

**'DRAWING A LINE' - ETHICAL AND POLITICAL STRATEGIES
IN COMPLEX EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE**

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ABSTRACT

Faced with massive crises in the 1990s, such as in Rwanda-Zaire, aid agencies have had to make ethical and strategic choices of great magnitude. One approach seeks to compare goods and bads from agencies' involvement, and to specify a 'bottom line' beneath which bads outweigh goods so that agencies should withdraw or change their involvement. In a second approach a line is drawn between (a) an agency's area of responsibility and (b) actions and consequences which are the responsibility of others--not a bottom line but a line dividing mine from thine. The paper probes and assesses those approaches, showing problems with both but especially with the second; qualifies them by reference to issues of motivation, feasibility and organisational level, and presents some complementary types of approach; and stresses finally that effective strategic action must be guided by broad causal analysis.

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