

Book Reviews

Rwanda and Genocide in the Twentieth Century

Alain Destexhe

London, Pluto Press, London

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The former Secretary General of Médecins Sans Frontières, Alain Destexhe has as the main focus of his work *Rwanda and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* that the genocide which occurred in Rwanda in April and May 1994 should never be forgotten nor under-estimated. It may not seem so obvious that this theme should be so strongly emphasised. However, the genocide itself in Rwanda in comparison to its aftermath of cholera and displacement received little media attention or international action. In this book, Destexhe rightly criticises the international community for depoliticising events in Rwanda and concentrating its efforts on the humanitarian operation in the wake of the genocide.

In the first chapter, Destexhe describes how the genocide in Rwanda demonstrates our inability to relate the present to the past. During 1994 millions of cinemagoers wept at Spielberg's moving film *Schindler's List* while history was repeating itself in Rwanda with little public outcry. Destexhe is obsessed with the term "genocide" and how it has been misused in modern times. He claims that it is important to make a clear distinction between what constitutes real genocide and "crimes against

humanity". While Stalin's policies to repress the Kulaks in the Ukraine resulted in at least six million victims, Destexhe claims that this was an example of political oppression rather than actual genocide. The same is true for 'Pol Pot' in Cambodia, Mengistu in Ethiopia and Mao's China.

Destexhe believes that using the term flippantly seeks to trivialise genocide in its true sense. He makes an important point when he writes: "The increased amount of exaggerated news coverage given to any disaster, natural or manmade, nearly always infers that these events have one common denominator; they are seen as the product of fate and misfortune rather than the deliberate policy of any one individual or group". This is true of so many humanitarian crises in the world today – Somalia, Southern Sudan, Angola, Sierra Leone and Mozambique. Destexhe points out that it is dangerous to group together all those who die in tragic circumstances, regardless of the way in which they die. The unwillingness of the media (and indeed the aid agencies when appealing for funds) to attempt to explain why the crisis has happened does not help this situation.

Important as it may be to make a clear distinction between what is a genocide and what is a crime against humanity from the point of view of the legal obligation of the international community, Destexhe overstates his case and his obsession with semantics becomes tedious. What is important to

stress is that all the terrible events of the 20th century which he chronicles, whether it be Stalin in the Ukraine or Mengistu in Ethiopia, are morally wrong and should not be accepted by the international community. The idea that the international community should only be legally obliged to intervene in the case of a genocide is highly questionable. In his analysis, Destexhe makes no attempt to discuss the concept of sovereignty which is so often used as an excuse by world leaders and the United Nations for their inaction in times of crisis. Genocide and sovereignty are so closely interlinked that it is difficult to discuss one without referring to the other.

Destexhe makes such a clear distinction between genocide and crimes against humanity that he suggests that during the twentieth century there have only been three true genocides and these are the 1915 genocide of the Armenians carried out by the Young Turks; the Final Solution for the Jews carried out by Hitler in Nazi Germany and the massacre of Tutsis by Hutus in Rwanda in 1994. He makes a somewhat unsubstantiated connection between the Armenian genocide and the Final Solution for the Jews in Nazi Germany, suggesting that because the first was carried out with impunity that Hitler and his accomplices believed they could do the same. Fortunately, he does not go as far as to say that the Hutus were influenced by the Nazis in Germany!

The remainder of the book concentrates on the Rwanda genocide itself, its background and its aftermath. The importance of the media both inside and outside Rwanda is high-

lighted. The influence of Radio Mille Collines in encouraging the violence by Hutus against Tutsis is given due attention. The inability (or unwillingness) of the international media to fully understand what was happening in Rwanda during April and May 1994 is also stressed. He writes: "Reviewing headlines in the French/English press in those first weeks, there is a clear attempt to present the massacres as part of a civil war: Rwanda on Fire, Fierce Clashes, Slaughter, Massacre, Civil War, Bloody Horror, Rwanda Anarchy. The word 'genocide' rarely appeared in the main headlines while conversely appearing widely to describe the cholera epidemics which subsequently happened in Goma".

A major weakness of Destexhe's analysis of the genocide itself is his total neglect of the economic factor. All research into the Rwanda genocide suggests that the massacre of Tutsis by Hutus was greatly influenced by what they could gain economically from such an act. In a country suffering from overpopulation and "land hunger" the possibility of acquiring more land by eliminating one's neighbour was undoubtedly a serious motivation. Mohamed Sahnoun, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations in Somalia writes about the situation there during 1991 and 1992: "I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that the instinct of survival in a threatening political and economic environment was the basic motivation in the behaviour pattern of the Somali people. The instinct becomes acute when repeated drought further worsens such a hostile environment. The rationale behind the Somali experience

is very much present in other conflict situations in a more or less elaborate way". This "instinct of survival" was certainly an important factor in the Rwanda situation.

