The Croatian War Experience

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In fall 1991, news reports stated that the Yugoslav [Serbian] navy had ships positioned up and down the Adriatic Sea, their warhead missiles pointing toward the coast. The cities of Zadar, Šibenik, Split, and Dubrovnik were being shelled. This is impossible, I thought at the time, while frantically trying to get in touch with relatives in Split to see if they were still alive. I found it incredible that anyone would want to destroy one of the most beautiful coasts in the world. It simply could not be true. Nobody expected this to happen. But it was true, and it is still happening. The shelling of Dubrovnik is an attack not just on Croatia but on the history of humankind. The old town of Split, enclosed by the walls of the Diocletian Palace, was built by Emperor Diocletianus in 33 B.C. as a summer residence. It survived the Roman, Venetian, and Turkish occupations. Various invaders wanted to own it, but they did not destroy it.

Soon the war was raging, and the daily news reports gave accounts of shelling, fighting, massacres, and the plight of the civilian populations, especially women, children, and the elderly. The damage reports were increasingly getting worse. All the international accounts said that the Yugoslav army was preventing a breakup of Yugoslavia. Neither Slovenes, nor Croats, nor Bosnians had thought that the Yugoslav army would use such force. The fighting had initially broken out when the Yugoslav army attacked Slovenia after its declaration of independence in June 1991. This war lasted less than one month. Immediately afterward, the Yugoslav army attacked different regions of Croatia. The level of violence was impossible to comprehend, even for those who had survived World War II. Yet many Croatians remained optimistic, believing the fighting would ease and the Serbs would stop their attacks. Croatians saw themselves as defending their own territory, their own homes.

Among Croatian-Americans, there was optimism that no matter how bad the current situation, the future would be brighter, because Yugoslavia would no longer exist and the Serbs would no longer have control. The Croats believed they were on their way to full independence, for Croatia was not only at war but in the process of transformation from a totalitarian Communist system into a democratic, market-oriented system. But it desperately needed help and know-how from the West. I was asked to organize and head the International Department in the Ministry of Science because of my training in the United States. As both an anthropologist and a Croatian-American, I was curious, and I also wanted to be a part of the historical process that was occurring. I saw this as an opportunity to be a participant observer in a high-conflict situation. However, I also wondered if I wanted this experience, which carried with it the risk of physical danger. Was my desire to help my people and my curiosity as an anthropologist strong enough to draw me to a war zone? My husband said, "If I were asked to go because of my job, I would not hesitate. I would go." I regarded this comment as a final blessing, and my decision to go was firm. My parents and friends could not talk me into postponing the departure until "things were safe." Once the date was set, my father, his face ashen, told me, "I know what you are doing, but I am not comfortable." My mother, however, tried to be practical. She insisted that I take with me a bullet-proof vest, a gas mask, and even a gun. She expected me to carry the gas mask with me and to wear the bullet-proof vest at all times, even while I slept.

I shrank away from both the gun and the bullet-proof vest, but then I thought she might be right; perhaps I ought to have the protective garment. So I stopped at an army surplus store and asked if they had a bullet-proof vest. The man behind the counter said, "You mean a flak jacket?" I replied, "I don't really know the difference . . . " He cut in and said, "A flak jacket is used to prevent a knife wound, and no, we don't deal with those because only two kinds of people buy them, the bad guys and the police." "Well, I'm neither of those," I muttered half to myself. He heard me and said, "Then what do you want it for?"

I could not tell him that I was an anthropologist who was going to war and that I was afraid, so I simply said, "I am going to Eastern Europe." He looked at me in disbelief and said, "Is it dangerous there? Do they have a lot of crime there?" "Yes," I said. He told me of another store that might carry the jackets. I went there, only to be directed to a third store. The area around the third store did not look safe, and the store had iron bars on its doors and windows. I passed by and sighed with relief when I saw a Closed sign posted on the door.

