

## DATELINE YUGOSLAVIA: THE PARTISAN PRESS

by Peter Brock

The international news story since mid-1991 has been Bosnia-Herzegovina—the atrocities, the refugees, and the world's inaction. In most accounts, the villain has been an aggressive Serbia or Bosnian Serbs, who have been denounced for the worst crimes committed on European soil since the death of Adolf Hitler and the demise of Joseph Stalin.

The evidence appears overwhelming that the military forces of the Bosnian Serbs have perpetrated grave offenses. But throughout the crisis the Serbs have complained that they were also victims, and there is apparent evidence to support their complaint. The almost uniform manner by which the international news media, including the American media, dismissed Serb claims has played a critical role in the unfolding tragedy in the former Yugoslavia. As the first phase of the crisis perhaps now draws to a close, it is time for a searching look at the performance of the international media.

The verdict is anything but positive. As one of America's most prominent journalists on America's most prestigious newspaper said in a risky moment of candor early last summer, "I despair for my profession, and I despair for my newspaper. And this is very definitely *not* for attribution." As the routine, sometimes zealous bearers of bad news, especially in war, newspeople cynically shrug off criticism (and especially abhor self-criticism) and trudge back to the trenches. But in the Yugoslav civil war, the press itself has been a large part of the bad news. Legitimate concern for personal safety undoubtedly affected the coverage. Many sto-

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ries that deserved a follow-up did not receive it because journalists could not get to the scene of the conflict and were forced to rely on less-than-perfect sources. But a close look at the record since the war began on June 27, 1991, reveals avoidable media negligence and a form of pack journalism that reached its extreme last winter and spring.

During that period, readers and viewers received the most vivid reports of cruelty, tragedy, and barbarism since World War II. It was an unprecedented and unrelenting onslaught, combining modern media techniques with advocacy journalism.

In the process, the media became a movement, co-belligerents no longer disguised as noncombatant and nonpartisan. News was outfitted in its full battle dress of bold headlines, multipage spreads of gory photographs, and gruesome video footage. The clear purpose was to force governments to intervene militarily. The effect was compelling, but was the picture complete?

In fact, the mistakes were blatant:

- Street scenes of ravaged Vukovar in 1991 were later depicted as combat footage from minimally damaged Dubrovnik on Western television networks.

- The August 17, 1992, *Time* cover photo, taken from a British television report, showed a smiling, shirtless, skeletal man who was described as being among "Muslim prisoners in a Serbian detention camp." In fact, the man was a Serb—Slobodan Konjević, 37, who, along with his brother Zoran, 41, had been arrested and confined on charges of looting. Konjević, more dramatically emaciated than others who wore shirts in the picture, had suffered from tuberculosis for 10 years, said his sister in Vienna, who later identified her brothers in the picture.

- The 1992 BBC filming of an ailing, elderly "Bosnian Muslim prisoner-of-war in a Serb concentration camp" resulted in his later identification by relatives as retired Yugoslav Army officer Branko Veleć, a Bosnian Serb held in a Muslim detention camp.

- Among wounded "Muslim toddlers and infants" aboard a Sarajevo bus hit by sniper fire in August 1992 were a number of Serb

children—a fact revealed much later. One of the children who died in the incident was identified at the funeral as Muslim by television reporters. But the unmistakable Serbian Orthodox funeral ritual told a different story.

- In its January 4, 1993, issue, *Newsweek* published a photo of several bodies with an accompanying story that began: "Is there any way to stop Serbian atrocities in Bosnia?" The photo was actually of Serb victims, including one clearly recognizable man wearing a red coat. The photo, with the same man in his red coat, is identical to a scene in television footage from Vukovar a year earlier.

- CNN aired reports in March and May 1993 from the scenes of massacres of 14 Muslims and then 10 Muslims who were supposedly killed by Serbs. The victims later turned out to be Serbs. There was no correction.

- In early August 1993, a photo caption in the *New York Times* described a Croat woman from Posusje grieving for a son killed in recent Serb attacks. In fact, the Croat village of Posusje, in Bosnia near the Dalmatian coast, had been the scene of bloody fighting between Muslims and Croats that had caused 34 Bosnian Croat deaths, including the son of the woman in the photo.

