



Responsibility to report: The politics of British press reporting of the Darfur humanitarian crisis

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Abstract

This article aims to establish whether the news media adopt a responsibility to report when covering humanitarian crises. It explores British press coverage of the genocide in Darfur and finds that the British press maintains traditional and ethnocentric frameworks that undermine the need for responsible reporting. Ultimately, the news values of negativity, elite people and elite nations have determined coverage of the Darfur crisis, and official and Western sources have been used to maintain credibility and a sense of identification with the domestic setting. Geopolitical biases continue to determine what stories are newsworthy, and political context remains scant. Sparse use of foreign correspondents and meagre inclusion of personal experiences suggest that journalists remain detached from the crisis, urging political rather than humanitarian intervention. This article concludes that the British press maintains institutionalised approaches to reporting humanitarian crises by avoiding attachment.

Keywords

Darfur, humanitarian crisis, news, politics, press, responsibility

Introduction

Humanitarian crises vary in nature; they can be manmade or natural and can happen overnight or over a long period of time. They can happen in developed countries with

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robust infrastructures or in the poorest and remotest places in the world. Whether flood, volcanic eruption, famine or genocide, all are extraordinary and unique. Where they are similar is in the threat they pose to human life and the enormous needs they create.

There has long been a broadly acknowledged need for international responsibility and activism in order to counter humanitarian crises. This led to a global agreement in the aftermath of World War II that humankind should never again bear witness to humanitarian crimes. This further resulted in the formulation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on 9 December 1948.¹ Despite global repudiation of manmade atrocities (in particular) and a global agreement to prevent them from occurring, repeated instances of conflict and destruction between ethnic and other groups continue to agitate the world. Eleven years after the slaughter of the Tutsi population in Rwanda in 1994, the 1948 Convention was revived and the Responsibility to Protect agreement was signed at the 2005 UN World Summit.² According to this agreement, the signatories (i.e. states and the international community as a whole) are responsible for protecting groups identified as victims of genocide and for preventing atrocities.

The role of the media in the 'responsibility to protect' order has been and remains far from resolved. In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, many emphasised the role news media play in international action and intervention and how real time news coverage affects the public's perceptions of and attitudes to such intervention (e.g. the CNN Effect) (Rotberg and Weiss, 1996a). In 1995, the UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, echoed this idea on an international scale by labelling CNN an unofficial member of the Security Council (Ammon, 2001: 7). At the same time, Minear et al. (1996) have acknowledged the complex dynamics between news media, governments and humanitarian organisations, calling it a 'crisis triangle' (p.2), and have highlighted the manipulation of information by 'political, professional, or commercial motives' (p.31). Benthall's (1993) study of the Nigerian Civil War in the 1960s and the Armenian earthquake in 1988 concluded that the relationship between the media and other actors is problematic. Cottle (2009) has stressed that global crises, staged in contemporary media in the forms of global surveillance, global-focusing events and global spectacles, are still strongly influenced by national interests and agendas: 'When reporting on distant disasters and humanitarian emergencies, national news media continue to seek out and populate stories with their own "nationals" – whether embodied as victims, survivors, heroes, or concerned celebrities' (p.509).

Such critical views invariably involve both the news media's 'responsibility to report' and governments' 'responsibility to protect' and suggest that where governments are unresponsive to crisis events, news media shape the agenda (Seib, 2002). Journalists, scholars and a former CEO of Time Warner, Gerard Levin, have conceded that 'today the media's responsibility for helping us to see the world in all its complexity is greater than ever' (McChesney, 2010: 203). The global media nowadays have the ability to extend their reach to anywhere on earth, and the development of satellite technology means that sounds, images and reports can be fed back to newsrooms instantaneously. Few other global organisations have the capacity or the audience of global news media institutions. However, manmade atrocities and genocides have often been absent in the news media. This happens not only because of limited access and resources, but also as a result of ideological and interest-related factors, since atrocities and genocides do not complement institutionalised norms or

national loyalties. The massacres in Rwanda were of little interest to the US government, so Rwanda was of little interest to the US media. Thompson (2007), in his discussion of the failure of the media to expose the Rwandan genocide, argues that ‘the Responsibility to Protect is driven by the simple realization that we have a responsibility to others ... journalists, as individuals, must accept the responsibility to report’ (pp.439–440).

Arguments that favour ‘responsibility to report’ involve a normative stand and bring counter-forces to the fore: the social mission of the media versus media professionalism and objectivity.³ For many, the role of the media is to simply be professional, to account for context and previous developments, to name the protagonists in crises and to produce analyses to help audiences understand the key elements at stake. Although this article does not aim to resolve this debate or analytically reveal its various dimensions, it is important to stress that the position in favour of responsibility to report does not undermine professionalism and objective coverage of events with human or social consequences. Professionalism and the ‘objective’ representation of crisis are not to be dismissed, but they should be coupled with responsibility to report, especially given the challenges arising in today’s globalised and disparate milieu. Professionalism and objectivity are not equivalent to journalistic neutrality or dissociation from reported events, and thus neutrality is not a prerequisite for the exercise of professionalism. On the contrary, objective representation and reporting of crises can compellingly develop journalists’ sense of ‘responsibility’ and ‘attachment’, with reporting sending clear messages that reflect reality and address calls for ‘responsible’ action and intervention.

This article does not aim to provide evidence for or against either side of the debate, nor does it attempt to outline the current situation regarding ‘responsibility to report’ journalism. Instead, it contains a content analysis of British broadsheet newspapers focused on answering the question of whether news media adopt ‘responsibility to report’ and, if so, what its characteristics are in the context of Western media reporting on the Darfur crisis. The next section presents the crisis in Darfur. The review of the literature discusses landmark theories on foreign news reporting and debates surrounding news values and responsible journalism. A methodological discussion follows, and the section after that presents the results of the content analysis and reflects upon whether these results confirm or challenge what we know so far. The last section summarises the results and points out implications for future research.

The Darfur humanitarian crisis

Darfur is a region populated by a majority of black African farmers and a minority of Arab nomads, both with patronage claims to the land. The region has a history of routine violence, but serious fighting broke out in 2003 when black Africans attempted to seek more rights, which had been suppressed by the government. The rebellion was led by the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The Arab-led government saw this as an opportunity to exacerbate tensions within the population. It armed the Arabs, unleashed ‘a bloody campaign of terror’ on black Africans (Steidle and Wallace, 2007: xiii) and thus began the first genocide of the 21st century.

Many factors have been inspected as possible explanations for the Darfur crisis; all show the complexities involved in it. Some commentators have stressed the importance

of ecological drivers (Mamdani, 2009: 4; UN, 2007: 60, 74–88), arguing that drought and increasing desertification created intense competition over natural resources in the region. Others have maintained ‘barbarisation’ discourses, presenting the violence in this African region as a serious indication of barbaric culture and uncivilised ways of managing domestic affairs (De Waal, 2007; Mamdani, 2009). Still others argue that this approach oversimplifies the complexity of the conflict, ignoring factors related to regional, national and international structures (Hassan, 2009; Tubiana, 2007). Regional parameters played a role in the spread and severity of the conflict, as struggle for regional control led local bodies to develop into militias of regional scope interested in gaining power and land. Conflicting interests at the regional level were reflected at the national level, with the Khartoum government supporting the Arab groups in the fight for farmers’ land and resources and the al-Bashir government escalating the conflict in 2003 to a massacre of thousands of villages. Finally, international forces played a part in the conflict early on. The US administration had been hostile to the Khartoum government since the 1980s and consequently offered military and financial support to the opposition (i.e. the SLA). In the early 2000s, the US forces continued to intervene through attempts to destabilise the al-Bashir government. Geopolitics and particularly the country’s oil resources, of which the United States aimed to gain control, almost entirely explain this persistent intervention of the United States.

