

**“Trail of Corpses”: *Newsweek*, *Time*, and U.S. News & World Report’s
Coverage of Genocide in Southern Sudan, 1989-2005**

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Abstract

This study examines how three U.S. national magazines, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, framed the conflict in southern Sudan. Based on a textual analysis of the reports, the most salient frame associated with the conflict throughout all the coverage was that it was a “religious” civil war. In all three magazines, two dominant themes emerged: famine and the way children were being affected by the war. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: civil war, genocide, framing, magazines, southern Sudan

Introduction

Her plight alerted the world to widespread suffering; her fate remains unknown. The image of a small, starving Sudanese girl, too weak to walk, with a vulture waiting behind her, garnered international attention and earned its photographer a Pulitzer.¹ The little girl, along with children who followed a “trail of corpses” to refugee camps, was one of the millions affected by the civil war between the Muslim-dominated northern Sudan and the Christian and animist southern part of the country.² Approximately two million people died in the conflict.

The famine that produced that infamous photograph was just one of the many terrible results of a racial and religious campaign the government waged against its own citizens in the South, a campaign that qualified as genocide, based on the United Nations’ definition. In fact, on June 16, 1999, a U.S. House Congressional Resolution condemned the Sudanese government “for its genocidal war in southern Sudan.”³ Despite the attention the photograph received, despite the strong language of that resolution, there were no cries for international intervention and no widespread use of the word “genocide.”⁴ It would be nearly five years later, when the government waged a similar campaign in the western Darfur region of the country, that the world would associate the regime with genocide.⁵

The failure of the U.S. media to call the conflict in southern Sudan what it was, genocide, is just the latest example of the media’s misreporting some of the world’s worst

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problems, particularly the problems of African countries.⁶ Franks argued the continent “rarely” makes news “except as a backdrop to disaster or as the scene of a celebrity visit.”⁷ Even this disaster, a genocidal campaign lasting for decades, failed to spur any real action from the international community. Media attention and change are cyclical, and with coverage often comes action.⁸ The historical context and media coverage of the southern Sudan conflict, an understudied topic, is more important than ever, as South Sudan begins its transition into a sovereign nation, after seceding from the north, on July 9, 2011.⁹

This study is a comprehensive examination of three U.S. national news magazines, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, to determine how the north and south Sudanese conflict was framed. News magazines, since their beginnings, have worked to establish themselves as a “national leaders” in both informing and interpreting events and stories for readers.¹⁰ Understanding how these magazines covered the conflict could explicate how readers regarded it across the United States and the world. Articles concerning Sudan from January 1, 1989, when rumors of an eventual military coup began, through September 1, 2005, one month after the death of southern rebel leader John Garang, are included in this research. The study further examines what themes are associated with the civil war in each of the news magazines.

Defining Genocide

Genocides have been woven into the fabric of human existence; governments and people in positions of power have targeted groups for extinction due to their religion, ethnicity, or political stance throughout recorded history.¹¹ For centuries, however, this crime against humanity went without name. During the Holocaust of World War II, a Jewish scholar decided that the crime of targeting a group of people for annihilation deserved a name. Raphael Lemkin escaped Poland after the Nazi invasion, moving first to Sweden before coming to the United States. After laboring over a name, he derived the word genocide from the Greek *geno*, or race, and the Latin *cide*, or killing.¹²

Defining genocide became a much more difficult task than naming it. On the international stage, critics argued genocide did not need to be further defined or separated from other crimes against humanity; it was already covered under human rights laws. Numbers were also at the crux of the argument. Questions arose over just how many people needed to be targeted in order to constitute genocide. Policymakers expressed fears that if a certain number were specified, “perpetrators would be granted a free reign up to a dastardly point.”¹³ In the United States, some senators voiced concerns the definition was too general, which might implicate the United States in the deaths of Native Americans, or not general enough, which would mean the Soviet Union would face no repercussions for political killings.¹⁴ Lemkin soldiered on, lobbying anyone with any kind of power to sway the vote. The core of his argument was the idea that “the destruction of foreign national or ethnic identities would bring huge losses to the world’s cultural heritage. All of humankind, even those who did not feel vulnerable to genocide, would suffer.”¹⁵

In 1951, the United Nations convened the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and finally defined genocide in a resolution. The declaration affirmed that genocide “whether committed in a time of peace or in a time of war, is a crime under international law.”¹⁶ Five acts “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” constituted genocide.¹⁷ These five acts included: “killing members of the group,” “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group,” “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part,” “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group,” and “forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”¹⁸ The following section briefly outlines the history of Sudan, and how these atrocities came to take place there.

