This Time We Knew

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Published by NYU Press

Mestrovic, Stjepan and Thomas Cushman.
This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia.
NYU Press, 1996.
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Introduction

In the summer of 1995, Bosnian Serb attacks on UN-declared safe areas of Srebrenica and Žepa proceeded, as did previous onslaughts in Bosnia, under the watchful gaze of the West. In the ensuing violence, thousands of Muslims were driven from their homes or executed and buried in mass graves. In late November 1995, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali reported that as many as 5,500 people are still unaccounted for in the wake of the Serbian attacks. At the time, no Western power intervened to stop the massacres. In the aftermath of the slaughter, however, the unexpected happened: Western powers seemingly decided that they had had enough of Serbian atrocities, war crimes, and genocide in Bosnia and made an apparent commitment to mobilize military power to protect other safe areas and to bring the Bosnian Serb leaders to the peace table. NATO air strikes commenced against the Bosnian Serbs, ostensibly to force them to remove their heavy weapons from the perimeter of Sarajevo.

This Western action was not agreeable to all the members of the NATO alliance. Yet it did occur, and the very fact that it did was remarkable, for the response of the West to the crisis in the Balkans prior to the air strikes had been weak, indecisive, and ineffective. One could even make the case that the nature of the Western response actually abetted genocide and
other crimes against humanity in the region by allowing the perpetrators
to proceed with a guarantee that they would not be punished. Bosnian
Serb forces pulled their weapons back, but fighting continued and ethnic
cleansing and war crimes continued even as peace talks proceeded. In the
northern territory near the city of Banja Luka, under threat of a concerted
Croat-Muslim drive in 1995 to reconquer territory that was seized and
ethnically cleansed three years ago, Bosnian Serb leaders reactivated
concentration camps and their policies of mass terror and summary execu-
tion of civilians. Nonetheless, the West, weary of the conflict and perhaps
guilty about its own silence in relation to it, continued to press for peace at
any cost. Peace talks were held in Dayton, Ohio, and—despite Radovan
Karadžić’s pronouncement that, as a result of the peace talks, “Sarajevo
will bleed for decades”—the parties in the conflict concluded a peace
agreement in December, 1995. Questions of a “just peace” were put to
the side in favor of settling the conflict, even at the cost of legitimizing
ill-gotten Serbian territorial gains in Bosnia and at the cost of tolerating
the nefarious deeds of indicted war criminals such as Radovan Karadžić
or General Ratko Mladić (see appendix 2 for the text of the indictments
against the latter by the International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former
Yugoslavia). Events change daily in the Balkans, and one wonders, given
the history of broken promises, just how stable the peace agreement
will be.

The NATO objective of stopping the interminable siege of Sarajevo
was apparently achieved. Yet at the same time hundreds and perhaps
thousands more Muslims from northern Bosnia, from the area near the
city of Banja Luka, were ethnically cleansed, some expelled to other parts
of Bosnia, others summarily executed and thrown into mass graves. In
spite of apparently more decisive action on the part of the West, the
tragedies and atrocities continued. It is clear that peace in the former
Yugoslavia is preferable to the continued loss of life. Yet even if peace is
achieved there, a vivid memory of a form of barbarism unmatched in
Europe since World War II will remain. Western scholars will try to
explain that barbarism to themselves for a long time to come. They will
seek answers to questions about the perpetrators of atrocities and war
crimes. But at the same time, the nature of our response to the Balkan
crisis will press us to explain another important aspect of the war: our
own silence and irresponsibility. The German historian Leopold von
Ranke once claimed, “history is.” In the postmodern age of mass media
we can agree with Ranke, but add that history is watched. For the last
four years, the West has played an important role in the Balkan War: the role of voyeur. The West has been a silent witness to some of the worst atrocities and crimes against humanity to occur in Europe in this century. So, in addition to exploring the minds of the perpetrators—a usual approach in the social scientific study of genocide—we must also explore the mind of those who have watched the perpetrators. In a postmodern world, we continue to study the other, but it is also necessary to study those who watch the other.

In recent years we have seen a proliferation of books and articles on various aspects of the current Balkan War. But one important area that has been neglected thus far is the self-critical, reflective study of the role of the West in interpreting and responding to the war. We propose to remedy this lack of critical reflection by offering detailed sociological, political, and historical analyses of Western responses to the war. In particular, we focus on the response of Western elites—defined broadly as academics, public intellectuals, journalists, and policy makers—to the war. While many authors have made discussions of the Western response to the Balkans central in their historical examinations of the area, we offer an extended analysis from a variety of perspectives. In this respect, the present volume includes many essays by intellectuals who have brought to the interpretation of the issues at hand perspectives that are not necessarily present in the dominant Western discourse on the events in the Balkans over the last five years.

We begin with the observation that most writers use the terms “Balkan War,” “war in the former Yugoslavia,” and similar referents uncritically. To be precise, the wars that began in June 1991 against Slovenia and which were still raging in Bosnia as of this writing have not included a single hour’s war in Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, or other regions of the Balkans. Until relatively recently, with the formation of a Muslim-Croat federation and the Croatian recapturing of territory occupied by armed Serbian rebels, the wars in question have been waged by proxies of the Belgrade regime and have been fought exclusively on the sovereign territories of the recognized nation-states of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The assessment given by Michael T. Kaufman in 1992 is the most accurate and still holds in 1995: “It is guns and ammunition supplied by Belgrade that are killing civilians in areas beyond the borders of Serbia... Since the fighting started a year ago, not a single part of Serbia or its allied state of Montenegro has come under attack from a Croatian or Muslim force.”
In addition, while we mostly think of war as occurring between organized armies, these have not been wars among organized armies for the most part, but mainly destruction inflicted by military and paramilitary forces against civilians. This is significant because the deliberate killing of civilians in wartime is considered a war crime. This was the situation when Croatian Serbs, backed by Belgrade and the might of the Yugoslav National Army, captured one-third of Croatian territory in an invasion in 1991, and it is especially the case in Bosnia, where, for almost four years, Bosnian civilians were left defenseless against a Serbian military juggernaut because of an arms embargo imposed on them by the West. It was still the case as Serbian paramilitary units—led most notably by the infamous Arkan—were imported from Belgrade to commence mass killings and ethnic cleansing in northern Bosnia near the Serb stronghold of Banja Luka, even as the sides prepared to make peace. Bosnian government officials have regularly referred to the conflict as “slaughter,” not war, an assessment reflected in David Rieff’s 1995 book titled *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West*.

The central question that is the impetus for the present volume is why so many Western intellectuals have been so unconcerned or ambivalent about the genocide that has occurred in Bosnia for the last four years. Again, let us attempt to be precise by noting that some sort of concern is indicated by the existence of thousands of articles and books on the events in Bosnia, to say nothing of the information that circulates along the information superhighway on the internet. Yet such concern is only partly characterized by strong statements advocating that this aggression should be stopped, that genocide should be halted, that Bosnia has a fundamental right to self-defense, and that territorial sovereignty of recognized European nations ought to be respected. Key elements of the rationalizations put forth by indicted war criminals have appeared with frequency in the pages of the most well respected Western journals, newsmagazines, and newspapers (indeed, in some cases the indicted war criminals themselves have been given equal time in the press to argue their cases). We cannot imagine that during World War II, the last time genocide appeared as a state policy in Europe, Nazi leaders or their acolytes in the West would have been interviewed on forums such as the CBS newsmagazine *Sixty Minutes*, on National Public Radio, or in the pages of large-city newspapers such as the *Houston Chronicle*. More astoundingly, we cannot imagine that some of the most well respected Western intellectuals, both writers and policy makers, would reproduce
and agree with the views of leaders like Radovan Karadžić or Slobodan Milošević, whose actual and alleged deeds are so ignoble that any self-respecting thinkers should in their political decisions and in their writings immediately distance themselves from them.

In addition to these outright supporters, many Western intellectuals—despite their curdled indignation at the reported atrocities and genocide in Bosnia—have taken some variant of the ambivalent position that all sides are equally guilty (specifically, the Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Serbs) and that peace at the price of ethnic partition or forgiving indicted war criminals is preferable to “more fighting.” We see this as evidence of a significant change in the habitus of Western intellectuals; in contrast to an earlier age when intellectuals were inclined to choose sides and fight for a cause, the dominant disposition of the contemporary intellectual is to be ambivalent in relation to the dramatic conflicts that are emerging in the “new world disorder.” Indeed, if in a previous age intellectuals were characterized by an almost overzealous degree of commitment to various causes, the present age is characterized by a stance of almost “aggressive ambivalence.” It often seems that modern-day intellectuals, on both the left and the right, go out of their way to be “balanced” in their discourse on the Balkan conflict, even if such attempts at balance cause confusion about the historical record of just who is killing whom and why, or how many people have been killed. Balance is a necessary quality of intellectual life, except when it comes, as it has in the case of much analysis of events in the former Yugoslavia, at the cost of confusing victims with aggressors, and the failure to recognize those who are the perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity.