The main phase of the conflict erupted in 2003, when the SLA and the JEM attacked El Fasher Airport and African villages. In September 2004, the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, announced to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee that ‘genocide has been committed in Darfur’ (Williams and Bellamy, 2005: 31), and placed liability on the Sudanese government and the Janjaweed.⁴ This failed to provoke an international response, in part due to China’s veto of the imposition of sanctions on the Sudanese government.⁵ The UN endorsed the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) peacekeeping force and threatened sanctions. A force of 300 African Union (AU) monitors and 1700 soldiers was deployed to Darfur. In January 2005, the International Commission of Inquiry instituted by the UN Security Council (UNSC) deemed that the crisis in Darfur could not be labelled as genocide because ‘intent to destroy’ could not be determined. The case was referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Meanwhile, the number of internationally displaced persons (IDPs) reached 2 million, with a further 18,000 dead (UN, 2005).

During 2006, attempts by UN peacekeeping troops to gain access to Darfur were repeatedly refused by President Omar al-Bashir. Humanitarian organisations were forced to shut down their operations. Not until April 2007 did al-Bashir accept the presence of 3000 UN troops to support the AU. By May 2007, there was increasing global awareness of the extremity of the situation for the IDPs and refugees from Darfur, and three global ‘Darfur Days’ expressed solidarity. In the later months of 2007, peace talks began between the SLA, the JEM and the Sudanese government, but differences persisted and violence continued.

In January 2008, Sudanese troops opened fire on the AU–UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) forces that had recently taken over the AMIS mission. In July 2008, the ICC announced findings that implicated al-Bashir in crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur. In October, al-Bashir made his first calls for peace, but these were labelled by the JEM and the SLA as attempts to distract attention from the ICC charges. Later that month, the Pan-African Parliament dismissed the principle of non-intervention in all African countries, including Darfur, as obsolete and no longer

acceptable. In March 2009, an arrest warrant was issued for al-Bashir on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity; subsequently, 13 humanitarian organisations were expelled and the JEM withdrew from peace talks. However, in early 2010, the ICC's appeals chamber ordered the court to reconsider whether genocide should be added to al-Bashir's list of charges, which eventually happened in July 2010. In February 2010, the JEM signed a peace accord with the Sudanese government and the conflict was declared over. Despite this, disputes continued over specific issues and conflict persisted between smaller rebel groups. This led to new peace talks and, in July 2011, to the Doha Agreement between the Sudanese government and the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), an umbrella organisation of 10 rebel groups formed in February 2010. This agreement includes provisions for a Darfuri vice-president, an administrative structure of three states of Darfur and a strategic regional authority, the Darfur Regional Authority, to coordinate the three states, ensure peace and security and oversee the reconstruction and development of the entire region of Darfur.⁶ Nevertheless, according to the arguments of the US Special Envoy to Sudan, Ambassador Smith, in an interview in September 2012, very little implementation of the Doha Agreement has been achieved and new concerns over security, stability and provisions for IDPs have arisen, sending alarming messages about a new round of crisis in the region.⁷

On the whole, international governments failed to act in a timely manner and this resulted in the death of 400,000 civilians, the displacement of 2,500,000 people and a trail of devastated villages and towns in Darfur. The international community had granted itself the power to act and the responsibility to protect citizens, but failed again. At the same time, the complexity of the factors involved and the different layers and levels of the conflict challenge simple explanations that employ 'barbarism' discourses. They therefore question the international community's understanding of the causes of conflict and the interventions needed from a 'responsibility' and 'humanitarian action' perspective. Yet, foreign governments are not the only actors that bear great power to influence; the far-reaching news media are held by some to be equally responsible for the global agenda, influencing the power of governments and therefore holding incredible power in the arena of the international politics of humanitarian crises.

Literature review

The way in which the media report humanitarian crises has become the subject of numerous debates concerning the producers, audience and content of news coverage. Many of these debates move around the 'responsibility to report' argument.

Foreign news reporting: Debates and concerns

Early studies drew conclusions about the news media's agenda in the coverage of international news. Galtung and Ruge's (1965) landmark study recognised 12 factors that influence foreign news reporting, including unambiguity, involvement of elites, ethnocentrism, negativity and unusualness. In a study of the press worldwide, Gerbner and Marvanyi (1977) identified the tendency of national media systems to first report foreign news from their own regions and then give attention to other regions. Later, Sreberny-Mohammadi (1984) introduced the idea of 'hot spots', according to which

there is more news attention given to areas where there is high political interest and military activity, while Elliott and Golding (2001) recognised the tendency for international news to tell domestic stories in a foreign setting. These arguments have highlighted the key role that individual, stakeholder, security and national interests play in shaping foreign news agenda and the dominance of an ethnocentric spirit in foreign news coverage.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) identified a complex process of media-system homogenisation. They found three dominant media system models in 18 West European and North American democracies: 'polarized pluralist', 'democratic corporatist' and 'liberal' models. They argued that homogenisation has developed to the extent that these three models (or variations of them) can be found in many non-Western regions of the world, such as Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. The homogenisation process can be explained, according to the authors, by historical connections, similarities in political structures and cultures and by the technological development, globalisation and neoliberalism that gathered speed in the 1980s and have continued to today.

Technological development has proliferated methods of global newsgathering and reporting (e.g. in the form of stringers, citizen reporters, the Internet), and foreign correspondents have found new technology both liberating (as it allows them to access remote geographical areas) and constraining (as it makes them vulnerable to manipulation by editors and elites). At the same time, globalisation and neoliberal forces have driven the emergence of multinational media companies and the rise of consequent debates on the nature of news media as a business, prompting concern that foreign news is being replaced with 'infotainment', which is deemed commercially more profitable (Minear et al., 1996: 35). With less attention being paid to important economic and political issues, there has been a decline in the number of specialist foreign news correspondents and a rise in celebrity, sports and fashion news. In this regard, Rotberg and Weiss (1996a) question whether the media have become 'shameless manipulators that are bound to convey shallow and misinformed conclusions' or 'helpless victims of the harsh economics of their industry' (p.4).

Why adopt a responsibility to report when reporting humanitarian crises?

Since the end of the Cold War and the resultant seismic shift in global politics, an increasing number of voices have suggested that news media should strengthen their role in setting the agenda of domestic and international governance. It is argued that this can be done by discarding passiveness and neutrality in coverage of foreign news and through adopting a responsibility to report.