By early 1993, several major news organizations appeared to be determined to use their reporting to generate the political pressure needed to force U.S. military intervention. In testing the effects of their stories, U.S. networks and publications conducted numerous polls during the Yugoslav civil war. But no matter how pollsters sculpted their questions, majorities of public opinion remained stubbornly opposed to all forms of armed intervention. Finally, on August 11, an ABC News-*Washington Post* poll said that six out of ten Americans supported allied "airstrikes against Bosnian Serb forces who are attacking the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo." The poll also showed that Americans overwhelmingly rejected air strikes by the United States, "if the European allies do not agree to participate." But the poll sought no objective opinions about Bosnian government forces who, according to many credible reports, frequently fired on their own positions and people in Sarajevo and manipulated artillery attacks

elsewhere in Bosnia for public relations and other purposes. A *Washington Post* spokeswoman said opinions were not asked about that because pollsters were "not sure the public would understand it." Also, she said, there "was not enough space" for other questions in the poll's format.

In May 1993, United Nations secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali chided the media for breaking the first commandment of objectivity as he addressed CNN's Fourth World Report Contributors Conference in Atlanta: "Today, the media do not simply report the news. Television has become a part of the events it covers. It has changed the way the world reacts to crisis." Boutros-Ghali accurately described the routine and consequence of coverage of the Yugoslav civil war: "Public emotion becomes so intense that United Nations work is undermined. On television, the problem may become simplified, and exaggerated."

Three months earlier, several high-ranking U.N. officials in Belgrade, usually reserved in their criticisms, privately shared confidences from journalists—verified during subsequent interviews in Belgrade with the correspondents themselves. The correspondents reported that they had met obstructions from editors. They told of stories changed without consultation and in some cases totally revised to coincide with the pack journalist bias that prevailed in Western news bureaus.

"The American press has become very partisan and anti-Serbian. They are very selective and manipulative with the information they use," said one U.N. official. "The reporters here have had their own wars with their editors. It was driving one literally crazy until she demanded to be transferred."

"I've worked with the press for a long time, and I have never seen so much lack of professionalism and ethics in the press," said another. "Especially by the American press, there is an extremely hostile style of reporting." "A kind of nihilism has been established," said yet another U.N. official.

"I was shocked when a relative read a story to me over the telephone," added an American correspondent in Belgrade. "My byline was on top of the story, but I couldn't recognize any-

thing else." Another reporter in Belgrade, previously singled out by one group of Serbian-Americans as especially one-sided, said he had argued with his editors at the *New York Times* until "they finally said I could write it like it really was. I finished the story and moved it to them. And after they read it, they killed it."

Also killed in the Yugoslav war was the professional mandate to get all sides of a story and to follow up on it—despite the obstacles. A British journalist angrily recalled how in May 1992 she had received an important tip in Belgrade. More than 1,000 Serb civilians—including men, women, children, and many elderly—from villages around the southwestern Bosnian town of Bradina were imprisoned by Muslims and Croats in a partly destroyed railroad tunnel at Konjić, near Sarajevo. "My editors said they were interested in the story," the reporter said. "But I told them it would take me three days to get there, another day or so to do the story and another three days to get back. They said it would take too much time." Months later, the same reporter was near Konjić on another story and managed to verify details of the earlier incident, though the Serb prisoners were no longer there. "The story was true, but several months had passed," she said. "I did the story anyway, but it wasn't played very well because of the late timing."

By late 1992, the majority of the media had become so mesmerized by their focus on Serb aggression and atrocities that many became incapable of studying or following up numerous episodes of horror and hostility against Serbs in Croatia and later in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

#### *Reporting from a Distance*

The imbalance in reporting began during the war in Croatia. Despite steady reports of atrocities committed there by Croatian soldiers and paramilitary units against Serbs, which some Belgrade correspondents were later able to confirm, the stories that reached the world talked only of Serb abuses. The other stories went unreported "because it was difficult to get close to those villages in Croatia. And it was damned dangerous," said one Belgrade correspondent. Reporters tended to foxhole in Sarajevo, Zagreb, or Belgrade and depend on their

networks of "stringers" and outlying contacts. Most arriving correspondents spoke no Serbo-Croatian, and interpreters were often domestic journalists or "stringers" with established allegiances as well as keen intuitions about what postcommunist censors in the "new democracies" in Zagreb and Sarajevo preferred. Reporters began to rely on aggressive government spokespeople—the government information ministry in Zagreb soon acquired scores of English-fluent publicists, and the Bosnian government also mobilized scores of handlers for the Western media. In that struggle for media attention, the Serbs were handicapped by the media sense that "the story" lay in the plight of the Muslims and by the isolation of Serbia because of U.N. sanctions and its own policies, which continued the previous official communist disdain for foreign media.