In 1936, George Orwell went to Spain to write about the Spanish Civil War and decided to remain there to fight against fascism. In his resultant chronicle, Homage to Catalonia, Orwell discusses many particulars of the war and his experiences of battle. But only in one short line does he give us some inkling of why he decided to stay and fight: “I had come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles, but I had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere, it seemed the only conceivable thing to do.” For Orwell, and for many intellectuals of the day, there was little difference between holding a position and acting on it: one’s beliefs and values necessarily led to action. In Orwell’s case, his contempt for fascism served as a compulsion to act against it by supporting antifascists with his thoughts and, if need be, his life.
In the present day, it seems, a new kind of ethic seems to have emerged among intellectuals. This ethic champions a kind of cynical, detached, Panglossian ambivalence that not only leads to inaction, but actually celebrates it and seeks to justify it. Many of the articles in the present volume explore this ambivalence and the historical, social, and cultural reasons for its existence. As a way of contextualizing our discussion of ambivalence, however, we focus on the significance of this ambivalence as it is occurring fifty years after World War II.

From Auschwitz to Bosnia

Until now, the most common rationalization given by intellectuals for not stopping the Holocaust is “we did not know.” This may or may not have been the case, since, even with regard to the Holocaust, one ought never to forget that the standard German cliché “we did not know” was more a rationalization than a truism. As Lucy Dawidowicz notes, the burning of corpses could be smelled in major population centers in Germany, and it is hard to imagine that Germans did not hear reports of atrocities and circulate them among themselves. Still, the authentic shock registered on the faces of Allied troops as they liberated the death camps and more general Western responses to what we realized had happened in Auschwitz, Dachau, and elsewhere provide some evidence that we in the West did not know the true extent of the crimes being committed by the Nazis.

In relation to Bosnia, the globalization of information through the mass media has made available a great deal of information about the conflicts and crises set into motion by the Belgrade regime in the 1990s. As in World War II, when we watched and read about German troop movements, we knew of the invasion of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina as they happened. We also knew about ethnic cleansing, mass rapes, and genocide. In contrast to a previous age, Western observers have been literally bombarded with information about the most recent wave of genocide in Europe. Atrocities have been recorded in sound bytes of human history for all to see—every concurrent episode of atrocity can be seen, compared with the previous one, and filed away in physical archives and human memories.

The excuse that “we did not know” is thus not applicable to the present context; it might even be said that we “know too much.” One might paraphrase the shift in collective attitudes to genocide in Europe over the
span of fifty years as a movement from "we did not know" to "we are confused, or ambivalent" precisely because we know so much. This shift is the central focus of the present volume. With the advent of instantaneous forms of mass media in the early twentieth century, intellectuals were optimistic that these media would be an instrument of information in the service of democracy. In just a short time, we witnessed the loss of this optimism and the recognition that mass culture was preferable to learned discourse on the problems of the age. In what Mark Poster has called "the second media age" of the postwar era, the problem is similar, but of a slightly different order.

The new computer-based media such as electronic mail and the internet allow us to gain access to hitherto unimaginable amounts of information and to reform and reshape our thinking and our identities based on that information. For Poster, this reshifting of identity is what is most important about the new media, for we now have the power to resist conventional identities and to make ourselves, via the media, into new types of people and engage in new forms of political practice.

Yet it is questionable whether this new media age facilitates practical, moral intervention in the affairs of the so-called new world order. It may be that the Internet opens up the practice of "postmodern politics," and it may be, as activist Sheri Fink points out in this volume, that electronic media have enhanced the ability of activists to mobilize support for their causes. In this volume, however, we raise directly the uncomfortable question of whether there is any relationship between the degree or extent of public information and practical or moral engagement by those who receive it. Or, to put it another way, one might call into question whether the Holocaust would have been stopped had the world known what was then mostly a closely guarded secret. One thing is certain: the butchering of innocent people in Bosnia has gone on under the watchful gaze of the West. This time, we know.

We wish to make it clear from the outset that our references to the Holocaust are not intended to imply an equation between genocide in Bosnia and the Holocaust. Our position is that there have been and continue to be many sites of genocide, but that there was only one Holocaust. The Holocaust holds many social meanings, but in this discussion we make a careful and precise reference to the Holocaust as a site of genocide. We note with regret that many writers have invoked the Holocaust in a less careful and less precise manner. Nevertheless, there is a
useful role for careful comparisons and contrasts. For example, Louis Gentile, a Canadian diplomat working for the United Nations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, writes in a letter to the editors of the New York Times,

I wonder how many of your readers have seen Steven Spielberg's "Schindler's List" and how many have heard of Banja Luka... . To those who said to themselves after seeing "Schindler's List," never again, it is happening again. The so-called leaders of the Western world have known what is happening here for the last year and a half. They receive play by play reports. They talk of prosecuting war criminals, but do nothing to stop the crimes. May God forgive them. May God forgive us all.6

Even Steven Spielberg claimed that Schindler's List "speaks not only about the Jewish Holocaust, but of every Holocaust, by anyone's definition."7 Anthony Lewis wrote a column entitled "Never Again" in which he contrasts Nuremberg with Bosnia.8 Zbigniew Brzezinski makes a similar argument in "Never Again— Except for Bosnia."9 Many Western intellectuals invoke this comparison and in the process remind us that it is sociologically useful to see formal similarities between historical events.

In the present volume, then, the Holocaust during World War II and the mass killing of Muslims in Bosnia are treated as European sites of genocide. Our precise aim is to compare and contrast Western intellectual responses to two different instances of genocide in Europe over the span of fifty years, one carried out deliberately and systematically against Jews and other peoples during World War II and the other carried out, also deliberately and systematically, against non-Serbs, primarily Muslims, in Europe in the 1990s. We shall refer below to the evidence that genocide has occurred and is occurring in Europe as of this writing. But the important point is that there is a sharp discrepancy between what we know and what we do, and this discrepancy has been neglected in most previous analyses. Yet this gap between knowledge and action is full of meaning for apprehending history as well as the present. In addition, this contrast causes us to rethink the success of the so-called Enlightenment project: the passive Western observation of genocide and other war crimes in the former Yugoslavia amounts to a toleration of the worst form of barbarity and gives us pause to wonder whether, behind the rhetoric of European progress and community, there is not some strong strain of irrationality that, if laid bare, would call into question the degree of enlightenment the civilized West has managed to attain at the century's end.
The neglected question that ought to be of concern to Western intellectuals—the main creators and purveyors of information—is, How is it that genocide in Bosnia has been tolerated, given the information “superhighway” of the 1990s? In a published response to an earlier work by Stjepan Meštrović on this issue, philosopher Daniel Kofman offers a penetrating analysis of the importance of this question with regard to broad developments in social theory:

How is genocide in Bosnia possible? But while putting it that way deliberately echoes the thought which has haunted the last half of our century—How was Auschwitz possible—Meštrović’s work implies that the two questions, despite a superficial resemblance, are radically different. The question about Auschwitz addresses the sheer evil, the very depths of inhumanity, reached by the Nazis. It has spawned reflections in writers as diverse as Hannah Arendt, Horkheimer and Adorno, and Elie Wiesel. Theories have ranged from the blaming of “irrationality” and the incomplete nature of the Enlightenment project in Germany, to the triumph precisely of modern “instrumental rationality” as a moment of the “dialectic of the Enlightenment” (in Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s work bearing that title). What all these theories share, however, is a preoccupation with the minds of the perpetrators, and with the factors which led such minds to gain control of a modern state.

With Bosnia the question which poses itself is rather different. It is not that the second time round on European soil we have moved from tragedy to farce, for despite the Serbian replacement of high tech gas chambers and crematoria with chain saws, knives, and everyday garden tools, the horror of genocide is never diminished by the bestial idiosyncrasies of its perpetrators. Rather, two factors have determined that on this occasion it is the onlookers—the Western powers in the main—and not the perpetrators themselves, who have become the chief focus of analysis. The first factor is that, as Meštrović puts it, the conflict in Bosnia has been given “massive coverage.” If the Holocaust was high-tech genocide with low-tech reportage, genocide in Bosnia is just the opposite. And secondly, a factor alluded to throughout by Meštrović, precisely because we have been here before, we are supposed to have learned something. After all, “Never again!” had been turned into a pious slogan for an entire generation.11

It is the high visibility of genocide in Bosnia that distinguishes it from most other current as well as historical sites of genocide. Never has genocide been covered so much and so well. Bosnia has been referred to as “prime time horror”12 in which, as one headline put it, “Serbs Shell Bosnian Capital as UN Monitors Watch.”13 Carla Anne Robbins wrote in
“Despite two years of watching Bosnia’s agony on TV, Americans seem remarkably disengaged.” Sarajevo journalist Zlatko Dizdarević noted, “Here in Sarajevo, hundreds of TV crews parade before our very eyes; dozens of foreign journalists, reporters, writers. Everything is known here, right down to the minutest details, and yet, nothing.”