This argument is rooted in debates concerning the role of the international community and global governance system in taking action to face international crises and humanitarian crimes. It has been deemed that state sovereignty is not a right, but a responsibility; states are obligated to protect their citizens in return for the guarantee of their sovereignty. It is increasingly considered that when states fail to fulfil their responsibilities, the international community should intervene (Hojjer, 2004; Williams and Bellamy, 2005). This cosmopolitan ideal, theorised in Beck's global cosmopolitanism, signifies that 'in a world of global crises and dangers produced by civilization, the old differentiations between internal and external, national and

international, us and them, lose their validity and a new cosmopolitan realism becomes essential to survival' (Beck, 2006: 14). This cosmopolitanism ideal is challenged by Calhoun (2002, 2003), who draws attention to the elitist, materialist and power-driven rhetoric and practices supporting what is fashionably called 'cosmopolitanism' and alleges that cosmopolitanism draws a false picture of globalisation and contemporary social relationships since it ignores the continuing importance of community, culture and other forms of solidarity. As regards the role of the media in the construction of the cosmopolitan ideal, Robertson (2010) contends that television news storytelling constructs a 'cosmopolitan imagination' and that the national perspective and its associated cultural and social contexts still matter for how news narratives present our world. Nevertheless, the 'cosmopolitanism' discourse and vision framed the decision of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) to introduce the idea of shared responsibility. This decision suggests that the international community must assume a shared 'responsibility to protect' – namely, to prevent, react and rebuild – when 'a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it' (ICISS, 2001: xi).

The increasingly diffused ideals of cosmopolitanism and shared responsibility send alarming calls for humanitarian action and intervention at various levels of agency internationally. Such calls not only concede the need for a new era of humanitarianism, but also involve heated debates around the contesting nature, characteristics and role(s) of humanitarianism today. Barnett and Weiss (2008) have brought to the fore the contention that humanitarianism is currently undergoing an identity crisis and is developing an ambivalent relationship with accountability, politics, power struggles, privatisation and corporate philanthropy and warlords. Similarly, journalist Linda Polman (2010) has put forward a polemic against humanitarian aid and humanitarian agencies (in their current form) and argues that humanitarianism is a massive, multi-million-pound industry that prolongs wars and empowers those involved in them. She offers a long list of contemporary civil wars, genocides and other humanitarian catastrophes in which humanitarian aid agencies have supported and empowered the crisis perpetrators, rather than the crisis victims; she argues that the agencies' neutrality and compassionate vision enable their work and funds to be extensively used and manipulated by those responsible for the crisis and those with a strong interest in its continuation. Hence, humanitarianism is presented as currently being under stress, with aid workers and agencies faced with inexorable ethical dilemmas around life-and-death decisions and related agendas.

There are also ethical questions concerning the humanitarian role of the media. Chouliaraki (2009) argues that transnational broadcasting primarily manages the visibility of distant suffering on the basis of its relevance to and infotainment capacity for the Western public, thus reproducing the moral deficiencies of global inequality. At the same time, she finds that, under certain technological and symbolic conditions, the media can produce a sense of moral responsibility and a burden of complicity in those who witness distant suffering, and can thus empower cosmopolitan communities of emotion and action. Chouliaraki (2008) introduces a view of mediation as moral education and of media representations as capable of fostering forms of action (e.g. humanitarian action) towards distant others and distant suffering. In a more critical vein, Cottle and Nolan (2007) discuss the loss of ethics within global humanitarianism and explain this loss by arguing that aid agencies' and non-governmental organisations'

(NGOs) strategies have become assimilated to the ‘media logic’ of branding, personalisation and commercialisation for the gain of media attention and publicity. Hammock and Charny (1996) suggest that ‘just as the media continue to rely on stereotypical images, so the relief agencies continue to perpetuate the images of helplessness and despondence among the beneficiaries of the work’, undervaluing in the process the ‘strength, dignity, and intelligence of the people’ (p.130). They contend that NGOs and the media have formed an ‘unholy alliance’, which reinforces patterns of domination and dependence and prevents long-term sustainable change (Hammock and Charny, 1996: 134). Although one could remark that such critical positions approach ethics of media coverage from a broader morality-driven perspective compared to the rather practice-oriented approach we take in this article, such a perspective constitutes part of the wider, partly normative and partly empirical, debate on how the media should and actually do cover times of humanitarian crisis, and on the role of ethics, morality and ‘responsibility to report’ in particular.

The claimed reality of cosmopolitanism and the advocacy of the paradigm of responsibility in global news reporting seriously challenge the traditional and institutionalised values of journalistic neutrality, accuracy, fairness and impartiality. Moeller (1999) argued that ‘objectivity in the face of rape, torture and mass murder is not possible’ (p.237). Cate (1996: 19) referred to fundamental difficulties in upholding accuracy and evaluation in the reporting of humanitarian crises. Martin Bell (1998), former BBC foreign correspondent, suggested a ‘journalism of attachment’ that ‘cares as well as knows; that is aware of its responsibilities; that will not stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor’ (p.16). Bell’s proposal for a journalism of attachment was strengthened by Minear et al.’s (1996) questioning of why journalists embark on their careers if not with the passion and personal interest to make a positive difference (p.33).

These positions on the question, ‘Why adopt a responsibility to report when reporting humanitarian crises?’, illustrate the existence of heterogeneous ideas, arguments and perspectives, all of which, however, can inform the emerging paradigm of ‘responsibility to report’ in the coverage of humanitarian crises. At the same time, such ideas, arguments and perspectives remain relatively prescriptive, and evidence is required regarding whether they are incorporated into coverage to increase understanding and visibility of crises without undermining the principles of professionalism and objectivity, instead placing these principles in a ‘responsibility to report’ framework.

Reporting humanitarian crises: A reality check

Existing research into the coverage of humanitarian emergencies has concluded that coverage is inadequate (Minear et al., 1996: 36).

The world’s deadliest crisis since World War II, the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which, according to the (IRC),⁸ led to 5.4 million deaths between 1998 and 2007, has received too little media attention. As Hollar (2009) notes, the lack of media coverage of the Congo crisis in American print and electronic media outlets can be explained by the complicated nature of the conflict and the fact that it did not serve US policy in the African continent, nor the narrative of the ‘war on terror’. Rotberg and Weiss’ (1996b) analysis of Burundi, Rwanda and South Africa contends

that 'humanitarian crises invariably rise to prominence rapidly but remain on the radar screen only briefly' (p.185). This is because when 'chronic disaster has become a normal way of life', it 'ceases to be news' (Benthall, 1993: 40). Ricchiardi (2005) demonstrated that US newspaper coverage of Darfur was minimal, with the majority of articles comprising 500 words or less. To explain the limited amount of coverage, Traquina (2004) argues that news is 'event-oriented', whereas humanitarian crises are issue-oriented and a significant amount of time may pass without there being anything new or spectacular to be reported. Furthermore, Girardet (2006: 57) argues that the media can only cope with reporting one disaster at a time; if another disaster occurs that embodies more of the desired foreign news values, news of other crises will be discarded (p. 57).

Regarding the characteristics of coverage, the Glasgow University Media Group found that the majority of reports concerning Rwanda 'made no attempt at a coherent political analysis, but concentrated on presenting shocking scenes of refugee movements' (Allen and Seaton, 1999: 2). Minear et al. (1996: 36) suggested that foreign news media explain too little cultural and historical context, and Murphy's (2007: 315) study of the US press narration of Darfur concluded that most articles recognise the complexity of the crisis, but do not make any attempt to go into detail. Shiras (1996: 97) explained that media and humanitarian organisations have a vested interest in oversimplifying complex situations to gain more attention, while Seib (2002: 1) believed simplified foreign news is a result of market manipulation of the audience's desire. Even when attempts to report in greater detail are made, this is often done through analogies with previous humanitarian crises. Murphy (2007) found that Darfur was often labelled 'the new Rwanda' or 'another Rwanda' in the US media, with little attempt made to explain why Rwanda is a moral equivalent of Darfur or to delineate the similarities between the two cases.