Media newcomers to Belgrade—where the Yugoslav federal information ministry included a mere half-dozen publicists—were therefore at a disadvantage. Coming from Western culture, they were accustomed to patronage, cooperation, access, and answers. But, isolated and denounced, the Belgrade government simply ignored their harangues. So, as some reporters freely admitted last February, they wrote what they wanted, often in adversarial tones. When official Belgrade read the results, it was confirmed in its original suspicion and passive media policies continued. Soon antagonisms became entrenched all around. Yet—unlike the controlled press in Zagreb—it was remarkable how domestic and foreign media through mid-1993 continued to lambaste the Serbian government. Perhaps Belgrade had a legitimate story to tell above the rising din from Sarajevo and Zagreb, where persistence, intensity, and volume had won the ears of the West. But, if so, it went untold because of official negligence, international sanctions, and a lack of media professionalism.

Before the summer of 1991, only a handful of Western correspondents had been based in Belgrade. The majority, along with new reporters who arrived in late 1991 and 1992, eventually migrated to Sarajevo or Zagreb, where technical communications with the West became centered—especially following the imposi-

tion of U.N. sanctions against Serbia on May 30, 1992. Establishing Zagreb as the communications and media hub during late 1992 and 1993 was all the more astonishing in light of Croatia's own repression of domestic media, which has included the resurrection of a communist-era law that threatens five years' imprisonment for anyone in the media—domestic or foreign—who criticizes the government.

Not surprisingly, Western journalists failed to produce meaningful stories with Zagreb datelines or hard-hitting reports that might shed unfavorable light on Croatian government figures or the darker sides of that "new" Balkan democracy, where libraries were being purged of volumes unsympathetic to official policies. Although some stories were filed, foreign journalists tended to look the other way as the government reclassified requirements for Croatian citizenship and ordered new policies for religious instruction in public schools. Boulevards and public squares were brazenly renamed for World War II Ustashi figures.

Meanwhile, by late 1991 Belgrade-based journalists and correspondents were nervously confronting the arrival of 60,000 Serb refugees from Croatia who had horrifying accounts of atrocities and of the destruction of scores of Serb villages. Nearly 100 of the 156 remaining Serbian Orthodox churches in Croatia had been razed, according to the patriarchate in Belgrade. (More than 800 Serbian churches stood in Croatia before World War II.) Media skepticism at the reports of refugees and Serbian officials limited any reporting about "concentration camps" holding Serb inmates, such as the one reported at Suhopolje among 18 destroyed Serb villages in the Grubišno Polje district. Another, later confirmed to exist, was at Stara Lipa, among the remains of 24 Serb villages in the Slavonska Požega district where Serbs had been evicted from their homes.

A Reuters photographer, who returned from Vukovar to report the discovery of the bodies of 41 Serb children in plastic bags, was initially quoted in other wire stories. But because he had not personally seen the bodies, news organizations pulled their stories about the alleged massacre. The same media standards regrettably did not apply when Western newspeople dealt

with reports based on second- and third-hand sources of massacres of Croats and later Muslims. The willingness to print without confirmation later affected the coverage of stories about tens of thousands of rapes of Muslim women.

By January 1992, it was too late to tell the Serbs' side of the war in Croatia because that war had ended. The war in Bosnia was about to erupt, with a host of new complexities. Few could follow the bewildering and abrupt alliances and counteralliances as Bosnian Serb and Croat forces attacked Bosnian government and Muslim troops and then Muslims fought Bosnian Croat forces.

When the Yugoslav civil war was nearly a year old, writer Slavko Ćuruvija diagnosed the cause of the media's disorientation: the role played by Western journalists who possessed minimal capabilities for covering a vexing civil war among South Slav cultures and nationalities. "The greatest difficulty for west European politicians and commentators in dealing with Yugoslavia is that most knew next to nothing about the country when they first delved into its crisis," he wrote in *The European*. "Now that everything has come loose, they are disgusted by the chaos and their powerlessness to change anything overnight."

It did not help the Western media that there were few credible guides to lead outsiders through the twisted madness of Yugoslav fratricide. U.N. officials—primarily because they spoke English—became corroborating sources, spokespeople, and patient tutors for journalists, but they too lacked sufficient Balkan orientation. Editors back home were even less experienced about the new Balkan events and were quick to accept the offerings from the pack. Helpful U.N. officials were often uncertain about details or even the veracity of incidents reported, but within minutes Western news agencies accepted their background speculations as fact. The media, U.N. staffers noted with eventual bitterness, cast the U.N. as anti-Serb and then later as pro-Serb. U.N. officials in Belgrade and Sarajevo winced when named as the source for prematurely blaming Bosnian Serbs for the fatal shooting of ABC-television news producer David Kaplan in August 1992.