While driving home, I decided that taking anything with me for safety would be ridiculous. If I was going to get killed, a flak jacket was not going

to help me. I have never touched a gun and am repulsed by the thought of handling one, not to mention using one. How could I convince my mother that all I really needed or wanted was a shortwave radio, a flashlight, and a waterproof sleeping bag in case I had to spend time in bomb shelters? I asked her to help me shop for these items, and she was finally convinced. However, the day before my departure, my mother gave me a going-away present, a gas mask. I could not refuse her this indulgence, even if I threw the thing into the garbage once I arrived in Zagreb, Croatia. As I packed my suitcase, I thought there must be a surplus of masks left over from the Gulf War, and I also remembered those Israelis in the bomb shelters during Saddam's SCUD attacks. Would I experience anything like that? What would it be like to be in such a situation?

TWO TRIPS, TWO REALITIES

On my way to war-torn Croatia, I thought of my first return there after several years in the United States. That trip was in the midseventies when I took a short summer vacation during a school break. In the warm glow of the sunset on a scorching summer day, I was picking blackberries by a dusty road adjacent to my father's house. From a distance, I could see a white car piled high with suitcases on its roof. Moving at a snail's pace, the car pulled up and stopped next to me. An elderly passenger, clearly a returning emigrant, stepped out of the car, a suit jacket thrown over his forearm. Without speaking, he approached and wrenched a foot-long branch from the blackberry bush and began chewing on it, including thorns and unripe berries. I looked at him in bewilderment, thinking that he would choke on the sharp thorns. In a quick sweeping glance, I looked at the other three people in the car. No one said anything. The man slowly walked back to the car and got in. As the car left, all I could see was the cloud of dust particles shimmering in the afternoon sun.

At that moment I understood what it meant to return home. I have asked other Croatians to interpret the meaning of what I had observed. The blackberry symbolized the sweet return, the reuniting, and the thorns conveyed the feeling of suffering, the anguish of a foreign place—of not belonging to one's own, of being apart. Pushing the metaphor further, the bush may have represented the meager livelihood of this desolate place and what life is about: identity and belonging.

Now, on my way to Croatia, fifteen years later, I could not help but compare my earlier experience with the one on which I was about to embark.

BRIEF HISTORY AND POLITICAL INTRODUCTION

To fully understand the current situation, it is necessary to step back and look at the historical context. Anyone who visited the former Yugoslavia

would have been intrigued by the blend of traditional and modern—themes that affect the question of power and dominance. The nation-state called Yugoslavia was at the same time backward and progressive. The main reason for this dichotomy may be geographic. The former nation-state was located on the Balkan Peninsula, a crossroads between the West and the East. There were always several neighbors claiming the peninsula, and every occupying power had to fight rivals. Yet the fights seldom brought decisive victors, and the frontiers between great powers and spheres of influence ran across the middle of the peninsula. This fault line is exactly where today's war, which has been termed the worst conflict since World War II, is occurring. Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Hercegovina, and the region of Vojvodina belonged to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, whereas Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia were in the Ottoman Empire.

With the creation of the "first Yugoslavia" in 1918, after World War I, East and West were combined in the same state. The South Slavs, with their Austrian imprint, were markedly different from those who had been under Turkish domination. They were also different from the Dinaric freedom fighters (known as *hajduci* and *uskoci*) situated along the Dinaric mountain range, which stretches along the Adriatic Coast. The uniting of these elements after centuries of estrangement made life difficult in the "first Yugoslavia." Cultural differences influenced political realities. According to Vera Stein Erlich (1966:18), "the divisive tendencies seemed to grow stronger than the unifying ones, and the regional peculiarities, developed under Eastern and Western influences, seemed to become even more extreme than before."

The "first Yugoslavia" was referred to by non-Serbs as the "prison of nations" (*tamnica naroda*) because a rigid system of centralism established in Belgrade made possible the hegemony of Serbian ruling groups, who regarded Yugoslavia as an expansion of Serbia. Bitter fighting among the various peoples who made up the "first Yugoslavia" occurred during World War II. However, the regions were once again reunited at the end of World War II (1945), and the "second Yugoslavia" was resurrected under the Communist leadership of Marshal Tito.

