

Introduction

Looking for the right lens

What should we do in...Hrvatska?

It was the fall of 1993. Bill Clinton entered his first year as President and “The New World Order” was taking an unsightly shape in a scarred United States (US) military withdrawal from Somalia. Meanwhile, international news headlines featured raging violence in the new republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. With an embarrassing desire to “save the world,” I decided then to focus my undergraduate studies at Hampshire College in “Conflict Resolution and International Relations.” At a Christmas gathering that winter, I mentioned this to members of my extended family and one immediate response continues to leave an impression on me, “oh, conflict resolution? So what should we do in Bosnia?”

Less than three years later, I am nervously sitting alone in the first class passenger car of a train heading south to Zagreb, Croatia from Austria – holding a second-class ticket. I had studied the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, the secessions of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia, but this is the first time I have actually ventured there. Before noticing I am in the wrong (first-class) car, I pick up a promotional Croatian magazine only to realize that I did not know the name of the country in its own language – Hrvatska. I am immediately stunned and embarrassed by my own ignorance. How could it be that a place could receive such intense media and academic attention without its viewers and readers learning fundamental elements of that place, its people, its language and its culture? From that point I began to realize just how long would be the road to understanding “the conflict” as it had been superficially presented.

After living in Zagreb for five months with a fellowship from the Winston Foundation for World Peace, I realized that there were many people like me who were writing far more about a place about which they knew less. Certainly some of them read more history or spoke more fluently, but a subtle air of arrogance by outsiders often bred resentment among locals that I often avoided by openly confessing (and displaying) my ignorance. One of my primary conclusions upon leaving Croatia was my lack of qualification to write deeply substantive

work about the situation there. Yet I could not turn my back on a place and people with whom I had begun to share so much. This paper then started as a search for the right *lens* through which to view the relationship of "empowered American" and "unfolding historical foreign crisis."

Growing up "American" seems to have encoded certain assumptions about the world and our power to change it. The question of "what should we do in Bosnia?" was one example and not a rare one. In the 1990s, similar questions have been asked over and over about other far-off places – from hurricanes in El Salvador to war in Kosovo. We are wealthy, democratic, peace-loving Americans. "What should we do to bring relief and peace to these poor, afflicted people?" Asked over and over again, it becomes a kind of reality; as "Americans" we have a right, practically a duty to do *something*. This reflection leads to two questions: 1) what does it say about a people when their discourse of far-away places assumes an intervening role? 2) From where does this assumption of intervention come? The answer to the first question is subject to collective moral and ethical assessments that may be touched on in this paper's conclusion. As a starting point, my own experience suggests that our predominant attitude assuming the right to intervene has not made many friends abroad, both in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere. Questions assuming the right to intervene also assume a kind of moral authority that is dangerously un-self-critical. Such an attitude has been – to say the least – unhelpful.

Thus the second question, "where do our assumptions come from?" opens up a completely new dimension toward understanding the external dynamics of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. This question not only points to deeply inculcated assumptions of our birthright in the so-called free world – ideologies traced back to Cold War capitalism, American nationalism and European colonialism. It also suggests that our immediate environment of information on a particular situation is laden with this assumption as well. Thus, our story turns to our major source of public information, the news media.

In a recent lecture to an international studies class at a liberal arts college, I asked the students if any knew about the "situation in Bosnia" from a first-hand (eyewitness) source. One person did. The rest of the class received information from: 1) television – CNN, evening news and documentary film, 2) newspapers, 3) Newsweek and "other magazines," 4) high school and college courses, 5) discussion of family and friends, 6) college or public radio

stations, 7) books, 8) academic journals and 9) feature films. This reinforces a fairly well known fact. The major news media outlets are responsible for giving both information and perspective to the vast majority of "the public" on global matters, even with influential academics and young scholars. To resolve the contradiction between the apparent public empowerment that we could "do something" in Bosnia and my own ignorance upon entering Croatia, it became obvious that I had to pay far more critical attention to the media than had traditionally been afforded in the study of international relations and foreign policy.

