Problematizing Humanitarianism:
A Critical Analysis of Major American Newspaper Coverage of the
1994 Rwandan Genocide

Thesis

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By
Lindsay McRae Sumner, B.A.

Graduate Program in African-American and African Studies

The Ohio State University

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Master’s Thesis Committee:
Dr. Franco Barchiesi, Advisor
Dr. Kwaku Korang
Dr. Kelechi Kalu
ABSTRACT

As part of its understanding of the U.S. public’s response to the Rwandan crisis, this paper examines theories and perspectives on Western humanitarian intervention in the post-colonial world and the relationship between media and the production of public discourse about African conflicts. The paper assesses how much news space is devoted to a “humanitarian” understanding of the conflict in newspaper articles that appeared in the New York Times, the L.A. Times and the Washington Post during between March 1 and July 31, 1994 as compared with the amount of space devoted to conveying some sense of historical or political context. This research reveals that a “humanitarian” concern purported by the media, public perception and official discourse will be mutually reflective of cultural myths that characterize Africa as violent, chaotic and context-less.
Dedicated to the truth-seeking work of Alison des Forges (1942-2009)
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VITA

June 2002........................Oak Park and River Forest High School

May 2006..........................B.A., Africana Studies and Sociology, Luther College

2007 to present..................Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of African-American and African Studies, The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: African-American and African Studies
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The lack of international response to the Rwandan genocide and Western neglect of Africa’s problems in general have been addressed by numerous scholars. Scholars and leaders alike have condemned the inaction, and former President Bill Clinton publicly acknowledged that the United States failed to take effective action that could have possibly prevented the catastrophe. However, fourteen years after Rwanda’s crisis, war is still raging in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and genocidal violence has been occurring in the Sudan since 2004, again largely neglected by the international community. It is clear that, despite the public interest stirred by films such as Hotel Rwanda, the international community has not in fact learned the lessons of Rwanda well enough to motivate effective action in current crises. The situation requires further critical analysis of the means by which ordinary Americans are informed and motivated to care about what happens in places like Rwanda, and their ability to pressure the United States government to enact foreign policy that reflects this motivation.

It appears that the public discourse about the Rwandan genocide, and about more current crises, such as the one that has been occurring in Darfur, Sudan since 2003, has been characterized largely by appeals for “humanitarian” action, or the provision of help and aid to survivors. Movements calling for equitable political relations and socio-economic redress seem less vocal. In-depth examinations of articles published in the
New York Times, Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post during the height of the Rwandan genocide and the subsequent refugee crisis indicate that the public was encouraged to understand the situation predominantly as a “humanitarian” crisis rather than one with political and historical causes. In this context, with regard to political or military intervention in African crises, a “humanitarian” situation is defined as a situation in which the lives of people are immediately threatened, no local actors can do anything about it given the resources available to them, and external interventions are intended to deal with the consequences of crises, rather than their causes. Further, since humanitarian assistance is almost exclusively directed from Western nations to those in the alleged “third world,” the West has the power to dictate, often according to its own needs and interests, how, when and to what extent intervention in ongoing crises will occur.

The U.S. government response to the Rwandan genocide mirrored this “humanitarian” concern, evidenced by the willingness of the United States to send $650 million dollars in aid to Rwandans between 1994 and 1997 but its reluctance to send resources to Rwanda to bolster UN efforts to curtail the massacres during the “100 Days” of the genocide. Further, since central Africa in the early 1990s was not of concern for United States national security, little diplomatic or any other kind of attention was paid to the volatile political situation developing there as Burundi and Rwanda dealt with socio-political tension, economic crisis, civil war and violence.

There is nothing inherently wrong with notions of “humanitarian” aid. When a catastrophe occurs and people are in crisis and in no position to help themselves, a sense

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of compassion may (and perhaps should) compel us to temporarily intervene of behalf of those who suffer and provide what assistance we can. However, the notion of “humanitarianism” also implies that the West, with its access to resources –ironically, resources it often accesses at the expense of the rest of the world – has the primary power to decide when people are in a position of need and thus decide when and how to respond to humanitarian crises.

The danger in the promotion of a “humanitarian” understanding of African crises such as the Rwandan disaster is twofold. First, such an approach reinforces popular Western notions of Africa as a diseased and catastrophe-ridden place in need of foreign salvation. “Humanitarianism” evokes images of children with fly-covered faces and swollen bellies. The reality of children in pain clearly should not be ignored. However, when these are the only, or at very best, the primary images that inform American perceptions of Africa, they can create an impression of hopelessness and erase all sense of context as there appear to be no political solutions to these problems – only “humanitarian” ones.

The Rwandan crisis is an excellent example of this attitude at work. The United States – both its government and its populace - ignored early indications that widespread massacres were imminent in Rwanda in 1994. American neglect of the Rwandan situation occurred for a variety of reasons, including lack of national interests in the region and fear for the lives of American troops in humanitarian missions – heightened after the ill-fated intervention in Somalia. However, it seems that a lack of understanding of the complex and political nature of the so-called “ethnic” conflict also played an important role in bolstering American apathy. There was no widespread public outcry in
the United States over the Rwandan genocide. State department officials seemed unruffled by estimates that perhaps 50,000 Rwandans could die in the aftermath of President Juvenal Habyarimana’s assassination on April 6, 1994.² Large-scale massacres occurred for weeks, and though American reporters covered the killings, relatively few newspaper articles gave any indication that the killings were stoppable. Rather, they lamented the helplessness of the United Nations mission (though did not always connect the failure of UNAMIR to the apathy expressed towards Rwanda by Western members of the U.N.), and emphasized the supposed “tribal” nature of the violence, attributing hostility between Hutu and Tutsi to “ancient” ethnic tensions.

Whether or not State Department officials had a better grasp of Rwandan history is unclear, but it is certain that the average American, having no prior knowledge of central Africa and few other easily-accessed sources of information on the subject, was likely to take journalists at their word – that the Rwandan crisis was the result of long-standing “ethnic” tension. In essence, I contend that a better-informed public – that is, a public with access to historically and politically contextualized information, is more likely to challenge the type of reaction the U.S. government exhibited towards the Rwandan crisis. A public armed with at least some basic historically and politically accurate knowledge about Rwanda would have been a public better equipped to demand that the U.S. contribute, for example, to potentially effective diplomatic and preventative resolution sought by the U.N.

The second danger of the “humanitarian” frame, if adopted by media outlets, is that it lulls readers into a false sense of complacency. If people have the impression that

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“something” is being done about a problem, the likelihood that they will press for further action might decrease. In the context of the Rwandan crisis, this danger may have manifested itself in multiple ways. Towards the end of the actual massacres, newspaper articles shifted their focus from the situation in Rwanda itself to the mass exodus of (mostly Hutu) refugees pouring into first Tanzania and then Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). There were hundreds of thousands of refugees, who had abandoned their homes and livelihoods to find themselves in crowded, unsanitary refugee camps, and needing food, water, medicine and shelter. Journalistic attention focused squarely on their plight and articles routinely appeared with reports of cholera epidemics, lost and orphaned children, hunger and thirst. Virtually no articles commented on the political situation in Zaire, the possible impact of the influx of Rwandan refugees (including some who had been perpetrators of genocide in Rwanda) on the situation or the implications of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) victory in Rwanda proper. Thus, there was little in the way of public understanding of the political complexity of the situation and again, the U.S. government did little, beyond encouraging Rwandan refugees to return home, to help facilitate the maintenance of stability in the region. The provision of massive amounts of humanitarian aid could make the United States government appear to be doing something, when in fact, attention was being diverted from an increasingly tense situation in Eastern Zaire – tension that continued to simmer, and periodically explode, for years afterward.

My primary question in this research is as follows: did American media sources encourage a “humanitarian” reading of the Rwandan genocide rather than a political-historical one? This query leads us to other, additional questions. If journalists did adopt
such a view, why was it so? Does the type of concern endorsed by the media have an
effect on the general public? Finally, what was the relationship between public
discourse, as shaped by media reporting, and official discourse, or attitudes or actions
endorsed by the government, with regard to the Rwandan genocide?

The relationship between media, public perception and official discourse is an
intimate one. The apparent concordance between the three in the United States during
the Rwandan genocide is troubling. Prevention, or at the very least, mitigation, of future
events as catastrophic as genocide will require responsible and independent journalism, a
more informed public, and the questioning of “humanitarianism” as both a model for
conflict resolution and a framework for conveying information about Africa.

METHODOLOGY

In examining the discourse of humanitarianism and its relation to crises in Africa,
as well as the discourse of prevention, this paper relies on a content analysis conducted of
selected media coverage of the Rwandan genocide. The research consists of all articles
appearing on the Rwandan crisis between March 1, 1994 and July 31, 1994 in the New
York Times, the Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Times. These major U.S.
newspapers were selected because of their widespread circulation and reputation.

There are four categories, or journalistic “frames” into which articles may fall.
The first is labeled “Humanitarian” and the second “Historical/Political.” Since some
articles may include content that falls into both categories, a third category labeled
“Both” reflects such occurrences. Finally, a fourth category labeled “Other” applies to
articles whose content is too ambiguous or brief to classify. Each category includes
particular themes or “key words” by which the news articles can be coded. The research
assesses how much space, measured by number of words, was devoted to each type of understanding – “Humanitarian,” “Historical/Political,” “Both” or “Other” and also the frequency with which each type of article appeared.

The “Humanitarian” frame refers to articles that focus heavily on the human catastrophe and human suffering cased by the genocide, but that fail to place the genocide in historical or political context. “Humanitarian” articles are thus marked by a sense of timelessness and hopelessness – that the violence or crisis is senseless, without beginning or end. Articles will be coded according to the presence of particular keywords. The following tags characterize the “Humanitarian” category: “People starving,” “People sick/injured/diseased,” “Infrastructure damaged/destroyed (and needing repair),” “Children in peril/Orphans,” “Chaos,” and “Displaced persons/refugees.” Further, the articles will be noted if they portray the crisis as “normal” or the situation as “hopeless.” The message conveyed by these articles is that the crisis cannot be understood within any sort of political framework and thus the most logical solution – even when not specifically suggested by the journalist - is to provide humanitarian aid to victims.

The “Historical/Political” frame is marked by attempts to place the genocide in the context of Rwandan history and contemporary politics. Political players are named and their actions described. Any article that attempts to convey a sense of historical or political context will be placed in this category, even if the information contained in that article is problematic or inaccurate. Articles in the “Historical/Political” category must include discussions of background to the event, political players, and historical context. Identifying tags are “Rwandan politics,” “Historical/Colonial legacy,” “Economics,”

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3 In the case of the Rwandan genocide, “normal” may include allusions to the “tribal” or “ethnic” nature of the crisis.
“RPF/Ugandan history,” and “Ethnic hostility.” Combinations of keywords or “tags” from both of the abovementioned categories, “Humanitarian” and “Historical/Political” characterizes articles falling into the category labeled “Both.”

The paper undertakes both a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the articles. The quantitative assessment will take account of the frequency with which each type of article appears in each of the newspapers and will also track the total amount of space occupied by each type of article, using word count as a measure. I will also consider the extent to which certain types of key phrases, terms and messages were conveyed by article headlines, as opposed to those present in the actual body of the articles.

The qualitative content analysis will be somewhat more subjective. It will allow for the evaluation of problems such as articles that appear to fall into the “Historical/Political” category, but whose content, when set against scholarship done by experts on Rwandan history, is found to be inaccurate or prone to sensationalizing the situation in a manner that distorts the issue.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

The second chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks on which I build my argument. First is an examination and problematization of theories of humanitarian intervention. Second, using Doris Graber’s notion of “cultural schemata,” the chapter looks at the ways in which mass media can inform public discourse on news issues by interacting with widely held preconceived cultural myths.

Chapter three is a brief discussion of the primary literature on the Rwandan genocide, most of which seeks to challenge the argument that the genocide was based on
“tribal” or ethnic “hatreds.” Most scholars’ arguments make direct connections between the Belgians’ racist colonial administrative policies in Rwanda to the political strife the country experienced in the decades after independence. Chapter two also looks at scholarship examining media portrayals of the genocide and the U.S. official response to the crisis.

Chapter four is an examination of U.S. foreign policy towards Africa in general over the past forty to fifty years and then a specific discussion of U.S. policy towards Rwanda during the genocide.

Chapter five is a content analysis of articles on the genocide appearing in three major U.S. newspapers, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* during the first five months of the crisis in 1994. Chapter four assesses the extent to which the newspapers adopted a “humanitarian” frame for understanding the genocide compared to a more politically or historically informed one.

Finally, the conclusion further addresses the question of why, if the idea of humanitarianism seems to demand intervention in foreign crises, did the U.S. fail to intervene early on the Rwandan genocide? I will attempt to connect U.S. policy on Rwanda to other international situations in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century and the problematic nature of Western “humanitarian” relationships with the rest of the world – relationships that frequently serve to reinforce imperial global power dynamics.
There are two important theoretical strands upon which I build my argument. First, the paper will examine theories of conflict resolution and humanitarian intervention that characterize the West’s responses to catastrophic events in the rest of the world, with particular attention to the African continent. Second is the extent to which news media informs public discourse with regard to African crises. Since humanitarianism is frequently the primary frame of reference adopted by both in terms of U.S. foreign policy and by media coverage with regard to Africa, critical analysis of the concept is a major focus of this paper.