This book is at its best when describing the international community's total failure to stop the genocide in Rwanda. Describing how in the early days of the genocide, the world's attention focused on the successful repatriation of Western civilians, Destexhe writes: "Rarely has there been an episode in history when differences in the status and destiny of groups of human beings has been so obvious". The same soldiers who were helping to save their compatriots were ordered to turn their back on women and children being slaughtered in the streets of Kigali. Destexhe correctly makes the connection with Somalia when describing the reluctance of the US Government to intervene in Rwanda. He calls this the "shadow of Somalia". The fact that 30 American soldiers had died in Somalia was a crucial factor in formulating American policy on UN operations signed by President Clinton just before the start of the crisis in Rwanda. He writes "The unfortunate Tutsis were the first victims of this new policy". Strongly influenced by the United States, the UN Security Council refused to qualify the massacres as genocide in any of its official papers as this would have obliged them to intervene under international law.

Operation Turquoise, the French intervention in south-west Rwanda is analysed in some detail. Destexhe rightly points out that while the French intervention was politically question-

able it nevertheless saved thousands of lives during the Rwanda crisis and stopped an even greater outflow of refugees into Zaire. However, Operation Turquoise was flawed in that it had a purely humanitarian mandate. The French government did little that might have contributed to resolving the political problems of Rwanda. No attempt was made to curb the propaganda of the Hutus and Radio Mille Collines continued to broadcast from south-west Rwanda until mid-July without any attempt by the French military to find and destroy the transmitter. A point that is not mentioned and which is even more serious is the failure of the French military to disarm the regular Hutu army and the Interhamwe. While travelling in the French controlled zone during Operation Turquoise, one could not but be struck by the fact that two armies patrolled the countryside side by side and that the Interhamwe continued to man the notorious road-blocks.

The subsequent outflow of refugees into Zaire and Tanzania and the humanitarian crisis this caused is well analysed by Destexhe from the point of view of the huge reaction it evoked in the international arena. The issue of aid agencies providing assistance to the perpetrators of genocide in Zaire and Tanzania is more sensitively dealt with in this book than by many other commentators. He writes: "Humanitarian workers are continually confronted with the same problem: how to aid the victims without becoming caught up in the power struggle of their oppressors". Relief agencies have been severely criticised for using local leaders in food distribution and logistics

in the camps of Tanzania and Zaire. While recognising the inherent dangers of this approach, Destexhe as a practitioner also acknowledges the huge problems faced by aid agencies in coping with such crises. He writes "A few dozen expatriates arriving in a country in a crisis situation cannot possibly be expected to cope with such an influx of refugees and resolve all the accompanying problems on their own without the assistance of local personnel. In the case of an emergency on this scale, the simplest answer is to use the existing infrastructure – in this case, the existing administrative system that was imported from Rwanda in the form of the Bourgmestres".

In his final chapter, Destexhe highlights how world attention was quick to focus on the human rights records of the RPF government following its installation in Kigali. He writes: "The FAR have committed a genocide and the RPF have carried out executions; the two things cannot be compared. If a distinction is not made, then genocide is reduced to the status of common murder – but murder is not the same as genocide". He points out that there must be justice before there can be reconciliation and that the international community must respond generously to rebuilding the justice system in Rwanda.

Alain Destexhe concludes by singling out Belgium, France and the US as having to accept a degree of responsibility for the Rwandan genocide: Belgium for its colonial policy of promoting differences between Hutu and Tutsi, France for its policy of actively supporting the Habyarimana Regime in the years prior

to the genocide and the US for refusing to allow the Security Council to admit that the genocide was actually taking place. He might also have singled out poverty and the "instinct of survival" as even greater contributors.