A Civil War without End

The foundation for the conflict between north and south Sudan was laid by British colonial rule. The British conquered Sudan “in the name of Egypt” and was initially covered in the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement signed in 1899.¹⁹ As is the case today, then the northern part of Sudan was home to lighter-skinned Arab-speaking Muslims. In the south, darker-skinned Christian and animist tribes, such as the Dinka and the Nuer, made up the majority. Following a revolution in Egypt in 1924, the British began to change the way they ruled Egypt and Sudan. In particular, they supported Christian missionaries in the south to combat the growth of Islam in the north. The “Southern Policy” developed by the British served “to protect the southern Sudanese from the external and alien influences of Arabic and Islam.”²⁰

Two years after Sudan gained its independence from Britain in 1956, violence erupted between the North and the South. General Ibrahim Abbud took control of the government in a military coup in 1958. His policies advocated for a conversion to Islam for the South, and he instituted a government-run school system, with classes taught in Arabic. Abbud’s policies served as the spark to ignite the civil war that would carry on for decades past his resignation in 1964.²¹

Colonel Ja’afar Muhammad Numeiri headed the government that followed Abbud, and in 1972, Numeiri brokered a peace agreement with the southern rebels who opposed the northern dominance. The peace held until Numeiri introduced Sharia Islamic law, and the fighting began again. Sudan became entangled “in a war over the question of identity.”²² The conflict continued through another change in government in 1989, this time with the current president of the country at the head, Lt. Gen. Omar al-Bashir.²³ For the next 22 years, the fighting raged on, in which time Sudan would be described as “a country embroiled in the longest-running civil war in the world, a conflict that has claimed more lives than Kosovo, Bosnia, Somalia and Chechnya combined.”²⁴ The following section outlines how such events in Africa, and around the world, have been framed by the U.S. media in the past.

Literature Review

Although a strong body of literature exists on both framing and U.S. media coverage of Africa in general, only a few known studies focus exclusively on Sudan, and all examined coverage of Darfur.²⁵ This study seeks to fill that gap in research, and provide insight into how *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report* framed the southern Sudan conflict. Understanding how these magazines covered the conflict is important, because these publications have been “one of the most common sites for national reminiscence” throughout the last few decades.²⁶

Framing

Framing has been defined as a process of “culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation.”²⁷ Framing takes facts, which alone have no “intrinsic meaning”²⁸ and makes them both significant and understandable to the reader. Framing may allow the reader to comprehend a story, but it also limits how a story is told. Frames direct the audience toward a particular aspect of a story, thereby eliminating other components or viewpoints.²⁹

Frames can be created both intentionally and unintentionally; Gamson argued that journalists should be considered “sponsors of frames.”³⁰ The unintentional or unconscious frames could be present only to provide context for the information, while intentional frames could serve the agenda of the source. Frames are not only determined by what they include, but by what is omitted.³¹ Frames can be created not only through words, but also by images as well. Messaris and Abraham argued “the special qualities of visuals—their iconicity, their indexicality, and especially their syntactic implicitness—makes them very effective tools for framing and articulating ideological messages.”³²

How similar stories could be framed differently was demonstrated in the findings of Entman’s seminal study on the U.S. media’s coverage of the KAL and Iran Air incidents.³³ In 1983, when a Soviet fighter plane shot down a Korean Air Lines plane, killing more than 250 people, U.S. media framed the story as “moral outrage.”³⁴ *Time* declared on its cover that the Soviets were “Shooting to Kill,” a sentiment echoed by *Newsweek*’s “Murder in the Air” cover. In 1988, under similar conditions, a U.S. Navy Ship shot down an Iran Air flight, killing nearly 300 people. The U.S. media framed this incident as an accident, however, blaming the deaths on a technical problem. In contrast to KAL, *Time* mentioned the Iran Air story only in a small tab in the corner of the magazine; *Newsweek* placed it on the cover, calling it “The Gulf Tragedy.”³⁵