Senior U.N. officials later stated that their investigation had determined the shot could not have been fired from Serb-held areas, but the disclosure went almost unreported. Similarly, U.N. spokesman Larry Hollingsworth in Sarajevo was widely quoted in April 1993 when he angrily stated his hope that the "hottest corners of hell" were reserved for Serb gunners in an artillery salvo that fell on Srebreniça, killing 56 civilians. But absent from news reports was any similar condemnation by him or others concerning allegations that the Bosnian army inside Srebreniça had fired its tanks on Serb positions first, triggering the Serb artillery response, as the U.N. was attempting to broker a ceasefire.

### *The Hidden Hand*

"Fingerprints" in the media war could be traced to public relations specialists, including several high-powered and highly financed U.S. firms, and their clients in government information ministries. The Washington public relations firms of Ruder Finn and Hill & Knowlton, Inc. were the premier agents at work behind the lines, launching media and political salvos and raking in hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of dollars while representing the hostile republics—sometimes two at a time—in the Yugoslav war. Hill & Knowlton had for several years represented agencies in the previous Federal Republic of Yugoslavia before it disintegrated. (The firm is best remembered for producing the phony witness who testified before a congressional committee about the alleged slaughter of Kuwaiti infants after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.) Ruder Finn, having simultaneously represented the governments of Croatia and Bosnia until mid-1993, when both stepped up ethnic cleansing of each other's civilians in Bosnian villages, finally abandoned the capital-drained Croatia and hired on exclusively for Bosnia, with its liberal donations from Islamic countries. Soon after, Ruder Finn scored a public relations home run in helping its Bosnian Muslim clients dominate the June 1993 conference on human rights in Vienna, virtually hijacking the two-week agenda that climaxed with an 88-to-1 vote deploring the failure of the U.N. to stop the war and demanding that the arms embargo on Bosnia be lifted.

Especially in the early days of the war in Croatia, few journalists were able to step back to take a clearer look at the images being manipulated to shape their stories. Many rookie Balkan reporters at first could do nothing but obediently attend nonstop press conferences. As Steve Crawshaw reported in the *London Independent*,

One thing is certain: nobody can complain that the Croatian publicity machine is overcautious about unsubstantiated allegations. If it is colourful tales that you are looking for, then Croatia can always oblige....It sometimes seems the ministers who turn up to the press conferences live in a rhetoric-rich, fact-free fairyland.

The *London Times* noted on November 18, 1991, that

clarity was an early victim of the war in Yugoslavia and reality has become progressively enveloped in a blanket of fog.... As the desperate attempts to win the hearts and minds of Europe grow, the claims become wilder, the proof skimpier. But the [government-controlled] Croatian media are convinced that officials in London and Washington can be outraged into submission, so the assault continues unabated.

There can be little doubt that media advocacy from the field fed editorial responses at home. A typical *Time* cover story (March 15, 1993) led with "The agony of Yugoslavia keeps replaying itself with new bombardments, massacres, rapes and 'ethnic cleansings.' At each horrifying recurrence, world opinion is outraged and opinion leaders call for an end to the barbarism."

Far rarer was the introspection about the media's coverage of the war that Charles Lane voiced in *Newsweek* seven months earlier: "There is undoubtedly an element of hyperbole—even hypocrisy—in the current outrage of Western journalists, politicians and voters. And perhaps even a strain of racism."

An excellent case of hyperbole was the peculiar statement that appeared in the March 15 *Time* cover story. In that article, Sadako Ogata, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, was quoted as telling members of the U.N. Security Council that "Civilians, women, children and old people are being killed, usually by having their throats cut." Ogata then said

her information was derived from uncorroborated broadcasts by unidentified ham radio operators in eastern Bosnia. Yet, such transmissions, an increasing source of on-the-scene propaganda, were frequently disproved after U.N. troops arrived. Nevertheless Ogata added, "If only 10 per cent of the information is true, we are witnessing a massacre." *Time* thus concluded: "In fact Ogata, like other U.N. officials and foreign journalists, had no firsthand knowledge of what was happening."

*Time* also repeated that 70,000 "detention-camp inmates" still existed. That echoed an exaggerated and uncorroborated statistic from a State Department spokesperson, whose mistake the Associated Press and the *New York Times* publicized during January 1993. A State Department official had admitted when confronted with the figure of 70,000 that it was a typographical error. The correct State Department estimate, she said, was less than 7,000.

News reports themselves showed that Bosnian Serbs were unusually cooperative in allowing international inspection of their camps, while Bosnian Muslims and Croats either refused or obstructed inspection of their camps—but that fact also received little public attention.