Mercy Under Fire – War and Global Humanitarian Community

Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss,
Colorado, Westview Press, 1995,
Stg£12.95, 260 pp

In recent years, the United Nations and relief agencies have come under increasing criticism for their humanitarian actions in times of crisis. While much of this criticism is deserved and while it is important to look to the past in order to avert failure in future humanitarian intervention, a weakness of much of the criticism is that the critics are academics with little or no practical experience of the difficulties of working on the ground. This book is different. As Jack Donnelly of the University of Denver points out in his blurb: "The authors strike an effective balance between the scholarly demands of even-handed assessment and a passionate devotion to the difficult but vital work of international humanitarian relief". What is particularly refreshing about this book is that while it poses the problems and chronicles the failures, it also proposes possible solutions and a framework for international action. It is an especially important book for those on the outside, those who are not actively involved in humanitarian relief but who want to understand more about the issues. It makes the inextricable connection between disasters and

politics and challenges the international community never to look at humanitarianism in isolation.

The first chapter deals comprehensively with the issue of humanitarianism and international law and the important question of sovereignty. While many governments that flaunt international standards frequently justify their freedom to act on the basis of sovereignty, this book points out that even in the UN charter, the conventional view that state sovereignty is absolute and uncontested is not fully supported. Following recent events in Rwanda, Sudan and Nigeria, the question of sovereignty must be seriously addressed by the international community. In Ken Saro-Wiwa's public statement before he was executed, he said: "Any nation which can do to the weak and disadvantaged what the Nigerian nation has done to the Ogoni loses a claim to independence and to freedom from outside influence". This is a powerful statement from a man articulate enough to challenge the notion of sovereignty. There are hundreds of millions of other people around the world – victims of oppression and human rights abuses who are caught up in this web of international law. Another major loophole in the international legal system is that while refugee protection now enjoys firm standing in international humanitarian law, there are no clear-cut legal protections available to internally displaced people. Displaced people do not qualify for comparable legal protection or UN help simply because they have not crossed an international border. This anomaly has caused massive suffering in many

countries of Africa – Sudan, Mozambique and Angola. The first chapter also deals sensitively and critically with the issues of the increasing use of the military in humanitarian operations, the role of the Church and indigenous NGOs in providing humanitarian relief and it introduces all the major humanitarian actors, both governmental and private.

The highlight of this book is undoubtedly chapter two entitled "Guiding Principles" which presents eight fundamental humanitarian principles which have evolved over time and which are rooted in the experience of several armed conflicts which have led to humanitarian disasters. These principles have come to be known as the Providence Principles and were developed by Larry Minear and Thomas Weiss at Brown University in 1991 following extensive consultation with practitioners. The authors make the point that given the huge diversity of humanitarian actors it is essential to have some guiding principles which should be taken not as moral absolutes but as norms towards which they should strive.

The principle of "proportionality" is particularly important. "From a humanitarian stand point, the idea that human life is equally precious everywhere in the world seems self-evident. In practice, however, the world's humanitarian system has great difficulty putting flesh on that proposition". Two striking examples of how proportionality is not observed are presented. The first is the example of the international response to the Gulf Crisis in 1990 while little or no attention was paid to the situation in Liberia. For

several months in 1990, the number of persons affected and the degree of their distress was far greater in Liberia than in the Persian Gulf. The second example is that in December 1992, when the Security Council authorised military action in Somalia, an equally serious situation existed in nearby Sudan. Not only was more money spent in Somalia on the alleviation of famine victims but also the stated reason for the intervention in Somalia was the fact that the protection of aid workers was vital, ignoring that at the time the US troops landed in Somalia in December 1992, more humanitarian personnel had been killed in Sudan.

The issue of "non-partisanship" is also listed as a basic guiding principle. "If the relief of life threatening suffering is undercut by a disproportionate allocation of limited resources, it is also compromised when political considerations are injected into life saving administrations". In many recent civil wars, the question of access to one side or another has been an issue. In Sudan, for example, many NGOs have been accused by the Sudanese government of partisanship by providing aid only to those in the south of the country, who are mainly Christians. The Muslim northerners on the other hand have received very little aid from the international community although they also have needs. This is a complex issue and the question of partisanship is closely linked to the level of need and to the security situation. More recently, NGOs have been accused of partisanship by providing help to mainly Hutu refugees in Goma while neglecting the needs of those inside Rwanda. This is not a fair criticism as

there is no doubt that the level of need in Goma was far greater than that inside Rwanda. Nevertheless, non-partisanship should remain a key guiding principle in any humanitarian action.

Another important guiding principle is that of "independence". Independence from political authorities in areas where activities actually take place and from those in donor countries. All humanitarian actors should provide assistance to those most in need and not be influenced by political or religious factors. The end of the Cold War has made it so much easier for NGOs to be political independent. The huge decline in development assistance by the United States and USSR following the end of the Cold War makes it very clear just how politicised aid can be.