The news media has a commonly understood influence on public perceptions. In *On Strategy*, a widely cited review of the US Army after the Vietnam War, Colonel Harry Summers acknowledges the power of the news media to negatively affect the support of "the people" for US military campaigns.¹ Perhaps owing largely to its apparent impact on the Vietnam War, the news media is commonly perceived to be both a brashly independent entity and one with a liberal political agenda. While demographic research on US "foreign correspondents" suggests a certain bias of class, race and culture,² the notion of a "liberal news media" is rightly contested by Herman and Chomsky who rightly point to powerful profit-interests at work in media corporations in addition to other conservative "filters."³ More important for this paper is the assumption of the media's supposed independence, especially with regards to foreign policy. The dissolution of the Cold War in the early 1990s was a unique opportunity to see US media and foreign policy operate in a situation of relative ideological chaos. From the ground in Croatia, I became vexed as to why a media unfettered by Cold War paradigms could not now better inform its readers and viewers about the world.

¹ See Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* 1st Ed. (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 1982), pp. 7-12, argues that the Army needs to take more responsibility for the unification of "national will" in war, a lesson thoroughly implemented in the invasions of Panama (1989), Kuwait and Iraq (1991) wherein the Department of Defense itself mounted an enormous public relations and media-control campaign.

² Stephen Hess, *International News and Foreign Correspondents* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997). Notably, Hess' research does not include political party affiliation, but the educational and cultural backgrounds clearly place such correspondents as a cultural elite: 71% male, 94% white, 49% from the Northeast US, 70% graduating from a "highly selective" college, 62% graduating from a private college and 40% with a graduate degree, p. 141.

³ Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), pp. 1-36, for overview.

In numerous conversations with a French journalist and friend in Zagreb in 1996, I found that a predominance of "foreign" reports came from news conferences held most often by [Croatian] government officials and thus characterized by an obvious nationalist rhetoric. At that time officials from international organizations were the other primary source of news in Croatia. On the other hand professional protocol inhibited the journalist from featuring non-governmental civic leaders unless he was pursuing a time-consuming "human interest" story. Furthermore, local academics, civic leaders and human rights professionals were rarely cross-referenced because of their uncertain credibility, English (or French) fluency and accessibility in addition to the reporter's time constraints, even though the sources would have definitely "balanced" the stories.⁴ From up close, the approaches and constraints of international news correspondents seemed clearly destined to feature a narrow range of information and perspectives. The question remains, are these limitations such that news recipients receive significantly skewed information, leading to unhelpful positions of analysis and intervention? Perhaps most people don't really need to know the real name of "Croatia." And many would make a case that civic leaders have little to add that would not confuse the "real issues" for readers and viewers.⁵

In this paper I argue that the reciprocal dependence of the news media and its official sources *did* significantly shape the coverage in the United States of the violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1992-1995. Despite a 1992 US presidential campaign pledge to decisively intervene in "Bosnia"⁶ if elected, Bill Clinton began to backpedal from the moment of his

⁴ *New York Times* War Correspondent Chris Hedges confirmed the challenge of questionable credibility in a retrospective lecture at Colgate University, February 1999. The fact that major news outlets have "war correspondents" seems destined to reproduce the kinds of situation that the correspondents and others are trying to avoid. They are invariably more familiar with international officials than local officials, not usually fluent in the local language, unable to ascertain the credibility of local informants, unable to offer deep analysis of the local situation and more apt to be manipulated by media savvy officials. However, other (regional) correspondents in informal conversations also echoed the series of criticism leveled by my French journalist friend.

⁵ Even noted sociologist Lewis Coser, "Salvation Through Communication?" in *The News Media in National and International Conflict*, Andrew Arno and Wimal Dissanayake, eds., (Boulder: Westview, 1984), pp. 17-26, attacking the "information as panacea" school of thought, makes arguments to the effect that "less information may be better" in situations of conflict, although his abstract argument lacks in-depth case analysis.