The media's effort to inflict a "Massada [sic] psychology" upon Serbia, as political scientist and Carleton University (Ottawa) professor C. G. Jacobsen calls it, has not completely escaped the notice of several academics and a handful of journalists who have condemned manipulation and negligence in the press. "The myopia and bias of the press is manifest," Jacobsen wrote in his report to the Independent Committee on War Crimes in the Balkans. "The *Washington Post*, France's *L'Observateur*' and other leading newspapers have published pictures of paramilitary troops and forces with captions describing them as Serb, though their insignia clearly identify them as [Croat] Ustasha."

In a three-month study of news reports, Howard University professor of international relations Nikolaos Stavrou detected "a disturbing pattern in news coverage." He claimed most of the stories were based on "hearsay evidence," with few attempts to show the

"other side's" perspectives. Ninety per cent of the stories originated in Sarajevo, but only 5 per cent in Belgrade. Stavrou's analysis cited ethnic stereotyping, with Serbs referred to as primitive "remnants of the Ottoman Empire" and Yugoslav army officers described as "orthodox Communist generals." News stories about Serbs abounded with descriptions of them as "Eastern," "Byzantine," and "orthodox"—all were "repeatedly used in a pejorative context." Stavrou said Croats were described as "Western," "nationalist," "wealthiest," "Westernized," and most advanced in development of their "Western-style democracy," while newspaper photographs neglected to show suffering or dead Serbs or destroyed Serb churches and villages.

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The 1993 double-barreled Pulitzer Prize for international reporting, shared between *Newsday's* Roy Gutman and *New York Times* correspondent John Burns, raised at least a few eyebrows. Burns received the award primarily for his account of seven hours of interviews with a captured Bosnian Serb soldier, Borislav Herak. Herak's confession of multiple rapes and murder occurred under the approving eyes of his Bosnian Muslim captors. Assured he would not be subjected to brutality as a prisoner, Herak also alleged that the then-commanding general of the U.N. Protective Forces (UNPROFOR), Lewis MacKenzie, had committed multiple rapes of young Muslim women.

Despite its vulnerable nature, the lengthy story about the confession—without mention of the bizarre accusations against MacKenzie—went over the *New York Times* wire service on November 26, 1992, targeted for publication in large Sunday newspapers with almost no opportunity for challenge or timely rebuttal. Belgrade officials expressed serious doubts about Herak's mental competency, but during his trial the question was ignored and prosecutors offered little additional evidence beyond Herak's original confession.

In a subsequent advertisement in the May 1993 issue of the *American Journalism Review*, the *Times* used curious wording to describe Burns's achievement. He "has written of the destruction of a major European city and the dispossession of Sarajevo's people. He virtually discovered these events for the world outside as they happened." According to the *Washington Post*, the story about Herak "knocked everyone [in the Pulitzer jury] over."

One of Burns's first stories after his arrival back in Sarajevo in July 1993 contained a reference to the infamous "bread line massacre" of the previous year, which Bosnian Muslims used to pressure the U.N. Security Council as it prepared to vote for sanctions against Serbia. A year after some U.N. officials acknowledged that Muslims—not Bosnian Serbs—had set off explosives that killed 22 civilians outside a Sarajevo bakery, Burns and the *Times* still reported the claim that a Serb mortar had caused the tragedy. Ironically, that same July 5 story by Burns focused on Bosnian paramilitary police in Sarajevo who were firing mortars on nearby Bosnian army units. Repeated attempts to interview Burns, who returned briefly to Toronto last June, were unsuccessful.

There have also been questions about Roy Gutman's Pulitzer-winning scoops in August 1992 about two Serb-run "death camps." Gutman constructed his accounts—to his credit, admittedly so—from alleged survivors of Manjaca and Trnopolje. But as one British journalist, Joan Phillips, has pointed out:

The death camp stories are very thinly sourced. They are based on the very few accounts from alleged survivors. They rely on hearsay and double hearsay. They are given the stamp of authority by speculation and surmise from officials. Gutman is not guilty of lying. [He] did not try to hide the fact that his stories were thinly sourced.

But it is also true, as Phillips noted, that Gutman's disclaimers were placed near the end of the article. Yet those stories were the principal basis for the world's belief that the Serbs were not simply holding Muslim prisoners but were operating death camps in Bosnia. Phillips also drew attention to Gutman's visit in September 1992 to the scene of a massacre of 17 Serbs near Banja Luka, which went unreported until

December 13—three months later. Gutman could not be contacted and *Newsday* editors would not explain the lapse in publication. Gutman did discuss his reporting later on: In an interview in the July 1993 *American Journalism Review*, he explained that he had abandoned strict objectivity in his coverage in order to pressure governments to act.