"Accountability" is also proposed as an important guiding principle. While the authors endorse the desirability of NGOs being accountable to sponsors and beneficiaries for their activities, they concede that accountability can also be an inhibiting factor. They write: "The slavish adherence to strict standards of accountability could be the enemy of creative action." This is particularly true of aid agencies working at the height of a humanitarian crisis where decisions are made quickly and where the need to mobilise resources quickly often overtakes the careful planning which is possible in relatively stable situations. The authors go on to suggest that accountability has been used in the past by donor governments as a means of controlling aid to areas where they prefer not to see it used. The US government is accused of demanding the most detailed accounting of its resources in the

government controlled areas of Nicaragua during the 1980s while adopting a much more relaxed approach for NGOs working in Contra-controlled areas. The question of accountability is particularly relevant in relation to Somalia where during parts of 1992, only about 10 to 20% of relief supplies were reaching famine-affected people due to extortion by clan militia. The authors rightly point out that had normal accountability been required in this situation, many feeding activities would simply not have taken place at all.

The prickly question of "transparency" is also raised. While it may seem obvious that humanitarian action should by definition have no secret agenda and nothing to hide, the reality is that covert action is not only common but also necessary in many cases. For example, many NGOs have provided humanitarian assistance in secret to affected communities in southern Sudan while at the same time operating in the north. Their operation in the north would have been jeopardised had their actions in the south been known to the Khartoum government. During the Eritrean struggle for independence, millions of dollars were provided secretly by donor governments through NGOs and the Eritrean Inter-Agency Consortium. Many of these donors had full diplomatic relations with Ethiopia and an embassy in Addis Ababa.

The authors put forward "appropriateness" of humanitarian action as another basic guiding principle. They cite examples of inappropriateness in its crudest form as in agencies shipping winter clothing to hurricane victims in the Caribbean, summer clothing to

landslide victims in the Himalayas and ready to eat meat containing pork to Muslim populations. However, they develop the theme by concentrating on the crucial area of the appropriateness of the delivery of emergency aid. The failure of the UN and many NGOs in tapping into local capacity and talent while often importing young and technical incompetent expatriates is well documented. Minear and Weiss write: "In the frantic scramble to assist the victims of war, the principle of appropriateness, unobjectionable in theory, often is a casualty. The clear and immediate challenge of saving lives usually wins out over the more ambiguous and longer term task of empowering local people. Agencies whose raison d'être is emergency relief are especially prone to act without reference to issues of appropriateness". The authors go on to say that relief activities that enlist local populations and institutions are generally more successful than those who do not. Given that this is actually the case, many NGOs have a lot of questions to answer on this issue.

Another guiding principle for humanitarian actors is that the "context" in which they work should be fully understood. NGOs often argue that it is not important to understand the problem but rather to provide humanitarian relief regardless of the context. This has become a particularly burning issue following the writing of this book in relation to the refugee camps in Goma and in Tanzania. There are countless other examples where it can be argued that aid has helped to allow conflict situations to continue.

Chapter three identifies certain

fundamental challenges which humanitarian organisations confront in every war situation. Among the obvious ones of these are negotiating access to the affected populations and mobilising resources. The authors also include the importance of pursuing education and advocacy in the countries that are providing resources. Examples of successful advocacy campaigns in relation to US foreign policy in Central America are cited. The authors go so far as to suggest a scenario where the NGOs of the South should be the main actors in humanitarian and development programmes in their own countries while Northern NGOs should be encouraged to focus their energies on educating their publics and improving the policies of their own government. This "division of labour" should be actively encouraged.

Chapter four depicts how major humanitarian actors interact in their effort to respond to the various challenges in war zones. The frequent isolation and under-funding of local NGOs and institutions is again put forward as a major weakness of the system. Inside actors should not be consigned to the roles of "hewers of wood and drawers of water".

The final chapter offers recommendations on how to improve the responses of the global humanitarian community to the challenges of dealing with post-Cold War conflict. It especially urges more attention to the prevention of major crises. The bulk of *Mercy under Fire* was written before the Rwanda crisis erupted and it is only in the final chapter that Rwanda is mentioned. However, the authors rightly do not regard that the central

propositions of this book have been overtaken by events. Instead, they see that the humanitarian challenges of war and conflict as proposed in *Mercy under Fire* have been confirmed by Rwanda. It is now time for all humanitarian actors to take these challenges seriously.