Roger Cohen quotes Simone Veil, a French minister and survivor of Auschwitz, who said regarding Sarajevo, “It’s terrible, it’s shocking’ and then concluded that nothing can be done.” Elsewhere, Cohen writes: “The world is tired of Sarajevo. There has been too much killing, too many stories of suffering over more than 1000 days.”

For this reason, too, we reject the charge of Eurocentrism that some analysts have made regarding Western intellectuals’ preoccupation with genocide in Bosnia. It is true that similar horrors in Cambodia, Rwanda, Kurdistan, and East Timor have not received the media attention that Bosnia captures. For whatever sociological reasons, Bosnia has been in the media spotlight, yet the information supplied by the media on genocide in Bosnia has not moved the West to put a decisive stop to it. For that very reason, it is a significant event in contrast to other sites of genocide. The Indonesian government, as Noam Chomsky has pointed out, has systematically killed thousands of East Timorese people, yet the media have remained relatively silent about these atrocities. About this genocide, the world knew very little and, therefore, did very little. While this genocide is tragic, some can always say in self-defense that “we did not know.” Yet Serbs have killed vast numbers of Muslims in the European country of Bosnia. About this, the world knows a great deal, and yet, until very recently with NATO air strikes (aimed primarily at bringing Bosnian Serbs to the so-called peace table rather than stopping or punishing genocide), the world has done very little. The visibility of this genocide leaves one with the troubling thought as to whether cognizance of genocide and moral condemnation of it even matter anymore.

Jean Baudrillard, in three essays especially translated for this volume, raises this haunting issue in his unique and provocative way: we do not respond because the portrayal of mass death is “hyperreal,” a mere “simulacrum”: in a world of manufactured violent images that coexist with the manipulated depiction of real violence, we have lost the ability to distinguish between real violence and simulated violence. Reality is confused with hyperreality, the world of the simulacrum. Western journalists and publics produce and consume the latter as if it were the “real world.” And, should they ever be able to tell the difference, it would
matter little, since, as Baudrillard tells us, there is no distinction between the Serbs and the West: the former's actions are a merely a reflection of the vicious tendencies that exist within us under the veneer of enlightened civility, which we imagine to be our dominant quality. The Serbs are us. The West's "Serbianization" (serbissement, in Baudrillard's terms) means that the issue of mass death and destruction will be little more than an afterthought, just as it is for those Serbs who have committed genocide and other atrocities; to acknowledge such genocide is to look in the mirror and see a face that looks remarkably like that of the perpetrator of mass violence and destruction.

To answer the question, "How is genocide in Bosnia possible?" we must examine the Western intellectual context in the 1990s, in which postmodernists have largely supplanted critical theorists as a frame of reference. The gap between George Orwell, the critic of evil, and Richard Rorty, the philosopher who has opened the way to seeing evil as just another vocabulary in a world where there are no final vocabularies, is vast. In Orwell's time, moral vocabularies were clearly defined and final; one acted on them. In the age of postmodernism, moral vocabularies are contingent and not final; our action in relation to them seems to consist in choosing what is best for ourselves and respecting the voice of the other, regardless of what that voice might be telling us. This is not meant to suggest, of course, that all or even most Western intellectuals are postmodernists. Rather, we mean that until recently, most intellectuals shared the faith in the Enlightenment project expressed by critical theorists, including a faith in scientific facts and the taking of moral positions based on those facts. But postmodernism defines itself as rebellion against the Enlightenment project and revels in relativism, the questioning of the possibility of facts, and the celebration of ambivalence. And postmodernism has penetrated most disciplines and occupations with these attitudes and assumptions. Even if all intellectuals have not adopted relativism as a code for their conduct, they have encountered it and exist in it much the same way as fish exist in water. This is particularly the case with those who these days identify themselves with the "left." Many left positions nowadays (at least in the United States) are notable in their commitment to the ideal of "multiculturalism." Multiculturalism is a complex ideological position. At the very least, it calls for us to accept the possibility that every position (or, in Rorty's terms, every "vocabulary") is right. Yet it also proscribes the possibility of telling anyone that they are, or have done, wrong.
Many modern leftists working under the rubric of multiculturalism (and at least one of the editors of this volume would continue to classify himself as being a “modern leftist”) have a difficult time identifying and condemning transgression. Many radical postmodernists actually celebrate transgression, since the object against which transgression is directed is usually some icon of modernist order that is seen as repressive. The calling of the modern leftist is not, as it was in George Orwell’s time, to morally sound positions, but to the defense of all positions and the refusal to disavow some positions, even the positions of evildoers. Thus, the fact that genocide is occurring in Europe in the 1990s is not taken at face value, but is subjected immediately to the impulses of the postmodern age: disbelief, deconstruction, questioning, and ambivalence. Moreover, this kind of attitude makes it more likely that Western intellectuals cannot bring themselves to say, unequivocally, “The Serbs have done wrong.” And if those words are uttered, then a corollary utterance is usually “Well, all of those Balkan tribalists have all done wrong.” Or, in a more radically relativist vein, when confronted with evidence of genocide, some might even try to understand and even empathize with the perpetrators: “The Serbs have been victims of Muslims and Croats for centuries.” Something, indeed, has happened when the perpetrators of genocide are seen by otherwise good and smart people as victims and when the genocide that they perpetrate is explained away by recourse to a lazy relativism that, in some varieties, assumes the form of empathy.

Postmodernism is a complex intellectual movement that is not amenable to easy characterization. Not all postmodernists would fit the generalization we make above, and postmodernism is difficult to define even among its adherents. A notable exception to our generalization is Jean Baudrillard, frequently referred to as the spokesperson for postmodernism (but who denies this label) and who clearly concludes that the Belgrade regime in Serbia is most responsible for the genocide under discussion here. It is, indeed, refreshing to see such a response, although it is an anomaly among those who would consider themselves adherents of Baudrillard’s or others’ postmodernist positions. Notwithstanding this ambiguity concerning postmodernism and intellectuals who see themselves as postmodernists, we hold that our generalization about postmodernism as a widespread social movement in the current fin de siècle holds overall. It is clear that there is not an absolute negative relationship between postmodernism and the proclivity to become morally engaged in the affairs of the world. Yet is also clear that there are cultural consequences
of a generalized relativism that go far beyond the groves of academe and some of the petty battles that characterize that arena at present. We are at a point where fairness and the interests of seeing the world in terms of the other have come to include trying to understand the “plight” of the Serbs, who see themselves as victims of Ottoman repression, then Ustashe genocide, vanquished, but never victors, even as they annihilate Bosnia. In the press, we see the lionization of indicted war criminals like General Ratko Mladić: in a feature article by Roger Cohen in the New York Times, for example, the author seems less concerned to lay out the crimes for which Mladić is charged (and warn us about the future actions—the destruction of Srebrenica and Žepa could have been foreseen in the expressed character of the general) than he is in letting Mladić define himself as a heroic Serbian victim. In a letter to the editor of the New York Review of Books, New York Times journalist David Binder, responding to a critical article about Mladić by Robert Block, writes, “I strongly wish to disassociate myself from his [Block’s] assessment of the general as a crazed killer. Until compelling evidence to the contrary surfaces, I will continue to view Mladić as a superb professional, an opinion voiced by senior American, British, French, and Canadian military officers who have met him or followed his career and who are better qualified to judge him than either Block or I.” Writing on the war and those responsible for it is often not so much an act of objective reporting, or even moral engagement and advocacy, as it is a form of therapy or an occasion for paeans, a chance for the world to hear the case of war criminals and be given the option to decide that they may be justified or even lauded for what they are doing.

Genocide Is Occurring in Bosnia

The facts assembled by respectable fact-gathering organizations indicate very clearly the parties and individuals that are responsible for the current war of aggression and the commission of genocide in Bosnia. To be sure, one must look at the history of the entire area and the political actions of all the major players in the conflict. Even though we feel that the West has been intransigent in responding to the conflict, we do not feel that the West is responsible for it (even though many commentators insist that it is somehow Germany’s fault for premature recognition of Slovenia and Croatia, as if the responsibility for genocide ultimately lies with those other than those who actually do the killing). Explanations of such things
as the dissolution of Yugoslavia or the ethnic conflicts and genocide that have ensued must invariably begin with an analysis of events internal to Yugoslavia. To be sure, no parties in the current conflict are blameless in fostering interethnic conflict and very many accounts remind us, rightfully, that atrocities have been committed by all sides.