⁶ I have chosen Bosnia-Herzegovina as the internationally recognized name of what is internally called Republika Bosna i Hercegovina since 1992 and what is better known in the US as "Bosnia." The name derives from two regions of the republic, Bosna and Hercegovina, thus the obvious incompleteness of the favored US term. *Time* is consistent in calling it "Bosnia-Herzegovina" (April

inauguration speech in January 1993 in a reversal herein called "the Clinton Shift." This entailed moving from a position of decisive intervention to one of no intervention with regards to the violence. Clinton was unable to ignore the crisis, however, and after more than three years of war in the former Yugoslav republic, his administration pushed a peace accord on the region's stakeholders. Given the Clinton administration's early strained relations with the US military and the suggested high stakes of decisive intervention – at home and abroad – the unstated reversal had a lot of political rationale. Peaking between May and September of 1993 after the collapse of the Vance-Owen negotiations and the resignation of three US State Department aides, the Clinton Shift had to be rationalized to the rest of the world in terms other than the President's domestic political image. I argue that this policy reversal was rationalized in part by emphasizing the so-called "ethnic" aspects of the situation, excusing intervention on the basis that the context was already simply *irrational*.

I make this argument by critically analyzing media literature, particularly from *Time Magazine*, in the context of Administration and State Department rhetoric, in order to track the development of a policy discourse. While news coverage of the Bosnia-Herzegovina situation did develop considerable nuance during this period, so did the sophistication of State Department rhetoric. Unfortunately, neither developed enough to demystify the horrific events unfolding. To complicate matters, the momentum of associated foreign policy interests and institutions in the US seeking the new post-Cold War global paradigm led to still greater obfuscation of the actual situation. The result was oversimplification and misrepresentation that delayed intelligent response by an informed public, by policy analysts and by academics who arguably and indirectly reified the grave situation that the Clinton administration had tried to ignore from the beginning.

Politicians, public demagogues, activists and academics have all complained about the partisan interests or sensationalizing distortion of the media at various times, especially when their interests have been at stake. That is not the intention of this work. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the complex interplay between individuals and institutions in the media and foreign policy communities in the United States and to understand how this

20, 1992, May 4, 1992) and later, "Bosnia" (*Time*, May 11, 1992 onward). Meanwhile, the *Washington Post* calls it "Bosnia-Hercegovina" once in a headlines in 1992 (*Washington Post*, B. Harden, Jan.15, 1992), but later refers to it in headlines simply as, "Bosnia." Thus, it appears that the streamlined term "Bosnia" develops soon after the first military actions in April 1992.

interplay is expressed in widely accessed media discourse. To illustrate these dynamics, I examine two prominent media sources – *Time Magazine* and the *Washington Post* -- in addition to US Department of State Dispatches and prominent foreign policy journals. The resulting picture then conceives that the news media is neither an independent actor(s) in international relations nor an agent(s) of a particular actor such as the state, but an intertwined system projecting images and text that expresses interrelated interests which are made explicit upon systematic examination.

"Ethnic Conflict" Re-examined

At its core, this paper is an intellectual assault on the concept of "ethnic conflict"⁷ – a concept taken for granted in much of the above-mentioned foreign policy community as well as in the peace and security studies community. I argue that this term functions to replace and thereby obstruct coherent analysis with incoherent, simplistic and problematic assumptions. Its defining properties serve to obscure the vital multidimensional realities of crises like that of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990s. Taking apart the phrase itself in fact leads to a better understanding of the academic debate on the concept.

First, it appears that the word *conflict* has become a simplifying and sanitizing device for analysts to remove the messy and complex realities of violence and war. This device arranges a situation with often just two discrete opposing sides having interests, needs and identities that can be clearly discerned and collectively ascribed. This is an arrangement worth questioning given the number of individual participants and institutions recognized in many such situations.

To confuse matters, writers in the conflict resolution field and in its self-identified sub-field of ethnic conflict, insist that conflict need not be violent, often basing their theories on social-psychological perspectives of *interpersonal* relations.⁸ As investigation of "ethnic

⁷ The choice of enclosing "ethnic conflict" in quotation marks throughout this paper stems from a basic rejection of its existence as a phenomenon as popularly perceived in foreign policy circles.