Across the literature, there is consensus that media coverage of humanitarian crises relies on official sources, such as aid agencies, policy-makers and governments. Kothari's (2010: 211) study of *The New York Times'* coverage of Darfur suggests that the use of official sources helps to maintain credibility. Traquina (2004: 101) has developed this idea and suggests that, as a result of deadlines and the need for immediacy, journalists adopt routines that involve official organisations, with news coverage featuring official sources. Kothari (2010) observes that there is a strong preference for the use of Western sources in the reporting of humanitarian crises. The absence of local sources perpetuates the images of the helpless victim and of Western heroes, and ignores local attempts at self-help. This appears to be the case, even though, according to Hammock and Charny (1996: 119), local agencies, local experts, local customs, local culture and local capacities provide the best and most efficient emergency-response systems. Furthermore, with a decline in the number of foreign correspondents, there is an increasing reliance on stories from international news agencies (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 2004), which further standardises news products.

Reporting the Darfur crisis: The 'responsibility to report' question

Thompson (2007) argues that the media should have learnt the lesson from their failure in the Rwandan genocide and given Darfur the attention it deserves. Yet, Darfur has

not 'become a mega-story, or a media sensation.... And that signals, once again, a media failure' (Thompson, 2007: 434).

Kothari's (2010: 222) empirical analysis of *The New York Times*' coverage concluded that the framing of the conflict depended predominantly on the type of primary sources used, the location of the journalist and the subject of the story. Kim et al. (2007) found that Canadian newspapers' coverage focused on multilateral/international help and people's suffering from the conflict more than did the US media coverage; the authors concluded that geopolitics had a direct effect on media coverage in the two countries. Furthermore, Waisbord (2008: 76) conducted an interview with Jan Eliasson, the UN Special Envoy to Darfur, who commented that the global media failed to highlight the main reasons for the tensions and to bring to the attention of the international community the situation in refugee camps and the problems over reoccupation of land. Murphy (2007) also analysed US press coverage and maintained that little attention was given to peace talks, with no real debate as to whether the United States could or should intervene.

A CARMA International (2006) study found that, in general, self-interest is a prerequisite for significant coverage of humanitarian crises by Western media and that self-interest is related more to politics and economics than to human suffering and humanitarianism. These trends appear to have significantly affected the coverage of Darfur, since, 'for the first eighteen months of the Darfur disaster, only 73 articles were written globally, as the disaster had not developed political capital – although as a humanitarian disaster, it most certainly had momentum' (CARMA International, 2006: 7). Prunier (2006) argues that the school of thought that explains conflicts by reference to ancient tribal hatreds prevailed in Western media coverage of Darfur, and De Waal (2005) argues that the US media mischaracterised the Darfur war as 'Arabs' killing 'Africans' (p.133). Quantitative and qualitative evidence shows that non-Sudanese media dedicated limited coverage to Darfur and adopted a strict self-oriented political framework lacking a human-interest framing of the crisis (Amman Community Net Cairo, Institute for Human Rights Studies International Media Support and Osservatorio di Pavia, 2009).⁹ From an African perspective, Alozie (2005) found in his framing analysis of the *Mail & Guardian Online* that this leading African news outlet did not offer extensive investigative reports on the causes and origins of the Darfur crisis, nor did it offer substantive suggestions for solving the crisis.

The evidence available about Darfur's media coverage in the West mainly concerns the US media. While this is useful secondary evidence, for the purposes of this study, it was necessary to undertake primary research of coverage from a British perspective. Relatively little research has explored the coverage of Darfur in the British media. One example is the work by Melvern (2006: 100), who argues that the British news media have failed to sufficiently explain the targeted nature of the killing in Darfur. The British government has accepted the 'responsibility to protect' and takes an active role in cosmopolitan global politics. Evidence is needed too on the attitudes and practices of the British media relating to the 'responsibility to report' paradigm. It is therefore appropriate to examine the British media coverage: it is an interesting case study and an analytically informative exemplar of Western media coverage. The examination of British media coverage will provide an understanding of the positioning of Western media in the 'responsibility to protect' and 'responsibility to report' ideas, in relation to trends and practices in past coverage. Hence, this article goes beyond the framing of the Darfur crisis and aims to capture the position of journalists concerning, on the one

hand, the values of traditional reporting and, on the other, the challenge of developing a personal association with the crisis and thus reporting elements of it relating to humanitarian action and intervention.

Methodology

Evidence is drawn from content analysis of British broadsheet¹⁰ coverage of Darfur.

The method

Content analysis (CA) is ‘a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication’ (Berelson, 1952: 74). It is suitable for analysing large amounts of text – which is not possible to handle through discursive analysis (Krippendorff, 2004: 42). The considerable amount of text that can be analysed through CA enables the scrutiny of media texts in particular (Deacon et al., 1999; Hansen et al., 1998) and ‘allows examination of a wide range of data over an extensive period to identify popular discourses and their likely meanings’ (Macnamara, 2005: 6). The media texts for analysis can be lengthy articles and commentaries of the kind that are often found in broadsheet newspapers. The larger the number of articles analysed, the more reliable and valid the results that are obtained.

The systematic nature of CA enables reliability and validity to be achieved. By turning observable phenomena into variables, an ‘operational measure is created that can be quantified and manipulated’ (Gunter, 2002: 210). There is a common tendency to consider CA as a quantitative method (its outputs consist of numbers and graphs), but it borrows elements from both qualitative and quantitative analytic approaches: ‘content analysis is and should be enriched by the theoretical framework offered by other more qualitative approaches, while bringing to these a methodological rigor, prescriptions for use, and systematicity rarely found in many of the more qualitative approaches’ (Hansen et al., 1998: 91).

Codebook and sample

In this study, CA enabled a theoretically informed systematic analysis and the generation of outputs that provide both quantitative and qualitative insights. The CA design consisted of a codebook that covers the targeted area of examination by addressing the following three themes:

1. *Characteristics of the news media’s coverage of the Darfur crisis:* Characteristics of coverage – such as length, focus or complexity, its relevance and the sources it used – can reveal how the British quality press has framed Darfur in general terms.
2. *Association of the news coverage of Darfur with humanitarian action:* The portrayal of humanitarian action and relevant actors in British broadsheet newspapers can offer evidence concerning the position of British journalists in humanitarian crises and whether they act as observers and reporters of facts more than as activists and adjudicators.
3. *Whether journalists associate themselves with Darfur:* Some journalists become activists, urging humanitarian intervention and taking on a responsibility to report

on the deep, often unexposed atrocities of a situation. But how regularly does this happen in the British broadsheet coverage of Darfur? Evidence can assist us in concluding whether a shift from traditional reporting (e.g. impartiality, professionalism, neutrality) to a journalism of attachment and responsibility has occurred or not.

The above-listed three themes allow us to trace the position of journalists in relation to, on the one hand, the values of traditional reporting and, on the other, the challenge of developing a personal association with the crisis and thus reporting elements of it relating to humanitarian action and intervention. Systematic thematic analysis of actual instances of reporting can achieve this aim more effectively than interviewing journalists. Interviews are likely to produce subjective, largely abstract and possibly defensive accounts of strategies for and approaches to crisis reporting that may not fully reflect the actual traits and practices involved in reporting. The decision to analyse reporting outputs and their key themes therefore ensures a more reliable analytical insight into crisis reporting and whether it adopts the ‘responsibility to report’ paradigm or not.