Such reports, however, very often fail to contextualize the actions of Croats, Bosnians, and Serbs. The Croatian recapturing of its Serb-occupied territory in the Krajina, for instance, is often seen as the same kind of “ethnic cleansing” as that engaged in by the Serbs. Seldom is any mention made of the fact that Croatia tried to negotiate with Serbs upon the breakup of the federation and then again during the Serbian occupation of the Krajina, a point noted by Slaven Letica in his paper in this volume. These negotiations were consistently met by Serbian aggression: in the early days of the conflict, by the rebellions of Jovan Rašković, amply described by Philip Cohen in his chapter on the complicity of Serbian intellectuals in genocide, and later by continued Serbian shelling of civilian targets in Croatia, in Vukovar, Dubrovnik, Zagreb, and other cities (one of the most memorable being the cluster bomb shelling of Zagreb in the spring of 1995, in which five civilians were killed and many more wounded). And, in contrast to the usual view that it was the revival of the Croatian currency unit, the kuna, or the Croatian coat of arms, the Sahovnica, that led Serbs to become ethnic cleansers, we feel compelled to point out that there is a difference between symbolic violence—the Serbs’ taking offense at certain Croatian actions is quite understandable from a sociological view—and physical violence. Similarly, the West labeled as ethnic cleansing the exodus of Serbs in February of 1995 from areas under Bosnian Government control, even though the exodus was orchestrated by Serbian television and leaders, not by the Bosnian Muslims. Such capricious misuse of the term ethnic cleansing denatures its meaning and gives a false portrait of equal guilt among the three “warring parties.”

Throughout the conflict, Serbs have complained that the West has failed to understand their case. They have complained that they have been demonized in the press (as if it takes the press to make demons out of those who have committed genocide). This may, in fact, be true, even though respectable news people have constantly offered the Serbs forums for their views. But what if the Serbs are right and their case has fallen on deaf ears? Why might that be so? One reason is that the West may not have, as yet, lost the capacity to recognize that there is no justifiable case
to be made in defense of genocide. One might argue that after the
commission of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and mass rape, the Serbs
relinquished the right to be heard. Genocide committed by Serbian leaders
in the name of Greater Serbia has nullified their right to be heard as an
equal in the community of nations. Verstehen, the social scientific impulse
to understand why people do what they do, is one thing, toleration and
empathy are quite another. The practical consequences of the Serbian
belief in their victimhood were atrocious, and such atrocities must be
subject to moral and ethical adjudication if we are to avoid slipping down
the slope from verstehen to relativism.22

The case against Bosnian Serb leaders as well as their supporters in
Belgrade is so overwhelming that there is little need to be apologetic for
sticking to the facts of the case. We do not agree that "all sides are equally
guilty" of genocide, and therefore we do not need to defend against the
perception of being polemical. We feel that it is vitally important to let
the facts speak for themselves, particularly where genocide is involved.
Moreover, the aim of the present volume is to offer a sustained critical
assessment of the facts of the case and to offer a critical examination of
why these facts seem to have been so egregiously ignored by many
Western intellectuals and opinion makers. Indeed, all the articles in the
present volume explain various facets of this inaction and ignorance in
different ways. The central facts of the case are as follows:

1. According to a leaked CIA report, that the Belgrade regime is
responsible for 90 percent of the atrocities committed in this war and 100
percent of the systematic killing (i.e., genocide).23

2. A UN-sponsored report over five thousand pages long, prepared
under the direction of Cherif Bassiouni and released in 1994 is another
key source of documentation that underscores Serbian official direction
and responsibility for the vast majority of war crimes committed.

3. Reports prepared by Congress and the U.S. State Department likewise indicate that between 80 percent and 90 percent of the war crimes
can be attributed to the Serbs.24

4. The reports by Helsinki Watch, War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina,
2 vols. (New York, 1992–93) also confirm these other findings.

5. Other such reports exist, by the CSCE, the Red Cross, the news
media—all of them remarkably consonant with one another.25 For exam-
ple, the United Nations concluded that Serbs committed the majority of
rapes in Bosnia, and again, did so as an organized, systematic policy.26
6. It should be noted that during an election campaign in Serbia in 1993, Serb leaders openly accused each other of systematic war crimes outside Serbia: “This government consists of criminals, profiteers and the financial Mafia,” shouts Vojislav Šešelj, former student of Frankfurt School critical theory, now ultranationalist leader of the Serbian Radical Party, and the coiner of “ethnic cleansing” as a concept and a policy. In return, Milošević’s Socialist Party brands Šešelj, once a close ally, as a “war criminal.” “The campaign is revealing in Serb leaders’ own words that, first, Serbs from Serbia have indeed committed war crimes in Croatia and Bosnia and, second, that the goal of the Serbian authorities all along has been the creation of a Greater Serbia. And Belgrade newspapers have for the first time printed eyewitness accounts of Serb atrocities in Croatia and Bosnia.”

Genocide has occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina and it has been perpetrated exclusively by the Belgrade regime and its proxies. What is significant is that in the former Yugoslavia, as was the case during World War II in Europe, all sides have committed atrocities and war crimes, but only specific parties supported by and controlled by the Belgrade regime are responsible for genocide, which is a systematic and organized policy of mass murder with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group (see appendix 1 for specific definitions of genocide). To be sure, Croatian offensives against Bosnian Muslims in 1993, particularly in the city of Mostar, were contemptible and indefensible; those events should be publicly exposed and those responsible punished. The International War Crimes Tribunal has indicted seven Croats, including individuals directly and closely linked to Franjo Tudjman. Indictments of Bosnian Croats for war crimes is one indication that no side is without blemish in this conflict. In the late summer of 1995, Croatian troops recaptured the rebel-held Krajina area of Croatia, an area that had been seized and “ethnically cleansed” by Croatian Serbs four years ago with the aid of Yugoslav National Army troops. The European Commission on Human Rights, UN observers, Amnesty International, Helsinki Watch, and the Red Cross all reported that atrocities such as burning, looting, and the murder of a number of Serbs who remained in the region were committed by these Croatian troops upon the recapturing of the Krajina region. Subsequently, these very same Western fact-finding organizations have accused the Croatian government of deliberately covering up these atrocities. Franjo Tudjman stupefied the international community
by promoting in the army a man who had recently been indicted by the International War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague. Presuming that the evidence for all these charges is accurate, we condemn those acts as we condemn any and all atrocities, whether committed by victims or aggressors.

Yet the central issue remains as to whether such Croatian actions—reprehensible and indefensible as they might be—constitute genocide as a policy. It is clear, as Norman Cigar has poignantly expressed it, that the systematic rounding up, torture, and murder of civilians have been a policy only of the Belgrade-sponsored Bosnian Serb aggressors in Bosnia-Herzegovina, whereas there is little evidence that the alleged atrocities in the Krajina proceeded as a result of state orders from Zagreb. In this event, small-scale acts of retribution by Croats have been given the same status as the large-scale, ongoing, and systematic atrocities and war crimes committed by Serbs in Bosnia; much of the mainstream media have been quick to use any act of violence on the part of Croats or Muslims as a pretext for morally equating all sides. Despite the fact that in the entire operation to liberate the Krajina only a few hundred civilians were killed, fewer than Bosnian Serbs slaughtered in an average hour of ethnic killing at Srebrenica, Žepa, and elsewhere, there is still no excuse for crimes and atrocities committed by Croatian forces, and the strident criticisms of Serbian actions that appear in this book should not be read as an apologia for Croatian misdeeds.29

This book, however, is about Western responses to the root cause of the Balkan War: the Serbian campaign of aggression and genocide. As the Cambridge historian Brendan Simms notes in this volume, “whatever opportunistic acts of Croat aggression may have taken place subsequently, the root cause of the war lies in a psychologically and logistically well prepared program of Serbian aggression.” And perhaps no one has put the issue better than Patrick Moore of the Open Media Research Institute: “It is true, as in any war, that no one side consisted entirely of angels. But what made Serbian atrocities different from those committed by others was that they represented not an incidental development in the conflict, but a deliberate instrument of policy. The rapes, expulsions, lootings, and massacres were a conscious and calculated means of setting up a Greater Serbia.”30

Significantly, the Nuremberg tribunal differentiated between war crimes, of which all sides were guilty, and genocide, for which German defendants alone stood trial. We feel that it is important to examine
critically an important assumption Western intellectuals make about the war in Bosnia, namely, that all sides are equally guilty for atrocities, war crimes, and genocide. All sides may have committed atrocities and war crimes, but all sides have not committed genocide. Our examination lays bare conventional wisdoms about “who has done what to whom” and offers evidence that challenges these conventional wisdoms. We feel this is important, since we are dealing with one of the most heinous of crimes—genocide. The facts of the case so clearly define the aggressor in this situation that some readers might be led to believe we are overtly partisan. This is not true, since, in addition to specifying the nature and causes of Serbian aggression, we acknowledge the existence of inter-ethnic conflicts between other parties in the region, particularly those between Croats and Muslims in 1993. It is certainly clear that Tudjman’s actions on the eve of the Yugoslav break-up were perceived as provocations by many Croatian Serbs. Yet at the same time, such provocations were magnified and intensified by Belgrade and Pale propagandists who played on the fears of the Serbian minority and led them to take positions against the Croats that were not in keeping with the relatively peaceful state of Serbo-Croat relations in the post-World War II era. Serbian intellectuals could not really have believed that Tudjman was the reincarnation of Ante Pavelić and his Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) a resurrection of the dreaded Ustashe. Nonetheless, as Philip J. Cohen, Brad K. Blitz, and Daniele Conversi point out in their articles for the volume, this was a central line of the propaganda created by Serbian intellectuals and promulgated in the Balkans and in the West and, in many cases, actually believed by many well-meaning Western observers, some who should have known better and all of whom should know about the dangers—both moral and logical—of the doctrine of collective guilt.