Niall Toibin

Paying the Price: Women and the Politics of International Economic Strategy

Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Giovanna F. Dalla Costa
London, Zed Books, 1995,
Stg£10.95, 127 pp

Despite prisms of light, this is one of the most deeply dispiriting, dismal and heartbreaking books I have read for some time. It also provokes a furious anger and furious guilt.

Has all of this information been around for decades for everybody to read? Like others, do I simply self-censor what I read, see and hear? I saw "Live Aid" this year, 10 years after the event, and was ineffably moved by it. For at least a day. Otherwise, am I so selfishly hell-bent on trying to improve life for myself, women of my generation and the next, in my own limited little pool? As a feminist do my beliefs simply take in the countries of the European Union? Why do I conveniently forget about the women in the rest of the world – redeeming my ignorance by token gestures like buying nice Christmas cards to help fund some Third World agency?

I suspect that I do not know as much as I should for a few simple reasons; the

world media is largely run by men who have a strongly divided view of the world. Because I work in the media I know how it works. I know what items and issues sell newspapers. Above all, the media has to make a profit.

The men who run the Third World countries suppress as far as possible (as in every country) the dirty deals done to women. And more importantly, the Third World agencies simply have not learned how to bring the full message back to the developed world.

Are they interested in telling the full story? Do those very agencies – intermediaries between the North and South – have a vested interest in keeping themselves in a job for life? Are they just another layer of colonists who choose Third World countries or continents as subjects for dissection and dissertation. As topics for theses. As worthy areas of the planet where they can convince that their tuppence halfpenny worth marks them out as a sort of super-race bringing their powdered food and powdered penicillin to the poor.

With regard to the media – television in particular – does not everybody now know that it is one of the most powerful forces in the world today? What images do we in the First World get from it about the Third World? We get pictures and reports by the thousand of starving women and children. It is even easier than that. What we see is so many people who look like bags of bones, who are dehumanised and degraded by wars, famine and corruption, that it is simply impossible to relate to them. Their stories and their lives are usually translated for us by white males (and now more females). The reasons for

their furrowed faces, their dying children, their tearless, aching eyes, are told in simplistic language with just enough jargon to confuse you. The pictures make it easy for us to turn away with helpless shrugs and put a few pounds in the poor box or buy Christmas cards for UNICEF. The pictures beamed into our living rooms at tea time or at 9 p.m., slotted between advertisements for food, detergents and toys, might as well have been painted by a new school of artists, so irrelevant are they to our lives.

Where do we get the full story? For the most part, we get it in books like this. And it is because we are relying on books like this, I believe we are not getting the full story. On the cover is a picture of a mother somewhere in the world with a child clasped to her breast, carrying a bundle of something on her back. The title could mean anything from the latest Jackie Collins pot-boiler to the memoirs of a politician or an embezzler. The subtitle, “Women and the politics of international economic strategy”, is clumsy and only likely to be picked up by people only interested in the subject. However, once you start reading the book, once you manage to plough through the obfuscating language, it is stunning stuff.

As one example, Andrée Michel’s essay, “African Women, Development and the North-South Relationship” shows both the shining jewels of information and the dank vocabulary of the academic.

The demystification of social prejudices accepted as objective facts is one of sociology’s most interesting and promising functions: the sociology of the family, for example, received a

strong impetus when its practitioners in the United States began unmasking prejudices taken as certainties. In the same way, the sociology of development pursued its demystifying task by researching the participation of women in Third World development, a sphere previously distorted by the myths propagated by some economic theories in which women's labour and its contribution to national income became invisible. Women sociologists have shown that the production of subsistence by rural Third World women, far from being extraneous to rural Third World women, far from being extraneous to the capitalistic production of commodities, is essential to it.

"Thanks to the invisible work of wives, children, mothers and sisters, the farmers of the Third World can sell their products at prices that are 20-30 per cent lower, reflecting the lower cost of reproducing their labour powers".

Briefly, the story right through the collection of essays on the situation of women in Brazil, Venezuela and African countries, is one of horrific discrimination and brutalisation of total populations. You can double this in the case of women.

Michel explains the Lomé Conventions and their effects. She shows that even when money became available to African states for development, little or nothing was spent on women. "Nothing was done for the primary needs of women (education, health, family planning, equipment to help with domestic tasks, drinking water supplies etc.) because they were not present at the North-South negotiations."