International News Coverage

Framing has been used to examine how the U.S. news media cover, or fail to cover, international news. Kothari examined the framing of Sudan’s Darfur conflict in *The New York Times* from 2003 through 2006.³⁶ Through a textual analysis of coverage and interviews with journalists, the author determined individual biases and perspectives of the journalists involved in coverage influenced the frame-building process.³⁷ The textual analysis of coverage

revealed four salient frames: United States as savior of Sudanese people, ethnic conflict, fatalist, and hybrid.³⁸ Eke examined U.S. television network news coverage of the genocide in Darfur and found that the crisis initially went unnoticed.³⁹ He found that only after celebrities began advocating for Darfur coverage, did the television networks begin paying attention. He argued the lack of coverage had “the potential to prolong the plight of Darfurians who have been killed, raped, starved and displaced.”⁴⁰

The U.S. media’s coverage of Africa in general has long been criticized for being based only on negative deviance and for being shallow and superficial.⁴¹ That is, when Africa receives coverage at all. Golan argued that Africa receives little coverage on U.S. television newscasts, despite famines, civil wars, and health crises, demonstrating a geographic imbalance in international coverage.⁴² He found African countries with economic ties to the United States and high GDPs, such as Egypt and Nigeria, were more likely to receive coverage than smaller, developing countries.⁴³

Moeller argued this constant focus on conflict and famine in Africa and other developing countries creates compassion fatigue.⁴⁴ She argued that compassion fatigue “reinforces simplistic, formulaic coverage” and inflates the criteria necessary for a crisis to receive attention.⁴⁵ Contributing to compassion fatigue also are photographs of conflict and war, which Griffin argued follow “a narrow range of predictable, recurrent motifs.”⁴⁶ Even ads from agencies such as Save the Children can oversaturate the U.S. audience. Moeller further posited that the U.S. media have a tendency to focus only on one crisis at a time; if one atrocity is receiving coverage, a similar one will not.⁴⁷

Nowhere was this criticism more applicable than in the most notorious genocide of the past 25 years, Rwanda in 1994. The genocidal conflict in Bosnia, which was happening about the same time, received widespread coverage and international assistance.⁴⁸ The violence in Rwanda garnered barely any coverage until after the fighting was finished and 800,000 people were dead, indicative of a “troubling apathy” toward Africa by the U.S. and European media.⁴⁹ Kuperman argued the Western media made critical mistakes in the earliest days of the genocide, including framing it simply as a civil war or tribal conflict.⁵⁰

Scholars argue African conflicts are often depicted this way in the U.S. media in order to simplify the story for the reader, allowing him or her to determine which side is good and bad and which side should be supported.⁵¹ Fair and Parks contended that Rwanda posed a difficult challenge for journalists, because both Tutsis and moderate Hutus were being slaughtered.⁵² This difficulty in determining who should be supported led to a decrease in coverage of the killings. Instead, reporters focused much of their attention on the refugee camps, which were actually filled by the people responsible for the genocide. As the Rwandan Patriotic Front pushed into Rwanda to end the war, the perpetrators of the genocide fled into the neighboring countries. This nuance, however, was lost in the coverage, and the people the media depicted as being so in need had actually just slaughtered their neighbors. Furthermore, aerial coverage of the camps served to keep the audience “distant and safe from any actual conflict, and from the complications of explanation.”⁵³

Research Questions

This study examined how *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report* covered the conflict between north and south Sudan. The following research questions were considered:

RQ1: How much coverage did the conflict between north and south Sudan receive in *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report*?

RQ2: How did *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report* frame the conflict between north and south Sudan?

RQ3: What themes emerged in the coverage of the conflict in *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report*?

Methodology

To determine how *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report* framed the north and south Sudan civil war, and the themes associated with coverage, data were collected from ArticlesPlus in the EBSCOhost database containing the three magazines' archives. Each magazine was searched separately for the keyword “Sudan” between January 1, 1989, and September 1, 2005. These dates include the beginning of rumors of a military coup and one month of coverage following the death of southern rebel leader John Garang in a helicopter crash.

Each story returned was considered a unit of analysis. Stories that only mentioned Sudan and did not report on the conflict in the South were excluded. For example, stories that focused only on Sudan's harboring of Osama bin Laden in the 1990s were excluded. As this study is primarily focused on the conflict in southern Sudan, stories that concentrated solely on Darfur were further excluded. If a report concerned both the southern conflict and Darfur, it was included in the study.