Unlike many Western intellectuals we do not consciously engage in moral equivocation or relativism in our assessment of responsibility for genocide or some of the most egregious war crimes committed on the European continent since World War II. It is one thing that the new Croatian government made Serbs aware of their minority status and displaced many of them from positions of government authority given to them during the Yugoslav period. It is quite another thing to agree that such actions warranted full military mobilization as a response or to agree with the dangerous principle of collective guilt as a pretext for mobilizing against a population. It is also quite another thing to agree that the
appropriate response to symbolic political infelicities in Croatia was to unleash a military juggernaut against a civilian population, as the Serbs did in Slovenia, Croatia, and then Bosnia. When Western intellectuals find themselves aping the justifications and legitimations of the architects of Greater Serbia, when they find themselves nodding their heads in agreement with indicted war criminals who appear on Sixty Minutes or in interviews in the New York Times Magazine, then, we argue, we have reached a new stage in the moral de-evolution of the Western intellectual. Equivocation and relativism may have their place when the actions of each party can be equated, but in this case they cannot.

Yet what concerns us is the ease with which many Western intellectual observers of the events of the last four years engaged in equivocation and relativism in their judgments of the parties involved in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. This kind of equivocation is not new. Brendan Simms and Daniele Conversi, in their contributions to this volume, note that British government officials had previously equated victims with perpetrators in the Balkans. History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes, as Mark Twain is reputed to have said. Conversi notes, without falling into the trap of historical determinism, that there is a long history of British Serbophilism that has had a direct impact not only on the conduct of the war, but in the toleration of war crimes and genocide in the region.

Such equivocation and relativism, we feel, obfuscate and obscure the realities of genocide, mass rape, and other atrocities and are, in our opinion, a central reason for the failure of Western intellectuals and political officials to respond adequately to these realities. Our own effort to respond responsibly is, therefore, grounded in a rather strident critique of our colleagues who have failed to do so and of those who see in every Serb action an equally bad and vile Croat or Muslim action.

As an important aside, we note that our treatment of genocide in Bosnia sidesteps intellectual arguments found in the literature as to whether a quantitative threshold has been reached to count as genocide in Bosnia; whether the UN definition of genocide is adequate; whether it is permissible to make any comparisons and contrasts between the Holocaust and genocide, and so on (to repeat: our reply is that these events are not comparable to the Holocaust per se, but to the Holocaust as an instance of genocide). Following Emile Durkheim, our more sociological approach notes that respected fact-gathering organizations have determined that genocide has occurred in Bosnia. In other words, even if the
UN definition is flawed, or some intellectuals are not satisfied that real genocide is occurring in Bosnia, or that others feel that “all sides” have committed genocide, or even if some believe that victims of genocide are simply getting what they deserve for past injustices, the fact remains: from the perspective of the social construction of reality, a respectable finding of genocide in Bosnia has been made and is largely ignored by Western intellectuals, politicians, and the public in general. And this fact calls into question the credibility of the United Nations, promotes cynicism among the general population in Western democracies, and hampers the development of the rule of law. The issue of the Western slide from the principles established at Nuremberg is described and analyzed in detail by James J. Sadkovich in his contribution to this volume.

The information media has noted and digested the findings above on several occasions. Regarding the practice of ethnic cleansing, the editors of the *New York Times* concluded that “the overwhelming responsibility for this practice lies with the Serbs.” The editors of the *Wall Street Journal* noted that “Serb forces were singled out in a UN report as the worst human rights violators in the Bosnian war.” And later, the same editors concluded that “UN investigators blame Serbs for the worst atrocities, from the creation of Nazi-like detention camps to forced deportations and systematic rape of Muslims.” Respected institutions such as the International Court of Justice in the Hague demanded in April 1993 that Serbia and Montenegro take preventative measures to prevent genocide from occurring in Bosnia. On February 13, 1995, the newly established International War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague charged a Serb with genocide and crimes against humanity. In April 1995 this same tribunal indicted the Serb leaders Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić as war criminals who orchestrated genocide, but the United Nations continued to negotiate with them as peacemakers. Commenting on many of these findings, Roger Cohen writes in the *New York Times* that “the overwhelming majority of crimes were committed by Serbs in an orchestrated campaign to eliminate Muslims from Serb-held territory.” Despite all these findings, as of this writing, the weapons embargo is still in place against Belgrade’s primary victim, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the sanctions against Belgrade are openly violated, the United Nations in Bosnia and Croatia is accused of widespread corruption, and Belgrade-sponsored genocidal aggression continued unabated even as “peace talks” took place.
Nevertheless, All Sides Are Deemed Equally Guilty

In the present context, knowledge abounds, but so, too, do rationalizations for nonintervention in Balkan affairs. Such rationalizations are scripted by political elites, circulated and reproduced by the mass media and by intellectuals, and consumed by the mass public, which is more or less trusting of expert systems of knowledge production and willing to abide by experts' judgments about domestic and international affairs. In sociological terms, such rationalizations can be seen as "frames" or "typifications" that guide the concrete policies of Western elites and mass publics.\(^{37}\) In this case, such rationalizations, rather than fostering coherent policies, actually serve to mitigate against the formation of a coherent Western policy in the Balkans. The central rationalization in the West appears to be this: "We, as civilized Westerners, cannot do anything to stop the Balkan tribalists from slaughtering each other." The evolution of the main rationalization for non-intervention from "we did not know" to "we cannot do anything to stop them" represents an important transition in the mode of Western response to genocide and atrocities in modern Europe.

Thus, alongside the clear findings that Serbian leaders are responsible for genocide in Bosnia, we find the following examples of frames of reference that blame all sides equally: Margaret D. Tutwiler, former Department of State spokeswoman, pronounced that "No party is blameless for the current situation";\(^ {38}\) the European mediator Lord Carrington declared with regard to a broken cease-fire that "Muslim Slav fighters were at least as responsible as the Serbs and Croats for violations."\(^ {39}\) When the Serbs increased their shelling of Sarajevo in 1995, UN spokesman Alexander Ivanko declared, "We're saying both sides were equally to blame for this fighting."\(^ {40}\) More recently, during the Serbian siege of the UN safe areas Srebrenica and Žepa—a time when the sheer horror of what was going on should have served as a clarion call for moral action by the West—we saw no reduction in the intensity of the equivocation and relativism in some of the leading organs of Western public opinion.\(^ {41}\)

Many Western intellectuals have either remained silent on the current genocide in Europe or, where they have become involved, have engaged in reproduction of some of the obfuscations, falsehoods, and other conventional wisdoms that circulate on the global information highway. However, we hasten to add that there are Western intellectuals and leaders of
many political persuasions who have not hesitated to condemn Belgrade-sponsored aggression and who have called for a decisive, moral response to the genocide in Bosnia, including but not limited to Anthony Lewis, Jean Baudrillard, William Safire, Georgie Anne Geyer, David Rieff, William F. Buckley, Andrea Dworkin, Henry Siegman, Susan Sontag, Albert Wohlstetter, Catharine MacKinnon, Pope John Paul II, Elie Wiesel, George Will, Senator Robert Dole, and Zbigniew Brzezinski. In her contribution to this volume, activist Sheri Fink offers an overview of anti-genocide campus grassroots activism in the United States and demonstrates convincingly that such activism exists and has had some positive effects.

Nevertheless, there are many different intellectual responses to the conflict and these responses are somewhat guided by the philosophical assumptions that underlie various Western intellectual positions. For instance, postmodern Western intellectuals who are guided by a spirit of ambivalence might find it difficult to act because to act would involve “choosing sides” and the relativism of postmodernism makes such choices difficult. Even some intellectuals who are committed to the modern project of Enlightenment (which some postmodernists challenge) have difficulty “choosing sides” in the conflict, since each side is viewed as “nationalistic” and therefore hostile to one of the central ideas of modernism, what we call “civilized federalism.” On this view, scholars who take a stand against genocide, which in this case means taking a stand against the Serbian orchestrators of genocide, are often seen as deviant partisans or labeled “unbalanced” or “one-sided.”

