

Chapter 4

Looking in the Mirror: Reflections on a US Discourse

Official Policy Discourse

“One time, I was made Man of the Year, together with Nixon, and I spent a month trying to get off the cover. Because I knew that sharing the cover with the President is not a recommended means of survival.¹

Henry Kissinger, Former Secretary of State
Time 75th Anniversary Birthday Party
March 3, 1998

While the precise relationship between the *Time* discourse on ethnic conflict and the official discourse will probably never be explored satisfactorily, the above quote by former secretary of state Henry Kissinger provides an illuminating starting point. Excerpted in *Time* promotional website literature, the magazine makes use of his celebrity status to in turn raise the status of the magazine. Such an illustration highlights the particularly close relationship that *Time Magazine* has sought to maintain with influential government leaders. In order to establish that relationship around the period of the Clinton Shift, the final question remains, how does the official government discourse compare to that of *Time*?

We have already observed that the *Time* discourse of ethnic conflict perceptively supported US foreign policy through its wholesale appropriation of both primordial and neo-primordial language and through its failure to critique the ethnicized paradigm on which the policy was legitimized. We have also seen a sample of the official US sources who frequently contributed to defining the situation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and how civilian sources “on the ground” were given comparatively no defining authority. Returning to the original claims by Feher that official discourse of the “international community” defined the violence of Bosnia-Herzegovina in terms of primordial ethnic claims,² it is now important to clarify the links between this official language and that of *Time*. This chapter then seeks to conclude the paper

¹ This quote was garnered from *Time*'s promotional website for prospective advertisers, “Rates & Specs: Time National,” (<http://www.time-planner.com/planner2001/rates/index.html>).

² Feher, *Powerless by Design* (2000), pp. 54-58.

by first surveying official US policy discourse based on US Department of State archives, reflecting on its development related to that of the *Time* discourse and finally, concluding with a number of practical and theoretical reflections.

Much critical media studies literature notes the routine and dominating dependence on official (governmental) sources by the news media.³ Such regular dependence was certainly obvious in the *Time* coverage, although official US sources did not necessarily predominate the text. It is instructive to compare this observation to a content survey of *New York Times* reporting on rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992-1993 by Susan Lambert, who found that 44% of all articles cited government officials.⁴ However, considering the lack of authority granted to unofficial sources in the *Time* coverage and the paragraph summaries that regularly defined the situation irregardless of their views, exploring the link to official sources remains vital in understanding *Time* coverage.

Like Lambert's source overview, *Time* sources included UN and "European diplomats" in addition to the definitive expert contributions of academics and policy analysts. Thus, the US Administration and State Department obviously could not have single-handedly reified "ethnic conflict" in media discourse. It was clearly in the interests of others to establish this as a defining construct in the breakup of Yugoslavia and generally, as a post-Cold War paradigm. Feher makes the case that "balance of power" interests in France and a limited UN mandate also helped to construct such paradigms.⁵ However, the parties most interested from the beginning of the breakup were of course the SDS and Milošević's SPS party.⁶ Meanwhile the HDZ also became keen to promote this view abroad when it

³ Herman and Chomsky, pp. 18-25, note the reciprocated dependence on official sources by the news media as well as the immediate legitimate status accorded to them. Gans, *Deciding What's News* (1979), pp. 116-122, also notes the preponderance of official sources and, pp. 128-131, notes the overriding concern for *efficiency* in source consideration.

⁴ Susan Lambert, *Covering Rape in Ethnic Conflict: The Case of the Bosnian War – A Content Analysis of The New York Times Coverage of Rape for the Years 1992 and 1993* (Bloomington: Indiana University School of Journalism, December 1996), pp. 55-56, 60-61, found that 33% of these sources were from the UN officials, 15% from the US and 10% from other outside governments, primarily Western European. The balance of official sources came from the "warring parties," less than 10% each.

⁵ Feher, pp. 65-68.