⁸ See Dean G. Pruitt and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate and Settlement* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1986), pp. 4-5, John Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Provention*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1990), p. 2, and Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 95.

conflict” in print media and State Department discourse will show in chapters one and four respectively, international “conflicts” in public discourse are presumed to be violent. This leads to a problematic confusion of terminology – the widely accepted implication of organized violence with a specialized definition technically void of it. When academic and public discourses mingle, this confusion is exaggerated with significant potential for misinterpretation.⁹ As chapter one demonstrates largely through the work of V.P. Gagnon,¹⁰ the instigation of violence is no small omission, being perhaps absolutely crucial to the establishment of an “ethnic” identity. Thus, the combination of collective simplification inherent in the “sides” paradigm and a problematic confusion over the level of violence implied in “conflict” render this a very questionably effective analytical device.

Problematizing the adjective *ethnic* further opens this question of conceptual utility. As an adjective we assume that this word defines the delineated conflicting “sides,” the organization by which the conflict is arranged. Two questions must be asked about this term. First, are there verifiable “ethnicities” with clearly distinguishable boundaries with which we can discern the “sides?” Second, do these (usually very large) groups in fact have definable collective needs, interests and actions? To the first question, scholarship that serves to actively and clearly delineate a society’s members based on ethnicity is often (justifiably) interpreted as having political aims – the political or economic gain of one group over another. In international relations scholarship with less overtly genocidal goals, ethnic boundaries are usually either simply assumed or approximated thereby often taking the propaganda of political opportunists as a priori fact. A relative few international relations scholars have taken on the questionably possible task of examining ethnic group composition

⁹ One revealing example of a prominent “crossover” who implies violence in “conflict” is former academic and then-National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, “From Containment to Enlargement,” US Department of State Dispatch (4: 39, September 27, 1993), in an address to the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University: “The third notable aspect of this era is an explosion of ethnic conflicts. As Senator Moynihan and others have noted, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of various repressive regimes have removed the lid from numerous cauldrons of ethnic, religious, or factional hatreds.... These conflicts are typically highly complex; at the same time, their brutality will tug at our consciences.”

¹⁰ See V.P. Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia,” *International Security* (19: 3, Winter 1994/95) pp. 130-166. Soon-to-published work by Gagnon, some available online at <http://www.ithaca.edu/gagnon> forms an extremely crucial body of research for this paper.

and boundaries with the aim of safeguarding basic human rights.¹¹ Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to the problematic assumption of clear composition and boundaries implies in "ethnicity."

To the second question of ethnically collective action, there is a surprising degree of contention, surprising because Western liberal "common sense" often assumes that individuals act according to their own wills rather than an objectively determined collective will – and indeed the schools which posit collective action are rooted in this Western liberal tradition. In fact, many international relations scholars seem to agree that ethnic groups indeed act collectively. One such group emphasizes the history of struggle and violence among "ethnic groups" in primordial terms – associated with the commonly used and generally discounted phrase "ancient ethnic hatreds." Asserting that ethnicity is a "natural" embodiment of group identity, thus "ethnic conflict" a natural expression of group hatred, this school suffered from an association with Nazi party propaganda and other destructive nationalisms of the early Twentieth Century.¹² It also suffered from a general lack of credible scholarship and has been seriously discounted in the academic community¹³ despite its lively existence as myth in popular culture.¹⁴

¹¹ Ted Robert Gurr is among the leading international relations scholars studying what he calls "ethnopolitical" or "communal conflict" through the Minorities at Risk project, a venture in part void of the simplification I am challenging herein. See Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1993). Nevertheless, it is worth questioning to what extent such work on a wide scale supports an articulation of violence in "ethnic" terms or worse, promotes violence as a defining feature of communal and political identity through recognition of "ethnicity" as a somehow inherent feature of politics.

¹² See William Safran. "Ethnic Mobilization, Modernization, and Ideology: Jacobinism, Marxism, Organicism and Functionalism," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* (15:1, Spring 1987), p. 7-9, who considers Johann Gottfried Herder's articulation of *volk* as the preeminent "organicist" (primordial) work.