THEORIES OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

Michel Foucault’s work can serve to question humanitarianism’s usefulness as a concept. For Foucault there is no universal truth, so practice and policy cannot rely on the assumption of “essential” or universal human rights. However, in a brief piece entitles “Confronting Governments: Human Rights,” published near the end of his life, Foucault offers his thoughts on international relations and responsibility. In keeping with his basic outlook, Foucault does not ground his argument in this piece upon the belief in universal human rights but rather appeals to individuals to understand their potential role in the

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affairs of the globe. Foucault argues that human rights in an international context rely on three principles. First is the existence of an “international citizenship” that “obliges one to speak out against every abuse of power, whoever its author, whoever its victims.”

Second, he describes the role and duties of governments, which he sees as responsible for the wellbeing of people and societies. He argues that governments cannot permit suffering to occur without intervention and that “international citizens” have the obligation “to... bring the testimony of people’s suffering to the eyes and ears of governments, suffering for which it’s untrue that they are not responsible.”

Foucault’s third, and perhaps most important, principle addresses the role of individuals more specifically. He argues “[t]he will of individuals must make a place for itself in a reality of which governments have attempted to reserve a monopoly for themselves…”

Individuals also have the right to “effectively intervene in the sphere of international policy and strategy.” In short, governments, though responsible, are not the only entities capable of taking action in a crisis. Foucault’s principles demand that all able nations and individuals take action in such situations.

However, there is growing debate about the use of a “humanitarian” lens to address crises around the world. Perhaps one of the greatest limitations of humanitarianism itself as a concept is that it is, by nature, a response to an existing situation. Humanitarianism may produce solutions (albeit often temporary ones) but does not necessarily promote resolution. It must therefore be examined with a critical and

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6 Ibid., 64.
7 Ibid., 65.
8 Ibid., 65.
perhaps even wary lens, when governments advocate it as an approach to international affairs.

Humanitarian aid workers themselves have begun to contemplate the limitations of humanitarianism; specifically with regard to provision of things such as food aid after a crisis has already reached its peak. Humanitarians have begun to question how efficient are uses of time and money in such situations, especially those in which there appears to be no particular end in sight or where there is the threat that the crisis may resurge. Humanitarians sometimes use the ironic label, “the well-fed dead” in reference to the frustration that things such as food aid and military intervention on their own do nothing to alter the situation of their clients, nor do they prevent the development of reliance on aid.9 Such considerations require deeper contextual analyses of the causes of crises in the so-called “third” world, of Western privilege and exploitation and of global political and economic imbalances.

Nonetheless, the humanitarian aid community tends to see itself and its work as “apolitical.”10 According to Michael Barnett and Thomas Weiss, the perceived separation of humanitarian efforts from politics makes for better publicity (thus making the purposeful distinction between humanitarianism and politics itself a political move), but the divide is artificial.11 It is necessary to question whether Western governments may favor “humanitarian” intervention over sustained prevention efforts – even when “humanitarian” relief may be more less economical in the end – because it is usually politically viable to say that “help” or “food” is being provided for the needy, while the

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10 Ibid., 36.
11 Ibid., 36-37.
reassessment of global power imbalances and critical investigation of root causes of crises are viewed as a politically charged issues.

In “Confronting Governments,” Foucault makes specific references to groups like Amnesty International, and other groups that respond to crises and injustice around the globe. But in light of some of the problematic aspects of a “humanitarianism” that responds to crises rather than seeking to prevent them, could Foucault’s principles be applied to a paradigm of global justice and crisis prevention? Often the root causes of genocide, civil wars, famines and other catastrophes are not exclusively local but are frequently international. They are situations caused or exacerbated by the legacy of colonialism, aggressive free trade policies, international exploitation of labor and resources, environmental degradation and so on. These things certainly constitute an “abuse of power” to borrow from Foucault’s passage on global citizenship. Western nations have the same responsibility to check their contributions to global crises, as do local actors.

A “humanitarian” paradigm then, which dictates nations need only intervene in the face of clear crisis, either militarily or by sending aid, fails to meaningfully address these kinds of problems. Meaningful “intervention” would require a contextual, historical understanding of catastrophic situations and purposeful moves, particularly by European and North American nations to dismantle the global political and economic power imbalance. In short a “humanitarian” understanding of events like genocide ignore pressing issues of racism, exploitation and privilege.
The second theoretical element of this paper is an examination of the production of public discourse about these catastrophic events. Scholars such as Curtis Keim have thoroughly illustrated the multiple ways in which cultural biases and myths regarding Africa permeate American public perception of the continent. Keim unpacks notions of “needy” Africa, uses of the term “tribe” and problematic images of the continent in advertising and other media. Keim argues that many American attempts to “help” Africa are informed by the assumption “that African societies are backward and need help so they can evolve to become more like ours.”

Keim also examines American usage of the word “tribe” in reference to Africa. He contends that for many Americans “to be part of a tribe sounds exotic and somewhat savage. The label tribal can imply an unthinking, primal attachment to kin.” Keim further states that despite the abandonment of “tribe” in the academy, it is still a common element of American vernaculars. While he argues that one reason for this may simply be American ignorance regarding the term’s implications Keim insists that there is another reason for Western retention of the term: “Americans equate tribe with savage and believe that modern African problems can be explained by African primitiveness.” Further, he argues that even the replacement of “tribe” with “ethnicity” does not automatically make a significant difference because the replacement does not necessarily challenge this view of Africa as “primitive.”

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13 Ibid., 84.
14 Ibid., 113.
15 Ibid., 122.
In this sense, the word we use is irrelevant. If we substitute *ethnic groups* for *tribe* but continue to apply it in the same way, there is no gain. In fact, some reporters who have abandoned the word *tribe* out of political correctness continue to analyze African situations from a nineteenth-century point of view.\(^{16}\)

Given media’s regular characterization of African conflicts as “tribal” or “ethnic” how does news reporting interact with these prior cultural myths about “primitive,” “chaotic” Africa? How much power does news media in fact have to inform public discourse on particular issues?

Most media images of Africa portray the continent as a place of crisis and chaos. Famine, civil war, “ethnic violence,” corruption and disease regularly dominate any news reporting on Africa. How heavily do these media-produced images influence the production of public discourse about African conflicts? How important a role do the media play in the production of public discourse generally?

William Gamson et al point out that “[i]t does not require a postmodernist perspective to come to the conclusion that news media provide a fragmented and confusing view of the world…”\(^{17}\) However, they also acknowledge that people do not rely solely on news media sources to frame their understanding of issues. Surely the news may report information or “facts” that were previously unknown to the reader, but the reader’s own experiences and prior assumptions about the world inform their understanding of news issues as well.\(^{18}\) In the case of Africa, Keim and other scholars have illustrated how Americans’ perceptions of the continent are informed by popular images and cultural myths that operate outside of news media. News stories that report

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\(^{16}\) Ibid., 122.


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 388.
inaccurate information, or that sensationalize African conflicts, then, serve to reinforce this embedded cultural “knowledge.” Media generated images play a powerful role in social construction, a role so powerful as to make the “process seem so normal and natural that the very art of social construction is invisible.”

Doris Graber’s *Processing the News*, published in 1988, reveals the results of a study she conducted on the manner in which people process information gleaned from the media. Her study also examines the ways in which people try to incorporate news media information into their previously established worldviews, which Graber and others call “schema.” According to Graber, schemata reflect “social learning” and clearly, originate from a number of social-cultural, political or familial sources. Keim makes clear the origins of public schemata with regard to Africa, including cultural myths such as the “Tarzan” story, advertising that depicts Africa inaccurately, film and other forms of popular media culture and dated or erroneous historical sources.

According to Graber, as journalists report news and as people attempt to integrate news into their established schema, information can become distorted or fuzzy. Among her findings were the following three conclusions: First, people tend to categorize events in such a way that causes them to forget details and lose track of context specificity. Graber states,

> During integration, information becomes substantially transformed to complement existing knowledge… Specific episodes usually became part of general concepts… the price that is paid is vagueness of memory, inability to recall details, and inability to distinguish among various incidents. As Deirdre Sandelius put it when she could not recall a story about a riot in the Middle East,

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19 Ibid., 374.
‘There’s so much of that kind of thing. I can’t separate one thing in my memory from the other.’

This lack of specificity encourages the proliferation of stereotypes about types of people or places. The quoted respondent cannot distinguish one event from the other, giving the impression that West Asia is engulfed in chaos that appears to have no beginning, no end and causes that are difficult to contextualize.

Second, Graber analyzes the ways in which the media may “prime” audiences to understand information in certain ways. She discusses “media cuing,” referring to the practice by news outlets of giving more space to some stories over others, giving the impression that the stories with greater coverage or prominence contain information that is more important.

The impact of media cuing is heightened by the fact that schemata brought to the forefront of memory are more likely to be used for processing subsequent news stories than equally appropriate schemata that have not been recently rehearsed…

Graber concludes that “[t]he topics stressed by the media, therefore, may serve as a rehearsal for relevant schemata that subsequently determine the public’s criteria for evaluating politics and politicians.” In other words, if media continually “primes” the public by feeding it stories about “tribal violence,” famine, war or other catastrophes in Africa that fit into many peoples’ “schemata” with regard to Africa as “chaotic” or “hopeless,” the political causes and consequences of events like the Rwandan genocide will fall under the public radar and will reinforce the notion that the only appropriate action is, possibly, to send things like food aid to refugees after the fact.

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21 Ibid., 149-151. Emphasis added.
22 Ibid., 159.
23 Ibid., 159.
Third, Graber also notes the significance language may play in the news and its role in shaping public perception of an event. She cites a study in which two groups of respondents were shown a video about an accident involving two cars. When questioned about the film, the question posed to the first group was worded thus, “How fast were the cars going when they smashed into each other?”\textsuperscript{24} while the other group’s question was “How fast were the cars going when they hit each other?”\textsuperscript{25} The group whose question included the word “smashed” estimated much higher speeds had been involved in the accident than the other group. Graber explains further, emphasizing the significance of this discrepancy,

A follow-up question, one week later, dramatized the difference that a single word can make in tapping different schemata. All subjects were then asked whether they had seen any broken glass in the film. There had been none, but schemata of car crashes usually evoke notions of breakage. So it was not surprising that a sizeable number of the subjects reported seeing broken glass despite its absence. More surprisingly… 32 percent of the ‘smash’ group, compared to 14 percent of the ‘hit group, erroneously reported seeing broken glass.\textsuperscript{26}

With relation to public perception of Africa, what role then do specific keywords such as, perhaps, “starvation,” “famine,” “disease,” “extreme poverty,” “ethnic violence,” “tribal conflict,” or images like “children covered in flies” or “white people on safari” play in the shaping of public discourse about Africa? Or perhaps more importantly, given Keim’s examples of the ways in which the above-mentioned phrases and images are quite ingrained in the American psyche, what kind of reaction do more general terms like “African conflict” elicit?

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 261. Emphasis original.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 261. Emphasis original.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 261.
Finally, Graber concludes that not only shared cultural schema, but wide access to the same sorts of news stories produces a large audience that understands a story in similar ways.\textsuperscript{27} Graber further argues that, since few other sources of information are often available to people, the news media has a relatively large amount of power to influence schemata, or to shape public discourse.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, Graber’s research suggests that news media has immense power to inform public discourse on a large scale.

In the United States, the voting population and civil society have the ability to affect policy. The public can demand action in the face of certain situations, and sometimes, elicit dramatic responses from government. The public outcry over the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s is a prime example of public demand determining foreign policy. The same public demand for action (of almost any sort) with regard to the Rwandan genocide was absent in the United States in 1994. Why? In order to consider the means of altering the public rhetoric, the question then becomes: what produces this “humanitarian” rather than “political” perception of African conflicts?

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 159.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 264.
CHAPTER 3:
Hutu, Tutsi and the Politics of Genocide:
Scholarly Perspectives on the Rwandan Genocide

Literature on the Rwandan genocide falls into several often-overlapping categories. The first includes attempts to place the genocide in the broader context of Rwandan history. The most extensive work on the genocide is Alison Des Forges’ 1999 Human Rights Watch publication, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, an analysis of both the historical causes of the genocide and the details of the crisis itself. Des Forges dismisses the notion that the division between “Hutu” and “Tutsi” is centuries old in Rwanda. She outlines Rwandan pre-colonial history and the relative fluidity of the categories “Hutu” and “Tutsi” prior to the twentieth century.29 Des Forges argues that “Hutu” and “Tutsi” were originally categories based primarily on labor – “Hutu” meaning those who engaged in agriculture and “Tutsi” meaning those who were cattle herders.30 She contends that the categories were only becoming more rigid when the Germans and then the Belgians arrived and took power. It was under the Belgian administration, des Forges argues, that the categories became inflexible.31 Most other historians of Rwanda and commentators on the genocide fall in line with this same notion that colonialism drastically altered the

30 Ibid., 32-33.
31 Ibid., 38.
character of Rwandan social categories – specifically that colonial rule solidified and institutionalized the boundaries between them.