⁶ Serbian Social Party (SPS), established in 1991 as the "reformed" successor to the Serbian League of Communists, the SPS elite became the primary group through which Milošević and associated former-

perpetrated military aggression against the Bosnia-Herzegovina government in 1993. Only the "pro-multiethnic" SDA party fought this perspective, although the weight of the discourse and its reification by violence lent credence to its more nationalist leaders as well. On a scale not documented before 1992, the governments of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Milošević-dominated Yugoslavia each contracted private public relations firms in the US to pitch their case to media and elites in the US and "the West."⁷ Furthermore, the end of the Cold War opened space for new research paradigms and programs, and numerous analysts and academics were anxious to add their under-researched conjecture to the "hot issue" that "Bosnia" presented to the foreign policy community, spawning a growth industry of "ethnic conflict studies" worth examining itself.⁸ Thus, France, the UN, the SDS, Milošević, Karadžić, the HDZ, US publicity firms, "Western" academics and policy analysts all eagerly contributed to an overtly "ethnic" definition of the "conflict" in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The contribution by eager entrepreneurs – and even nationalist parties – to define and reify "ethnic conflict" in the United States is woefully incomplete without the central role of the US government. Given its global influence in the wake of the Cold War and the Gulf War (1990-1991), the role of the US government to define the component parts of the "international system" cannot be ignored. Recognition by EU member states prompted the onslaught of violence in Croatia and recognition by the US and EU had similar though magnified effects in Bosnia-Herzegovina. And whether or not this recognition was cause, excuse or both for JNA/SDS aggression, the continued influence of US-sponsored negotiating

LC politicians established ties to the SDS in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina through which military aid and organization was funneled since 1991.

⁷ Jarol B. Manheim, "Going Less Public: Managing Images to Influence US Foreign Policy," in *Do the Media Govern? Politicians, Voters and Reporters in America*, Shanto Iyengar and Richard Reeves, eds., (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997), pp. 379-390, documents the dramatic rise of public relations firms contracted by non-US parties in the US since 1984. Specifically, Brock, *Foreign Policy* (1993), p. 160-161, with an undisguised relativist orientation, notes that the public relations firms of Rudder Finn and Hill & Knowlton, Inc. played large roles for their governmental clients - Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and the remaining FRY. A more pointed and thoroughly documented examination is offered by Brad K. Blitz, "Serbia's War Lobby: Diaspora Groups and Western Elites," in *This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia*, Thomas Cushman and Stjepan G. Meštrović eds., (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 187-243.

⁸ Among organizations benefiting from the perception of "rising global ethnic conflict" were such groups as International Alert (<http://www.international-alert.org/>) and the Institute for Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity (INCORE) not to mention the more established US think-tanks who received numerous grants in "ethnic conflict" studies in the 1990s. See: <http://www.ned.org/research/demresources/subject-conflict.html> .

paradigms that also marked periods of violence – Vance-Owen, Geneva, Lisbon and Dayton – unmistakably defined and redefined territorial goals for SDS and HDZ forces. Thus, the role of the US government is key to understanding how “Bosnia” was defined.

The public discourse of the Clinton Administration and US State Department during this period is instructive. Appendix 2.1 lists the archival documents located via the State Department’s archival search engine.⁹ While the archives contain an apparently sporadic list of interviews, speeches and press briefings, the overall findings are nonetheless illuminating. Following Clinton’s inauguration speech, both he and Secretary Christopher give speeches with important references to “ethnic hatreds” and “ethnic conflict and aggressive nationalism” respectively (2/26/93), but the discourse becomes overwhelmingly neo-primordial until August-September 1993, when Christopher (8/11/93), Assistant Secretary Strobe Talbott (9/7/93), Clinton (9/21/93) and National Security Advisor Anthony Lake (9/21/93) all make efforts to magnify the primordial elements of “ethnic conflict” in interviews, speeches and hearings – some of high profile. Christopher provides the clearest example of discourse weaving the primordial and neo-primordial conceptions in an interview with Roger Mudd on *MacNeil/Lehrer*:

“In Bosnia, there are such **ancient hatreds** that evidently the ethnic groups want to try to divide it and be in separate enclaves. That will be a decision that they will have to make, and it’s very hard to dictate that from a distance.¹⁰

Given that this blitz immediately followed the notorious resignation of three State Department officials that August and a failed negotiating effort in Geneva, the timing was crucial. It was a clear tool for staving off critics of an administration now determined to keep its distance. This flurry of primordial assertions clearly marked the height of the Clinton Shift.