¹³ The "primordial" school regained some footing in quasi-academic policy circles through the work of former senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1993) and the political psychology writings of Vamik D. Volkan, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997). However, given the difficulty of proving such claims and continued trends in political science valuing prediction and prescription in the study of rational entities, many international relations scholars disavow this blatantly biologically rooted perspective.

¹⁴ Much of its recent popularity stems from popular journalism, notably that of Robert Kaplan. As associate editor of *Atlantic Monthly* and author of numerous books on the impending global chaos of uncorked ethnic passions, Kaplan was prominently placed to establish a popular post-Cold War ideology. Most crucial to this paper is his popular, widely cited travelogue, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1993). As its title suggests, it attends to the same

A second school of thought focuses on the collective actions of "ethnic groups" in behaviorist terms in order to describe patterns and prescribe response and intervention.¹⁵ This group of scholars has a great deal more scientific literature, but it nonetheless lacks serious critical inquiry on the heart of its subject, "ethnicity." While a number of explanations about the sources of ethnic conflict have sprung from this literature,¹⁶ its overall effort has been more descriptive than explanatory.¹⁷ Such description warrants description since it often falls neatly in line with superficial accounts of the situations by media and political propaganda. In fact, the vast majority of international relations literature on this topic falls into this category in part perhaps because its heavily quantitative methodology and behaviorist theoretical underpinnings are consistent with those in currently dominant schools of political science. While many in this school acknowledge that "ethnicity" may be an instrumental concept, malleable and manipulable by elites and other environmental factors,¹⁸ they nonetheless assert that it is an inherent characteristic, delineating boundaries of ascribed "collective action." Because of the inherency that this school ultimately affords to "ethnicity," it is herein named *neo-primordial* in its understanding of "ethnic conflict."¹⁹ In both of the above schools, the existence of distinctively defined "ethnic groups" with capacities for collective destructive action is never doubted.

divisive historical incidents on which many local nationalist leaders also focused. Kaplan frequently references the English-language travelogue by Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (New York: Viking, 1941) and for the most part writes off forty years of peaceful ethnic cohabitation (1945-1985) with the cliché that Tito's dictatorship kept a tight lid on the cauldron of ethnic hatreds.

¹⁵ Donald Horowitz is probably the most well-known of these writers with his epic-length *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) and many in the international peace studies and conflict resolution community continue to access this same collectivist logic, see Stephen Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations* (Brookfield: Dartmouth Publishing, 1995).

¹⁶ For example, David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict," *International Security* (21: 2, Fall 1996), p. 41, who assert the falseness of "ancient hatreds" and go on to argue for an organizing principle of "collective fear."

¹⁷ Beverly Crawford discusses this school in terms of the "security dilemma," incomplete she argues, because it "equates communal conflict with interstate conflict," and "takes the formation of politically relevant cultural groups as given; [their] preferences are assumed and not explained." See Beverly Crawford and Ronnie D. Lipschutz, eds., *The Myth of "Ethnic Conflict: "Politics, Economics, and "Cultural" Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 10-11.

¹⁸ See Gurr (1993), p. 4.

¹⁹ Termed by John Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution," *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, Edwin Wilmsen and

This paper is based on qualitatively different assumptions. It assumes that collective "ethnic identity" is first and foremost a *representation* of group-ness attributed by subjective observers or participants, not a spontaneous and natural recognition of group-ness by its members. It also assumes that collective action of an "ethnic group" is action ascribed to an imagined ethnic group by subjective observers or participants rather than organic formations of group action that reflect a type of group will, need or interest. In other words the actuality, cohesiveness and action of an ethnic group are not "given;" they must be proven. This set of more open assumptions has well-documented support from a number of different fields including well known historical accounts of nation-building,²⁰ critical historical texts on race construction²¹ and anthropological perspectives on so-called ethnic violence.²² Much of this work takes an extremely critical approach to modern-day ethnicity, understanding its construction as a colonial-era development, often the product of imperial administrative policies of respective European regimes,²³ thus far younger than the "ancient hatreds" often cited by self-serving politicians, nostalgic historians and sensationalizing journalists. Recent work in international relations and related fields continues to open the inquiry on so-called

Patrick McAllister, eds., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 163-165, in which he offers an incisive overview of all three ethnic conflict schools.