Catharine Newbury (1988) examines Rwandan history between 1860 and 1960. Her main focus is on the historical context of the Belgian colonial withdrawal from Rwanda in 1959, an event often referred to as the “Hutu Revolution.” The Rwandan struggle for independence was largely characterized by Hutu demands for political and social freedoms denied to them under Belgian rule, which tended to privilege Tutsi. Like the scholars who have looked at Rwanda since 1994 and have attempted to contextualize the genocide in terms of history and politics, Newbury seeks to dispute notions that the 1959 Hutu Revolution in Rwanda and its immediate aftermath can be understood as “ethnic” conflict. Newbury traces the pre-colonial and colonial development of ethnic categories in Rwanda and also maintains that the political meanings of “Hutu” and “Tutsi” were considerably altered and rigidified by German and Belgian rule. Newbury describes the colonial situation in Rwanda as “dual colonialism.” She argues for the use of this term based on the indirect rule-style administration instituted by the Belgians who “persuaded and often coerced the incumbent (Tutsi) elite to serve as intermediaries for colonial administration.” 32 However, contends Newbury, the Tutsi did not become “mere puppets.” 33 Rather, she states, “[w]hile sacrificing much of their former autonomy, Tutsi chiefs gained new and more effective forms of power,” thus her application of the term “dual colonialism.” 34

33 Ibid., 53, alternate spelling in original.
34 Ibid., 53.
Newbury and Newbury (1999) also go to great lengths to problematize ethnicity in the context of Rwanda and examine the polarization of Rwandan society both before and after the genocide. They claim that after the genocide, observers developed an increasing tendency to write off Rwanda’s problems as “ethnic.” However, Newbury and Newbury insist that “ethnic” categories must not be viewed as static, but that they change and adapt under given political, social, economic and military circumstances. Newbury and Newbury, often drawing on their previous research, situate the 1994 crisis in terms of Rwandan history – making clear that the precedent of seemingly “ethnic” violence in Rwanda in 1959, 1963 and 1973 does not indicate a propensity for spontaneous “tribal” conflict, but that both the changing character of ethnic identity in Rwanda, and its specific instances of ethnic violence must be examined in a socio-political or socio-economic manner in order to make sense of them. For instance, an important aspect of the political nature of ethnicity in Rwanda is evidenced by the experiences of Rwandan Tutsi refugees from the ethnic pogroms who fled to Uganda in the 1960s and 1970s. The children of these refugees, who came of age in exile, found themselves denied political rights by the Ugandan government despite the support of many of them in overthrowing the regime of dictator Idi Amin. In addition, their attempts at repatriation to Rwanda were rejected by Habyarimana’s government, on the grounds that Rwanda lacked the space to accommodate these refugees. Thus, in addition to ethnicity, and like other scholars, notably Crawford Young and Mahmood Mamdani, Newbury and Newbury also make the case for understanding the Rwandan genocide in

its full regional context by thoroughly discussing the situation of Rwandans in Uganda in the 1980s and the eventual invasion of Rwanda by the Uganda-based, primarily Tutsi RPF as well.

Aimable Twagilimana argues that “functionalism” and “essentialism” are the two primary theoretical means by which scholars have traditionally considered ethnicity in Rwanda but that neither of these notions is entirely appropriate as a conceptual framework because both “atomize the fluid reality of ethnicity.” By this he means that the notion of ethnicity cannot necessarily be understood only in terms of “functionalism” or “essentialism” but that ethnicity is a flexible concept that can be shaped by many political, social, economic and religious forces. He contends that there exists a political relationship between notions of ethnic functionalism and essentialism that is closely related to the mobilization of violence in Rwanda in 1994:

The functionalism of colonial historiography will later become, and coexist with, the essentialism of leaders of independent Rwanda… Functionalism allowed ethnicity to be constructed in cultural narratives whereas essentialism produced ethnic features and attributes as innately determined.

This intersection was aided by colonial and pre-colonial myths regarding the origins of the categories “Hutu” and “Tutsi.”

According to Twagilimana, Rwandan origin myths often privileged Tutsi, by ascribing rank and value to certain practices, such as farming or cattle-raising, though sometimes it appeared that some versions of the myths merely explained why some people farmed, while others hunt, or still others herd livestock, without necessarily

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37 Ibid., 35.
assigning worth to those occupations. However, Twagilimana asserts that the primary purpose of the myths was to “assign different roles, again establishing the Tutsi as shrewd in the successful attempt to enslave the Hutu.” The Tutsi monarchy used these sorts of cultural origin myths regarding social categories, with their “divinely” inspired overtones, as “moral justification of the perpetuation of minority rule…” Thus, points out Twagilimana, a “functional,” and probably semi-“ethnic” division between Hutu and Tutsi had developed in Rwanda prior to colonial rule, along with the stereotypes and tensions that accompany social division. It is important to note though, that this division was by no means an ancient one, as purported by much popular media in the West. Rather, as Twagilimana also points out, these identities existed within a particular social context and during a certain time period, and were given to change and evolve as time passed. Twagilimana, similarly to des Forges, argues that colonial rule in fact “froze” these categories and stripped them of their previously more fluid character. This occurred primarily because the Belgians instituted an identity card system that forced people to become officially identified as “Hutu” or “Tutsi.” Once one’s “tribal” affiliation was officially recorded, it became unchangeable. Further, significant social and political value was ascribed to these categories. Those identified as “Tutsi” were relatively privileged under the colonial administration, reinforcing the boundaries between groups.

This colonial legacy of institutionalized identity led to problematic social and political circumstances in post-colonial Rwanda. Said Adejumobi criticizes the

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38 Ibid., 37.
39 Ibid. 37.
40 Ibid., 36.
41 Ibid., 46.
categories of race and ethnicity by looking at citizenship as a central theme of Rwandan conflicts. Due to the disruption colonialism caused to African social and political systems, and the divisions created under colonial rule, Adejumobi argues that people’s loyalties are “bifurcated,” or split. In other words, Africans living in post-colonial states do not necessarily devote their full allegiance to the nation. Rather, allegiances to other groups or institutions may supersede their loyalty to the state. Adejumobi argues that citizenship in African states has often failed to transcend this bifurcation. He uses Rwanda as a prime example of this argument, for obvious reasons. The post-1959 revolution Hutu-dominated Rwandan government failed to fully include all Rwandans in the embrace of citizenship. Instead of abandoning the colonially-instituted identity cards after independence, the Hutu government chose to retain the labels in the hopes that continued recognition of the categories would allow for corrections of the wrongs done to Hutus under colonial rule and curtail the relative privilege of the Tutsi. Periodic pogroms against Rwanda’s Tutsi population occurred in those decades after independence, leading thousands of Tutsis to make their homes in neighboring states such as Uganda. In the 1980s, the Rwandan government denied the repatriation attempts of those refugees’ children.

It is clear that the development of a Tutsi “diaspora” in central Africa, as a result of periodic political violence in Rwanda during the decades after independence, played an important role in the genocide – as evidenced by the situation shaped by the Uganda-based RPF invasion of Rwanda in 1990. Furthermore, the categories “Hutu” and “Tutsi” are not limited to the population within Rwanda or to refugee populations in neighboring

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states claiming origin in Rwanda. The community of Kinyarwanda-speakers, encompassing people known as “Hutu,” “Tutsi,” or during certain time periods in much of the Eastern DRC, simply “Banyarwanda,” also transcends state boundaries. These factors illustrate the necessity for a regional analysis of the Rwandan genocide.

Crawford Young stresses the political nature of the genocide and the significance of Hutu Power propaganda – primarily based on the colonial or Hamitic notion that the Tutsi were a “race” separate from the Hutu and that the Tutsi were not native to Rwanda - leading up to and during the 1994 crisis. He connects the Rwandan crisis to the political and military circumstances of its neighbors, namely Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire). Young and other scholars, notably, Mahmood Mamdani, have also emphasized that the ethno-political tensions and refugee situation in Burundi that mirrored pressures in Rwanda cannot be examined as phenomena completely distinct from the Rwandan genocide. Further, due to the mass movement of Rwandan refugees over the border, the Rwandan conflict spilled over into the DRC, altering notions of ethnic identity there and ultimately sparking a Congolese civil war.

In addition to stressing the need to put the Rwandan genocide in regional context – which for Mamdani mostly involves a discussion of the role of the Rwandan civil war between the RPF and government forces. Mamdani examines the genocide in terms of ethnicity, citizenship and post-colonial legacy. He argues that colonial rule was unique in Rwanda for two reasons. First is that Belgian rule in Rwanda was characteristic of both
direct and indirect models of colonial administration. By this Mamdani means that if direct rule employed the concept of “race” as its primary means of discrimination between “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” people and indirect rule used ethnicity as a means of administration, then in Rwanda, the Belgians used a combination of these two forms of rule. In short, the Belgians not only defined “Hutu” and “Tutsi” as two different “ethnicities”, they defined them as two different “races” – the Hutu as “Bantu” indigenous to Rwanda and the Tutsi as “Hamites,” and foreign. This question of “indigeneity,” Mamdani asserts, was a primary legacy of colonial rule in Rwanda and a central issue in the 1994 genocide. Mamdani is also concerned with the large numbers of ordinary Hutu who participated in the massacres. He argues that Hutus who participated in the genocide did so primarily out of fear that they would lose power in the face of the advancing RPF if they did not act to prevent an RPF, read as “Tutsi,” victory.

Other authors specifically attempt to grapple with the massive level of civilian participation that occurred during the genocide. Scott Straus devotes his attention to the question of mass Hutu participation in the genocide. Straus’s research is a detailed analysis of the means by which Hutus mobilized to commit collective violence and his findings provide insight into the genocide as a popular phenomenon. Straus attempts to challenge some common perspectives on the Rwandan genocide, namely the notions that the genocide was “meticulously planned” long before 1994 arrived, that it radiated out from Kigali, that Burundian refugees in Rwanda were significant instigators of violence, that frustration about poverty or unemployment motivated killers and that preexisting

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44 Ibid., 24-25.
Hutu animosity towards Tutsis is what drove ordinary Hutus to join killing mobs. His argument with regard to the collective nature of Hutu violence against Tutsis (and moderate Hutus) is threefold. While Mamdani claims that Hutus participated in the violence out of what might be termed “self-preservation” or perhaps more aptly, “power-preservation” in the face of an RPF victory in the civil war, Straus finds that the reasons for participation in the genocide were more complex, and often, more personal than Mamdani suggests.

First, Straus argues for the significance of the Rwandan civil war that had begun when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RFP) invaded the country in 1990. Straus emphasizes the impact of the insecurity related to the war upon the Rwandan Hutu psyche, arguing that this uncertainty played a substantial role in the mobilization of violence during the genocide. Second, Straus’s research shows that peer pressure – the notion that if a neighbor or social circle was participating in the murders, one was more likely to succumb to the pressure to join - among Hutus was a significant factor in the number of Hutu who participated in the killing. Third, Straus argues that the opportunity to grasp “power and property” was the final “principal mechanism” for mobilization to mass violence.

A further category includes works that examine the international response (or lack thereof) to the Rwandan crisis and problematize the actions of the international community. Romeo Dallaire, the UN general in charge of the peacekeeping mission to Rwanda in 1994, provides one of the most comprehensive works in this category, also

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46 Ibid., 9, 89, 96-7, 119-120, 122, 135-6, 140, 151.
47 Ibid., 9-10, 88, 97, 138, 164-5,
interesting for the details it provides about daily occurrences on the ground during the genocide. Dallaire illustrates the reasons for the UN failure in Rwanda, largely due to U.S. foot-dragging, to effectively intervene and stop the genocidal violence before it reached its peak.

A predominant myth with regard to the U.S. response to the genocide is that the United States presidential administration was unaware of the extent of the crisis. F. Ugboaja Ohaegbulam disputes the argument that President Clinton did not know the scope of the tragedy occurring in Rwanda during the early weeks of the massacres. Ohaegbulam points to ample evidence that both President Clinton and the U.S. State Department were well aware of the magnitude of the massacres in Rwanda. Further, he argues that the U.S. restricted the use of the term “genocide” to describe the Rwandan crisis, because of fears that naming the massacres “genocide” would morally obligate the U.S. to act. Failure to intervene under those circumstances, it was feared, might tarnish the U.S.’s reputation.\footnote{Ugboaja Ohaegbulam. \textit{U.S. Policy in Postcolonial Africa: Four Case Studies in Conflict Resolution.} New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2004, 211-212.} Ohaegbulam names the deadly consequences of the U.S.’s intervention in Somalia in 1993 as a chief reason why the U.S. refused to become involved in the Rwandan crisis. He says however, that because “the Rwandan genocide generated \textit{no sense of urgency} in the American public,” the Clinton administration was able to ignore the issue without significant detriment to itself.\footnote{Ibid., 214. Emphasis added.}

Samantha Power similarly details the American response to the Rwandan crisis. She understands the U.S.’s failure to act in terms of both apathy and unawareness among the American public and the memory of the American military deaths during the U.S.
intervention in Somalia. Power also frames the American response in terms of what the United States had come to expect from central Africa and its lack of concern over the loss of African lives. She highlights racist perceptions, quoting General Dallaire, – “‘Burundi had just blown up, and 50,000 had been killed in just a few days,’ Dallaire explains. ‘So… we actually expected around 50,000 plus dead [in Rwanda]. Can you imagine having that expectation in Europe? Racism slips in so it changes our expectations.’”