After late 1993, primordial conceptions of ethnic conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina greatly subsided with the coolly analytical neo-primordial conceptions again prevalent. Speeches at the opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC (5/12/94) provided opportunities for strong words against “ethnic cleansing” amidst a new policy initiative for a special “war crimes tribunal,” resembling in discourse and substance the article, “No Rush to Judgment,” that appeared in *Time* six weeks later (6/27/94). Meanwhile, the neo-primordial

⁹ Beginning in 1993, the search reveals only development since the Clinton Administration.

conception was fully operative as demonstrated in the following State Department press briefing with representative Michael McCurry on the violence in Chechnya from December 12, 1994:

Q: My question is the **ethnic aspect** of it. Is this the way to deal with what is, in part, an **ethnic conflict**—to use force? In fact, to start what could be a long-term military conflict?

MR. McCURRY: Is this a wise course of action on the part of the Russian Government? That certainly remains to be seen.¹¹

In this illustrative example, a journalist and McCurry exchanged words that made it clear that both understood "ethnic conflict" as a specific categorical device for succinctly defining instances of organized violence. Its obvious instrumental role in the discourse around Chechnya was certainly consonant with the observations of *Time* discourse in January-June 1994 around Bosnia-Herzegovina.

For the most part, the profile of "Bosnia" in State Department discourse subsided until August 1995 when SDS forces overran Srebrenica and the UN "safe areas." Finally, in November of that year with the US-induced Dayton negotiations nearing their conclusion, the Clinton Shift, with its earlier primordial discursive strategies exhausted, became completely transparent in a speech by Talbott at the National Press Club (11/9/95):

"Can those [democratic] values and institutions ever take hold in the former Yugoslavia? I realize there is a lot of skepticism if not cynicism on that point. Many assert, or at least imply, that the **conflict among Serbs, Croats and Muslims** is, quite simply, insoluble; that the region is a permanent and hopeless quagmire—a word intended to have, in our ears, cautionary echoes of Vietnam. Listen carefully and you will sometimes hear in the current debate a hint that there's something in the air or the water of the Balkans that dooms those wretched people to slaughter each other. That's often the subliminal message, I believe, of the cliché? about "**ancient hatreds**."

Having lived in Yugoslavia for two years—and having seen how the South Slavs could live harmoniously with each other—I find this view wrong-headed in the extreme. There was nothing predestined about the horror that has been raging in the Balkans for the past four years. It was foolish, demagogic local

¹⁰ Interview with Roger Mudd, "MacNeil/Lehrer," *U.S. Department of State Office of the Spokesman* (<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/index.html>, August 11, 1993).

¹¹ Daily Press Briefing with Michael McCurry, *U.S. Department of State Office of the Spokesman* (<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/index.html>, December 14, 1994, 12:54 PM).

politics, along with short-sighted international diplomacy, that helped trigger, in the late 1980s and early '90s, the Third Balkan war of this century.¹²

In a statement reminiscent of his *Time* editorial described in chapter three, Talbott here explicitly highlighted the actual rhetoric of the Administration whose spokespeople (including Talbott himself) had employed such "clichés" in two distinct periods of its three-year history. (See Appendix 2.1.) By late 1995, such "clichés" had apparently become so prohibitive to US foreign policy and its negotiation efforts that they were blatantly attacked and arduously rescinded.