She explains how women have lost out again and again. With their husbands forced to move to cities for work, they assume jobs as heads of families plus additional manual (femual) work. "Women have been hit particularly hard by the criteria used for assigning public expenditure. For example, in 1981, 11 per cent of total public expenditure in the African states went on the military sector when only 5 per cent went on health and 16 per cent on education. In the 1970s arms trading grew considerably and Europe sold at least 20 per cent of the arms purchased by the Third World countries."

However, the glimmerings of light all over the Third World are coming from women and women's organisations. In their chapter on "Pauperisation and Women's Participation in Social Movements in Brazil" the authors, Alda Britto da Motta and Inaia Maria Moreira de Carvalho, show how women are responding to their impoverishment with instinctive, imaginative strategies. "In the last decades the unfolding of grassroots movements and on-the-ground roles played by women in social movements have crosscut if not utterly collapsed into each other, and all the more as women constitute ever larger percentages of the participants."

Such women, they note, are unused to formal, political activity and this has proved a bonus. "The rupturing of ideological barriers could only be achieved at collective level and through more familiar paths, closer to the daily personal experiences of women.

"Without a previous awareness that they are joining an organisation, women instead view their activities in terms of working with their friends and

neighbours towards the improvement of living conditions and neighbourhood services. It is mainly as mothers and housewives that women are motivated.”

They cite several countries which have several powerful women leaders heading many neighbourhood organisations. The sound bites they use from women are exhilarating but they point out that tensions are still evident between them and men and between the women leaders and others who follow at a more sedate pace.

But the personal gains of involvement in the external politics that define their lives, expressed by Third World women are the only notes of optimism in this book. And they could apply to marginalised women everywhere such as this quote from an “ordinary” member of her local group in El Salvador.

“I used to be an ignorant woman. Really ignorant. I knew nothing. Now I can speak up about what I think. I know how to talk and what I think I am capable of doing, I do. At the beginning I was really embarrassed but I have outgrown it by now, thank goodness. I am a new woman.” Echoes of Clondalkin, Clare, Tuam et al?

Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect

Olivia Bennett, Jo Bexley and Kitty Warnock (eds)
London, Panos, 1995
Stg£10.95, 282 pp

Not even a chapter, just one page of *Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect*, would have focused the minds of all those attending the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, even if only for a

few mute and anguished minutes in some cases, on the impact of violence on women.

Why? Because this is one of the most devastatingly gripping and gruesome books written about the effects of war on humankind – particularly women. It is written with a lucid dispassion that carries you along on the crest of wave after desolating wave of the brutalities waged on women and children. Men are included – mostly as the wreckers of ruin, havoc and brutal force. A minority of them are shown in the pitiable light of a gender that is unable to survive change, that cannot adapt to powerlessness or does so with sullen resentment that simply creates more problems for themselves and those around them.

The introduction sets out the state of some of the wars of the world in eleven countries from Liberia to Lebanon, through Uganda, India, Nicaragua, Bosnia, Croatia, Somalia, Ethiopia (Tigray), Sri Lanka, Vietnam and El Salvador. The book carries graphic, personal accounts from women of their war experiences in each of the countries and encompasses succinct accounts of the individual histories of each country. But where is Northern Ireland? The book begs an inclusion on the women in Ireland – particularly in the North.

Some of the women interviewed are active fighters in wars. They have chosen to take up arms, to fight or to actively support their wars. The majority are women facing death or worse daily in the bid for survival for themselves and their families.

In an overview, the authors conclude that the effects of women’s active participation varies with the nature of

the conflict. "In Uganda, the women regarded the war as a senseless battle for power between men, motivated primarily by greed... who were 'power-hungry' and 'wishing to get rich by force'. Women found themselves caught in the middle – looted, abducted and raped by soldiers on both sides...."

"In contrast the Tigrayan women, who all participated against the Ethiopia government, saw themselves as fighting for political justice and social progress – including equality for themselves. They were victorious and felt pride in their suffering and their achievements. Psychologically, they appeared to be stronger post-war than those who had survived a war which they viewed as pointless butchery."

There are, however, many variants between these two extremes and the authors examine the experiences of women caught in ethnic or religious conflicts. Again, where is Northern Ireland?

The overwhelming strength of the book is the way it demystifies wars and their reasons, spelling out what happens in ordinary language instead of pushing the mindless brutality under the carpet of anodyne words like "violence". Even "slaughter" has become a catch-all word that hides the viciousness and evil considered part of the modern-war culture.