The sample of articles for analysis was selected via the LexisNexis database. Two keywords were used to search the population of articles available: ‘genocide’ and ‘Darfur’. The search was narrowed down to British broadsheets between the dates of 9 September 2004 (when Colin Powell labelled the atrocities as ‘genocide’, and also a sufficient period of time after the extreme violence began in April 2003 to allow international actors to elaborate on what had been happening in Darfur) and 24 February 2010 (when a ceasefire was signed in Khartoum). The search generated 928 articles. Systematic random sampling was employed to reduce the number of articles to 60 (i.e. every 15th article was selected). This sample (unit of analysis: ‘article’) represented all main broadsheet newspapers in Britain and allowed for the analysis of various types of coverage (news stories, feature articles, editorials, etc.).

Data analysis

The analysis was carried out on three levels corresponding with the thematic areas of the codebook. The inter-coder reliability test produced 87 per cent agreement. Once coding was completed, all coded data were input into SPSS. Statistical analysis of variables and areas of exploration generated frequencies, cross-tabulations and chi-square tests that tested bivariate associations between variables.

Results

Characteristics of coverage

Almost 70 per cent of the articles were published in *The Guardian* and *The Independent*; in contrast, coverage of Darfur was an exception in *The Telegraph* and *The Observer*. In the 60 articles identified through LexisNexis, coverage of Darfur was relatively episodic, giving credibility to Girardet’s (2006: 57) theory that news media can only deal with one crisis at a time. Between September 2004 and February 2010, the world witnessed the Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, the war in Iraq, the Haiti earthquake, a global financial crisis and other critical events. The humanitarian

crisis in Darfur became lost among other crises that were deemed more exceptional and sensational by news producers. Also, it was stretched out over a long period and, as Benthall (1993) suggests, when a disaster becomes routine, it ceases to be news.

The majority of articles (38)¹¹ took the format of traditional news stories, with only eight being feature articles and 12 being in a format where it would be acceptable to include opinion and move beyond event reporting (e.g. commentary, editorials, letters). The crisis in Darfur was a peripheral theme in 30 per cent of the articles, suggesting that, as a topic on the news agenda, Darfur was often mentioned in relation to other issues without really being at the core of journalistic interest.

A significant number of articles (20) focused on the politics of international intervention in Darfur, and only eight stressed the humanitarian crisis that was underway (Figure 1). The focus of the majority of articles (28) seemed to be on other issues, such as American foreign policy, China’s attempt to veto action, financial problems in Darfur and celebrities campaigning for intervention. This confirms findings that media coverage of Darfur mostly adopted a political framing of the crisis and emphasised international intervention and diplomatic policy rather than local events of humanitarian value (Amman Community Net Cairo, Institute for Human Rights Studies International Media Support and Osservatorio di Pavia, 2009). As regards the issue of celebrity campaigning, although celebrities drew attention to the humanitarian aspect of the crisis, the focus remained on the ‘celebrity’ element, rather than on ‘action for Darfur’. These focuses demonstrate that humanitarian crises are often framed on the basis of domestic interests, rather than as internal problems of the crisis victims. This trend marries with Minear et al.’s (1996) argument (p.38) that the coverage of international crises is not substantial if it is devoid of domestic interest and gives consideration to Seib’s (2002) suggestion that news organisations need to ‘rely less on governments’ priorities and take a more proactive approach when evaluating events around the world’ (p.3).

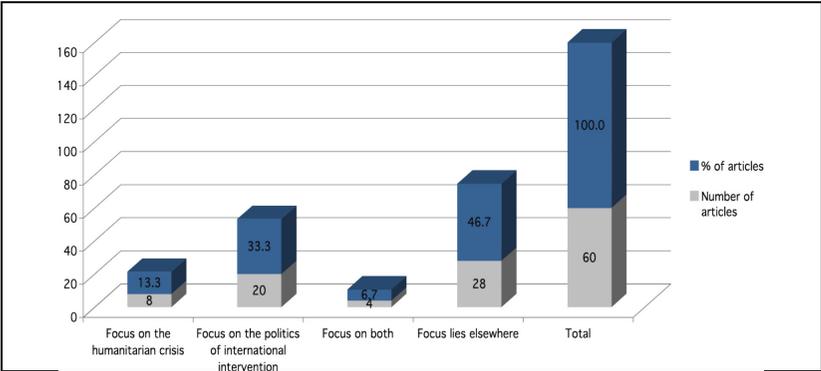


Figure 1. Focus of coverage.

The focus of coverage was related to the types of sources used. The overwhelming majority of articles used only official sources (75%); just 5 per cent of articles used unofficial sources and 15 per cent used a mixture of official and unofficial sources. The use of official sources helps to routinise the unexpected, giving credibility to the article. Most of the articles (53) used Western sources either on their own or in combination with other, non-Western sources. This continued predominance of Western sources

reiterates the maintenance of certain framings. Kothari (2010) suggests that dominance of Western sources maintains social norms and preserves socio-political hierarchies.

Usage of official and Western sources was reinforced by the continued use of ‘elite people’ and ‘elite nations’ (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) (Figure 2). Elite nations¹² were referenced in 85 per cent of the articles and elite people were present in 90 per cent of the articles. This confirms the theory of ‘geopolitical bias’ articulated by Gerbner and Marvani (1977) and Sreberny-Mohammadi’s (1984) concept of ‘hot spots’. The ‘elite people’ ranged from Khartoum officials to celebrities such as Steven Spielberg and George Clooney; the latter personified the ‘good face’ of the West. The presence of celebrities can create ‘infotainment’, making the news more commercial (Miner et al., 1996: 35). By referencing elite people and elite nations with which the British audience is familiar, domestic attachment can be created. Elliott and Golding (2001) concede that reporting foreign news in a domestic light contributes to the newsworthiness of a foreign news story, but argue that when it comes to the coverage of a humanitarian crisis, such orientation distracts the audience from the primary issue.

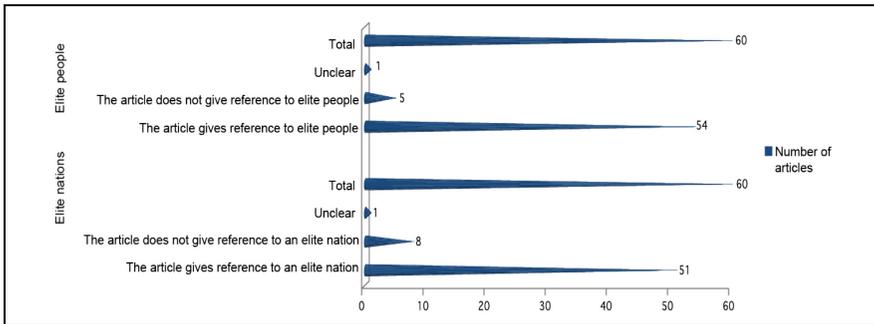


Figure 2. Elitism in coverage.

As mentioned above, there has long been a tradition of reporting events rather than long-standing issues. This concerns the ‘timeliness’ of events (Galtung and Ruge, 1965), which is one of the major ‘news values’ that explains poor coverage of lasting humanitarian crises. Here, an even split between event- and issue-oriented articles appeared that was not associated with the type of article. It is positive that British broadsheet newspapers have recognised Darfur as an ongoing issue, even if its coverage is sporadic and marginalised among other stories. On the other hand, this does not legitimise the claim that there has been a serious shift away from event-oriented reporting.