#### *Playing Favorites*

The entire media response to the issue of atrocities against Serbs raises a troubling question: Why did the press show such minimal interest in Serb claims of death camps housing their own people? Documents submitted to the European Parliament and U.N. by Bosnian Serbs have included horrible claims:

- Late March 1992—Serb females imprisoned at Breza were raped and then murdered by Muslims; their bodies were later incinerated.

- May 27, 1992—Female prisoners from Bradina were taken to the camp in Celebici where they were repeatedly raped.

- July 26, 1992—An escapee from Gorazde reported Muslims forced Serb fathers to rape their own daughters before both were murdered.

- August 27, 1992—An affidavit by Dr. Olga Draško, a former inmate of an Ustashi camp at Dretelj, described rapes and mutilations of women, including herself, during her three-month confinement.

- November 1992—A group of Serb women released from Tuzla requested late-term abortions after having been repeatedly raped by Muslims during lengthy captivities.

- December 10, 1992—In Belgrade, Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle told officials of the Swiss Federal Parliament and representatives from European ecumenical movements that 800 Serb women were documented as repeated rape victims in 20 camps operated by Muslims and Croats.

The patriarch also cited parts of an August 2, 1992, report from the State Center for Investigation of War Crimes (Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina). Compiled for the U.N. in November 1992, it identified locations at Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bugojno, Konjić, Bihać, and Slavonski Brod where Serb women were

allegedly confined and raped by Croat and Muslim soldiers.

Also unnoticed by the media was the submission on December 18, 1992, of the lengthy report (S/24991) by the U.N. Security Council to the General Assembly. The report includes some of the depositions by Serb rape victims from the incidents above. U.N. officials have never explained why it was not made publicly available until January 5, 1993, even though it was the only report produced by an international agency that contained documented testimonies from any rape victims up until that time. Yet, while that report was receiving minimal circulation at the U.N., the news media were focusing on undocumented claims by Bosnian government officials that Serb soldiers had committed as many as 60,000 rapes of Muslim women.

From the start of the Bosnian war in April 1992 until November of that year, thousands of refugees fled into Croatia and other countries. There, extensive interviews failed to disclose allegations of "systematic rape." Then suddenly, in late November and early December, the world received a deluge of reports about rapes of Muslim women. The accounts originated in the information ministries of the governments of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The January 4, 1993, *Newsweek*, for one, quoted unsubstantiated Bosnian government claims of up to 50,000 rapes of Muslims by Serb soldiers.

A European Community delegation headed by Dame Anne Warburton made a hurried investigation during two brief visits to the region in December 1992 and January 1993. It reported that it had visited primarily Zagreb but obtained only minimal access to alleged Muslim victims or refugee centers where victims were supposedly located. Of note, the delegation said it had encountered additional reports about rapes of Croat and Serb women. Although it declined to specify the source of "the most reasoned estimates suggested to the mission," Warburton's group decided to accept and report "the number of victims at around 20,000."

An inquiry by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights soon presented a more moderate estimate, however. Its investigators visited

Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia from January 12 to 23, 1993. In its report of February 10, the commission, while refraining from giving an official estimate, mentioned a figure of 2,400 victims. The estimate was based on 119 documented cases. The report concluded that Muslims, Croats, and Serbs had been raped, with Muslims making up the largest number of victims.

Finally, the EC's Committee on Women's Rights held hearings on February 17 and 18 on the Warburton Delegation's findings, eventually rejecting the estimate of 20,000 Muslim rape victims because of the lack of documented evidence and testimony. At the hearing, U.N. war crimes commission chairman Frits Kalshoven testified that the evidence collected up to that point would not stand up as proof in a court. Similarly, representatives from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees concluded that not enough independent evidence could be found, while Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross concurrently declared that all sides were committing atrocities and rape.

The resulting handful of rape-produced births also clearly contradicts claims of waves of systematic rape-induced pregnancies supposedly treated in Bosnian hospitals and reported by Bosnian government authorities and Western journalists.

The general lack of follow-up on the rape allegations is in stark contrast to the lone account of French journalist Jérôme Bony, who described in a February 4, 1993, broadcast on the French television program "Envoyé Spécial" his trek to Tuzla, notorious for its concentration of Muslim rape victims:

When I was at 50 kilometers from Tuzla I was told, "Go to Tuzla high school ground [where] there are 4,000 raped women." At 20 kilometers this figure dropped to 400. At 10 kilometers only 40 were left. Once at the site, I found only four women willing to testify.

At the height of the rape story, media gullibility reached new levels. In mid-February 1993, the Associated Press, citing only a Bosnian government source, reported alleged cannibalism by starving Muslims in eastern Bosnia. The story achieved instant headlines in the United States. Receiving little if any play,

however, was the vigorous denial the following day by U.N. officials in Bosnia, who rushed to the scene of supposedly starving villagers and discovered them still in possession of livestock and chickens.