While the heavy use of primordialism at the peak of the Clinton Shift vindicates Feher's assertion that it was instrumental in excusing US policy, the State Department discourse also reveals something more complex – and familiar. Instead of an ongoing policy reverting to primordial "ethnic conflict" associations, a far more subtle and flexible language of neo-primordialism is employed throughout the period of war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The new discourse is again, strongly linked to the classic primordial conceptions, evident in Lake's address to Johns Hopkins University (9/21/93), referencing Moynihan and naming "ethnic conflict" as one of the major post-Cold War threats. However, as in *Time* coverage and analysis, such language appears untenable as an ongoing policy platform. While primordialism is reified in the service of more subtle neo-primordial language, it can also be explicitly refuted without apparent damage to the functioning of its neo-primordial cousin. Thus, the prominent parallels between the development of "ethnic conflict" discourse in both *Time* and the State Department are the unquestioned use of neo-primordial language in reference to both Bosnia-Herzegovina and to "ethnic conflict" as a global trend. The Clinton Shift, rather than simply escalating discourse on primordialism, potently entrenched its more sinister association – quasi-state "ethnic groups" are to blame for the problems of the "new era," an assertion that continues to allow primordialism to resurface when expedient.¹³

¹² Strobe Talbott, "The Balkan Challenge," *U.S. Department of State Office of the Spokesman* (<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/index.html>, November 9, 1995).

¹³ Elaine Monaghan, "Powell to Bosnia: Don't Return to 'Law of Jungle'" *Reuters Top Stories* (http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20010413/ts/balkans_powell_dc_7.html, April 13, 2001). Such a quote from a former member of Clinton's national security team reverting to blatant primordial conceptions is sufficient evidence that primordialism was latent within the less savage discourse of neo-primordialism and thus, at least in this case, that the change of language was more superficial than indicative of any analytical developments.

The direct links between *Time* and the Clinton Administration still remain technically "unproven," but the parallel developments of their respective discursive strategies strongly suggest a very close relationship. As previously noted, *Time* was eager to employ primordialism when convenient and despite suspending such blatant language in the course of routinizing its coverage, failed to offer any real critique of primordialism. Neither *Time* nor the Clinton administration could sustain the language of primordialism, a feature that perhaps reflects on both its inherent impoverishment as a concept and its limited utility in policy and reporting. Both the Clinton Administration and *Time* continued to characterize the situation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in explicitly ethnic terms, implementing the neo-primordial discourse in such a way that promoted "ethnic conflict" as a global trend and allowed for the resurgence of primordial language particularly in discussion of Rwanda.¹⁴ So while the exact character of the relationship between *Time* and the Clinton Administration remains undefined, the nearly identical patterns of discourse heavily implicate close ties. Thus, the Clinton Shift did not simply incite a sustained primordial discourse as Feher suggests, but served to inculcate primordial ethnic claims into an ongoing neo-primordial discourse that would continue to feature prominently in the constructions of violence and "peace" of Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁵

The Damage Done: Practical Reflections on the News Media

The crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina was not an "ethnic conflict" but a highly organized manipulation of violence by leaders of state and sub-state political entities for the purposes of gaining power in those entities and over other entities. While emotion aroused by the concept of a large imagined "ethnic" community may have played a role in the breakup of Yugoslavia and the subsequent violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992, it very contestably played a defining role and thus does not warrant such a label. Rather, the character of violence itself played a defining role, a violence organized by institutions that carried out their genocidal goals with ruthless efficiency. The origin of such "conflict" was political, not ethnic.

¹⁴ Feher, pp. 65-82-84, simultaneously attends to Western treatment of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, noting the oft-repeated claim that State Department officials were explicitly ordered to refrain from mentioning "genocide" in their discussion of the latter "conflict."

¹⁵ See Campbell, *National Deconstruction* (1998), pp. 125-164, for an excellent overview of how "the West" negotiated "Bosnia."

This paper has so far suggested a number of answers to the question, "how was 'ethnic conflict' reified in US discourse?" However, it has not sought to answer the deeper question of, "why?" Specifically, "what purposes did exploiting 'ethnic conflict' serve the news media and foreign policy community?" While reflections on this question will invariably represent varied perspectives and levels of analysis, I would like to suggest two principle answers to the question, "why ethnic conflict?" The first response highlights the media system and its institutional constraints in pragmatic terms. The second focuses on a more theoretical level at the reflective process of "Western" identity construction evident in the discourse.

The violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina left many journalists frustrated with both the government and the news media itself. While some of this debate easily took the form of partisan "positioning" both within Bosnia-Herzegovina and US politics,¹⁶ some journalists took a genuine self-reflective role on media discourse.¹⁷ Others such as Shapiro and Thompson of the *Los Angeles Times* even critiqued the excessive reliance on "ethnic conflict" to excuse lack of intelligent analysis.¹⁸ It is clear that the prolonged character of the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis amidst a post-Cold War disorientation provoked an extended wave of self-reflection on the media and foreign reporting. But what has been learned? Practically speaking, the media operate with the same or increased restraints that characterized the discourse of "Bosnia coverage" with the possible exception that now, journalists and editors are armed with more well-established post-Cold War paradigms with which to categorize and replace analysis (e.g., ethnic conflict, rogue states, etc.).¹⁹ The preceding overview suggests

¹⁶ Brock (1993), pp. 152-172, and Charles Trueheart, "Journalists Take Aim at Policymakers," *Washington Post* (July 21, 1995), p. A27.

¹⁷ Dusko Doder, "Media Fanned Yugoslavia's Flames," *Boston Globe* (June 27, 1993), p. 5, and David Rohde, "The Other War in Bosnia: Influencing the Western Media," *Christian Science Monitor* (May 23, 1995), p. 1.

¹⁸ Joel Shapiro and Gordon R. Thompson, "Myths Stand in the Way of Peace," *The Los Angeles Times* (September 6, 1995), p. B09. See also Alan W. Brock, "Ancient Ethnic Hatreds: Fact or Fancy?" *St. Louis Post – Dispatch* (June 21, 1993), p. 3B.

¹⁹ The *New York Times*, known for heavily primordial conceptions of the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, featured an article, Serge Schmemmann, "What's Wrong With This Picture of Nationalism?" *New York Times* (February 21, 1999), P. D01, serving to debunk the association with "ethnic conflict" and the post-Cold War trends. However, editors continue to define crises as "ethnic" as in the contents summary, "Push to Calm **Ethnic Conflict**," *New York Times* (April 10, 2001), p. A2 summarizing a story whose text that does not mention "ethnic conflict" with: "President Bush met separately with leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia and urged them toward a peaceful resolution to their **ethnic conflict** in which 35,000 have died."

that the problem of the news media is not primarily a problem of content – of “not understanding the post-Cold War world” – as some foreign policy pundits believe.²⁰ A far more endemic difficulty remains – the structure of media organization.

A rising chorus of critics is demanding more general media reform in the wake of the Gulf War incited “CNN revolution.” Such prominent figures as CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour²¹ and Pulitzer Prizewinner Roy Gutman²² are begging, even demanding more ethical practice, quality reporting and in-depth investigative coverage. And yet, the market demands of “sound byte journalism” have forced quality investigative news into a tiny corner of the media spectrum – *Sixty Minutes*, Bill Moyer specials and scattered print media. While Herman and Chomsky persuasively outline six filters that severely constrain diversity of media discourse,²³ it may be enough to focus on the first – increasing size, consolidating ownership and extreme profit orientation of the mass media. Certainly *Time* discourse suggested such a strong market influence in both its language and layout that its prohibitive portrayal of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda betrayed journalistic ethics in favor of a macabre entertainment.²⁴ The challenge of this increasingly apparent market orientation of the mass media is a challenge posed by increasing numbers of media and policy analysts who argue that it poses both a threat to the “free market” and more importantly, to democratic process in the US.²⁵

²⁰ Grunwald, *Foreign Affairs* (1993), pp. 12-16, in an article written in the same issue as Huntington’s (in)famous “Clash of Civilizations?” Unfortunately, his attention to media and its relation to foreign policy formation was practically ignored compared to Huntington’s outrageous claims.

²¹ Christiane Amanpour, “Why Do I Do It?” *Brill’s Content* (3:10, December, 2000-January, 2001), pp. 50-54.