Power also outlines the importance of the media. She states, “During the conflict in Bosnia, U.S. officials had tried to convince journalists that the conflict was born of ‘ancient tribal hatreds’; in Rwanda reporters in the field adopted this frame on their own.” The fact that field reporters for Rwanda, an African nation, began to characterize the conflict there as “ethnic” or “tribal” without prompt while reporters in Bosnia in Southern Europe did not strongly suggests that cultural schemata can inform not only readers’ interpretations of crises but journalists’ accounts of them as well.

A final category, often closely related to investigations of the international response to the genocide, deals with media representations of Rwanda during the crisis. Johan Pottier focuses on “disinformation” during the genocide by examining the manner in which the genocide was portrayed in the international news media. Pottier examines news coverage of three central African events, including the end of the genocide and war in Rwanda in July 1994, which appeared in both the U.S. and European press from 1994-1996. Pottier acknowledges the immense pressure journalists in situations like the Rwandan genocide are under from various sources to report news in a particular manner. However, he is concerned that Western journalists (and humanitarian aid workers) in

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50 Power, 350.
51 Ibid., 355.
Central Africa, who often have little historical knowledge of the area they are reporting on, are susceptible to stories and “information” that do not always reflect the full dynamics of a given situation. Pottier observes that news on the conflict available to continental Europe was superior in “coverage and analysis” to reporting in the United States and the UK. Pottier points to evidence that, for instance, Belgian journalists understood the political context in which the Rwandan genocide occurred and were able to inform their readers. Further, Pottier argues that primary reporting problems in Britain and the U.S. were reliance on the notion of “tribal hatred” to explain the genocide and second, media sympathy for the RPF. Arguing that ignorance about Rwandan history made journalists susceptible to RPF “rewriting-of-history projects,” Pottier critiques Fergal Keane’s *Season of Blood*, “[i]gnorant about Rwandan society and history, ignorant too about the quality of scholarly research since the end of colonialism, Keane was game for the interpretation of his RPF guides.” Pottier further illustrates that “[e]thnographic ignorance was revealed” in repeated language employed by Western journalists who portrayed the conflict as purely “ethnic” or “tribal.” This lack of context, results, Pottier points out, in Western news stories that reference “tribal violence” and present an unproblematic picture of the RPF, decidedly distorts the information received by Western audiences via the media with regard to African conflicts.

Focusing specifically on *The New York Times*, Peter Schraeder and Brian Endless conduct a comparative study of portrayals of the Rwandan genocide and portrayals of the

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53 Ibid., 62.
54 Ibid., 64.
55 Ibid., 66.
near-simultaneous crisis in Bosnia. They show that despite the similarly tragic nature of the two situations, fewer news items related to the Rwandan genocide appeared in the Times than did articles on the European crisis in Bosnia. As Power’s previous commentary regarding journalistic frames for understanding the two crises illustrated the media effects of politically constructed racial distinctions between Europeans and Africans, Schraeder and Endless’ study suggests that there may be less public interest in stories about African crises than European ones. They argue preconceived Western assumptions about Africa’s supposedly violent nature resulted in fewer articles being printed about Rwanda as compared to Bosnia. Americans do not make the same automatic connections between Europe and violent conflict, nor does the majority of reporting on Europe involve issues of war, poverty and misery. These factors thus perhaps made the Bosnian situation seem more serious, and thus more newsworthy.

The mention of Africa typically conjures up stereotypical images… poverty and famine, corruption and ‘tribal’ warfare, and deadly diseases… These stereotypical images are further reinforced by the nature of media reporting, which… usually concentrates on the sensationalist and often negative aspects of the continent.

In addition to the relative lack of articles on Rwanda as compared to Bosnia, Schraeder and Endless further argue the reporting on Rwanda was characterized by stereotypical, misleading language that served reinforced Western racism towards Africa and notions of the continent as a place riddled with tribal conflict.

57 Ibid., 29.
58 Ibid., 29.
CHAPTER 4:
Official Discourse: United States Foreign Policy Towards Africa

U.S. foreign policy is heavily driven by issues of concern to national security and national interest. During much of the mid-twentieth century, when anti-communist fervor in the West was at its peak, U.S. foreign policy towards Africa was almost solely defined by Cold War politics. Peter Schraeder refers to this as the “East-West” factor. African independence in the late 1950s and into the 1960s prompted then Vice President Richard Nixon to advise President Eisenhower to establish a new State Department unit devoted exclusively to issues of U.S. foreign policy towards Africa. The Bureau of African Affairs was set up in 1958, one year after Ghana’s independence in West Africa. Increasing U.S. anxiety over the expansion of the USSR made new African nations an important aspect of global politics.

The desire to keep communist forces at bay and ensure the development of Western-friendly governments in post-World War II and post-independence Africa was the primary motivation for the U.S.’s intimate involvement with Zaire (present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo) during the 1960s. The assassination of Prime Minister Lumumba in collusion with the American CIA exemplified the concern that Lumumba was a “radical” whose government could not be relied upon to resist alliance with the Soviet Union. Schraeder points out that this manipulation of leadership to serve U.S. ideological interests was implemented despite, for example, the Kennedy

59 Ohaegbulam, 6.
administration’s purported support of African nationalism. Ohaegbulam explains this apparent paradox in terms of Cold War global politics:

The apprehension that abrupt decolonization might lead to political disorder and create opportunities for communist penetration of Africa was so strong among U.S. leaders in the 1950s that they decided to subordinate the promotion of African freedom to this overriding concern.

However, despite the ideological motivations provided by the Cold War world for influence in Africa, Ohaegbulam provides reminders that U.S. interests were driven as much by resources as they were by ideology.

The reason that Zaire was important to the United States was not only fear over the expansion of a Soviet sphere of influence, but also because Zaire’s natural resources valuable to both the United States and the USSR. Explains Ohaegbulam,

Africa is a major producer of many primary products – oil, gold, diamond, cobalt, uranium, for example – essential to America’s continued industrial growth and production… In this context, U.S. perception of the threat of communism and Soviet ideological expansion after World War II enhanced the significance of Africa to the United States.

Regions in Zaire, in particular, for instance, were rich in uranium – a primary element in the production of nuclear weapons. Competition for access to such resources, then, has characterized the United States’ relationship with the continent.

In spite of Africa’s importance to the United States in terms of the Cold War, for the most part, little official attention has been paid to the continent during the past fifty years, outside of heightened “crisis” situations such as in the Congo in 1960, or Ethiopia in the 1980s. Low levels of knowledge about Africa both at the public and official levels

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61 Ohaegbulam, 51.
62 Ibid., 8.
have made Africa easy to ignore.\textsuperscript{63} Conversely, attention to Africa during times of “crisis” has had unfortunate effects. Namely, Schraeder argues that in this sort of atmosphere, “policy often becomes driven by events, as opposed to the more desirable outcome of policy shaping events.”\textsuperscript{64} In other words, U.S. foreign policy towards Africa during the Cold War and after has been marked not by substantial and meaningful diplomacy, but rather, by response to crises whose contexts U.S. policy-makers have limited understanding of.

Schraeder further suggests that despite differing opinions between parties and presidential administrations, U.S. foreign policy is entrenched in such bureaucracy that policy towards Africa tends to be static from one administration to the next, regardless of the emergence of new perspectives on U.S.-Africa relations.\textsuperscript{65} However, Schraeder also illustrates that the development of a crisis can drastically alter this bureaucratic formula. During a crisis, the policy process shifts from the bureaucratic machinery of the State Department or the CIA to the hands of the president.\textsuperscript{66} Schraeder argues further that an “extended crisis” can allow for the participation of Congress in decisions about foreign policy the region experiencing crisis. These points are important because a time of crisis may be the only, or at the very least, most effective time for public pressure to inform U.S. foreign policy.

In the 1980s – in the case of the Ethiopian famine – and into the early 1990s – especially in terms of the Somali conflict and the refugee crisis after the Rwandan genocide, U.S. involvement in African affairs became increasingly characterized by

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 2 and 4.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{65} Schraeder, 6.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 49-50.
humanitarianism. Discussing the relationship between U.S. foreign affairs and the United Nations missions of the last part of the twentieth century, Welsh contends that the United States intervention in Somalia in 1992 was “particularly notable” because it was “the first occasion on which the [U.N. Security Council] authorized military action… without the consent of the sovereign government and for solely humanitarian reasons.”

Further, outside of intervention in conflict, the United States’ relationship to the African continent in the decades since independence has become largely marked by the provision of humanitarian aid.

In 2006, the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations published a task force report on U.S. foreign policy towards African countries. The report’s call for greater U.S. diplomatic and economic attention to African nations and involvement in addressing African problems was due to the council’s emphasis on U.S. strategic interests on the continent. The report does not necessarily argue for or against the possible benefits of humanitarian aid projects, but insists that humanitarian aid alone is not an effective means of furthering U.S. interests in Africa. Rather, the council argues that beyond humanitarianism, it is in the United States’ best interests economically to encourage the development of human rights, HIV/AIDS prevention and popular participation in politics on the continent. In order to accomplish these goals, the report states, the United States must engage in more comprehensive economic investment in Africa.

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In illustrating this point, the task force made clear the lack of a public discourse on African crises outside of providing humanitarian aid. They argue that “the public rhetoric… has continued to emphasize humanitarian concerns…”\(^{69}\) and that the U.S. continues to provide mostly emergency aid “with long-term investments in growth essentially flat.”\(^{70}\) The council argues that this is the case because the United States has yet to recognize the strategic importance of Africa in terms of things such as energy, terrorism, and economic growth. However, it is not clear that the United States has, in fact, failed to recognize these interests. For instance, Africa has increasingly become the target of the U.S. “war on terror.” Recently, some have argued that prevention of terrorist activity has been the primary, though not publicly stated, motive behind U.S. efforts to establish a permanent military presence in Africa by moving AFRICOM headquarters to the continent. Further, African nations, particularly Nigeria, have long been major suppliers of oil to the United States.

Herein lie the major shortcomings of the task force’s report. The report fails to acknowledge that the American concentration on humanitarianism also serves the political and economic interests of the United States. Western humanitarianism precludes the problematization of colonial and imperial global power relations by defining the relationship between the African nations and the West as one of need and provision of aid. The task force is correct in its criticisms of humanitarianism, specifically, that humanitarianism is not a means of encouraging long-term political or economic investment. However, the assumption that long-term political and economic investment is necessarily the main the goal of the U.S. is problematic. Certainly, the U.S. seeks to

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 7
\(^{70}\) Ibid.
further particular political and economic interests in Africa but it is unclear whether or not the U.S. government finds necessary the kind of stability and growth that the council task force claims is essential to realizing these interests. In fact, an Africa-U.S. or Africa-Europe relationship predominantly characterized by humanitarianism in many ways serve to reproduce an imperial world order in which African nations find themselves dependent on Western capital to stay afloat and Western nations have the power to decide if, when and how to intervene, or interfere, as the case may be, in problems or crises that arise on the African continent.

The Rwandan situation certainly fits Peter Schraeder’s definition of a “crisis” – a conflict which commands the attention of the President – even if it was not understood as “extended” and gave control of the decision-making process to the Clinton administration. Further, U.S. political and economic interests in Rwanda were relatively (though not entirely) limited. Finally, as both Ohaegbulam and Power point out, the Clinton administration was not subject to any significant public pressure on the Rwandan matter during the height of the massacres and consequently proceeded as they saw most practical. As a result, the U.S. response to the Rwandan genocide was characterized by extreme caution and was largely marked by the provision of humanitarian aid to survivors after most of the massacres had subsided.

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS RWANDA DURING THE 1994 GENOCIDE

The interaction between media, the public and government becomes clearer after a brief examination of the manner in which U.S. foreign policy – especially towards Africa – tends to develop in specific situations. Multiple scholars have pointed out that once a situation reaches a level of crisis akin to that in Rwanda in 1994, the immediate
high-level decision-making done by the President, and sometimes by Congress, means that public pressure can have some effect on foreign policy. This was true for example, during the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s, to which the United States did not effectively respond until widespread public outcry forced government action. Elected officials, especially those in the Senate and the House of Representatives, are acutely aware of the power their constituencies have over their continued tenure in office. Intense public pressure for action on any issue is likely to elicit some type of response. When no such outcry is present, however, the public loses this capacity for influence.

