11.96
400,000 returning	<i>The Mirror</i> 18.11.96
400,000 returning	<i>The Mirror</i> 19.11.96

#### Number of refugees left in Zaire

still hundreds of thousands missing	ITN: <i>Channel 4 News</i> , 15.11.96
700,000 people at least missing	
(aid worker)	ITN: <i>News at Ten</i> , 15.11.96
another 800,000 out there (UN)	BBC2: <i>Newsnight</i> , 15.11.96
100,000 starving refugees fled	<i>The Mirror</i> 16.11.96
400,000	ITN: 20 <sup>15</sup> , 16.11.96
only about 180,000 have fled in the	
opposite direction	BBC1: 21 <sup>25</sup> , 17.11.96
another 500,000 to come	<i>The Mirror</i> 19.11.96

The truth about the number of refugees was that nobody knew how many were involved, but this was acknowledged only twice on television broadcasts in our sample. As BBC reporter George Alagiah stated:

Figures are being bandied about from 100,000 to half a million people. I don't know the figures. The aid agencies don't know the figures. Until we do know that the vast majority of Rwandans are coming back, I think there still may be a role for an intervention force. (BBC1 *Nine O'Clock News*, 15.11.96)

We should also note the difficulties which the journalists faced in covering these events. The war, from its beginnings in Eastern Zaire, was logistically difficult to report. The Zairean rebels sometimes prevented reporters from seeing what was happening. They were especially keen to hide massacres,

news of which filtered through slowly by word of mouth. The Rwandan government deliberately created confusion to prevent the reporters from seeing Rwandan troops working with, or commanding, the Zairean rebels. The fall of President Mobutu was reported patchily, partly because it was so dangerous – many journalists scarcely ventured out of hotels because of the high risk of being arrested or having their cameras seized.

The Rwandan authorities and their clients, Laurent Kabila's new government in Kinshasa, also became adept media manipulators. They decided that it was important to control foreign media coverage. Their methods have included the taxing of journalists heavily with payments for visas and satellite phones, using soldiers and intelligence officers to restrict journalists' movements, issuing confusing or untrue information, and intimidating local people who might provide foreign journalists with information (Hilsum, 1997: 9). These strategies made covering the region time-consuming, expensive and, sometimes, dangerous for news reporters and television teams.

## Conclusions

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There were important changes between the early coverage of the refugee crisis in 1994 and news reports of the refugees in the later phases of the conflict and the war in Zaire in 1996/7. Some news accounts in the later coverage did give more detailed explanations of the events and their historical causes than had been available to viewers when the story was first reported. There are still some significant issues for debate in relation to the quality in reporting as a whole. As we have argued, many of the explanations given were very brief and did little to move beyond traditional accounts of Africa. Indeed some reports actually endorsed very crude views of Africans and 'tribal' behaviour. We also noted the important issue of the difference between journalists' reports from the ground and reports based in London, where accounts could apparently be confined by the parameters of government briefings.

At the heart of many of these problems is that public knowledge of Africa and much of the developing world is very limited. This is sometimes also the case for journalists who are assigned to cover stories in such areas. As John Ryle has noted (1997), no serious news organisation would think of sending a journalist to France who did not speak French. Yet this happens routinely in Africa, which is often covered by journalists who have very little specialist knowledge. One result is that a highly differentiated continent, with many different languages and social structures, can be seen through a series of general stereotypes. This problem raises several key issues (including the training of journalists, the need for specialist correspondents in the field and the role of such input in the news room). It is not the case that the structure of news accounts could be changed by simply altering the training of journalists. However, if journalists have any discretion in the

shaping of news stories, there is a case for improving the base of knowledge and understanding from which they do so. It is time perhaps for news organisations, and those responsible for training and teaching journalists, to think again about what journalists need to know and on what they are competent to report.

## Note

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<sup>1</sup> A longer version of this study was originally published by Save the Children (UK) in May 1998.