A textual analysis was then conducted on the data collected to identify dominant frames and themes associated with coverage of southern Sudan in the three magazines.⁵⁴ Entman defined a frame as selecting “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text.”⁵⁵ For the purpose of this study, aspects of the conflict in southern Sudan that were highlighted by the magazines were coded. For example, this conflict could have been described as a religious war, a war over resources, etc. Each of these would be considered a frame. The textual analysis also included determining what themes emerged in the coverage of southern Sudan. An element of coverage became a theme if it made “a repeated or consistent appearance.”⁵⁶ These repetitions in news articles can make them more salient to the audience.⁵⁷ Examples of a theme would be if the article focused on the condition of camps, famine, children, etc. If photographs accompanied the story, they were also noted to determine if they contributed to a dominant frame or theme.

Results

In total, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report* covered the conflict in 73 articles between January 1, 1989, and September 1, 2005. *Newsweek* mentioned the conflict four times more frequently than the other two magazines, in 49 articles total. *Time* and *U.S. News & World Report* each covered the conflict in 12 articles. Based on a textual analysis of the reports, the most salient frame associated with the conflict throughout all the coverage was that it was a “religious” civil war. In all three magazines, two dominant themes emerged: famine and the way children were being affected by the war. In *Newsweek*, which covered the conflict more often, another theme emerged: that this was a forgotten genocide.

Magazine/ Frequency	Frame: Religious War	Theme: Famine	Theme: Children
<i>Time</i>	47	14	9
<i>Newsweek</i>	11	8	6
<i>U.S. World & News Report</i>	10	8	4
Total	68	30	19

The Religious Frame: Holy War vs. Crusade

In total, 68 articles dealing with the conflict in the three magazines framed the civil war as a conflict over religion. In about half of these, the religious frame was paired with the issue of ethnicity as well. The only five articles that did not use the religion frame were small news briefs or mentions of the Sudanese conflict in a story about a larger issue, such as a health crisis.

Newsweek detailed how the Islamic government of Sudan was “fighting a holy war against the Christian and animist south.”⁵⁸ Another article informed the reader how the southern rebels were waging a “crusade” for independence.⁵⁹ An interview with rebel leader John Garang detailed how the government had “declared jihad” on its own people, with “persecution in the country against Christians” and “relief being used for conversions.”⁶⁰ Regarding ethnicity, the conflict was referred to as an “ethnic-cleansing campaign” in two articles⁶¹; several other articles did not use that terminology, only referring to the “dark-skinned people” of the South.⁶²

Time and *U.S. News & World Report* used the religious frame similarly. *Time* covered Pope John Paul II’s visit to Khartoum, quoting the Vatican as saying Sudan’s government was “dripping with the blood of Christians.”⁶³ *Time* also used the word “crusade” to detail a group of American children’s efforts to raise money to end slavery in Sudan.⁶⁴ *U.S. News &*

World Report detailed the “religious warfare”⁶⁵ taking place and the Sudanese government’s “stepped-up persecution of the country’s 3 million Christians” in an article titled “Religious Cleansing.”⁶⁶

Famine Theme: “The Pornography of African Suffering”

The reoccurring famines that resulted from the civil war were the dominant theme in coverage in all three magazines. *Newsweek* focused on the famine in 14 articles, *Time* in 8 (more than half), and *U.S. News & World Report* discussed the famine in 8 articles as well.

Newsweek, in a year-end review of international abuses, listed Sudan as using “large-scale starvation as a political weapon.”⁶⁷ Most of the time, graphic descriptions and photographs of “skeletal, starving” Sudanese accompanied the causes of the famine, which one author called “the pornography of African suffering.”⁶⁸ *Time*’s coverage echoed *Newsweek*’s, describing how the “devastating” famine “is in part the result of civil war” in an article that was supplemented by four photographs taken by famed photographer James Nachtwey.⁶⁹ One of the photographs showed a person crawling to a feeding center, too hungry to walk; another showed a starving man staring at a bowl of water.⁷⁰ Five years later, another article asked, “Why are we seeing these wrenching pictures again?” after explaining how “in unholy synergy, drought and human folly are producing another shocking famine.”⁷¹