Questions about the United States’ foreign policy towards the Rwanda crisis often revolve around President Clinton’s decision not to send troops to the region and to refrain from insisting that the Pentagon supply immediate and comprehensive logistical support to UNAMIR. At the heart of many of these questions is the extent to which President Clinton was aware of the massacres in Rwanda. As mentioned previously, Ohaegbulam challenges the notion that the lack of U.S. response was due to Clinton’s ignorance of the scope of the massacres. He argues instead that the U.S. government was under no pressure to take effective action as a feeling of “urgency” was not part of the public discourse on Rwanda at that time. There are several reasons that the Rwanda crisis lacked urgency or appeal for U.S. State Department and the Clinton administration.

First was the political fallout from the 1993 U.S. military humanitarian intervention in Somalia. The intervention in Somalia was an immense failure for the United States. It resulted in the deaths of almost two dozen U.S. soldiers and did not bring peace or security to Somalia and in fact may have served to destabilize the country.

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71 Ohaegbulam, 214. Emphasis added.
further. Scholars on the Rwandan crisis, which followed closely on the heels of the U.S. operation in Somalia, agree that the U.S. intervention experience in Somalia made American citizens and government officials alike wary of any further operations on the African continent. The Clinton administration would have been eager to avoid another potentially disastrous foreign military engagement.

Second, it is possible, though difficult to prove, that lack of urgency regarding the Rwandan genocide at the U.S. official level was further due to tacit U.S. support for the RPF via ties to the Museveni regime. Exiled Rwandans living in Uganda had increasingly becoming a problem for Museveni, a U.S. ally, during the 1980s. Although he denied Rwandan refugees Ugandan citizenship, he allowed the RPF to organize and train openly on Ugandan soil.\textsuperscript{72} Meanwhile, following the initial RPF crossing into Rwanda in 1990, Waugh points to apparent evidence that the United States had informed Museveni that continued support for rebel armies operating out of his country would threaten U.S. economic aid to Uganda due to the increased demands on humanitarian aid from increased refugees populations caused by the war in Rwanda.\textsuperscript{73} Waugh goes on to argue that neither Uganda nor the United States was a significant direct or implicit supporter of the RPF. However, Waugh also allows that the United States “in its eager sponsorship of a Ugandan private-sector African economic miracle, failed to make Kampala impart the pressure on the RPF which could have averted the hostilities.”\textsuperscript{74} In short, while the U.S. warned Museveni that violence and displacement in the region would be a drain on resources earmarked for Uganda, the Clinton administration made no


\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 91.
move to prevent the RPF’s movement into Rwanda. Perhaps Museveni hoped that RPF success in Rwanda would relieve his Rwandan exile problem and the U.S. feared that if it intervened, it might inadvertently prevent an RPF victory. Some scholars have argued that rivalry between France and the United States resulted in U.S. ideological support for the RPF. Gnamo contends

as far as France and the U.S. are concerned, the Cold War had been replaced in Africa by a “cold peace.” If France blindly supported the Habyarimana regime and the Hutu-dominated government, it was because it thought that the RPF was supplied and supported by the Anglo-Saxons and their “representative” in the region, Yoweri Museveni…

Whatever the political reasons for U.S. inaction, Waugh concludes that “[a] reduction in tacit Ugandan support and a curtailment of cross-border supply lines could have helped secure a less aggressive stance from the rebels and thereby ease the pressure which the threat of war was bringing to bear on the Kigali leadership,” possibly prevented the massacres of 1994 from occurring on the level that they ultimately did.

Finally, other global events of the mid-1990s may have contributed to the lack of public awareness and mobilization around the Rwandan issue, such as the fall of the apartheid regime and the May 10, 1994 inauguration of Nelson Mandela as president of South Africa. Interestingly, an African-American response to the Rwandan crisis was relatively absent. Although African-Americans have historically been actively involved in U.S. foreign affairs towards Africa, instrumental black American lobby groups such as TransAfrica were occupied by concern for the near-simultaneous crisis occurring in Haiti in 1994. In fact, TransAfrica chair Randall Robinson embarked on a hunger strike on

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76 Waugh., 91.
April 15, 1994 – barely a week after the beginning of the Rwandan massacres – to protest the United States’ refusal to admit Haitian refugees to the U.S. Thus the amount of time and resources TransAfrica was able to devote to elevating the public profile the Rwandan genocide were very little. Still, the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s and widespread American activism to end the South African apartheid regime demonstrate that interest in African affairs is not necessarily limited to predominantly black lobby groups like TransAfrica.

Samantha Power similarly details the American official and public response to the Rwandan crisis. Power also frames the American response in terms of what the United States had come to expect from central Africa and its lack of concern over the loss of African life. For all individuals – from people working in the State Department to elected officials to the general public – this kind of thinking certainly taps again into notions of Africa endorsed by American cultural schemata on the continent. Like Ohaegbulam, Power argues that a primary reason the U.S. hesitated to become involved in Rwanda was its memory of its recent intervention in Somalia and the deaths of American soldiers there and the lack of pressure from the American public. About Clinton’s decision not to become involved, Power states, 

[rem]embering Somalia and hearing no American demands for intervention, President Clinton and his advisors knew that the military and political risks of involving the United States in a bloody conflict in central Africa were great, yet there were no costs to avoiding Rwanda altogether.

78 Power, 347.
79 Ibid., 335.
80 Ibid., 335, emphasis added.
Again, the conflation of Somalia and Rwanda are especially interesting in light of the United States’ almost simultaneous involvement in a similar conflict in Bosnia. It is clear that cultural and political schemata on Africa played a central role in the official decision to keep the United States out of Rwanda during the genocide.

Let us return for a moment to Doris Graber’s idea of schema. Somalia and Rwanda are vastly different culturally, are geographically distant from each other, and their respective violent political crises in the early 1990s were distinct in origin and manifestation. However, let us assume that for most Americans, both Rwandan and Somalia, despite their differences, are connected by their location on the African continent and thus fit into cultural schemata on Africa, which are characterized, among other things, by poverty, “tribal” conflict, disease and violence. Under these circumstances, the task of the news to make clear the distinction between Somalia and Rwanda, and to discourage Americans from “explaining” the causes of the Rwandan genocide in terms of cultural myths about Africa would have been enormous. Further, the news may have been the American public’s only potential means of understanding the conflict in Rwanda as having causes outside those delineated by their cultural schemata on Africa.

However, the crisis also evoked what we might call a “political” schema on Africa. Those in the State Department assigned to follow events in central Africa developed their own set of schema regarding the region and the notion of ethnic or “tribal” violence fit into schema particular to Burundi and Rwanda. Because “tribal” violence – even on a scale as large as the massacres that occurred in Burundi in the autumn of 1993 and in the spring and summer of 1994 in Rwanda – fit neatly into
predetermined political schema regarding central Africa, State Department officials did not reach a level of concern about the problem that reflected its intensity.

Further, as General Dallaire alludes to in his statement, the fact that African lives were at stake, rather than, for instance, European ones was clearly an issue in the intervention decision, whether it was blatantly discussed or not. For instance, the Bosnian crisis was occurring near simultaneously to the Rwandan crisis and the United States chose to involve itself heavily in Bosnia. Further, the U.S. government could be assured that subliminal racism and the American public’s perception of Africa as chaotic and violent would largely prevent the U.S. public from fully appreciating the scope of the massacres in Rwanda.

Of course, this discussion of U.S. inaction during the primary weeks of the massacres in Rwanda presents us with an apparent contradiction in terms of humanitarianism. By nature, humanitarianism dictates intervention in international problems. However, during the greater part of the Rwandan genocide, the United States firmly sidelined the option of intervention. Why, if humanitarianism is the prevailing frame characterizing U.S. foreign policy towards African conflicts, did a humanitarian approach to Rwanda not result in immediate intervention?

However, the idea of “humanitarianism” supports a hidden agenda. The paradox of how the idea of humanitarian intervention enabled the lack of U.S. intervention in Rwanda has something to do with the factors listed above – the memory of Somalia, possible concerns about diplomatic ties to Uganda, the lack of an effective lobby movement within the United States and generally racist attitudes towards Africa. Humanitarianism as a frame for U.S. relations with the globe also works to serve U.S.
political and economic interests. The case of Rwanda illustrates the ways in which the concept of “humanitarianism” can be manipulated in the name of particular interests. In the case of Rwanda, the U.S. had few to no economic interests in the country and had potential political interests in maintaining good diplomatic relations with Uganda, which could be bolstered by an RPF victory. Further, U.S. public distaste for military humanitarian intervention like that which occurred earlier in Somalia resulted in a definition of “humanitarian intervention” that in 1994, precluded genocide prevention assistance in Rwanda. The key differences between Bosnia and Rwanda then, are race and location. Bosnia was located in Europe and populated by people of Caucasian appearance. Rwanda was a black African nation.

Although as illustrated by Schraeder and Endless’ study, Rwanda received less media attention than Bosnia (at least in the *New York Times*), the amount of media coverage the Rwandan genocide received suggests that the public was relatively aware of the crisis. What accounted for the absence of pressure on the U.S. government or the U.N. to aid in the prevention of massacres and the conflict’s resolution? Why the emphasis, both officially and popularly, on the humanitarian aid efforts for Rwandan refugees in Zaire and Tanzania, but little concern for the Rwandans who were killed during the massacres? In short, this lack of public pressure and the emphases on the provision of food and medicine to refugees is directly in keeping with a humanitarian approach to African crises. The U.S. public did not understand the crisis, but was able to explain by means of cultural schemata about “violent Africa.” Public sentiment became aligned with official discourse in the acceptance by both of a “humanitarian” (non-intervention) solution to a deeply political problem. Since the media was a primary
means by which the American public received information on the genocide, the following
questions arise: To what extent did the news media play a role in informing public
discourse on the crisis? Specifically, to what extent did the news media adopt a
“humanitarian” frame with regard to the crisis rather than a politically informed one?
CHAPTER 5:
American Media Representations of Rwanda During the Genocide: Content Analysis of the New York Times, Washington Post and Los Angeles Times

We can see a pattern emerging in news reporting on the Rwandan genocide simply by looking at the number of articles that appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* each month from April to July of 1994. For example, the *New York Times* published 39 articles on the Rwandan genocide in April, and 36 each in the months of May and June. In July, the numbers nearly double and 69 articles appear on the crisis that month. This means that in the *New York Times*, almost 40% of the articles printed about Rwanda in the five months from March to July of 1994 appeared that final month. In the *Washington Post*, 41% of its articles on Rwanda during the same five months appeared in July. For the *Los Angeles Times*, the figure is 32%.

| TABLE 1 Percentage of total articles appearing in each publication March-July 1994 |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
|                                 | March | April | May | June | July |
| *The New York Times*            | <1%   | 22%   | 20% | 20%  | 38%  |
| *The Washington Post*           | <1%   | 22%   | 19% | 18%  | 41%  |
| *The Los Angeles Times*         | <1%   | 21%   | 26% | 15%  | 32%  |

These numbers are significant in the context of the Rwandan genocide’s timeline. The assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana occurred on April 6, 1994. Murders of Tutsi and Hutu moderates began almost immediately. The killing was at its height in
April and May, with much of it subsiding by the end of June. The genocide is often referred to as the “100 Days,” meaning that by early July, the genocide itself was mostly over and the primary news stories at that point would have involved the refugee crises in Tanzania and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and possibly, the aftermath of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) victory in the civil war that occurred simultaneously with the genocide. For instance, very few articles on the subject of the political ramifications of the RPF victory appeared in any of the three newspapers in the late summer. In July, 13 out of the 151 total articles appearing in all three papers that month made mention of the RPF at all. Nine of those 13 articles appeared in the *New York Times*. Overall, from mid-April to the end of July, of 68 total articles that made mention of the RPF and the civil war, eight articles appeared between the three papers that portrayed the RPF in a sympathetic, or relatively unproblematic, light.\(^{81}\) The remaining articles that mentioned the RPF generally described only the RPF’s military movements and skirmishes with the Rwandan army. Occasionally journalists addressed accusations that the RPF had committed human rights abuses, such as the June 1994 murders of several priests by RPF soldiers.

While the numbers of refugees from Rwanda were unprecedented and thousands of people died in refugee camps, it is interesting that nearly *twice* as many articles about Rwanda appeared in the month after most of the killing had concluded than appeared in any of the months when the massacres - which experts agree resulted in the death of more than 500,000 people and approximately 75 per cent of the Rwandan Tutsi population\(^ {82}\) -

\(^{81}\) Of these eight articles, three appeared in the *Post*, three in the *New York Times* and two in the *Los Angeles Times*.
\(^{82}\) Des Forges, 15-16.
were at their peak. Further, in March of 1994, prior to the start of the genocide, and while peace talks were occurring with the goal of reducing violence and political instability in both Burundi and Rwanda, only one article on the situation appeared in each of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*. In each case, the articles conveyed no information about Rwanda’s potentially volatile political tensions, the effects of the 1990 RPF invasion of the country or the internationally facilitated attempts to build a coalition government. Rather, these articles were all brief travel advisories, encouraging American citizens to avoid the region.\(^83\)

These initial numbers indicate two things, at least superficially. First, that the historical and political context of the Rwandan genocide was largely ignored in the news; and second, that all three papers deemed the genocide itself of less journalistic importance than the ensuing refugee crisis. The papers also depicted the refugee crisis as a massive problem to which there still may have been no solution, but which allowed the United States to provide assistance and appear to be doing “something” without the burden of political or military engagement or complication.