Another typical characteristic of news media is ‘negativity’. In our sample, the atmosphere was predominately negative, with only 8.3 per cent of articles demonstrating any positivity with regard to the crisis. Negative coverage can have implications for attempts to agree on peace and the development of political and other action. In the earlier-mentioned interview, Eliasson explained that negative news causes a problem for diplomacy and contended that military operations are more likely to be reported in the media than peace talks (Waisbord, 2008: 79–80). The articles showed no evidence of positivity with regard to peace talks, in a way indicating that development and peace do not constitute news.

Analysis of the coverage of the complicated political context surrounding the Darfur crisis found that the majority of articles (60%) neglected to provide such context, despite the fact that it was essential to understanding the crisis. Depoliticising a situation is a way to make news more approachable; however, it can generate views that ethnic conflict emerges in part as ‘a kind of lazy shorthand for beastly wars’ (Allen and Seaton, 1999: 3). Another large majority of articles (72%) did not explain the targeted nature of the killings, despite the fact that it is this parameter that pushes conflicts beyond civil war and justifies international intervention. Difficulties faced by refugees were explained in about half of the articles, but 11 articles did not even mention refugees. In his 2008 interview, Eliasson raised concerns that the media were missing important details about the suffering of refugees (Waisbord, 2008). Hoijer (2004) suggested that victims are not considered ‘worthy’ of attention if they are not victims of a state that is an enemy to the West (p.517). Absence of attention to context and victims, which is vital to understanding the urgent need for global action, is symptomatic of a humanitarian crisis that does not affect Western populations.

The majority of articles did not use analogies to assist in the explanation of Darfur; those that used an analogy mostly drew comparison with Rwanda, the genocide preceding Darfur. There are parallels here with Melvern’s (2006) and Murphy’s (2007) findings; however, it should also be borne in mind that such analogies can dismiss the complexity of individual crises, removing the extraordinariness of the situation and devaluing the crisis as a whole.

Darfur coverage and humanitarian action

Turning our attention to the representation of other actors in the Darfur crisis, foreign governments were mentioned in the majority of articles (42). Given the focus on the politics of intervention mentioned above, it is important to examine how foreign governments were reported. Fewer than half of the articles (27) criticised foreign governments for their approach to and/or action for Darfur, but no article offered praise without criticism. Criticisms largely referred to China’s politics in Sudan and to foreign governments’ delayed acknowledgement of the Darfur genocide. On the other hand, 38 articles (63.3%) did not mention the AU at all, despite it being the only formally established regional organisation that acted in favour of the peacekeeping forces in the area. When the AU was mentioned, it was done either neutrally (11) or negatively (9). External intervention by foreign governments and regional organisations is often the only means of bringing a halt to violence and the press has a dual responsibility: to call governments to action and to provide accurate descriptions of the results of policy, especially when governments are unresponsive (Seib, 2002: 9–10). Despite the criticism of foreign governments, the media’s role as a fourth estate in this crisis remained unfulfilled. The British quality press appears to have made no real attempt to hold the international community accountable for its failure to bring wider condemnation to the events in Darfur and to halt the violence.

The coverage of legislation and international agreements on humanitarian crimes and genocides was limited. A minority of articles referred to the ‘responsibility to protect’ legislation or the 1948 Genocide Convention (10), while 50 articles did not mention any agreements aimed at strengthening the ‘never again’ promise of the international community. Coverage of humanitarian organisations was also neglected by the majority of articles (47). Just five articles purely praised humanitarian

organisations for their activity in Darfur (Figure 3), despite there being 98 different organisations trying to help the victims of the genocide (Justice Africa Sudan, 2007). Rotberg and Weiss (1996b) suggested that the complex relationship between policy-makers, humanitarian agencies and the media often results in misrepresentation of humanitarian organisations. In this sample, the absence of coverage of humanitarian organisations indeed creates misrepresentation, as it suggests that Darfur did not receive humanitarian assistance. This finding is not sufficient to prove Girardet’s (2006: 55) theory that humanitarian organisations overlook the need to disseminate information to the media, nor to claim that it is the media that overlook humanitarian organisations. Nevertheless, the neglect of coverage reinforces the argument that the media continue to fail to make associations with humanitarian action, suggesting that print media in particular are being left behind in a move towards a cosmopolitan world order. This is particularly important in the context of critiques concerning the identity crisis of contemporary humanitarianism (Barnett and Weiss, 2008) and how humanitarian aid agencies often prolong war and crises by taking a neutral position and being business-minded (Polman, 2010). In this respect, the print media examined here appear to have failed to take account of such critiques and to assess humanitarianism in such a way as to contribute to the accountability and positive action of those representing humanitarian aid.

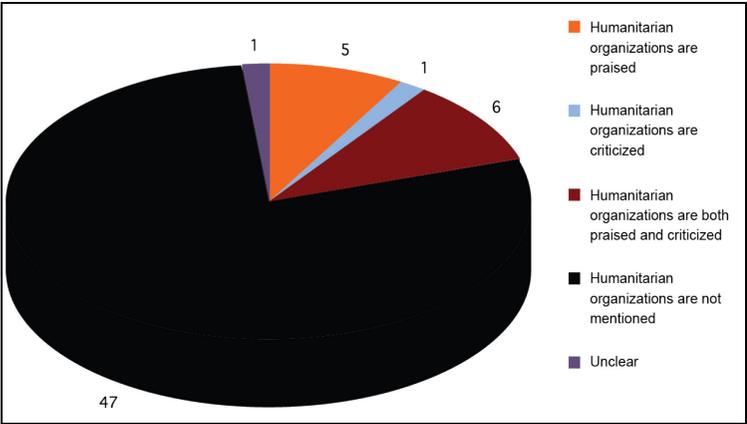


Figure 3. Humanitarian organisations in coverage.

Finally, the analysis opposes Minear et al.’s (1996) argument that ‘persons affected by international crises often are portrayed as helpless victims who are dependent on, and take liberties with, international largesse’ (p.37). We found that whereas instances of self-help are hardly represented (two examples of self-help reported), it is positive that there is an absence of coverage depicting foreign aid workers as ‘white heroes’ who save the ‘victim’ population of Darfur. Almost all articles (55) did not make reference to foreign aid workers in Darfur, with just two articles presenting them as ‘white heroes’. Military involvement of the country brings patriotism in the national media and, thus, it is likely that the absence of international political and military intervention in Darfur contributed to the absence of reference to ‘white heroes’, which, according to Hammock and Charny (1996), is one of the conventions of media coverage of distant crises. At the same time, this finding reinforces the overall picture

drawn so far: that of a lack of focus on humanitarian and emotionally attaching activity in Darfur.

Darfur coverage and ‘responsibility to report’

The (article) author was unidentifiable in 22 articles. In 15 articles, the authors were specialists, such as Alex de Waal, an expert on Sudan who has actively taken part in advising in the peace negotiations between the Sudanese government, Janjaweed and the SLA. A small number of authors were foreign correspondents (7) or African correspondents (4), whereas a larger number of authors were general reporters (11) whose connection (geographical and professional) with the conflict was loose and occasional. The costs involved in accessing certain areas have been argued to be the reason for the rise of international news agencies as dominant sources of foreign news (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 2004).