U.S. News & World Report, more than a decade before a peace treaty would be signed between the north and south, called hunger “the last battlefield” with “the assault on the stomach [being] all too successful.”⁷² Nine years later, the magazine would still be discussing the “famine made by man” that was “causing mass starvation.”⁷³ Again, the article featured a photograph of weak, starving people walking to a feeding center.⁷⁴

Children Theme: “The Children Suffer Most”

All three magazines used the lens of children to demonstrate all the different aspects of the civil war, including famine, slavery, and the “lost boys” displaced by the fighting. *Newsweek* focused on the plight of children specifically in nine articles and mentioned children in many others. *Time* focused on Sudanese children in six stories, and in another story, used children in the United States to tell the story of fundraising efforts to stop slavery. *U.S. News & World Report* directed readers to the suffering of children in four articles. Furthermore, every famine article that included pictures in all three magazines had at least one picture of a starving child.

Newsweek reported on the “orphans of civil war,”⁷⁵ the so-called lost boys of Sudan in four stories. Children dominated descriptions of other results of the war, especially famine and slavery. A profile of a refugee camp explained how “every morning in Ajiep begins with the same sound: the feeble wails of underfed children.”⁷⁶ Another report declared the fighting “the children’s war.”⁷⁷ Four stories about slavery specifically highlighted that raiders often kidnapped children to sell into bondage.

Similarly, *Time* focused on children in its three stories on slavery, explaining how the raiders were often referred to as “child catchers.”⁷⁸ The Nachtwey photo essay on the famine in 1993 included a starving boy and his father.⁷⁹ Both photographs accompanying another article featured children; in one a starving child lingers on the edge of a feeding station, the other shows a mother unable to feed her starving child.⁸⁰

U.S. News & World Report declared that in Sudan, “as with all famines, the children suffer most.”⁸¹ Just as *Time* did, in a photo essay on the famine, *U.S. News & World Report* focused on children in four of the five photographs.⁸² One picture shows a weak, starving boy lying on a tarp; in the other, a child who died in the cold night is buried first thing in the morning.⁸³ Unlike *Newsweek* and *Time*, however, *U.S. News & World Report*’s only story on slavery did not focus on children.

Religious Cleansing, a Holocaust, and Genocide

Although *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report* used the religion frame similarly and featured similar themes in coverage, in one area *Newsweek* separated itself from the other two. *Newsweek* was the only magazine to call the conflict genocide. It used the word “genocide” in relation to Sudan in four articles and the term “ethnic cleansing” in two others. *Time* only went so far as to reference the killings as “religious persecution” once in all the articles. *U.S. News & World Report*, although referencing “religious cleansing” and “holocaust,” never used the word “genocide.”

Newsweek in 1997 featured an article called “The Death of Genocide,” in which a genocide scholar listed the conflict in Sudan as one of the genocides of this century.⁸⁴ In 2001, a story about ways to stop the “carnage” in Sudan reported how “the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum joined the fight, declaring through its ‘committee on conscience’ that Khartoum’s atrocities against the Southerners warranted an unprecedented ‘genocide warning.’”⁸⁵ Just over a week later, another article casually referred to the “genocidal wars” of Rwanda and Sudan.⁸⁶

Beyond calling it genocide, *Newsweek*, throughout its coverage, emphasized that no one seemed to care that this conflict was happening. In one particularly accusatory article, the author wrote, “The face of famine in Sudan should not be that of a starving child. It should be the face of the country’s leaders... It should be the faces of the men in Washington.”⁸⁷ In the “Mail Call” department, a refugee from southern Sudan wrote that, “Now the world has a chance to learn about the hell we have to suffer.”⁸⁸ Another article, titled “Hidden Horrors in Sudan,” featured a letter “smuggled” from southern Sudan that declared: “Lucky are the people in Yugoslavia and Somalia, for the world is with them... It may be a blessing to die or get killed in front of a camera, because the world will know.”⁸⁹

Although *Time* and *U.S. News & World Report* did not refer to the conflict as genocide, both touched on this theme of general ignorance about the civil war and the lack of intervention by the international community. An article in *Time* asked, “Isn’t the U.N. doing its job? Didn’t President Clinton go to Africa last spring and promise to pay more

attention?”⁹⁰ *U.S. News & World Report* explained how “the rest of the world has shrugged off [the conflict] as insolvable,”⁹¹ and later detailed how “Sudan has long been the forgotten conflict in Africa. Foreign governments have stood by while more than 1.9 million people have died in the country’s 15-year civil war.”⁹²