²⁰ Given the well-established literature of Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Books, 1991) and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), the degree of contention and/or ignorance afforded the implications of their constructionist work is surprising and something I briefly address in the paper's conclusion.

²¹ See Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (New York: Verso Books, 1994), Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995) and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

²² See Christopher C. Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994* (New York: Berg, 1999), E. Valentine Daniels, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

²³ See Richard Fardon, "Ethnic Pervasion" in *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence*, Tim Allen and Jean Seaton, eds., (New York: Zed Books, 1999), pp. 64-80, for an overview. Excellent examples of research uncovering colonial origins of ethnicity include John D. Rogers, "Post-Orientalism and the Interpretation of Premodern and Modern Political Identities: The Case of Sri Lanka" *Journal of Asian Studies* (53: 1, February 1994) pp. 10-23, and Martijn van Beek, "Beyond Identity Fetishism: 'Communal' Conflict in Ladakh and the Limits of Autonomy" in conference *Does Ethnic Conflict Exist? Globalization and the Processes of Identity and Violence* (Cornell University, 1997).

ethnic conflict and informs much of the foundation of this paper.²⁴ All of this newer literature supports a far more open concept of ethnically organized action on which this paper is based. Such a skeptical school of thought is herein considered *constructionism*.²⁵

My first experiential encounter with "ethnic conflict" was in Northern Ireland in 1995. Arriving with a theoretical framework built on infant, static conflict resolution theories²⁶ I encountered a great degree of resistance from many of those who I interviewed. It became clear in retrospect that people were sick of being considered a part of the "two sides" paradigm that my work reinforced. Apart from the politicians I interviewed, many people did not identify with the religious-ethno-national question, so why should scholars insist that they belong there? I became convinced that the use of absolute collectivist notions of ethnicity in the face of such objections is inaccurate, unhelpful, unethical and blatantly disrespectful.

It is important to renounce my affiliation with the aforementioned prominent notions of "ethnic conflict" because they are taken for granted to such a great extent in English-language literature, both popularly and in the international relations field. The task of fully deconstructing such notions of ethnicity and revealing their exotic, romantic and resource-intensive prerequisites – both for participants and observers – is beyond the scope of this work. Instead, I merely intend to reveal its functions in a discourse located some geographical distance from the "conflict" in question. Now that sufficient questions have opened space around the term *ethnic conflict*, both its implication of "sidedness" and its common simplification of the composition and movement of those "sides," it is possible to continue on the basis of these new assumptions.

²⁴ See V.P. Gagnon, (1994/95) pp. 130-166 and "Ethnicizing Politics: Violence and the Construction of Political Space in the Balkans," *SSRC-MacArthur Research Workshop, "Does Ethnic Conflict Exist? Globalization and Processes of Identity and Violence"* (Ithaca: Cornell University, May 31-June 1, 1997). See also Crawford and Lipschutz, eds., *ibid*, Yahya Sadowski, *The Myth of Global Chaos* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998) and especially David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

²⁵ Comaroff, p. 165.

²⁶ Especially C.R. Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1981).

Finding a Mirror

I don't remember how I responded to my relative who asked, "what should we do in Bosnia." In mulling over it I realized that the question and the first impulsive responses that I sought to verbalize revealed more about "us" than it did about "Bosnia." It exposed a superficial cultural perspective – a system of language and expectations – laden with naiveté, privilege and a presumed right of intervention. It revealed a kind of implied asymmetrical relationship between a "US/international community" and "Bosnia." And most basically, it presumed a "them" and an "us" around which to organize action. David Campbell in *National Deconstruction* devotes a great deal of analytical and theoretical effort to this question of identity-formation through the discourse of foreign policy. Accessing the work of Jacques Derrida, he suggests that identity is "the effect of a contingent set of relations" rather than a self-contained set of givens.²⁷ Such a concept forms a theoretical basis for this paper. That is, the complex interrelations of me, my family members, the news media, the Clinton Administration, the international community and Bosnia-Herzegovina were all integral to the ongoing formation of those identities. This paper seeks to examine the complex "us" and its evolutions in relation to the complex "them" that is Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992-1994.