²² Roy Gutman, “A Call for Better International Reporting,” *Editor and Publisher* (126:31, July 31, 1993), pp. 16-17.

²³ Herman and Chomsky, pp. 1-35, include the “filters,” 1) size ownership and profit orientation, 2) advertising influence, 3) source dependence, 4) flak from corporate, civic and governmental organizations, 5) the anticommunist paradigm, 6) dichotomization and propaganda campaigns.

²⁴ For a discussion of “journalistic ethics” in the context of Bosnia-Herzegovina, see Sadkovitch, *The US Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995* (1998), pp. 38-43. While Sadkovitch focuses on the problems inherent in “balanced reporting,” he also suggests that a kind of ethical practice was realistic if challenging in the case of the former Yugoslavia.

²⁵ Daniel Hallin, “Sound Byte News: Television Coverage of Elections,” Ben H. Bagdikian, “The US Media: Supermarket or Assembly Line?” Ken Auletta, “Raiding the Global Village,” and Jeff Greenfield, “The Business of Television News” in *Do Media Govern?* (1997), pp. 57-76, 82-98, all offer numerous critical insight into the realities of current market-driven news production. See also

The lessons of post-communist former Yugoslavia may be instructive for the US. The monopoly of public discourse by centralized media outlets throughout Yugoslavia enabled violence on a massive scale; thus, supporting media plurality should be of utmost priority for a democratic "multicultural" market society. While many point to the Internet and 400 stations on satellite television as evidence of a proliferating news media, the *organization* of such sources continues to centralize and simultaneously grow more entertainment-oriented. Ultimately this analysis then pleads for the further enabling of the special democratizing functions of the news media in what Herbert Gans called, "multiperspectival news."²⁶

Assessing "Ethnic Conflict" in the US: Theoretical Reflections

Despite hope for a de-ideological world after the Cold War, the development of more subtle ideologies such as the "ethnic" perspective that rose to deafening din in the 1990s demonstrates the power of simplistic catch-all concepts in a public discourse dominated by an increasingly centralized market system of news alongside an official political system oriented toward immediate short-term interests. Most curious is that the academy, supposedly insulated by the pressures of the market and state utility, fed into this system of discourse in some very powerful ways. Notably, well-positioned writers auditioning for lead roles in the new grand theater of the "post-Cold War foreign policy paradigm," hurriedly churned out simplistic frameworks that became part and parcel of this market-driven and state-driven discourse.

Certainly these discourses had functions that ran deeper than their immediate salability, political ends or academic prestige. Returning to the central claim of Campbell in *National Deconstruction*, that "ethnicity" and its practice in public discourse served to clarify an identity and relationship of "the West" and the "US" in a post-Cold War world, we can see how this operated explicitly in *Time* discourse. The distinctions made between West and non-West and the assignments made of the "global trend" of "ethnic conflict" support this

Robert W. McChesney, "The Global Media Giants: The Nine Firms That Dominate the World," Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (<http://www.fair.org/extra/9711/gmg.html>), naming Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom, News Corporation, Sony, TCI, Universal and NBC.

²⁶ Gans, *Deciding What's News* (1979), pp. 313-336, outlines a two-tiered model of national news – one general and the other specific and analytical – which is more specific than my proposal above. However, the issues he outlines, furthering a plurality of perspectives, remain essentially similar to my own.

argument. By asserting that Bosnia-Herzegovina was a conflict of "those people," writers more importantly defined "we (the) people" in contrast, an assertion further enabled by linguistic and geographical distances of the discourse foci.²⁷

However, defining a "Western" identity as "not them" may be an incomplete argument because it lacks inherent content. While by contrast we may assume that "not them" may mean the opposite – and this is explicit in some of the characterizations in *Time* – it may still be incomplete to argue that the discourse constructs identity on the basis of "not them." I would argue that the content of ethnically organized collective action in *Time* discourse functions to reify a nation-state-based system in which "we" as "the West" are willing and enthusiastic participants. While use of ethnic entities in "state-entity" language is never explained, its interchangeability and the silent induction of "ethnic units" into the interstate system forces us to also acknowledge that the so-called international system and its attached political identities are at least part of the substantive body of "Western" identity construction in this discourse. In other words, the neo-primordial constructions specifically function to reify "our own" state system.