Discussion

Of the three magazines, only *Newsweek* covered the conflict in southern Sudan with any kind of regularity. *Time* and *U.S. News & World Report* reported on the civil war sporadically over the time period examined in this study. Although all three magazines primarily framed the conflict as one based on religion and ethnicity, the link to genocide was only made (and rarely) by *Newsweek*, despite the explicit language of the horrors of southern Sudan that were often accompanied by disturbing pictures of suffering.

The plight of the southern Sudanese people was particularly jarring in the unsettling images and descriptions of the despicable famine-induced conditions they faced. As the magazines routinely reported, the victims were men, women, and children not directly involved in the conflict between the rebels and the government. The hollow-cheeked, thin-limbed children of the famine filled the pages of the magazine, as reports explained that food was being withheld as a weapon of war. As the government created the famine by often denying food to the area, it demonstrated the government’s guilt of genocide, by inflicting conditions on the group with the aim of causing physical harm or death.⁹³ *Time* and *U.S. News & World Report* did not make the connection between the famine and genocide, and *Newsweek*, although making the connection eventually, never championed it with any force.

Even when the focus was on the children affected by the war, the magazines failed to consistently make the connection to genocide. Beyond the famine, the instances of slavery chronicled by the magazines constitute another facet of genocide. Kidnapping children and selling them into slavery fulfills the fifth act, as defined by the United Nations, which constitutes genocide, forcibly transferring children of a particular group to another group. Another detail of the slavery in Sudan, often overlooked by the magazines, actually supported the fourth act that qualified as genocide. Besides children, slave raiders often kidnapped women as well. The Muslim men who bought the women often raped them; the children of those rapes were declared Muslim.⁹⁴ The slave trade, therefore, effectively prevented births within the group.

On December 31, 2004, rebel leaders in the South and the northern government signed a peace treaty that gave the South more autonomy, particularly with regard to religion, and a chance to vote for independence in 2011. The peace treaty, and the possibility of a new nation, however, became quickly overshadowed by a new conflict in Sudan, this time in the western region of Darfur. Government-funded militia, known as the Janjaweed, or devils on horseback, raided villages and burned them to the ground. The conflict in Darfur almost immediately became known as genocide by both the media and world leaders.⁹⁵

Why, then, did the Darfur conflict receive the label of genocide, and the southern conflict did not? One factor could be that the Darfur conflict began around the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, when policy makers, particularly Kofi Annan at the UN, were eager to be shown as taking action to prevent another genocide, after receiving harsh criticism for deciding not to take action while 800,000 people were being slaughtered in Rwanda.⁹⁶ Regardless of why Darfur became known as genocide, the effects of the label were clear. Celebrities such as Bono, Mia Farrow, Angelina Jolie, and Don Cheadle, who had just starred in *Hotel Rwanda*, began making the television show circuit, pushing for action.⁹⁷ Some of those stars, including Mia Farrow and Don Cheadle, even visited refugee camps. The “Save Darfur” campaign was created, and soon the international community began to pressure the government to stop the raids and disarm the Janjaweed. In 2010, the International Criminal Court charged al-Bashir with war crimes.⁹⁸ The U.S. media, when it turned its attention to the crisis, became a powerful tool to spur action.⁹⁹

Typically, the media cite poor access or conflicting information as reasons for decreased coverage of a conflict such as southern Sudan.¹⁰⁰ Access to the South was often a problem, due to safety concerns and southern Sudan’s lack of infrastructure, and the rebel groups themselves were often guilty of contributing to the misery of the average southern Sudanese citizen.¹⁰¹ The rebels’ part in the suffering, although considerably smaller than the larger genocide orchestrated by the government, complicated the issue for reporters.¹⁰² This is still the case in South Sudan as an independent state. Access to South Sudan and infrastructure has not improved, and in early 2014, a U.N. human rights chief told the BBC that both the South Sudan government and rebels had committed atrocities in a conflict within the country, including looting and burning towns.¹⁰³ Much like Rwanda, where reporters were unsure of which side was good and which side was bad, Sudan existed in a gray area. Regardless of the issues of access, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report* had enough information on the conflict to ascertain it was genocide based on the stories published.