The loose connections of many journalists with the Darfur crisis can be seen in the absence of ‘experience sharing’, with experience referring to forms of involvement, such as witnessing, practical involvement, talking/interviewing, reflection and others. The analysis finds that just seven journalists commented on and shared their personal experiences and feelings with the readers. Including personal experiences in articles creates an association with the crisis. Furthermore, the use of personal experiences demonstrates that journalism does not have to stand ‘neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor’ (Bell, 1998: 16). The small number of articles that did include personal experiences does not allow us to argue that British journalism is undergoing significant changes in the way it reports humanitarian crises. The limited sharing of experience correlates with the author of the article; foreign correspondents and specialists were more likely to include a commentary on their experience in Darfur (Table 1). This association is important as the number of foreign correspondents has declined and, thus, the coverage of conflict is more likely to omit the actual story and to lack an insider’s perspective.

Table 1. Personal experiences and the author.

		Personal experiences shared	Personal experiences not shared
General reporter	Number of articles	0	11
	Percentage of articles where authors share personal experiences	0	20.8
Foreign correspondent	Number of articles	3	4
	Percentage of articles where authors share personal experiences	42.9	7.5
Specialist	Number of articles	3	12
	Percentage of articles where authors share personal experiences	42.9	22.6
Africa correspondent	Number of articles	0	4
	Percentage of articles where authors share personal	0	7.5

	experiences		
Reprinted from	Number of articles	0	1
newswire	Percentage of articles where authors share personal experiences	0	1.9
Unclear	Number of articles	1	21
	Percentage of articles where authors share personal experiences	14.3	39.6

χ^2 : 10.815, df: 5, p = .055.

As shown below (Figure 4), fewer than half of the articles urged some sort of intervention, with most referring to political (21.7%) rather than humanitarian intervention (13.3%). This demonstrates that the British press still relies on and links reporting to official politics and governmental authorities in the country and around the world, neglecting the need for and potential results of humanitarian and less-politically driven agency. This also shows that the British press emphasised the political side of the crisis, finding it hard to use words denoting genocide and humanitarian disaster, which would require journalists to conduct a more rebellious, highly motivated and revolutionary campaign for the end of the crisis. McChesney (2010: 202) suggests that conservatism in news media exists because opinions stand in the way of increased profits. Alternatively, it is likely that many journalists have not yet deemed it acceptable to break traditional values of journalism, and maintain that opinion and attachment should be confined to opinion pages and editorials and never provoke real action (Tester, 2001: 25).

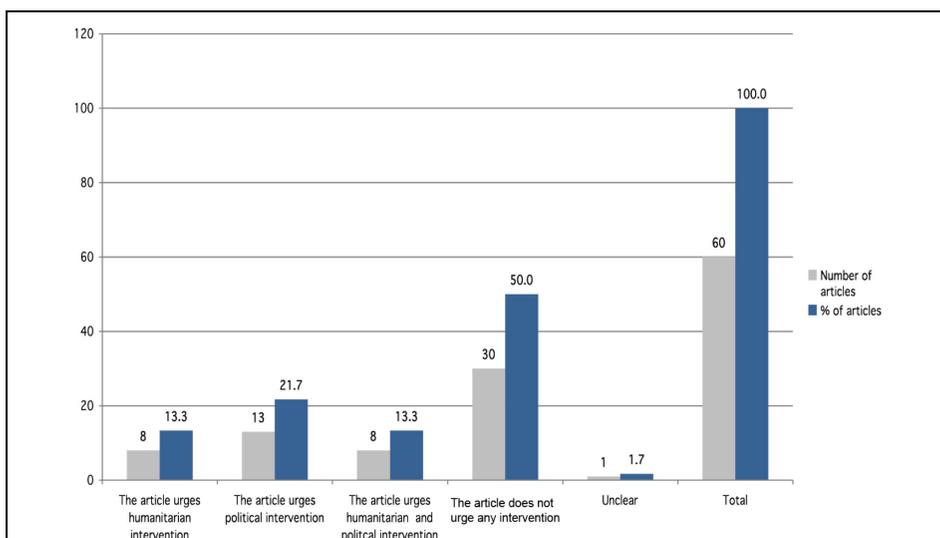


Figure 4. Intervention in coverage.

An association was found when comparing journalists who urged action with those who shared personal experiences (Table 2). This association demonstrates that

journalists who commented on and shared their personal experiences in or around Darfur were more likely to urge action than those who did not. This means that personal attachment and insight make journalists more interested in exposing crises, in suggesting political or humanitarian action (as appropriate) and, thus, in protecting the victims of crises.

Table 2. Experiences and urging of intervention.

		Urges humanitarian intervention	Urges political intervention	Urges both humanitarian and political intervention	Does not urge any intervention	Unclear
Experiences shared	Number of articles	1	3	3	0	0
	Percentage of articles urging humanitarian intervention	12.5	23.1	37.5	0	0
Experiences not shared	Number of articles	7	10	5	30	1
	Percentage of articles urging humanitarian intervention	87.5	76.9	62.5	100.0	100.0

χ^2 : 10.923, *df.* 4, *p* = .027.

It is also interesting to assess whether journalists' connection with the idea of 'responsibility to protect' through responsible reporting and by urging intervention is related to general characteristics of coverage. Articles that did not explain the plight of refugees were significantly less likely to urge political or humanitarian intervention (χ^2 : 24.100, *p* = .020). In addition, the articles that offered a negative portrayal of the events during the crisis were significantly less likely to urge intervention to encounter the crisis (χ^2 : 24.049, *p* = .020).¹³ Table 3 shows that when the heart of the coverage was the humanitarian character of the crisis or the politics of international intervention, it was more likely that humanitarian or political intervention would be urged than when the focus of the coverage was something else.

Table 3. Focus of coverage and urging of intervention.

Focus of coverage		Urges humanitarian intervention	Urges political intervention	Urges both humanitarian and political intervention	Does not urge any intervention	Unclear
Humanitarian crisis	Number of articles	2	2	1	3	0
	Percentage of articles urging intervention	25.0	15.4	12.5	10.0	.0
Politics of international intervention	Number of articles	5	7	0	8	0
	Percentage of articles urging intervention	62.5	53.8	0	26.7	0
Both	Number of articles	0	1	3	0	0
	Percentage of articles urging intervention	0	7.7	37.5	0	0
Elsewhere	Number of articles	1	3	4	19	1
	Percentage of articles urging intervention	12.5	23.1	50.0	63.3	100.0

χ^2 : 28.322, *df*: 12, *p* = .005.

Finally, it is important to consider the level of neutrality, as this can demonstrate the degree of attachment to the issue reported. The majority of articles (35) upheld the tradition of neutral reporting and only 21 showed clear attachment to the crisis and adopted responsibility to report. This is confirmed by the association of ‘neutrality’ of coverage with the ‘urging of intervention’, with neutral articles being significantly less likely to urge humanitarian or political intervention (χ^2 : 93.038, *df*: 12, *p* = .000). These figures suggest that, regardless of the changes happening in the news media and the increasing level of global compassion as a result of globalisation, British broadsheet papers retain traditional practices and values on reporting (such as ‘neutrality’) that are wrongly conflated with professional, objective and trustworthy reporting. The association between ‘neutrality’ – namely, the lack of attachment of the journalist to the nature, effects or future course of the conflict – and the absence of urges for intervention essentially shows that traditional reporting is still prominent and precludes the reporting of controversial matters of crisis, thus seriously impeding the paradigm of ‘responsibility to report’ from being fully endorsed. This finding raises questions about the future look and content of the framework of values, principles and practices of reporting as well as about the journalist of the future and how best she or he will serve the profession’s social mission and its fourth-estate role in an increasingly globalised and simultaneously disparate world.