This assertion helps to explain *why* primordial language was unsustainable. The transition from primordial to neo-primordial "ethnic conflict" language was virtually necessitated by this need for a reified Western state identity. Given that primordial constructions were untenable for state-based interaction and threatened to promote a powerless "America" in its degree of disconnect (especially in a world rampant with "ancient ethnic hatreds"), the primordial "ethnic conflict" language needed to rejoin – at least periodically – "our" language of an orderly state-based international system replete with the US (ultimately) in command. The convenient use of ethnic adjectives such as "Serb aggression" and "displaced Muslims" served this purpose without disavowing the other-ing function promoted by irrational primordialism.

Such an assertion highlights a marked inconsistency in the behavior of "Western" state governments. Specifically, sub-state entities (SDS and HDZ) were accorded state-like status and recognition in both discourse and policy. Although "the West" recognized the sovereignty of Bosnia-Herzegovina, it also levied an arms embargo on "all parties," its leaders

²⁷ Campbell, pp. 33-82.

insisted on the presence of "peacekeeping" observers/aid chaperones and denied the existence of systematic "genocide." In the final contradiction, an Administration known for expressions such as, "the problem of minorities cannot be resolved through ethnic cleansing"²⁸ muscled an agreement in which state and sub-state "parties" partitioned Bosnia-Herzegovina along lines forged by genocidal military aims, with the SDS handed control of 49% of territory in the infant republic. Thus, it appears that although the official discourse of the foreign policy establishment sought to reify the state system, it did so at the expense of also reifying a particular, violent practice of sub-state ethnic identity politics. Out of such unabashed recognition came repeated and similar efforts to gain and maintain political power through a violence under an ethnic cover such as Rwandan and East Timorese "militias" – violence that bore remarkable resemblance to the "ethnic cleansing" so efficiently honed by SDS forces. For the time being, "the West" would rest assured that it remained the comfortable, newly crowned victor of the Cold War.

Reflections for an Academic Community:

If Not Ethnic Conflict, Then What?

Several important ethical implications arise from the preceding analysis, not the least of which is the allegation that the academic community surrounding foreign policy decision making in the US aided and abetted the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina by not significantly critiquing the ethnic paradigm on which genocide was both established and avoided. Thus, for those of us in the academic community willing to critically consider our roles, I offer a number of suggestions for more coherent, ethical response during foreign policy crises.

First and foremost, we can no longer afford to see the media as simply "one of many factors" in our effort to examine far-away situations of organized violence. The degree to which the news media are constrained to provide analysis and the demonstrated lack of learning from the protracted Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis reveal the extent to which this medium is an extraordinarily impoverished source from which to draw substantial analytical conclusions. The characterization of "conflicts" in terms handed to us by news media or state government is a dangerous game with an enormously problematic corollary.

²⁸ Madelaine Albright, "Bosnia in Light of the Holocaust: War Crimes Tribunals," *US Department of State Dispatch* (5:16, April 18, 1994).

Furthermore, while the paper intimates a reversion to traditional political analyses over "ethnic" ones in its account of the breakup of Yugoslavia, it also proposes that local media and other powerful sub-state institutions also be seen as part and parcel of the analysis as argued in chapter one. This suggests a valuation of regional "expertise" over that of general foreign policy "expertise." It also implies the refutation of grand paradigmatic proposals characterizing the world in broad sweeping generalizations offered by analysts such as Huntington. The recent interest in politicized "ethnic" identity as a global development suggests that perhaps "cultural" knowledge may be an important aspect of international political analyses, however, the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina also suggests that a cursory reading of "culture" can be exploited to serve violent political interests. Cultural examination should thus be thoroughly specific and regionally informed. Given its politicized nature, such specific knowledge will still invariably contain a maze of propaganda and misinformation with its own well-crafted political objectives.