Although this superficial analysis based on the distribution of articles over five months gives fairly clear evidence that all three papers likely emphasized a “humanitarian” concern over a “historical/political” one during the Rwandan genocide, closer examination of the type of articles appearing within each month offers further clarification of the manner in which information on the crisis was conveyed to readers.

The following two tables summarize data gleaned from careful reading of the total articles on Rwanda that appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the

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Los Angeles Times during the genocide and the first month of the refugee crisis. Table 1 reveals the frequency with which articles in each category listed above appeared in the three papers combined from March to July of 1994. Table 2 shows the amount of space, in number of words, devoted to each category in all three papers during the same months.

TABLE 2 Article Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Humanitarian” Frame</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Historical/Political” Frame</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Frames</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3 Article Word Count

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Humanitarian” Frame</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25,097</td>
<td>21,032</td>
<td>18,074</td>
<td>89,369</td>
<td>153,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Historical/Political” Frame</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15,146</td>
<td>9,323</td>
<td>10,643</td>
<td>13,814</td>
<td>49,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Frames</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23,860</td>
<td>20,062</td>
<td>17,731</td>
<td>20,834</td>
<td>79,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,538</td>
<td>4,848</td>
<td>12,451</td>
<td>12,924</td>
<td>10,250</td>
<td>42,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>29,580</td>
<td>28,279</td>
<td>28,564</td>
<td>56,294</td>
<td>143,036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables reveal the extent to which historical and political analysis of the crisis was overlooked by these papers during the genocide. For instance, while the number of articles and the articles’ word counts appearing in the categories “Humanitarian,”
“Historical/Political” and “Both” in April are relatively even, in May there is a relatively striking decrease in articles adopting a historical or political one. In fact, in May, more articles labeled “Other,” conveying generic information not characterized by the tags of either the “Humanitarian” or “Historical/Political” frames appeared than articles in the “Historical/Political” category alone.

Further, from June to July, the number of “Humanitarian” articles appearing in just the *New York Times* increased threefold (14 in June to 42 in July) while the number of “Historical/Political” articles appearing in July was only twice that in June (5 in June to 10 in July). Those labeled “Both” in the *New York Times* increased from 7 in June to 11 in July, meaning that in July there were still approximately twice as many articles falling solely into the “Humanitarian” category as there were any articles that attempted to examine the genocide in historical or political context at all.

The *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* followed a nearly identical pattern, though both papers contained significantly fewer total articles on Rwanda than the *New York Times* and also shared trends slightly different from the disproportionate increase in “Humanitarian” articles (relative to “Historical/Political” ones) found in the *New York Times*. In fact, in both the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*, not only did the number of “Humanitarian” articles increase significantly in July as compared to previous months, but the number of articles labeled “Historical/Political” actually decreased. At the same time, the number of articles labeled “Both” in both the *Post* and

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85 In the *Washington Post*, there were 15 “Humanitarian” articles in April, 12 in May and 9 in June. In July, the number increased to 41. Similarly, in the *Los Angeles Times* there were 12 “Humanitarian” articles in April and 6 each in May and June, while in July 23 “Humanitarian” articles appeared. At the same time, the *Post* published 6 “Historical/Political” articles in April, 2 in May and 5 in June, then falling
the *Los Angeles Times* remained relatively stable from April to July. This means that for the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, over half of all of the articles printed in July provided no significant historical or political context with regards to the crisis while nearly 75% of the articles printed in the *Post* in July lacked such information.

The categories are also broken down according to “tags” or keywords. These coding phrases illustrate the extent to which certain aspects of each category were emphasized by the selected newspapers. These tags reveal further the problematic nature of much of the media information that informed public discourse, as represented by material in all three papers. For example, Table 1 shows that in April, the first month of the genocide, 45 articles appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* (combined) that attempted to contextualize the crisis historically and politically (18 in the “Historical/Political” category and 27 in the “Both” category). However, of these 45 articles, 32 of them – or 71% - state that the genocide was based on “tribal” or “ethnic” hostility, which most scholarship on Rwandan history proves to be a misleading characterization. In May, 64% of articles invoked the “tribal” frame. In June and July, the number of journalists using the “tribal” frame decreases to 49% and 47% respectively. While the use of the “ethnicity” frame did decrease over time, journalists’ heavy reliance on it during the peak of the massacres is troubling at best.

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Furthermore, only 18 of that same group of 45 April articles attempts to examine the historical legacy of colonial rule in Rwanda, which is widely agreed by scholars to have played a primary role in the development of ethnicity-based politics and violence in the country.\textsuperscript{87} Even more striking, less than half - only 18 out of the 45 articles - mention the role of the civil war between the Rwandan government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which was made up primarily of the adult children of Rwandan Tutsi refugees who fled political violence in the 1960s and 1970s and which invaded the country from Uganda in 1990. Finally, only four of the articles make mention of Rwanda’s primarily agricultural economy, which was heavily stressed by high population density the fall of coffee prices on the global market in the 1980s.

Subsequent months also reveal a similar distribution of article frequency within the categories according to these tags, though it is clear that at the very least, journalists slightly decreased their dependence on the “tribal warfare” theory to explain the crisis. However, even considering what may be a nominal improvement in reporting on historical and political context later on, articles appearing in April were of vital importance to the shaping of public discourse. Since it is clear that not a single article describing the Rwandan situation appeared in any of the three papers in March, despite ongoing peace talks between the Rwandan government and the RPF, April was the beginning of the crisis and the first time many Americans may have ever even heard of Rwanda.\textsuperscript{88} The articles written in April, then, set the tone for subsequent public perception of the genocide as it unfolded into the summer of 1994 and potentially made it more difficult for later, “new” information to reach readers. The overall lack of articles

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Soderlund, 112.
in April, and the overabundance of articles in July, conveys a message that understanding the genocide itself was less important than illustrating the reality of the refugee crisis that followed.

Finally, in examining very visible aspects of news reporting, such as article headlines, and what sorts of images and messages they convey it becomes even clearer that political and historical information is privileged less often than “humanitarian” information. For example, in the three papers combined, roughly half of the headlines fit solely in the “Humanitarian” category, while only 16% of articles had titles that were purely “Historical/Political.” Given the prominent position of headlines on a newspaper page, the near lack of political or historical information that would have been conveyed to readers by a quick glance at the paper is further evidence of the problematic nature of reporting on the Rwandan genocide.

Political and historical context are vital to truly understanding any aspect of the 1994 Rwandan crisis, such as the massacres, the refugee situation, or the RPF victory. Nevertheless, quantitative analysis of the articles on the crisis that appeared in *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* during the spring and summer of 1994 indicate that context was largely neglected by the media.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Close examination of the content of the articles beyond their frequency, word count, or the “tags” by which they were categorized can further illuminate the messages they convey about African crises generally and the Rwandan genocide specifically.

Before analyzing the reporting by category, it is also important to note that articles in all

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89 For the purposes of the quantitative section, headlines and articles' full text were analyzed separately in order to determine if there was a difference between the text and the more visible headlines.
categories tended to employ over-sensationalized language when describing the crisis. Further, many headlines evoked images that were either extremely inaccurate or not reflected by the main text of the article, or both.

An excellent example of all of these problems is a *Los Angeles Times* article that appeared on July 24 titled “Rwandan Tells of Horrors, Cannibalism.”\(^90\) The vague title seems to imply that in addition to the massacres, instances of cannibalism were taking place in Rwanda as part of the genocidal campaign. The use of the word “cannibalism” is particularly problematic in the context of both historical and contemporary European and American interpretations of Africans as cannibalistic “primitives.” The idea that African “tribes” participate in regular cannibalism is an integral part of American cultural myths about the continent.\(^91\) According to Keim, “Sixty percent of preservice social studies teachers who were surveyed about their knowledge of Africa associated the word *cannibalism* with that continent.”\(^92\) The use of “cannibalism” in the headline is made more problematic by the fact that the article itself is not actually about cannibalism. In fact, the article details a man’s escape from his Hutu army captors, during which he and a friend were forced to eat the remains of a deceased fellow prisoner in order to survive. Only a few dozen words out of this over 900-word article are devoted to this incident. Yet, allusions to “cannibalism” are highlighted in the article’s headline. Although of all 447 articles appearing in all three papers during the genocide and its aftermath, this was the only use of the word “cannibalism,” the sensationalization present in this article was common to reporting on the genocide across categories.

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\(^91\) See Keim, 54, 105, 109.

\(^92\) Ibid., 105. Keim quotes this statistic from a study that was incidentally published only two years after the Rwandan genocide.
Articles labeled “Historical/Political,” while they did attempt to put the crisis into wider perspective, often did not succeed in doing so in a historically accurate manner. For instance, in the example given in the quantitative analysis, while there were 45 articles written on Rwanda in the three papers in April, well over half of those articles misleadingly characterized the violence as “tribal.” Thus it is important to undertake a qualitative analysis of selected articles in order to better illustrate such discrepancies.

On April 15, a little over a week into the crisis, an article titled, “U.N. in Rwanda Says It Is Powerless to Halt the Violence” appeared in the *New York Times*. The author was *Times* correspondent Donatella Lorch, one of a few *Times* writers responsible for most of the coverage of Rwanda during the genocide. While the article does make brief mention of the fact that the U.N. mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR) did not have a mandate to enforce peace, but were rather in the country as “peacekeepers,” the rest of the article implies that the ineffectiveness of the U.N. mission was due to the chaos of the crisis.93 The extent of the violence certainly played a role in the frustration of U.N. efforts. Nevertheless, as the UNAMIR commanding officer, General Dallaire made clear, UNAMIR’s potential for effective violence prevention was thwarted in large part by U.N. member nations, specifically the United States, that were extremely reluctant to offer logistical assistance to the mission, despite UNAMIR’s multiple pleas for such help.94 The article instead focuses on the mayhem in Kigali during the first nine days of the crisis stating that, “[w]ith the city descending into further chaos, the role of the 2,000 United

94 Dallaire, 331, 332, 375, 376, 399, 400.
Nations troops in Rwanda has become increasingly difficult.”\textsuperscript{95} The article quotes Red Cross representative Philippe Gaillard who said that “[The Rwandan] army cannot control” the machete-wielding civilian militias who were perpetrating the massacres.\textsuperscript{96} Lorch says little about the politics of UNAMIR and nothing about the lack of helpful contributions from U.N. member nations, both of which were important factors in terms of limiting the capacity of UNAMIR for effective action. Articles appeared in all three papers with regard to the failure of U.N. member states, particularly the U.S., to contribute funding and logistics in an expedient manner, but this article is an example of journalists’ failure to fully articulate the connection between this problem and UNAMIR’s effectiveness.

Two days after Lorch’s article was printed, another article appeared titled “U.N. Flies Food and Medicine Into Rwanda.” This article similarly says nothing about the politics of UNAMIR or the debates among U.N. member states with regard to the crisis. It does not address the question of why money for food aid was available but not resources of the sort General Dallaire requested in order to increase the capacity of UNAMIR to protect people in danger of becoming massacre victims. The message conveyed by these two articles appearing nearly back-to-back, and so early on in the crisis, was that Rwanda was a hopeless situation and the only possible way to help was to send food and medical assistance in the hopes that it might reach anybody still alive in the capital.

Articles printed in the other two papers evidence similar patterns. For instance, in the \textit{Washington Post}, in the week between April 14 and April 21, three out of the nine

\textsuperscript{95} Idem.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
articles printed on Rwanda highlight the U.N.’s debate over whether to pull out of Rwanda. The headlines read as such: On April 14, “U.N. Considers Pulling Troops Out of Rwanda,” on April 19, “U.N. Force Threatens to Quit Riven Rwanda” and on April 21 “U.N. Force Nears Collapse in Chaotic Rwanda.” The text of these three articles characterized the U.N. pullout (which diminished the U.N. peacekeeping force from 2,500 troops to 250) in terms of Belgium’s decision to pull its troops and the chaos and violence on the ground. None of the three articles made mention of UNAMIR’s lack of adequate resources as one of the sources of its “collapse.” Headlines of the other articles during that week, exemplified by a second article from April 14 titled “Rwanda’s ‘Sad, Sad, Sad’ Self-Immolation; Free-for-All Slaughter Continues Among Tribes, Rebels, Army and Roving Gangs,” further give the impression that it is purely Rwanda’s “chaos” and not the failure of U.N. member states to agree on an effective plan of action that caused the potential pullout of UNAMIR. Further, these sorts of articles, coupled with articles announcing the provision of food aid to Rwanda – which appeared during that same week in April all three papers - suggest that the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* indeed adopted a “humanitarian” approach to understanding and conveying information about the Rwandan genocide.