Indeed, it is also worth exploring the negative judgments of the phenomenon of nationalism among Western intellectuals: it is almost always seen as a negative force and as an antipode to Western civility. For example, the last U.S. Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmermann, writes that “Nationalism is by nature uncivil, antidemocratic and separatist because it empowers one ethnic group over all others.” Following David Riesman, our reply is that it depends on which nationalism and particular context is under discussion. As the great Czech statesman and sociologist Thomas Masaryk argued, nationalism can be a very constructive force, and there are many instances in which it serves as a firm basis for identity. Liah Greenfeld, in a speech given to various national and international policy makers and reprinted in this volume, makes a distinction between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism and points out the dangers of authoritarianism inherent in the latter. In a context in which
nationalism is ritually and crudely blasted and vilified by Western intellectuals, Greenfeld reminds us, echoing Durkheim, that nationalism can, in fact, be an important basis of a civil or civic culture and, as such, can serve as an important basis for identity. While it is important to understand distinctions between the various types and degrees of ethnic nationalisms in the former Yugoslavia (and thus avoid what we have been critical of here, namely, the dangers of relativism in seeing all nationalisms as leading to the same consequence in the former Yugoslavia), it is also important to think about the ways ethnic nationalism can be made more democratic than it has often been so far in various postcommunist societies.

Proponents of neo-isolationism hold that "all sides in the former Yugoslavia have committed atrocities," so the West would be foolish to try to step in—the latter seldom differentiate war crimes from genocide, nor do they specify variations in the degree of guilt for war crimes. Western diplomats continued to negotiate with suspected war criminals (Slobodan Milošević) as well as indicted Serbian war criminals (Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić) even as the United Nations threatened to put them on trial and even as strong evidence emerged that shows that Serbia continued to arm and supply Bosnian Serbs despite specific UN resolutions that prohibited such collaboration and even though Belgrade has emphatically declared that it did not: 45 "Even as the West courts Serbia's President in hopes of bringing peace to Bosnia . . . his military is secretly assisting the Bosnian Serbs." 46 Many journalists and editors, guided by a sense of realpolitik that seems strangely out of place in the world of journalism, nevertheless continue to argue that it is not in Western interests to intervene and that there is nothing else the West can do but let combatants fight it out or make an unjust peace to stop further killing. This view was promulgated forcefully by former secretary of state Lawrence Eagleburger: "Until the Bosnians, Croats and Serbs decide to stop killing each other, there is nothing the outside world can do about it." 47

This, of course, neglects the central question of who started the killing, but this is rather normal in much discourse about the Balkans. Most policy makers are against lifting the weapons embargo that would enable victims to defend themselves, again, along the lines of the rationalization discussed above: all sides are potentially bad, so an increase in weapons would "escalate the violence." If Western weapons and troops are to be sent to Bosnia, it should be to protect the UN peacekeepers there, not the civilians. Indeed, in this volume, Michael N. Barnett has offered a
theoretically and autobiographically informed discussion of the politics of indifference at the United Nations. He comes to the chilling conclusion that in Rwanda and Bosnia "the bureaucratization of peacekeeping contributed to [an] indifference to the suffering of the very people it is mandated to assist." As Barnett points out, the commitments of many UN personnel were primarily to the norms and goals of the organization, not the people that the organization had pledged to help. Such indifference is widespread, and in some cases it is actually proudly declared, as for instance by journalist Thomas L. Friedman, who notes, "I don't give two cents about Bosnia. Not two cents. The people there have brought on their own troubles. But I do feel loyalty to the Allies." Such utterances are precisely what we find so problematic, not only because they are wrong (the Bosnian people did not bring their own troubles on themselves, but were brutally attacked by Serbs under the direction of Belgrade), but because they are so patently immoral. Can one imagine the outcry if one were to say that European Jews in Germany had brought on their own troubles?

But these and similar rationalizations really call into question how previous opinion makers and intellectuals rationalized World War II. During that war American, British, and Canadian servicemen all committed atrocities. However, the understanding up to now has been that, unlike the Nazis, it was not Western government policy to do so in order to eliminate any ethnic or religious group. Moreover, despite the excesses of the Allies at Dresden, Hiroshima, and elsewhere, most intellectuals today are not prepared to say that Nazi Germany and the Allies were morally equivalent (that is, all equally guilty). But this argument is regularly made regarding Bosnia in the 1990s. They are also not prepared to say that it really does not matter who won the war. Yet these arguments are reversed with regard to genocide in Bosnia: all sides are treated as morally equivalent despite what the facts say, and the West behaves as if it does not matter who wins, so long as "peace" is achieved even at the cost of ethnic partition, which is the central outcome of the peace plan agreed on in Dayton in November 1995.

It seems unthinkable to most intellectuals today that Adolf Hitler might have been interviewed on television and allowed to defend his racist positions and heinous acts, yet Serb leaders and spokesmen get all the play they want on CNN and have been interviewed frequently by major media. Jimmy Carter is sometimes interviewed alongside them (and, in one instance, brought flowers to indicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić)
and basically supports the rationalization that all sides are equally guilty and a “negotiated settlement” is the only option open to the West. As Brad K. Blitz notes in this volume, Serbia’s government agencies routinely disseminate propaganda advertisements as well as statements in the Western press—usually equating the Jews and Serbs as historical victims of Croats and Muslims, blaming all Muslims for their defeat at Kosovo in 1389, and insinuating that all contemporary Croats are Nazis. Such propaganda, as Daniel Kofman points out in his criticism of Israeli-Serbian relations in this volume, seem to be accepted by many leading Israeli intellectuals, media figures, and politicians. In his essay, Kofman notes that while diaspora Jews have responded outstandingly to the crisis in Bosnia, many Israeli elites, including intellectuals, have been indulgent of Serbia.

But throughout the West, what is surprising is the number of intellectuals and scholars at conferences who mouth these clearly noncredible (and incredible) slogans. At the 1994 meetings of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in Philadelphia, for instance, a panel on media coverage of the Balkan War included a presentation in which the presenter, a Serb, chastised the New York Times for its anti-Serb views, that is, for failing to point out that the Bosnian Serbs are allegedly victims of Croat-Muslim aggression. These very same views can also be found on elaborate home page displays on the internet’s World Wide Web. If, in fact, the New York Times did take an unequivocal position against the Serbs and their genocidal practices, we would be heartened, since it would prove our arguments about the lack of intellectual response to be either exaggerated or just plain wrong. Yet many key elements of Serbian propaganda have been adopted to a large extent by intellectuals, diplomats, and journalists, and these serve as further rationalizations that mitigate the responsibility of intellectuals. For instance, an editorial in the New York Times notes that “Croatia’s 20th century record of aggression and ethnic cleansing is every bit as bad as Serbia’s. Memories of the atrocities committed by Croatia’s fascist Ustashe regime against Serbs, Muslims, and Jews during World War II helped fuel the Serbian revolt in Krajina four years ago.” What is most striking about this statement is not only that it equates Croatian actions with those of the past, but that it so clearly resonates with the central themes of Serbian propaganda, which rely on the principle of intergenerational collective guilt as a legitimization for aggression.

Many other frames exist in the perceptions of this war; in our opinion,
these frames have had a great deal to do with the inability of Western intellectuals to mount an effective response to genocide. A more detailed sociological study of these frames is needed, but we present here some of the central ones that are relevant to understanding the obfuscation of genocide in Bosnia in the West:

1. The fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina is supposed to be a civil war. Very often, the label “civil war” is applied without definition (there are many examples of this in scholarly literature on the conflict). All sides are viewed as warring parties who are equally responsible for the conflict. Consider, as a particularly drastic example, the following excerpt from an editorial by William Finnegan: “Basic values such as the rule of law, the inviolability of borders, and the safety of innocent civilians have been trashed beyond recognition by the war parties.” This view and others like it ignore the history of Serbian expansion and aggression in the last two centuries, as well as the history of Serbian hegemony in the Yugoslav federation. More important, it confuses victims with aggressors by presuming that all warring parties have committed the stated sins in equal measure.

2. Islamic fundamentalism is a threat to the West; Europe should not allow an Islamic nation (Bosnia) in Europe, since to do so provides a foothold for other, more aggressive fundamentalist regimes. This rationalization presumes that there is little variation among Muslims in terms of degree of fundamentalism. It appears to be related to other Western “orientalist” assumptions of the kind that Edward Said has noted in his work on Western anti-Islamic prejudices.

3. In World War II, all Serbs were on the Allied side—no Serbs collaborated with the Nazis. This is, in fact, not the case: the Serbian General Milan Nedić was a Nazi puppet ruler who collaborated with Nazi officials. In the early days of Serbian aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina, this frame served to legitimize Western Allied support for Serbs in spite of the fact that knowledge of what the latter were doing in Bosnia was abundant.

4. All Croats were Nazi collaborators in a homegrown Ustashe movement that was supposed to have been widely popular, and whose legacy still persists in Croatia. This ignores overwhelming evidence that the Ustashe were not widely popular and that there was a strong resistance movement among Croats. As noted above, this frame is often invoked when authors try to rationalize and explain Serbian genocide, as if what a
small minority of Croatian thugs did in World War II is the root cause of Serbian-perpetrated genocide in the present.