The authors say: "Women have generally been under – or misrepresented in stories of war and are often seen as grief-stricken, powerless victims. Although development and relief agencies largely recognise the importance of women's active roles, economic and social, in helping communities survive conflict, there is

still a tendency to categorise and generalise. Women and children are still seen as one unit, for example. Such labels, if they are used to influence policy, can be limiting and even damaging. The term "refugees" conjures up an image of a featureless mass of people queuing to be fed, whereas in the interviews collected, time and again, women describe how the worst aspect of being a refugee is precisely the humiliation of losing one's identity and having all options for individuality curtailed.

The people this book is about are not just hundreds or thousands but millions. Civilians increasingly make up the majority of war victims – about 75 per cent. In 1993, 42 countries were engaged in 52 wars. Vastly increasing numbers are homeless. In 1994, about 40 million of the 46 million refugees and displaced people around the world, were reckoned to have fled war or its consequences.

The stark reality of horrific war crimes, like rape of women and children, is that you quickly realise how little these crimes are actually spelt out each and every day in plain language when these wars are reported. You wonder if it always went on. You realise that you do not really know if this is a new type of holocaust. You realise the absolute importance of more publications like this (Northern Ireland Office and White House, please copy). As Esmeralda from El Salvador says: "For the coming generations it is important they understand what we've been through... if we forget history, we forget everything."

Mary Cummins

The Oxfam Poverty Report

Kevin Watkins
Oxford, Oxfam, 1995
Stg£9.95, 250 pp

Before Rio, before Cairo, before Copenhagen, before Beijing, experts and non-governmental organisation members asked: "But what can I read?" The *Oxfam Poverty Report* fills precisely that demand – an exact and measured analysis of the global imbalance in aid, trade, peace, economy, the environment, and the relations between people of the planet. Behind the authorship of Kevin Watkins of Oxfam's policy department, stands a carefully arranged collectivity of contributions ranging from Oxford and Sussex to Oxfam's own field reports from across the globe. Yet this is not an edited collection of opinions. On the contrary, the *Oxfam Poverty Report* is a highly coherent and internally consistent view of the development of underdevelopment since the Second World War, which draws on more than 500 studies and publications.

Opening the study on poverty and livelihoods, the Report explains to the reader how the "lethal interaction of global forces with local structures of poverty is the basis of the poverty trap". Avoiding apocalyptic appeals to identify with the wretched and the miserable, the Report presents substantiated evidence, such as inequity of land ownership in Brazil, or natural disaster in Africa, to illustrate the vulnerability of the poorest in the face of competing global and natural forces. One will not find in this publication an attribution of blame. The Report does not enter the terrain of William

Shawcross in his study of *The Quality of Mercy*. Instead, the Report approaches poverty as a theme to be deconstructed. Critical of coercive population policies for example, the Report brings examples from Korea and India to show that population growth can reduce significantly with social investment and education. The underlying myth of the indolence of the poor is deconstructed by an emphasis on evidence of survival strategies among the poor, women in particular and the need for aid programmes to comprehend traditional mechanisms for coping with disaster.

Having established the complexity of levels and mechanisms which propel millions into poverty, ill health and illiteracy, the Report addresses violence, war, the destruction of livelihoods and the potential for conflict resolution. Special consideration is given to the aftermath of war giving rise to the need for landmine clearance. The aftermath of war finds a mention too for women, victims of rape and obliged to bear the children of their own torturers.

The thirty pages on structural adjustment which form Chapter three of the Report, could stand alone as a study in itself. The *Oxfam Poverty Report* tells us that "The term 'structural adjustment' is shorthand for a wide range of policy reforms... these typically start with an IMF stabilisation programme which is intended to reduce fiscal deficits... and restore the balance of payments to a viable position". Oxfam makes a genuine recognition and description of the efforts of international lending agencies to mitigate the effects of structural adjustment programmes or to ring fence social expenditure.

"Unfortunately, these efforts have often been belated and ineffective," we are told. Particularly ineffective has been the failure to reduce military budgets or introduce progressive taxation of elites, thereby shifting the costs of structural adjustment onto the poor and onto women. Here the Report is particularly good in taking apart the image of the "coping poor", by presenting evidence that the poor do not have an infinite capacity to survive with falling standards of living. The costs or absence of health care lead to long-term illness, entailing loss of production or education and a further drop in living standards. In the case of Ecuador, some families simply fall apart.

The imbalance in the ecological footprints of our planet of the countries of the South compared to the countries of the North is given critical treatment in the *Oxfam Poverty Report*.