Further interesting is an article that appeared in the *Washington Post* at the end of May. The article, titled “Rebel Victory Called Path to End Rwandan Slaughter,” reinforces the notion established by all three papers in April that UNAMIR was helpless in the face of the massacres. The article begins by stating “[w]ith the world community horrified by the bloodshed in Rwanda but paralyzed by confusion, indecision or fear, many aid officials, human rights advocates and Africa watchers are hoping for a victory
by rebel forces to end the tumult.”

Keith Richburg, the journalist responsible for the piece continues: “[s]uch a scenario seems likely, with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels improving their positions in neighborhoods around the capital…” The article does not present a completely unproblematic perspective on the RPF. In fact, although his tone frequently suggests a level of sympathy for the RPF, Richburg points out the problems inherent in heralding an RPF victory. He writes:

Many who have been watching Rwanda’s horror say a rebel victory would relieve foreign governments of witnessing mass slaughter while failing to muster the political will to try to stop it. “There is some thinking that if the rebels win, maybe that would take care of the problem for now,” said Pauline Baker, an Africa scholar with the Washington office of the Aspen institute.

The problem is that articles in all three papers printed material in April suggesting that the UN was “powerless” in the face of the massacres. Richburg’s piece, and a small number of other articles that were also relatively sympathetic to the RPF and looked towards an RPF victory, appeared in all three papers after the UN mission had been declared impotent - primarily in May, June and July. While Richburg does try to problematize the issue to an extent, this timeline of articles further serves to relieve guilt Americans might have experienced as a result of UNAMIR’s failure because these articles imply that the RPF was close to solving the problem anyway. However, because stopping the genocide was not an immediate RPF objective, the RPF continued to advance in terms of its strategic military conquest of Rwanda, not necessarily in terms of the quickest end to the slaughter. Richburg’s article fails to clearly emphasize this point. Richburg and others’ lack of attention to the future political repercussions of an RPF

98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
victory exacerbate the problem. Richburg alludes to the fact that such a situation in
Rwanda might present challenges, but does not deeply engage the subject.

Articles labeled “Humanitarian” appearing in May and June reflect this neglect of
political detail. In July, the focus shifts from Rwanda itself to the refugee camps in
Tanzania and Zaire (DRC). Most of the stories in July were about injured or hungry
refugees, the cholera outbreaks in the Zairian refugee camps, and lost, orphaned or
abandoned children. Having been categorized as “Humanitarian,” most of the articles
lack any contextual information at all and tend to avoid any mention of possible political
or diplomatic solutions to the refugee crisis, though some of the articles do mention the
attempts made by aid organizations, foreign powers and the U.N. to encourage the
refugees to return to Rwanda. Interestingly, the following quotation from Dr. Jacques de
Milliano, president of Doctors Without Borders appeared in a July 21 article in the
New York Times. He insisted that the situation was “a humanitarian crisis without any
humanitarian solution… There has to be a political solution.” Despite Dr. de
Milliano’s insightful comment, and despite the fact that the writer responsible for this
piece found it appropriate to include the quotation in the article, the vast majority of
articles out of the New York Times, the Post and the Los Angeles Times in July, as noted
above, continued to focus on humanitarian “solutions” rather than possible political
actions that could protect civilians and rebuild Rwanda, such as comprehensive strategies
to encourage refugees to return home.

A story on a botched United States food airdrop in Zaire that appeared in all three
papers four days later, on July 25, brought out similar issues. The New York Times

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1994.
version, part of “The Rwanda Disaster” series of news articles that appeared in the Times in July illustrates, ironically, the limitations of humanitarian aid missions and the failure on the part of the United States to respond to stated needs. The article explains that despite U.N. requests that the United States support the refugees with “logistics, manpower and heavy equipment, including trucks,”[101] rather than food, the United States proceeded with its airdrop, which allegedly missed its target. An aid official from an Irish relief organization was quoted as saying that at the refugee camp near where the American food drop landed, lack of food was not an issue. The article states that although the United States was the largest donor to the relief effort for Rwandan refugees, “relief officials have complained that the Clinton Administration had been slow to respond with the kind of logistical help that [was] sorely needed.” Despite the implication in the New York Times that food aid at that particular location was actually not necessary, an article on the same event in the Los Angeles Times opens with the following declaration: “U.S. Air Force planes dropped about seven tons of emergency food for Rwandan refugees here Sunday, but the first direct American aid was barely a drop in the ocean of desperate humanity that has engulfed the region.”[102] Further, as the same article states, one of the misguided pallets landed on the farm of a Zairian family, who narrowly escaped being crushed by the giant crate. The Los Angeles Times article does do an adequate job of questioning the effectiveness of such food drops – both the

actual logistics of the drop and the fact that rather impractical food items (among them cheese and chocolate) were included in the pallets.

However, as before with the article that included de Milliano’s comment, most of the rest of the “Humanitarian” articles appearing in July in all three papers fail to fully address issues of practicality and effectiveness of aid, but rather examine only whether or not aid was provided and what aid was needed. Finally, the continual focus on the squalid conditions of the camps and the horrors and suffering experienced by the people within them reinforces the notion that food drops, even ones that fail, are better than nothing, and can well replace interventions informed by political and historical context.

Of equal importance is the fact that articles that were categorized as “Historical/Political” or “Both” do not necessarily include accurate contextual information about genocide, reflective of leading scholarship on Rwanda. Two interesting points arise here. First is the proportion of journalists who characterized the conflict as “tribal.” Half of the New York Times journalists and slightly over half of the Los Angeles Times journalists attempted to contextualize the violence in terms of “ethnic” or “tribal” hostility.\textsuperscript{103} The proportion was much higher in the Washington Post, possibly partly due to its overabundance of articles that fit squarely into the “Humanitarian” category and lack of articles categorized as “Both,” relative to the other two papers. Thus in the Post, out of 37 total articles labeled either “Historical/Political” or “Both,” 28 (or roughly 75%) used a “tribal violence” frame to contextualize the massacres. Samantha Power explains the frame adopted by journalists in Rwanda. She states that despite

\textsuperscript{103} Out of 62 total articles that fit into the “Historical/Political” or “Both” categories in the New York Times, 31 articles explained the genocide in terms of “ethnic” or “tribal” hatred, frequently indicating that this hostility went back centuries. For the Los Angeles Times, out of 62 total articles labeled either “Historical/Political” or “Both,” 34 used tribalism to explain the violence.
General Romeo Dallaire’s hopes that a media presence in Rwanda might spark outcry from ordinary people in Europe and the United States and lead to popular pressure on UN member nations to strengthen UNAMIR. However, as Power argues, the nature of much of the press coverage on Rwanda was such that it did not encourage activism on the intervention issue. While Dallaire had hoped that the news might provide sufficient information to Europeans and Americans to prompt them to action, in fact, much of the reporting reinforced Western notions of Africa as a violent, chaotic place in which “tribal warfare” was an inevitable and unstoppable force.

Two of the first lengthy *New York Times* articles on the crisis, “2 Nations Joined by Common History of Genocide” (April 9) and “Terror Convulses Rwandan Capital as Tribes Battle” (April 9), are excellent examples of this “historical-political ethnic” frame. While later articles in the *New York Times* tend to employ relatively less sensationalized language, these articles, as many readers’ first “impression” of Rwanda might have led to a dangerously distorted view of the conflict – a view that likely fit perfectly into Americans’ shared cultural schemata about Africa and Africa’s problems. The first article told readers that

*The bloodletting in Rwanda and Burundi runs through the history of both countries as fluidly as the meandering Akanyaru River that marks their common border. Tribal problems exist in virtually every African country. But modern weapons, the centuries-old feud between the Hutu and the Tutsi and a competition for land unlike anywhere else in Africa have led to genocidal orgies in Rwanda and Burundi.*

The article makes brief mention of colonial rule in Rwanda and even states that under Belgian administration, those identified as Tutsi were favored and given relatively more

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privileges than those identified as Hutu. However, the article fails to describe the manner in which colonial rule altered ethnic identity entirely in Burundi and Rwanda, creating the rigid categories that most people understand to exist today, but which did not always operate in the same way across time and place in Rwandan history.

William Schmidt, a journalist who reported on the Rwandan genocide for the *New York Times* on multiple occasions and who largely subscribed to the “ethnicity” frame, wrote the second article. The title of the April 9 article, “Terror Convulses Rwandan Capital as Tribes Battle,” employs language that evokes images consistent with Americans’ schema on Africa. The use of the word “convulse” give the impression that those involved in the crisis were driven by primal, chaotic urges. Further, “tribe,” is a problematic term with connotations of the primitive. In the piece itself, Schmidt fails to distinguish the Rwandan civil war, which began in 1990 between the RPF and the Rwandan government and had been fought on and off up until the start of the genocide, from the massacres themselves. Schmidt states, “Rival tribal factions waged vicious street battles Friday for control of the city… The death toll of civilians, Government ministers and soldiers – including at least 10 U.N. peacekeeping troops – was estimated to be in the thousands.”

Most of the deaths that occurred immediately after April 6 in Kigali were not due to “battle” between groups, as Schmidt indicates, but were the result of Hutu militia-perpetrated murders. The civilians, government ministers and U.N. soldiers Schmidt refers to were not involved in “rival tribal” battles, but were rather casualties of extremist Hutu militias that hunted down and killed moderate Hutu officials and politicians and Tutsi officials and civilians in the days directly after the plane crash.

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that killed Habyarimana. The U.N. soldiers he refers to were sent to protect the prime minister (A Hutu who was one of the government officials murdered). They were unarmed when they were killed, having laid down their weapons in the face of confrontation with Hutu militia members, in the hopes that they might appear less threatening without them. Schmidt’s conflation of the civil war battles between the largely Tutsi RPF and the Hutu Rwandan government army and the massacres of Tutsi and Hutu civilians, mostly by Hutu extremist militias and some Hutu civilians, was reflective of much of the reporting on the Rwandan genocide, especially in the early weeks.

On April 12, the Washington Post printed an article called “Rebels Advance in Rwanda, Vow to Take Over Capital; More Foreigners Flee Central African Nation’s Tribal Slaughter.” Jennifer Parmelee began her article with language common many of the “Historical/Political” articles. She says “Rebels advanced to the edge of Rwanda’s capital today and vowed to take power as fighting between the central African country’s two main tribes raged for a fifth day, news reports and evacuees reported.” Parmelee’s article continues, like most of the others during this same time period, by describing some of the massacres, though like Schmidt from the New York Times, she conflates them with the fighting between the Rwandan army and the RPF. The most problematic aspect of her reporting in this piece, however, is her heavy emphasis on the “tribal” element of the situation. Initially, she describes the Rwandan army and government and the RPF more or less accurately, stating that the Rwandan government was primarily made up of Hutu and that the RPF was mostly Tutsi. However, by the end of the article, she abandons

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politics entirely and characterizes the situation entirely as a “tribal” problem. This becomes clear when she references the Arusha Accords peace negotiations that occurred in Tanzania during the months leading up to the crisis as “Hutu-Tutsi peace talks.” In describing the talks as such, Parmelee obliterates the specific political and military organizations and ideological spaces to which various Hutu and Tutsi belong, from Rwanda’s multiple moderate political parties to the extremist Hutu hardliner “Hutu Power” party, the RPF, the Hutu militias, the Rwandan army and ordinary individuals.

This type of misinformation is not limited to “Historical/Political” articles printed early on during the conflict, but is also evident in pieces appearing as late as July. An article appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on July 27, shortly after the story on the botched U.S. food drop that attempted to describe the atmosphere of intimidation that members of the Hutu Power group and other Hutu militia members tried to create among Hutu refugees in the Zairian camps. The article was written by a correspondent stationed at one of the Zaire camps. Its title, “Refugees Get Steady Diet of Propaganda,” is promising, but the actual text of the article fails to fully explain the issue. The article states that “former Hutu government officials and their minions insist that [the Hutu refugees] will be tortured and killed if they return to Rwanda.” The article quotes a number of refugees who have heard such rumors and tells of a journalist who was accused of lying after telling some refugees that it appeared safe to return to Rwanda. The article goes to great lengths to describe the rumors themselves and also the insistence on the part of aid workers that by most accounts, it fact seemed safe to return to Rwanda. However, the article is less clear about why the ex-government officials and Hutu militia

108 Ibid.
members would want to spread such rumors. The article makes no attempt to explain the shift in regional political dynamics caused by the RPF’s victory in Rwanda, the fear of the Hutu militias and former Hutu-controlled government that the blame for the genocide would fall on them if they returned and the strategy of those same groups to keep full control of Rwanda out of the RPF’s hands by keeping a critical mass of Rwandans from returning to the country.

Misunderstanding of the political, rather than “tribal” nature of both the massacres and the civil war and journalists’ continual use of tag words such as “bloodletting,” “tribal,” “warrior” and “orgy” indicate both that journalists attempted to conform the Rwandan crisis to their pre-established schema on Africa and African crises, and that their reporting was sure to allow, if not persuade American readers to do the same.