The application of "conflict resolution" paradigms in a perversely asymmetrical situation of genocide such as that in Bosnia-Herzegovina is also disastrous. The neo-primordial "civil war" and "ethnic conflict" discourses equally recognized state and non-state entities on one hand, and also legitimized genocide – military action targeting civilians – simultaneously positioning "the West" as a "neutral" mediating party as Feher notes.²⁹ Cushman sees this balancing tendency as an insidious influence of cynical "relativism" in Western culture.³⁰ And it does appear that a rising movement of conflict resolution theorists and practitioners (as well as security studies scholars) took advantage of confused, relativist (or "balanced" media) discourse to superimpose an accessible, simplistic framework on top of that. Perhaps appropriately then, international conflict resolution suffered a general setback in interest and funding following the disillusionment after the Dayton Accords. However, given the heartiness with which organizations like International Alert and Search for Common Ground continue their "dialogue work," the lessons of complex, large-scale political violence may still be lost on the international "conflict resolution" community.

The post-Cold War foreign policy scramble that occurred in the US as the Soviet Union disintegrated showed us all that the marketplace was alive and well in academia. And

²⁹ Feher, p. 74-77.

³⁰ Thomas Cushman, *Critical Theory and the War in Croatia and Bosnia* (1997).

as in media discourse, the paradigms that came to dominate, even temporarily, were the best "sound bytes," not the most soundly researched theory. This is transparent in Robert Kaplan's "cauldron" paradigms which focused on early 20th Century "Balkan history" to establish an argument about current regional trends.³¹ But this observation need not prohibit serious academic work from engaging popular discourse; if anything, it should challenge academics to continually contest problematic and harmful assumptions circulating in popular discourse, especially in periods where academic entrepreneurialism is rampant.

Finally and most pointedly, "ethnic conflict" is not a meaningful characterization of war as this examination showed in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Media and government discourses all too easily access its racist primordial associations and continue to promote the implicit centrality of "White European-descended Americans" in its remanufacture. As academics concerned with the life and dignity of people around the world, we need to expose the hypocritical use of this term, its implied xenophobia and problematic implications for analysis, policy and civic response.

While directions for future research have already been suggested in the wake of a thoroughly deconstructed "ethnic conflict," an outline of such a relevant research agenda bears mention. First and foremost, international relations scholarship cannot afford to not seriously engage with the vast bodies of empirical and theoretical work on media and culture. Its continued isolated literature situated in the seclusion of the political science field will continue to churn out problematic frameworks as the Westphalian state systems creaks and groans under the enormous changes wrought by globalization. Such an engagement must entail an equally serious confrontation with the developments of "critical theory" including the multifaceted nature of violence and the power and roles of image and representation in cultural and political production. Without acknowledgement of the contested nature of the state system, further ignorance is certain to propose increasingly irrelevant analysis and policy, isolating the state from more and more of its members.

³¹ Kaplan, *The Atlantic Monthly* (1991).

Purposeful Conclusions

In the course of writing this work, I found myself one day in conversation with a well-read business-savvy friend whom I considered generally up to date on commonly known events of the world. In explaining the topic of the paper, I waited for some indication of his understanding of "Bosnia." His reply was chilling, approximately, "yeah, where people have been killing each other for hundreds of years?" I was at once disheartened and vindicated. His exposure to a steady stream of intelligent-sounding media had not managed to debunk the simple primordial claims so thoroughly established by Milošević, *Time* and the Clinton Administration. How many others who read less or watched more superficial accounts would hold such demeaning perceptions? On the other hand, the encounter reinforced my work. I have written to understand the complex relationships with which "we" are engaged in the context of the events that became "Bosnia." The process of inquiry has been, ultimately, an intervention in such a web of relationships, a simultaneous recognition and challenge of the enormous power and privilege reified in the discourse of "us" vis a vis "Bosnia." And out of this recognition of privilege, we can build and rebuild just and dignified relationships.