5. Bosnia-Herzegovina is not a nation-state; it could never really exist as a nation-state because it never had been one. Bosnia-Herzegovina, however, was a highly autonomous and defined area within the Ottoman Empire and was a republic within Tito’s Yugoslavia, as were Slovenia and Croatia. The point has been rather glaringly made by historians of Bosnia, but generally ignored.

6. The wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina started because of premature Western recognition. From the perspective of this frame, Western nations—in particular Germany—rather than the actual perpetrators of genocide are, at base, responsible for acts of aggression and genocide committed by Serbs in Bosnia.

7. Bosnian and Croatian Serbs commit atrocities out of generalized fear of Croats and Muslims. While this may be true in the sociological sense that people act on their deeply held beliefs, the idea that contemporary Croats and Muslims are somehow genocidal by nature smacks of racism and essentialism. This view often relies on the doctrine of collective guilt, which holds that a whole group is guilty for the crimes of some of its members. On this logic, German reunification could have been used as a pretext for the invasion of Germany by former Nazi victims, an idea that is preposterous when thought of in the context of Western Europe, but that is invoked relatively unproblematically in explanations (and in some ways, justifications) of Serbian aggression in the Balkans. It is worth pointing out that Karadžić appeared on the CBS television newsmagazine Sixty Minutes in September 1995 and declared that Bosnian Serb aggression against the Croats was necessary to prevent the latter from doing to Serbs what they had done in World War II. He also noted that Europe would thank him and the Bosnian Serbs for protecting Europe from the threat of Islamic fundamentalism, presumably by killing Bosnian Muslims. As we have noted above, we find that these views resonate in the discourse of many Western intellectuals, and we are deeply troubled by this fact.

8. Bosnian Muslims often shoot themselves to gain sympathy. Very often, overt acts of aggression (shelling of Sarajevo marketplaces, bombing of schools) by one side are seen as potentially self-inflicted provocations by desperate victims (in this case the Bosnian Muslims). This type of equivocation recasts victims as villains. For example, Serbs massacred dozens of civilians in a Sarajevo marketplace in August 1995, and the
media dutifully reported the Serb claim that the Bosnian Muslims “had attacked their own civilian population today to arouse international sympathy and drag NATO into the war. ‘This is a classic act of Islamic terrorism,’ said Miroslav Toholj, a Bosnian Serb official.”

9. The leader of the Bosnians, Alija Izetbegović, is an Islamic fundamentalist. This is a variant of the more general orientalist theme rather than a comment on Izetbegović’s own book, *Islam between East and West*, in which Izetbegović’s admiration for the West is so great as to be pathetic, given how the West has rejected him. In fact, Izetbegović takes great pains to show the distinctive identities of Bosnian Muslims as being “between East and West.” Anyone even faintly familiar with the history of Bosnia would find the assertion that Bosnians are Islamic fundamentalists preposterous, given Bosnia’s history of religious tolerance, pluralism, and cosmopolitanism. This frame is taken directly from Serbian propaganda, which uses a youthful work by Izetbegović, his so-called Islamic Declaration, in which he called for a “united Islamic community from Morocco to Indonesia,” as the basis for present policy toward Bosnia. The construction of Izetbegović as an Islamic fundamentalist has important ramifications for Western policy, given the historical relationship between Islam and the West.

10. If genocide is occurring in Bosnia, it is genocide with a small *g*—no big deal, and certainly not tantamount to that perpetrated against Jews (a point argued recently by former State Department official George Kenney in the *New York Times Magazine*).

11. “Those people [in the Balkans] have been fighting each other for hundreds, if not thousands of years and conflicts are basically a result of age-old, tribal hatreds.” This rationalization might be said to be a “master frame” that circulates in intellectual and political circles and in the Western public sphere more generally.

The Importance of Frames of Reference

These and other common rationalizations constitute “frames of reference” that condition thinking about events. Ongoing events are made to “fit” preexisting frames; this process ensures that conventional wisdoms and misperceptions are reproduced over time. Thus, if the Croats are defined as Nazis they cannot be victims of Serbs, since it is impossible for Nazis to be victims. If Serbs were Allies in World War II they cannot be enemies of the West at present, since the structure of Western alliances supersedes
any other considerations, especially moral ones. If Bosnian Muslims are fundamentalists, this places them outside Enlightenment rationality and, as such, they either cannot be expected to act in a civilized manner or are an actual threat to Western civility. Serbian "ethnic cleansing" is thus conceptualized as a service to Europe since it guards against the persistent Islamic fundamentalist threat to modernity that began in Iran. And so on. Jean Baudrillard, in particular, poignantly exposes the direction of these and related frames of reference in his essays in this volume.

Genocide is a particularly sensitive issue that has been obfuscated in writings concerning the current Balkan War. To repeat: fact-finding organizations have definitely found that genocide has occurred and have laid all the blame for it on the Serbs (as explained above). But interestingly, the Belgrade regime has (1) claimed that its Serbian minorities in Croatia and Bosnia are and have been victims of genocide;\(^\text{69}\) (2) made allusions to a Serbian Holocaust;\(^\text{70}\) and (3) recast its genocide in Bosnia as a civil war in which Serbs are victims.\(^\text{71}\) That these arguments have had their intended effect, including gaining widespread sympathy in Israel for the Belgrade cause even to the extent that some Israelis have offered military support for Serbia, is documented by Daniel Kofman in his essay in this volume.

Several issues ought to be examined in this regard. First, many Jews have rightly complained that efforts to compare the Holocaust with, say, the slavery of African Americans, the extermination of the Native Americans, and other sites of genocide are misguided because they cheapen the Holocaust. Serbian comparisons of their own plight with that of the Jews, in this sense, also debases the memory of the Holocaust. Second, what prevented Hitler from establishing his new order on the East European plains, including expelling the local population and replacing them with Germans, was the strong and effective resistance movements in these areas. Such resistance was and is championed by Western scholars and politicians and is regularly commemorated in celebrations of Allied victories in World War II. In the present context, the Bosnians, against all odds, without adequate weapons, and isolated by the West, have similarly fought back and resisted Serbian aggression and genocide. Yet this resistance goes unrecognized, except by a few prominent Western intellectuals who travel to Sarajevo to express solidarity with the Bosnians (but who, of course, are guaranteed exit from sniper fire, cluster bombing, and other acts of terror should the going get rough). And in late 1995, even as Bosnian forces recaptured territory and protected their people
from further genocide, such acts were regularly seen as “opportunism” rather than as just reclamation of territory that was brutally seized and ethnically cleansed. As Jean Baudrillard notes in his contributions to this volume, the Western intellectual response is characterized by “harmless and powerless intellectuals exchanging their misery with those who are miserable, each sustaining the other through a sort of perverse contract.” Did the Bosnian Muslims have to comply and avoid any resistance as they were being “cleansed” in order to conform to our notion of genocide victims? There was considerable criticism of the Jews after World War II that they were too passive and did not do enough to defend themselves. Third, one ought not to adopt a “bookkeeping” mentality on genocide. What is the numerical threshold of victims before genocide is reached? Is there one? Not according to the UN Charter, which focuses on the qualitative measure of efforts to destroy a group in part or in whole. Bosnia counts as an instance of genocide, not only because it has been determined by respected organizations to be genocide, but because by any scholarly or moral standard, the Bosnians have been isolated, dehumanized, and made fair game for elimination by government policy simply because individuals belong to a certain group and stand in the way of concrete policy goals, the main one being the establishment of a Greater Serbia.

One could argue also that people’s willingness to respond to genocide is based on self-interest. That is why the international response to Bosnia has been weak. The world most likely would not have done much more in the case of the Holocaust at the time even if there was more information (the “we did not know” argument is useful ex post facto but probably irrelevant). One needs to recall that the Allies imposed a weapons embargo on the newly emergent state of Israel, right after the Holocaust, precisely because Israel’s existence was perceived as a threat to British and French national interests in the Middle East. To a great extent, governments seek to rationalize situations by creating a model or image of the situation that is consonant with their policy interests when they do not want to intervene militarily, or for other reasons (cost, casualties, etc.). Hence the rationalizations listed above: civil war, eons of ethnic strife in the former Yugoslavia, no solution, Balkan quagmire, all equally guilty. This is self-evident. Much more problematic is the fact that many intellectuals and journalists follow in the wake of these rationalizations put forth by governments, and for the most part do not challenge them. Had these rationalizations been challenged effectively by intellectuals (as in the case of, say, the Vietnam War), governments would have had to
respond in order to maintain proper public relations with their constituents. Indeed, it is interesting to note that during the Vietnam era, journalists were very adversarial to government's interventionist policy in Vietnam because they felt it was wrong, whereas in the present, they mostly appear supportive of the government policy of nonintervention in the Balkans to stop a situation that is wrong. Such a shift is definitely worthy of further study.