It is critical of an environmental approach which stresses action exclusively or mainly in the South of the planet to the neglect of end user conservation policies in the Northern hemisphere. While equally strewn with data, the Report here is slightly weaker in grassroots evidence than the testimony and witness of earlier chapters, notwithstanding the examples of the nefarious effects of Asian shrimp farming among others. The scale of impoverishment consequent to such chemical spoliations as that of Bhopal are rather underestimated. In the same vein, the complexity of social

interactions and relative poverty experienced in environmental upheavals such as that of the Latin American rain forest, described in Cockburn and Hecht's *The Fate of the Forest*, attracted perhaps too little attention.

The *Oxfam Poverty Report* is stylistically agreeable to read. It is written for insiders and outsiders to the debate on globalisation and has been stripped of any colloquial or polemical terms without reducing its intellectual rigour.

If the study has a lacking, it is in the few references to other and different theoretical approaches to global poverty issues. A number of these were brought to the World Summit for Social Development by the International Institute for Labour Studies in their publication *Social Exclusion: Rhetoric Reality and Responses*.

A few additional acknowledgements of Spanish and French oriented approaches would enhance a Report, which is, but does not claim to be, a scholarly work.

The *Oxfam Poverty Report* proposes reasonable strategies for interlinked growth and equity for the decade ahead. It argues caution on strategies that are apparently bottom-up and demand-led, but which may only serve to confer benefits on those best equipped to make applications. It is a study which will be especially useful for aid agencies, foreign affairs ministries, non-governmental organisations and centres of development studies.

Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Towards an Economy of Care

Bob Goudzwaard, Harry de Lange,
Michigan and Geneva
William B. Erdmans Publishing Co.
and WCC Publications
3rd edition, 1995

When economists offer prescriptions for change in the economy, the reader awaits with trepidation for yet another round of proposals for fiscal and monetary adjustments. Goudzwaard and de Lange offer a surprise by appealing for a new ethical renewal of the international economic order, to address the problems of global poverty, environmental degradation and unemployment.

“... neoclassical economic thinking cannot actually help us with these economic dilemmas of our time. Because it operates in terms of the market, it misses entirely the large shards of poverty that the market is unable to register...”

Rejecting the neoclassical approach, the authors propose a new paradigm of socio-economic development which takes account of labour, of human needs, of nature and the environment, and of economic accountability. Factoring in these dimensions, would, according to Goudzwaard and De Lange, respond to the major paradoxes of the current world economic system which give rise to substantial increases in poverty in Africa and other parts of the world.

First published in Dutch in 1986, and then in German, *Beyond Poverty and Affluence* is essentially an ethical critique of contemporary economic

thinking. Christian theology, drawing on German theologian Jurgen Moltmann and South Africa's Alan Boesak, are combined with rationalist philosopher Emmanuel Kant, to forge a strongly constructed moral imperative to reorder current economic priorities in favour of the poor and a more sustainable form of development.

The concept of economic renewal is advanced with its implicit resonances of spiritual renewal. Renewal, however, has a more secular meaning in current social thinking in the Netherlands. In 1989, the government of the Netherlands announced a new policy of “social renewal”. The shift in policy was concerned with disadvantaged individuals and groups in society and adopted a new integrated administrative approach involving a number of different sectors of civil society (Interbestuurlijke Projectgroep Sociale Vernieuwing, 1991).

Social renewal in the Netherlands was adopted with substantial consensus from the social partners and NGOs but attracted also some important critiques for its failure to direct a redistribution of housing resources and an expansion of social security entitlements. Goudzwaard and de Lange for their part, do aim at a redistribution, to be partially achieved by a freeze on wages and incomes, the creation of employee-based solidarity funds in favour of the disadvantaged, and by some reductions in levels of western consumption. The difficulty with these proposals is that the working poor in western Europe are already taxed, have to self-reduce their consumption and are exposed to wages which allow them only to underconsume the necessities of life.

In their "twelve-step programme for economic recovery", the authors advance a number of useful suggestions, such as redressing the balance towards the Southern hemisphere in international trade agreements or rethinking economic incentives to maximise agricultural output in Europe. They hope that the general public will adopt some of these proposals, some of which are already policy in international

organisations. *Beyond Poverty and Affluence* will hold an attraction for its strong visionary pull away from market economics and its identification of the many paradoxes of the social order. Its publication is a necessary contribution to the diversity of approaches to reconstructing a new more just and more equitable international order.

Pauline Conroy