Concluding discussion

As the global media have become able to reach increasingly hostile environments, the presence of news media is increasingly becoming the difference between life and death (Cate, 1996: 18). The situation in Darfur was no different. This has led to growing calls for journalism to evolve from a passive and neutral profession to a craft of reporting that can strike a balance between conveying sheer horror and emotional reactions and conveying the political, social, economic, military, cultural and relief/development issues underlying crises (Shiras, 1996: 94). Yet, despite the calls for news media to accept responsibility to report (Bell, 1998; Minear et al., 1996; Seib, 2002; Tester, 2001; Thompson, 2007) and to clearly link reporting with international authorities’ responsibility to protect, this study found that centuries-old foreign news values and characteristics continue to mark British press coverage of humanitarian crises. It is ultimately the news values of elite people, elite nations and negativity that determine coverage, with official and Western sources continuously being used to maintain credibility and identification with the domestic setting. Geopolitical bias and hot spots continue to make stories newsworthy and political context remains scant. Coverage of Darfur in the British quality press remains confined to traditional reporting styles and there is nothing that indicates a move towards journalism of attachment or responsibility to report. The evidence presented here does not suggest that the press in Britain or in similar news media systems is anywhere near to fulfilling its position as a fourth estate. Despite the independence of news corporations and increasing access to information, there is little evidence of news media holding governments accountable for policies on humanitarian crises and particularly on genocides. Finally, in the British quality press, there is little devotion to personal opinion or emotive expression, thus maintaining the long-standing values of neutrality and passivity. The sparse use of foreign correspondents and the meagre inclusion of personal experiences demonstrate

that journalists do not become attached to the reported crisis and are inclined to urge for political intervention rather than humanitarian intervention to stop crises.

It is clear that the reporting of the Darfur crisis in the British quality press concealed the complexities of the crisis while being too close to the national interests of Britain and too far away from the rapidly emerging and increasingly important 'responsibility to report' paradigm. This conclusion does not support Minear et al.'s (1996) argument that the news media 'have become a major humanitarian actor in their own right' (p. ix). Furthermore, it shows that there are significant changes to be made to the profession in order to switch to a cosmopolitan way of reporting and to begin incorporating attachment and responsibility. It asserts that certain news values remain dominant, and raises the concern that news media and humanitarian organisations do not appear to be working together to help those most at risk. This study found a relative shift (though not a sea change) to issue-oriented reporting and found that a small number of journalists (in Britain) do incorporate personal experiences and opinions in order to draw attention to crises.

These findings do not provide evidence as to why the media do not carry out their responsibility. However, the findings do make a contribution to the debate concerning whether the media and their representation of suffering and crisis can trigger action. This is a debate loudly echoed in Sontag's (1979) critique of photojournalism and in Linfield's (2010) advocacy of photography. Specifically, Sontag (1979) argued that 'images transfix. Images anesthetize ... The vast photographic catalogue of misery and injustice throughout the world has given everyone a certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem more ordinary ... remote ... inevitable' (pp.20–21). On the other hand, Linfield (2010) contended that images of suffering are ethically and politically important, as atrocities shown in photographs can trigger reflection and mindful compassion, and can hopefully drive change if looked at and used properly. Our findings highlight the need to complement professionalism and objectivity in coverage with a strong sense of responsibility to report. The latter does not challenge the former, but, rather, enables what has been found to be a currently missing reflection on the multiplicity of local, regional, national and international factors that drove the crisis in Darfur (Melvern, 2006). Such a reflection on causes could put journalists in the position of accounting for the actions, omissions and possible liabilities of the international community, as well as for their own roles in resolving crises like Darfur. 'Attachment' and 'responsibility to report' are important principles not only because they add value to the fourth estate and the humanitarian role that the media are called on to play today, but also because they allow a thorough representation of the causes of conflict and the reasons why humanitarian action that goes beyond geopolitics, national agendas and ethnocentric discourses is greatly needed. 'Attachment' and 'responsibility to report' are important for disentangling the arguably contested role of humanitarianism in crises, and in relation to the ethics surrounding the humanitarian role of the media per se.

The case of Darfur examined here enables research to assess the politics of representation of other humanitarian crises, and to compare British coverage with coverage in other parts of the world so as to reliably evaluate the broader position of the 'responsibility to report' paradigm. At the same time, it offers fertile ground for comparison with other humanitarian catastrophes, such as the 187,000 deaths during the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster in 2004, the media coverage of which appeared to adhere to the 'responsibility to report' paradigm and mobilised humanitarian aid

agencies, national government authorities, transnational activist bodies and international governance organisations. Such comparisons may say something meaningful about the factors that influence the role of the ‘responsibility to report’ paradigm in media coverage of humanitarian crises and whether this role is determined by the duration of the crisis; the acuteness of the crisis’s events; the geographic region where the crisis takes place; the natural, political or other drivers of the crisis; or other factors.

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Notes

1. See <http://www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm>
2. For a summary, see http://www.un.org/summit2005/presskit/fact_sheet.pdf
3. Objectivity and the related notions of professionalism, neutrality and impartiality have long been discussed as a panacea for liberal journalism. However, critical reflections on definition, feasibility and appropriateness of ‘objective’ journalism have recently been proposed (e.g. Cunningham, 2003). For reporting conflict, it has been argued that objectivity often privileges elites, favours event over process and supports ‘dualism’ in relation to causes and outcomes of conflict (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 209). Objectivity arguably leads to violence-orientated coverage that can do little to turn war reporting into peace reporting (McGoldrick, 2006). Some of these critiques are considered here, but not in contrast with the ‘responsibility to report’ paradigm.
4. The militia became known as the Janjaweed, which aptly translates as ‘devil on horseback’.
5. China buys 10 per cent of its oil from this North African country (Worth, 2007).
6. The draft text of the Agreement can be found at http://www.sudantribune.com/IMG/pdf/DPA-_Doha_draft.pdf
7. The interview transcript can be found at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201209200049.html>
8. The full International Rescue Committee (IRC) report on the Congo crisis can be found at <http://www.rescue.org/special-reports/special-report-congo-y>
9. On the other hand, the Sudanese media covered the crisis more extensively than the non-Sudanese media, but, like the non-Sudanese media, they adopted a political framing of the crisis. Censorship and domestic politics played a role in the Sudanese media’s coverage, giving space to biased and highly politicised reporting (Amman Community Net Cairo, Institute for Human Rights Studies International Media Support and Osservatorio di Pavia, 2009).
10. Newspapers remain a fundamental provider of news in Britain. Broadsheet newspapers have long maintained their reputation as quality news providers – in contrast to the tabloid press – and they are where the British public is most likely to find extensive and diverse coverage of the Darfur crisis.
11. For many of the results, raw numbers are reported instead of percentages due to the rather small sample size.
12. By ‘elite nations’, we mean the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). China and United States were the most frequently mentioned elite nations. As China is taking an increasingly influential position in global politics and economics, news coverage has granted more attention to it than to the actual region of crisis or to countries directly involved in peacekeeping for Darfur.
13. The significance of this association has to be treated with caution due to the large number of negative articles in the sample.

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