This book intends to do what intellectuals have been trained for—criticize, analyze, deconstruct—and our aim is to specify what should have been done on a large scale in relation to these rationalizations, which are clearly at odds with the findings of the world's most respected fact-gathering organizations. Specifically, the international community should have acted according to the rule of law championed by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and other political idealists to preserve the national sovereignties of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia after these nations were recognized internationally; in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, lift the illegal and immoral weapons embargo imposed on these nation-states at Belgrade's request; and once a finding of genocide was established, take actions to prevent it, as specified in the UN Charter. This is the fulcrum of the volume: the critical examination of the tolerated discrepancy between the rationalizations and facts put forth by Western governments and organizations and the passive acquiescence of the West's intellectuals and policy makers, who, ideally, ought to be more willing to puncture such rationalizations. The various contributors to this volume not only puncture the rationalizations, but theorize on the reasons these rationalizations have persisted for so long.

Finally, we note that we are pleased to offer in this volume some commentary by David Riesman, one of the most eminent twentieth-century American sociologists. Riesman has taken an active interest in the situation in the Balkans and has read the papers assembled here. We offer his observations and thoughts as an epilogue to this volume.

NOTES

1. We were reminded of this obvious fact by Slaven Letica during his presentation at a roundtable discussion chaired by Thomas Cushman, "Postcommunist Transformations," at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, Washington, DC, August 21, 1995.

3. For instance, in September 1995, indicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić appeared on *Sixty Minutes*. An op-ed piece ostensibly written by him appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* the summer before that. During the Serbian conquest of safe areas in Bosnia in late summer 1995, Danielle Sremac, director of the Serbian American Affairs Office and the official Bosnian Serb representative in the United States, appeared often on Christian Science Monitor Radio to explicate the Bosnian Serbs’ positions.


19. For a discussion of Richard Rorty’s views on “postmodern irony,” the stance that a thinker “does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others,” see *Irony, Contingency, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. 73–74.

20. Cohen describes Mladić as “a[stute, alternately ribald and boominly defiant, this stocky general with bright blue eyes and a popular touch has been particularly effective in getting these messages across because he appears to
Serbs as a soldier's soldier, ready to take personal risks and repeating that his life is worth no more than that of any private in the trenches." In the next line, Cohen reports a UN figure who declares that Mladić "has charm . . . it's a little bestial, but it's there." *New York Times*, April 17, 1994, 12. One is reminded of journalists' laudatory discussions of the crazed killer in the Oliver Stone film *Natural Born Killers*.


22. This is something that the great progenitor of the idea of *verstehen*, Max Weber, managed not to do: for Weber, one could understand the world as it was perceived by the other, but not move from a position of understanding to empathy. One must imagine Weber as someone who could understand that subjective feelings led to the objective practice of genocide, but one can also imagine Weber having the ability, unlike many modern analysts of the war in the Balkans, to see the difference between symbolic perception and objective aggression.


The report makes nonsense of the view—now consistently put forward by Western European governments and intermittently by the Clinton Administration—that the Bosnian conflict is a civil war for which guilt should be divided between Serbs, Croats and Muslims rather than a case of Serbian aggression . . . “To those who think the parties are equally guilty, this report is pretty devastating,” one official said. “The scale of what the Serbs did is of a different order. But more than that, it makes clear, with concrete evidence, that there was a conscious, coherent, and systematic Serbian policy to get rid of Muslims through murders, torture and imprisonment.”


37. Frame analysis in sociology focuses on the central ideas that are created by journalists, ways of seeing, and so forth. These frames then become rootless, circulating modes of perception. For an example of how frame analysis has been used in social analysis, see William A. Gamson, Talking Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Also relevant to this discussion is William A. Gamson’s presidential address to the American Sociological Association, “Hiroshima, the Holocaust, and the Politics of Exclusion: 1994 Presidential Address,” American Sociological Review 60 (1994): 1–20. Gamson notes specifically the rationalization that “all sides are equally guilty” in the coverage of genocide in Bosnia.


41. Again, see Krauthammer, op. cit., 21. Amazingly, Krauthammer does not mention the fact that the Croatian recapturing of the Krajina region was motivated by (1) the inability of Croats to make any progress after negotiating for three years for the return of their sovereign territory; (2) the Croatian efforts to guarantee Serbian autonomy in a Croatian state; and (3) the desire to stop further killing of Muslims and Croats in UN declared safe areas. Nor is mention made of the fact that while the West stood by, the Croat assistance of the Bosnians saved lives. Such historical context is rarely provided in such articles and, in this case, the standard line of "the Serbs were justified in invading and ethnically cleansing Croatia because of the Sahovnica and the kuna" takes precedence. Krauthammer is apparently unaware that his logic is exactly the same as that of indicted war criminals Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. A more in-depth study of this kind of relativism in major media is called for.

42. Many groups have also taken a moral stand on the slaughter in Bosnia, including the American Committee to Save Bosnia. Consider also advertisements such as the following: "In Memoriam: Our Commitments, Principles, and Moral Values. Died: Bosnia 1994. On the occasion of the 1000th day of the siege of Sarajevo." It was published in the New York Times, December 29, 1994, A6, and signed by Daniel Bell, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Hodding Carter, Leslie Gelb, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Bianca Jagger, Carl Sagan, Susan Sontag, and Simon Wiesenthal.

43. Warren Zimmermann, "The Last Ambassador: A Memoir of the Collapse of Yugoslavia," Foreign Affairs, March-April, 1995, 3–20. Zimmermann adds that "The Slovenes bear considerable responsibility for the bloodbath that followed their secession... . Tudjman [is] an implacable nationalist... . Unlike Milošević, who is driven by power, Tudjman is obsessed by nationalism... . It was the Slovenes who started the war." Slaven Letica provides a response to Zimmermann's article in this volume.


This latter article asserts that Belgrade continues to supply the Bosnian Serbs with fuel and money, and that an air defense system remains linked to Yugoslav National Army computers in Belgrade.


51. Consider, for example, how some of these assessments are refracted in the following: Dan Morgan, "Haunted Serbia: My Journey Back in Time to a Self-Defeated Nation," *Washington Post*, June 19, 1994, E4, in which Morgan asserts that "Like the Jews, Serbs are unified by the memory of a glorious defeat"; Teddy Preuss, "Serbia, an Ally Spurned," *Jerusalem Post*, June 9, 1994, 6; Jo-Ann Mort, "Croatia's Festering Fascism," *Jewish Forward*, September 16, 1994, 7; Stephen Kinzer, "Pro-Nazi Legacy Lingers for Croatia," *New York Times*, October 31, 1993, A6; see also an editorial entitled "Ethnic Cleansing," *Boston Globe*, October 22, 1995, 78, which notes, "Much of what has been happening today in the Balkans cannot be understood outside the context of the ethnic cleansings of 50 years ago. In the Nazi puppet state of Croatia during World War II, Croats [sic] set about to cleanse Croatia of as many Serbs as they could." The author attributes to "Croats" in general the actions of the Ustashe minority, an obfuscation that implies collective guilt and that indirectly blames contemporary Croats for much of what is happening in the Balkans. No mention is made of the causes of the current genocide, which, as many authors in this volume point out, are to be found in the specific actions of Serbian intellectuals and leaders.


54. The best documentation for this is found in Philip J. Cohen, Serbia’s Secret War: Propaganda and the Deceit of History (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996).


57. The best documentation for this is found in Philip J. Cohen, op. cit.


59. This view was put forth most forcefully by Henry Kissinger, “Choosing among Evils,” Houston Chronicle, June 11, 1995, 35A.


62. See, for example, Bette Denich, “Dismembering Yugoslavia: The Nationalist Ideologies and the Symbolic Revival of Genocide,” American Ethnologist 21 (May 1994): 367–90. Denich’s article is perhaps the most glaring example of published pro-Serb sentiment in the American Balkan studies community. A further examination of such sympathies in this community is warranted.

63. New York Times, August 29, 1995, A1. This pattern of coverage began most prominently with the reporting of the shelling massacre in the crowded
Markale marketplace in northeastern Sarajevo on February 5, 1994. A prime example of the press’s acceptance of the Bosnian Serb line in relation to this attack can be found in David Binder, “Anatomy of a Massacre,” *Foreign Policy* 97 (winter 1994–95): 70–78. It is also worth stressing a point made above that Binder’s own opinion of General Ratko Mladić, who has been indicted for war crimes against the people of Sarajevo, is that he is a “superb professional.” See Binder, letter, 85.


67. This phrase is found frequently, as in the *New York Times*, February 13, 1994, A10, which contains the phrases “These people are very afraid of each other” and “these people will fight on forever.”


70. A theme reproduced, for example, in an opinion piece, “Bosnian Serbs, Too, Have Vowed, Never Again,” *Houston Chronicle*, March 16, 1995, A33.


72. See, for example, Senator Moynihan’s comments on the war in Bosnia in the *Congressional Record* regarding the Bosnia and Herzegovina Self-Defense Act of 1995, vol. 141, no. 117 (July 19, 1995); vol. 141, no. 121 (July 25, 1995); and volume 141, no. 122 (July 26, 1995).