My first train-ride to Croatia begged me to seriously question if my entire set of cultural presumptions, naiveté, privilege and constructed "them/us" was not also a significant part of "the conflict." What else did I not know about the politically constructed place of "Croatia" and "former Yugoslavia," its language, its people and its stories? What kinds of assumptions would I never realize I was carrying? How many other do-good "outsiders" also carried such ignorance and assumptions and projected them onto an international stage with enormous and influential audiences? And when these short-term visitors to "Bosnia" carried their assumptions back to an imagined "home" world constructed by a profit-driven popular media and foreign policy discourse, what forms did their assumptions assume? As visitors, spectators and analysts looking at such distance places as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we must find a mirror to examine the superficial representations through which we have made influential decisions, or we pose the real risk of continually becoming willing accomplices to the hardships we truly wished to avoid.

²⁷ Campbell, p. 20.

Michel Feher in his vital work, *Powerless by Design*, emphasizes the instrumental ways in which leaders of the so-called international community sought to position themselves favorably in the post-Cold War world by defining the situations of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda in exclusively ethnic terms. Such a dramatic assertion provides an important reference point, arguing that a primordial conception of ethnicity in Bosnia-Herzegovina with its "ancient ethnic hatreds" dominated official foreign policy discourse since the advent of violence in April 1992.²⁸ However, Feher fails to provide a detailed and nuanced picture of *how* this happened – what conditions allowed an ethnic dimension to be emphasized, who besides the Clinton Administration promoted this newly prominent discourse and how it was promoted and revised – a gap that this work seeks to partially fill.

This is foremost a story about the language of foreign policy, specifically the term *ethnic conflict*. This term was chosen because of its specific, technical function widely accessed in academic, journalistic and governmental discourses, notably more technical and potentially less inflammatory than the primordial language critiqued by Feher. While I acknowledge numerous variations throughout the paper, "ethnic conflict" remains the most universally applied across such a broad spectrum. Amidst the open constructionist assumptions outlined above, this paper seeks to move a small step toward answering critical questions about the observers of and participants in foreign policy by examining the changing shape of this phrase. How did it gain prominence in foreign policy in the 1990s? Who used it and what purposes did it serve in their language? How did assumptions develop and change about this concept? What kinds of consensus can be attributed to the meaning and use of the term before, during and after the Clinton Shift of 1993? It is hoped that this work will move a reader toward a better understanding of the reflective issues raised by these questions.

The primary contribution of this paper is a detailed examination of two periods of *Time Magazine* before and after the Clinton Shift – March-August 1992 and January-June 1994. A rich set of conclusions spring out of this investigation to suggest a complex series of developments in the discourse, both in favor of better understanding the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and also reifying the grave situation of injustice and violence. Chapter one seeks to provide context for this study by first portraying the drama of the Clinton Shift and its

²⁸ Michel Feher, *Powerless by Design: The Age of the International Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 31-50.

realities alongside a markedly non-ethnic interpretation of the breakup of Yugoslavia and its subsequent violence. Concluding with an overview of "ethnic conflict" discourse in news media since the late 1970s, especially the *Washington Post*, the chapter spins a rich web of context in which to ensnare and digest the term in the subsequent primary research. Chapter two provides an overview of Time Magazine coverage of "ethnic conflict" and "Bosnia," both its text and images, making light of the steady "routinization" of that story over two years. Chapter three provides in-depth article text analysis to examine the function and meaning of ethnic conflict discourse and its multi-faceted development, culminating in the coverage of the Rwanda genocide in April 1994. Chapter four concludes with an overview of official Clinton Administration and US State Department discourse of "ethnic conflict" and reflects on the integral role of media and its official relationships in public discourse, ethnicity and foreign policy. Such an interdisciplinary journey intimates a wide range of responses, practically and theoretically, and in conclusion I seek to share these for members of academic, foreign policy and journalistic communities with whom I share ethical if not professional commitments.