What is especially interesting, and in some sense, alarming about this situation is that more than one article cites quotations and interviews with leading historians of Rwanda such as Alison des Forges and David Newbury, who were visible and available to the press from the start of the crisis and who emphasized clearly the political nature of the violence and the relationship between colonial rule, power and ethnic identity in Rwanda and Burundi. In the New York Times Schmidt himself employed quotations from both des Forges and Newbury in another article on Rwanda that appeared in the Times on April 17. Even as Schmidt continued to characterize the violence in Rwanda as “tribal” and use much of the same sensationalized language present in his article from the previous week, he included quotations from des Forges that explain the effects of colonialism on Rwandan society and the use of identity to gain and manipulate power.\(^{110}\)

\(^{110}\) Ibid..
Further, an article by another *New York Times* journalist on May 5 also quotes des Forges, who again warned against a “tribal” interpretation of the genocide. Des Forges was quoted as stating,

‘Habyarimana used Burundi to persuade [Rwandan Hutu] people that the Tutsi threat was real… It was a pretext for the hard-line Hutus in Rwanda. There was plenty of paranoia and fear. *This is not a tribal conflict* but a coldblooded, ruthless, cynical plot.’  

However, as noted above with regard to similar issues in the “Humanitarian” articles, journalists attempting to find the roots of the genocide continued to characterize the violence as “tribal” after, or even simultaneous to, the publication of comments such as des Forges’. For instance, on May 19, the *Los Angeles Times* printed an article that included quotations from Abdul Kabia, a spokesperson for the United Nations. He insisted that the killings were not “ethnic” in nature. Specifically, he is quoted as saying that “the massacres were not ethnic fighting but a genocide carried out by the majority Hutu government against the Tutsi minority and its Hutu allies.”

However, this assertion was apparently not understood as significant to the *Los Angeles Times* staff as the quotation was somewhat randomly placed in a brief article about the U.N.’s attempt to ensure control of the Kigali airport rather than in an article detailing the history of Rwanda or the politics of ethnicity in the country.

Beyond instances of reference to the fear that the (mostly Hutu) refugees in the Zaire camps felt with regard to returning to an RPF-controlled Rwanda, there is little mention in any article of the political dynamics of the situation. Construed still as a “tribal” conflict, the papers do not effectively convey information on possible political or

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diplomatic means of stopping the massacres, alleviating the problems faced by refugees and addressing the situation in Rwanda immediately after the end of the peak of the genocide. Only on July 11 did an article appear that incorporated accurate historical information – at least more effectively and clearly than its predecessors – into its analysis. The article managed to address – although briefly - colonialism and its effects on ethnicity, the interaction between the development of Rwandan ethnic identities and political power, the propaganda spread by Hutu extremist hate machines such as the RTLM (Radio Television des Milles Collines) radio station and the civil war with the RPF. However, by July 11, the massacres had largely subsided and most victims of the hundreds of thousands of genocide victims were already dead. Further, for most American readers, weary of bad news from central Africa and having already incorporated the Rwandan genocide into their “African conflict” schema, or perhaps already having switched gears to address the refugee crisis, the message was likely too late.

CONCLUSION

Over the past several decades, the notion of “humanitarianism” has increasingly been employed and manipulated to justify almost any sort of intervention in conflicts or sociopolitical crises. For example, in his 1999 reflections on the U.S. intervention in Kosovo, Noam Chomsky makes reference to the hypocrisy of Western/Northern bases for “humanitarian” intervention, which lead to military campaigns against certain governments and individuals that appear guilty of crimes against humanity and mercy towards others, especially if the United States or Europe has close ties to the regime in question. Chomsky contends,

\[\text{[t]the conflict of intervention is difficult to resolve if history is declared irrelevant and the present scene is glimpsed only through the filters established by the enlightened states, which transmits the evil deeds of official enemies while blocking unwanted images…}\]

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He argues that this kind of “new” humanitarian intervention frame was “given forceful expression by the Clinton Doctrine” which relied on the rhetoric of development and democracy as the basis of U.S. intervention in foreign crises.116

However, the Rwandan situation presents us with a perplexing paradox. In the case of Rwanda, if we can extrapolate from this examination of reporting in the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times, it is clear that American news

115 Ibid., 12.
116 Ibid., 14.
outlets adopted a “humanitarian” frame for understanding the genocide. Further, U.S. foreign policy towards Africa is almost entirely characterized by a humanitarian posture that eschews grappling with thorny political and economic dynamics. If humanitarianism is usually about Western intervention (or interference) in the crises of troubled countries, how could it then be compatible with the lack of a U.S. intervention in Rwanda? Certainly, scholars have pointed to U.S. racism towards Africa, the fall-out from the intervention in Somalia and U.S. hopes for an RPF victory and subsequent reluctance to interfere as reasons for U.S. inaction.

Chomsky’s analysis of Kosovo is illuminating. The problem with a “humanitarian” approach to global crises is not solely its lack of attention to historical and political context or its lack of concern for long-term, sustainable conflict resolution. Humanitarianism allows the West exclusive power to determine what intervention is “appropriate” in a given scenario. In Rwanda this meant that Western nations, and in particular the United States, had the power to decide whether to intervene during the crisis or to react to its consequences. Keim further argues that the humanitarian approach is flawed because it masks the political dynamics of both crisis situations themselves and of the relationships between Western and African nations. He explains, “if we portray all of our actions in Africa as ‘helping Africa develop,’ it becomes difficult even to imagine that we might be exploiting Africa.”117 Humanitarian projects then serve to limit the extent to which nations like the United States turn a critical eye on their own global policies and contributions to international crises.

117 Keim, 97.
Similarly, humanitarianism also acts as a front for Western nations to ensure that contemporary world order continues to reflect imperial power dynamics. Humanitarian approaches to conflicts allow Western nations dictate the rules of engagement, so to speak. As Chomsky illustrates with the case of Kosovo, it is Western nations who have the power to decide when, where and how to intervene in the affairs of a given nation. Frequently, as evidenced by Chomsky’s analysis and by much of the scholarship on the Rwandan crises, the question of “when, where and how” is dictated by the national political and economic interests or international relationships of Western nations. The notion of “humanitarianism” then is fraught with ambiguity and false pretense. Not only does the concept preclude both government officials and ordinary citizens from undertaking political and historical analyses of crises like the Rwandan genocide, “humanitarianism” also serves to recreate colonial global hierarchies.

The early twenty-first century saw shifts initiated by the Bush administration. While Clinton era international intervention and humanitarian aid projects were embarked on largely in terms of “development,” under the Bush administration humanitarianism was defined increasingly by regime change and a growing number of “moral” issues such as reproductive freedom.

September 11 has also caused critical changes in the U.S.’s approach to humanitarian intervention over the past decade. The Bush administration’s “War on Terror” and invasion of Iraq have defined what Mahmood Mamdani, echoing Chomsky, calls “the new humanitarian order.” Mamdani summarizes the impact Bush politics have had on global governance thus,
The standard of responsibility is no longer international law; it has shifted, fatefuly, from law to rights. As the Bush Administration made patently clear at the time of the invasion of Iraq, humanitarian intervention does not need to abide by the law. Indeed, its defining characteristic is that it is beyond law. It is this feature that makes humanitarian intervention the twin of the “war of terror.”

In a preview excerpt from his new book, Mamdani connects this “new order” to the case of Darfur. In assessing the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) 2008 indictment of Sudanese president Omar Hassan Ahmad a-Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity, Mamdani states that the ICC seeks to “connect all consequences in Darfur to a single cause: Bashir.” However, Mamdani insists that “[a] workable solution to the conflict requires that all its causes be understood in their full complexity.” What the “new humanitarian order” rejects, Mamdani argues, is the acknowledgement of people as citizens. Mamdani continues,

If the rights of the citizen are pointedly political, the rights of the human pertain to sheer survival; they are summed up in one word: protection. The new language refers to its subjects not as bearers of rights – and thus active agents in their emancipation – but as passive beneficiaries of an external “responsibility to protect.” Rather than rights-bearing citizens, beneficiaries of the humanitarian order are akin to recipients of charity. Humanitarianism does not claim to reinforce agency, only to sustain bare life. If anything, its tendency is to promote dependence. Humanitarianism heralds a system of trusteeship.

Such an approach enables the continued entrenchment of U.S. foreign policy in bureaucratic processes because it does not require any “real” diplomacy, only the provision of aid.

While the Rwandan crisis occurred during the Clinton administration, rather than during the Bush presidency, Mamdani’s assessment of the “humanitarian” approach to

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119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
crises is an accurate description of much of the international response to the 1994 genocide. During the past several decades, U.S. diplomacy has been hampered by, as Mamdani puts it, a lack of comprehension of international crises “in their full complexity.”

The *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*’ “humanitarian” assessments of the Rwandan genocide preclude the conception of Rwandans as citizens of either a specific country or of the globe – and thus strips them, in the American mind at any rate, of any capacity to participate in a process of international or domestic negotiation on their own behalf. The relative lack of historical or any other contextual information in large numbers of the news pieces on Rwanda appearing in those publications leads to a perception of Rwandans as apolitical, timeless, placeless beings whose only relationship of significance is that between themselves and bringers of humanitarian aid.

The idea of “humanitarianism” relies on the existence of a system of global governance – in which one country has the right to intervene in the affairs of another in pursuit of “human rights.” Both Chomsky and Mamdani alluded to the potentially problematic nature of such a system, given global power dynamics and the context of colonial and imperial histories which have endowed the West/North with a disproportionate amount of power to decide who is in violation of “human rights” and who is not. In terms of Rwanda, this situation was rather clear in that the post-Holocaust “global” agreement on issues of genocide prevention did not seem to apply to the United States. The U.S. could choose to direct the State Department to avoid the use of the word “genocide” in order to excuse the U.S. from any obligation such language might require.
The United States decision not to apply the term “genocide” to Rwanda’s situation of course greatly affected the capacity of the UN to operate effectively on the ground.

In a broader sense, then this “global governance system” is based on web of international relationships, which frequently make it seem that the solutions to problems faced by African nations are under the influence of “supra-national” actors. The idea of “humanitarianism,” then, is divorced from diplomacy and international relations in that intervention and crisis prevention is something done to Africa rather than with it. Given the nature of news articles printed in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* during the Rwandan genocide, this was the frame through which Americans were encouraged to understand the 1994 crisis. Although in many respects, the 2008 election of Barack Obama to the U.S. presidency may entail significant changes to American politics, it is yet unclear exactly how and to what extent the post-Bush period will signify a different political climate with regard to international affairs and foreign crises and how the Obama administration will interpret and implement U.S. “humanitarianism.”

It is not difficult to apply Doris Graber’s conclusions from *Processing the News* to news about the Rwandan crisis. Graber’s notions of “schemata” are evident in Curtis Keim’s descriptions of popular American cultural myths about Africa – namely that the continent is a chaotic, violent, impoverished and disease-ridden place. While the newspaper articles labeled “Humanitarian” did a particular kind of damage to Rwanda in removing its crisis almost entirely from historical or political context, those articles labeled “Historical/Political” did a kind of damage that was just as harmful, despite their efforts to contextualize the crisis. However, because the efforts of these
“Historical/Political” articles relied on cultural schemata about the “tribal” nature of many of Africa’s problems, their message to readers was not decidedly different from the messages conveyed by the “Humanitarian” articles. In either case, the message appears to have been simple: Rwanda is a lost cause without viable political or even military solutions. The solution is either to provide aid or avoid it entirely.

While it is clear that both the Clinton administration and the State Department lacked a certain level of political and historical information on central Africa, the United States official response to the Rwandan crisis was due only in part to lack of understanding of Rwandan historical and political context. The Clinton administration, as Power asserts, was also encumbered by its reluctance to send its troops into a conflict zone, budget concerns and the risk of political fallout threatening re-election opportunities.121 The New York Times, the Post and the Los Angeles Times, unencumbered by such official concerns, had the relative freedom to address the crisis more comprehensively. However, as discussed at length above, articles in the all three papers tended to play down the significance of the role of power and politics in the Rwandan genocide. Reporting, as represented by these three newspapers, by and large reflected the officially sanctioned notion that Rwanda’s problems were based upon deep-seated “tribal hatred” and that extensive carnage on the African continent was not worth becoming exceptionally distressed over.

It is impossible to fully prove whether or not the lack of public outcry in the U.S. over the Rwandan genocide is the fault of media directly or the result of a variety of factors. Nonetheless, due to the relative obscurity of a country like Rwanda in the

121 Power, 335.
American mind and mainstream American cultural myths and stereotypes regarding Africa, national media outlets such as the *New York Times*, the *Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*, were in a unique position to inform the public about the genocide and to be an honest international voice for its victims. While some individual journalists did attempt to fill such a role, on the whole, mainstream U.S. newspapers, which largely encouraged a “humanitarian” reading of the crisis, failed to responsibly inform the public on the Rwandan situation.
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