As to why Darfur received the genocide label and southern Sudan did not, two possible answers suggest themselves. The first is the pack-like nature of journalism, where stories and issues are covered much the same way, which has been demonstrated in other conflicts.¹⁰⁴ The coverage of southern Sudan certainly showed aspects of this type of reporting. This is evidenced by *Time* and *U.S. News & World Report* printing 12 articles each on southern Sudan. *Newsweek* was something of an outlier in this case, dedicating steady coverage to southern Sudan over the course of the 16 years examined here. Why *Newsweek* devoted more coverage to southern Sudan than *Time* or *U.S. News & World Report* is beyond the scope of this study. Future studies could employ interviews with journalists at the magazines to determine what conversations were had regarding southern Sudan and how coverage was approached.

The concept of press nationalism may offer a second explanation for why *Time* and *U.S. News & World Report* never reported the violence in southern Sudan as genocide. Scholars have posited that the media take cues from the policies of their government and

government leaders.¹⁰⁵ No one in the U.S. government stepped forward to call the deaths in southern Sudan genocide, but that was not the case with Darfur. Nearly immediately, both U.S. and U.N. officials called for an investigation to determine if genocide was occurring in Darfur.

The role of Rwanda on the international stage adds another perplexing layer to the failure of the media in the case of southern Sudan. As the media, and the world, began to realize their mistake with Rwanda, the U.S. media broke away from the norm of following officials’ lead. Toward the end of the Rwandan conflict, the media hounded U.S. and international officials, urging them to call it genocide. In one infamous U.S. State Department press conference on June 10, 1994, spokeswoman Christine Shelly told reporters that “acts of genocide have occurred” in Rwanda, to which one reporter quickly asked what the difference was between “acts of genocide” and “genocide.”¹⁰⁶ Later that day, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said, after more pressure from journalists: “If there is any particular magic in calling it genocide, I have no hesitancy in saying that.”¹⁰⁷ The truth is, there is some kind of magic in that word, if applied at the correct time. As demonstrated by Bosnia and Darfur, calling a conflict genocide, combined with media attention, can lead to interventions and/or sanctions that save thousands of lives. Following Rwanda, and their failure to realize early what was happening, the U.S. media, including *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, should have been more perceptive concerning southern Sudan.

Conclusion

In the July 19, 2004, issue, *Newsweek* published a letter from a mother in Illinois. She wrote:

Thank you for publishing the photographs of the suffering people in the Darfur region of Sudan (“Living and the Dead,” July 5). My child is 17 months old, and I have watched him develop into a healthy little boy. Little did I know that for almost as long as he’s been alive, ethnic cleansing has been going on in Sudan.¹⁰⁸

In reality, the ethnic cleansing in Sudan had been going on for much longer than that; it had probably been happening for most of *her* life. A lack of media coverage and a clear understanding of what was happening in southern Sudan kept the conflict off the radar of most U.S. citizens and world leaders.

In mid-December 2013, the independent state of South Sudan began to garner media attention for an outbreak of violence between government forces and rebel factions within the country.¹⁰⁹ In a month, the conflict displaced nearly half a million people, and forced tens of thousands to flee into neighboring countries.¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch warned of “targeted attacks against civilians on an ethnic basis” and widespread killing.¹¹¹ These latest events demonstrate the complexity of such conflicts and serve as a grim reminder that independence does not necessarily bring peace.

Regardless of the current situation in Sudan, understanding why the southern Sudanese genocide slipped through the new magazines’ watchful eyes is important for informing the reporting of future conflicts. After the Holocaust of World War II, the world said “never again.” Those words were repeated again after Bosnia and again after Rwanda. The media, by informing the world and pressuring international leaders, are key to keeping “never again” from becoming never again... again.

Notes

1. The picture accompanied a special report in *The New York Times*. See Donatella Lorch, “Sudan Is Described as Trying to Placate the West,” *The New York Times*, March 26, 1993. The photographer, Kevin Carter, received harsh criticism for not helping the little girl. Due to reader inquiries, *The New York Times* published an Editor’s Note to explain what happened after the photograph was taken. See “Editor’s Note,” *The New York Times* March 30, 1993.
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