Rotberg, Robert I., and Thomas G. Weiss, eds. *From Massacres to Genocide: The Media, Public Policy, and Humanitarian Crises.* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution and World Peace Foundation, 1996.

Is there a correlation between media coverage of humanitarian crises and international response? Is the role of the media key in generating public support for forceful intervention in complex humanitarian emergencies halfway around the world? Can the media be used more effectively to generate effective and sustained responses to such emergencies? These are some of the questions this edited volume examines. The answers to all of these questions, as one might expect from an academic exercise, are "yes, no, and maybe." In others words, this book goes beyond the traditional view of the "CNN effect" as a major determinant of public policy (particularly in the US) to examine the various ways in which the media report, distort, and participate in complex humanitarian emergencies. Yes, the media can play a role at times, but this can be both positive in the sense that it might spur on a humanitarian response or negative by either ignoring an emergency or portraying it in such a way that an inappropriate response is made, or response is precluded. Or, the role may be more ambiguous.

In various ways, the contributors to this volume identify three important nexuses in which the media are involved in humanitarian crises: the media-public nexus, the media-relief agency nexus, and the media-policy maker nexus. All of these points of interaction are, of course, related in complex ways, but this framework will serve as an organizing principle for a discussion of the book. First, with regard to the media-public nexus, which is generally considered to be the most important point of interaction with regard to media influence, the media can structure what people think about, simply by airing one story and not another. Why does one story make it on the air and not another? Steven Livingston points out that gaining access to an area can be the limiting factor. For example, Somalia is easier to cover than the Sudan at least partially because in Somalia, a reporter can fly into Mogadishu in the morning, pick up a UN or NGO escort, get to where he or she wants, and be back to one's main base of operation in Niarobi in time for dinner, whereas reporting in Sudan is a much longer, involved undertaking. Further, the way the media portray a story can affect its perceived importance. As Fred Cates notes: "The media do not change the importance of humanitarian crises, but they significantly affect their impact." In addition, the way the media report a story can frequently lead to distortion. Negative stories predominate, and this fact, along with the content of the stories can lead to a distorted view of the less developed world where only chaos, anarchy and corruption rule. Several of the authors point out that many reporters (although certainly by no means all) have preconceived notions and little experience or direct knowledge of the areas which they fly into for a 90 second spot on the evening news, which can lead to very superficial, and sometimes just wrong reporting. For example, the initial reports from Rwanda focused on the "tribal" and "ethnic" component of what appeared to be spontaneous, snseless killing, which turned out to have been part of an elaborate, preconceived plan on the part of some Hutu leaders to kill 3,000 Tutsi and Hutu opponents an hour. And regardless of whatever else comes out of media reporting, images of starving people can generate public support for humanitarian aid and intervention.

Non governmental relief agencies recognize this, and are able to use the media to their advantage. John Hammock and Joel Charney identify a basic script that is used in humanitarian crises, which they describe as "emergency response as morality play." In all these stories there are heroes and villains. The heroes are the Red Cross and the personnel of other relief agencies who are "portrayed as being close to angels in their selfless sacrifice to assist the victims." The villains are the local military leaders (warlords, thugs, "technicals," etc.) and "the UN bureaucract who failed to mobilize his agency to respond in time or failed to stand up to the power of the local military authorities." The heroes, villains and victims all make for good television. The NGOs are happy with the "script" because it portrays them in a good light and facilitates their fundraising efforts. Yet, this script is "ultimately unsatisfying" because of the elements it leaves out. These "missing elements" include analysis of root causes (easier to do in print than on television), the credibility of relief agencies (which are there for the long-haul vs. being just "interlopers," which are willing to speak out on policy issues, which are cooperating with the military and why, etc.), and any discussion of local capacity to respond to the crisis (frequently large Western agencies will run roughshod over local structures and culture). The fact that these issues are rarely looked at benefits relief agencies because, to a large extent, they prefer the focus to be on logistics and humanitarianism, rather than on political issues. Staying away from political issues frequently makes the continued presence of NGOs and reporters in an area conflict palatable to local military leaders. In addition, media criticism of NGO activities could jeopardize a reporter's access to NGO transportation, which is frequently vital to getting to where "the story" is.

The interaction between the media and policy makers is, according to some of the authors, the most ambiguous. Lionel Rosenblatt, the maverick head of Refugees International, argues that in recent instances where there has been international military intervention in humanitarian crises, there was significant media coverage, whereas in other instances where such coverage was lacking, the humanitarian emergencies are but blips on policy makers' radar screens. He maintains that it "was primarily media attention that moved the United States into a rescue operation" in Northern Iraq, while in Somalia, "media coverage created a constituency for military intervention but also served to undermine that constituency" by showing "the pictures of the corpse of a US soldier being dragged through the streets" on national television. Andrew Natsios, former head of the US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, maintains that the "CNN effect" is overblown. He argues that the US disaster assistance apparatus does get involved regardless of (and frequently before) media coverage. Geopolitical interests and/or sufficient resources are the main determinants. It is when a complex humanitarian emergency occurs in an area of peripheral interest and which may necessitate a military response that "the electronic media can play an important role in focusing public and policy-makers' attention to the crisis." Yet, if one accepts these propositions, one could also point out that most complex humanitarian emergencies (with the exception of Northern Iraq) do and will probably continue to occur in areas of marginal interest to traditional US foreign policy concerns.

Throughout the book recommendations are made with regard to how the media can better cover humanitarian crises and conflict, and how to ensure "close cooperation between

international relief agencies and the media." Many of these will seem obvious and straightforward. At the same time, there is no discussion of how to convince the relevant actors in what is usually a media circus that changing some of their practices may be in their interest. For example, how does one convince editors that consistent, critical global reporting will sell more newspapers or garner more revenue from television commercials than will sensationalistic, attention-grabbing, saturation coverage of starving children. This is the major weakness of the book, but it does not detract from the overall insightful analysis of the role of the media in the emerging global (dis)order. This will be a useful book both for those in media studies as well as those who are interested in the increasingly complex and ambiguous interaction between the media on the one hand, and governments and other international actors on the other, in both domestic and international settings.

Kurt Mills

The American University in Cairo