In its effort to force Western military intervention, the media also critically neglected to report essential details about the 17-hour debate last May that led to the Bosnian Serb parliament's rejection of the Vance-Owen plan. No fewer than 50 reports were filed on the Associated Press and *New York Times* wire services in the 18-hour period following the final vote by the Bosnian Serb parliament, but only one of them attempted a minimal description of the actual debate. So Western readers never learned why the Bosnian Serbs were so opposed to the plan. Among their objections were the following:

- The plan's narrow umbilical connection between Serbia and Serb-populated territories adjacent to Croatia and within Bosnia was not a defensible, long-term proposition.
- Some 460,000 Bosnian Serbs would end up in Muslim provinces and 160,000 Bosnian Serbs would be located within Croat provinces.
- Of a total of \$31.4 billion in identified assets in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Vance-Owen plan apportioned \$18 billion to Muslims, \$7.3 billion to Croats, and \$6.1 billion to Serbs.
- None of the known deposits of bauxite, lead, zinc, salt, or iron would be given to the Bosnian Serbs.
- Out of 3,900 megawatts in electrical generating capacity, Muslims would receive 1,765 megawatts, Croats would receive 1,220 megawatts, and Serbs would receive 905 megawatts. (All 10 hydroelectric plants would essentially be under the control of Bosnian Croats.)
- Of the 920 total kilometers of railway lines, 500 would pass through Muslim provinces, 260 through Croat areas, and 160 through Serb-controlled lands.
- Only 200 out of 1,200 kilometers of improved roadways would lie within Bosnian Serb jurisdictions.
- Bosnian Serbs would have been required to relinquish or would have otherwise lost nearly 24 per cent of the land they have held

for generations.

#### *Awkward Realities*

"The mauling of Sarajevo—the worst single crime against a community in Europe since Auschwitz—cannot be watched impassively night after night on television news bulletins," as Robert Fox of the *London Daily Telegraph* put it. That was the general image. But another side of the story deserved more attention.

As early as July 1992, senior Western diplomats had stated publicly that Bosnian Muslim forces in Sarajevo were repeatedly provoking Serb shelling of the city to trigger Western military intervention. But few wire stories from Sarajevo bothered to establish that the almost daily artillery barrages and ceasefire violations were not always started by Bosnian Serbs, who often, officials said repeatedly, were returning fire from Muslims who had fired on Serb targets and neighborhoods first. Without making such distinctions, stories implied that the Serbs were alone to blame for the "siege of Sarajevo." Also, U.N. observers were positioned primarily to detect artillery actions by Serbs, raising questions about the volume of non-Serb artillery fire, which was often observed to be almost as intense as Serb shelling.

Kosevo Hospital in Sarajevo was a favorite backdrop for television journalists who, when the hospital's water supply was interrupted because of the shelling, eagerly awaited the first birth without water in the maternity ward. Once they got their pictures, the Western film crews dismantled their cameras and returned to the nearby Holiday Inn, where hot water was abundant. Unreported was the fact that on their exit from the hospital they had to avoid tripping over a shielded Bosnian army mortar emplacement that was never identified as the probable reason why Serbs sporadically fired at the hospital.

Countless news stories rarely heeded statements from U.N. officials that Bosnian Muslim units frequently initiated their own shelling of Muslim quarters of the city as well as Serb neighborhoods. For instance, on March 23, 1993, Major Pepe Gallegos of UNPROFOR in Sarajevo described the previous day's exchanges: "There were 341 impacts recorded—133 on the

Serbian side and 208 on the Bosnian side with 82 artillery rounds, 29 mortar rounds and 22 tank rounds hitting the Serbians; and 115 artillery, 73 mortar and 20 tank rounds hitting the Bosnians."

It was a rare exception to the media's usual tilt when, on July 22, 1992, the *Guardian* reported U.N. commander MacKenzie's reaction to attacks on civilian targets in Sarajevo: "Mortars are set up beside hospitals, artillery beside schools, mortars and other weapons are carried in ambulances. I've never seen the Red Cross abused like that, on both sides." Such reports seldom appeared in the American media, which may explain some dramatic differences in the public perspectives about intervention between Europe and the United States.

French general Phillipe Morillon, following his relief as commander of UNPROFOR in late June 1993, emphatically blamed the Bosnian Muslim government for failing to lift the siege of Sarajevo. In an interview with the Prague daily *Lidove Noviny*, Morillon said the Bosnian regime wanted to keep Sarajevo a focal point for world sympathy and repeatedly refused to allow UNPROFOR to achieve a ceasefire.

By mid-1993, the ability to tell the Serb side of the story was gone, as some observers recognized. "The Serbians have much to say and as yet have had virtually no opportunity to do so," argued Mary Hueniken in the *London Free Press*. "Sanctions slapped on Serbia prevent it from hiring a PR firm to help it put its two cents in," reported the June 7, 1993, issue of *O'Dwyer's Washington Report*, a public relations and public affairs publication that monitors the PR industry in Washington.

As a result, Serbs, though surely guilty of numerous atrocities, have been pilloried in the press. Reporters, meanwhile, cheer on the out-gunned Bosnians, who undoubtedly have their own skeletons in the closet, and give Croatia, which wants to carve up its own chunk of Bosnia, a free ride. The U.S. public won't get a clear picture of what is really happening in the Balkans until Serbia is allowed to present its case through PR.

The tentative media self-criticism that has emerged so far has focused superficially on television coverage of the Yugoslav civil war.

According to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonprofit research organization in Washington, for the first three months of 1993 the major networks aired 233 stories on Bosnia during prime-time news, as opposed to only 137 stories on President Bill Clinton's economic plans.

Similarly, Marc Gunther, of Knight-Ridder Newspapers, noted the "depressing regularity" of ABC's "World News Tonight" broadcasts about Bosnia. "Is ABC doing too much with the story, or are its rivals not doing enough? And what accounts for the different approaches?" he wrote. Gunther's story was based on the *Tyndall Report*, which monitors evening newscasts. It found that ABC's Yugoslav war reporting had "provided 301 minutes of coverage, compared with 179 for NBC's 'Nightly News' and 177 for the 'CBS Evening News' during the 11 months that ended in March."

"In 1992, excluding the election, the most covered story on ABC was the Balkans," Gunther continued. "CBS's top story was the Los Angeles riots, while NBC devoted the most minutes to Somalia. ABC's 'Nightline,' meanwhile, has devoted more than a dozen programs to the Balkans since last year, many consisting entirely of reporting from the scene of the fighting." The analysis suggested a special ABC commitment to the Bosnian war. Gunther noted that Roone Arledge "has a personal connection to the war because, as president of ABC Sports, he produced coverage of the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo. Last year, David Kaplan, a producer for ABC's 'PrimeTime Live,' was killed by a sniper's bullet while preparing a report on the war." Gunther also underlined Peter Jennings's "personal convictions on Bosnia" and his admonitions that the world community had failed to ease the suffering there. An ABC spokesman, contacted for response, said Gunther and the Knight-Ridder story were "right on the money."

In ABC's case, the motive for its coverage may be easy to find. But that is not the case for many other news organizations. In the wake of the negligence and pack journalism that have distorted the coverage of the Yugoslav civil war to date, the media would be well-advised to gaze into their own mirrors and consider their

dubious records. At some point, historians or an official international investigation will determine the true culpability of all the actors in the Yugoslav tragedy. But one of those actors is the press itself. In Bosnia, where major governments had few intelligence assets and where the role of international public opinion was central, it was critical that the news media report with precision and professionalism. Instead, the epitaph above the grave of objective and fair reporting in the Yugoslav war probably will be written with the cynicism conveyed in an internal memorandum of April 19, 1993, from a cartoonist to his syndicate's editorial-page editors:

I was SKEDed earlier today for a cartoon on the Rodney King verdict to be faxed out this afternoon. However, given the racial and legal complexities of the case we have decided that such an issue is best left unaddressed in the uncompromising language of an editorial cartoon. I will be sending a cartoon on the war in Bosnia instead.

## MISREADING THE BALKANS

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**The Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of War**  
by *Slavenka Drakulić*  
146 pages, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, \$19.95

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**The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War**  
by *Misha Glenny*  
194 pages, New York: Penguin Books, \$10.00 (pbk.)

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**A Witness to Genocide: the 1993 Pulitzer Prize-Winning Dispatches on the "Ethnic Cleansing" of Bosnia**  
by *Roy Gutman*  
180 pages, New York: Macmillan, \$12.00

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**The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-up 1980-92**  
by *Branka Magaš*  
366 pages, New York: Verso, \$64.95; \$19.95 (pbk.)

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**Le Nettoyage Ethnique: Documents Historiques sur une Idéologie Serbe**  
by *Mirko Grmek, Marc Gjidara and Neven Šimac*  
340 pages, Paris: Fayard, Fr 120 (pbk.)

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**The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict** by *George F. Kennan*  
418 pages + maps, Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, \$15.95

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by *Ivo Banac*

In his polemical classic "On the Malice of Herodotus," Plutarch distinguished between the artistry of Herodotus, which he found charming and even skillful, and what he regarded as

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