The "second Yugoslavia" was based on "fraternity and unity" (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*), and the Communists in power referred to World War II as a "fratricidal war." Post–World War II Yugoslavia was famous for various social experiments. The best known were "self-managing socialism," "worker's self-management," and the "nonalignment" (nonaligned nation movement led by Tito), by which Tito creatively manipulated both the East and the West. All of these contained and maintained the nation-state called Yugoslavia. (In both of these Yugoslavias, the rule of Belgrade was forced on the non-Serbian peoples and nations. On the eve of war in 1991, Serbs comprised more than 70 percent of the officer corps of the "Yugoslav People's Army.")

After Tito's death in 1980, the economy of the country worsened and the foreign debt increased exponentially. This culminated in the rise of the Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević in 1988. Under his direction, Serbia annexed two autonomous regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina and ousted the government of Montenegro by means of a so-called antibureaucratic revolution. It became clear to all the republics that Serbia intended to seize control of non-Serbian territories under the pretext of building a "third Yugoslavia," or as non-Serbians referred to it, "Serboslavia." It was at this point that the Communists in both Croatia and Slovenia allowed multiparty elections because they were afraid of losing their own power to the Serbs.

Thus it is not surprising that at the end of 1990 and at the beginning of 1991, the *New York Times* published several CIA reports stating that the Yugoslav territories were going to experience a major conflict that would spill over their borders. (This was the first warning.) However, only two months earlier (in September 1990), a small Croatian delegation headed by Croatian President Franjo Tudjman had visited with several U.S. officials, including President George Bush. According to one member of the Croatian delegation, this was the first missed opportunity for preventing the current tragic war in the Balkans.

> Our purpose was to present draft documents on a proposed alliance of Yugoslav states, aimed at establishing a peaceful, nonviolent transformation from the old, Bolshevik-style Yugoslav federation to a new confederation of sovereign states. However, Scowcroft [National Security Adviser] and other U.S. administration members would not support our peaceful aims. They wanted to preserve the unity of federal Yugoslavia seemingly at any cost. In fact, [President Franjo] Tudjman pleaded with Scowcroft for his support in order to avert certain war. He refused and his refusal was logically consistent not only with Secretary of State James Baker's subsequent visit to Belgrade [in June 1991] but also with the U.S. government's slow movement toward recognition of the independence of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Letica 1992:5)

BLURRING OF DIFFERENCES

After all attempts to create a confederation failed, two former republics, Slovenia and Croatia, declared independence based on referendums in both republics overwhelmingly favoring independence (more than 94 percent voted in favor of independence in Croatia). Before the two republics seceded (on June 25, 1991), U.S. Secretary of State James Baker visited Belgrade and assured the Communist government that the United States would support them in keeping Yugoslavia together. In fact, when the war was well under way in Croatia, Baker, addressing the UN General Assembly in fall 1991, "thanked" Serbia and said that he "appreciated Serbia's efforts in trying to maintain Yugoslavia intact."

Did or did not Yugoslavia exist at that time? Opposing views or definitions of Yugoslavia emerged in the domestic and international communities. In the minds of most of the international community, Yugoslavia did indeed continue to exist until the beginning of 1992. In the minds of Croats and Slovenes, who had voted in free elections to secede, Yugoslavia had ceased to exist in June 1991. In any case, both Slovenia and Croatia were referred to in the U.S. press at the time as "rebel" or "breakaway republics."

While the West continued to oppose the breakup of Yugoslavia, the following issues remained blurred: Was this an "ethnic war"/"civil war" or a "war of aggression"? Calling the conflict the "Yugoslav crisis," the "powder keg of the Balkans," the "Balkan quagmire," and the result of "centuries-old hatreds" promoted the idea of an ethnic war. The jargon used in both the media and the political arenas not only led to further confusion but also encouraged noninvolvement and nonrecognition of the national differences by both the United States and Europe.

Another problem was that the distinction between the aggressor and the victim was unclear to the international community. In the early stages of the war, the U.S. and European media distorted the reality of the war—first by ignoring it, then by downplaying it as a primitive, tribal conflict. Stories that might have educated people about this conflict early on did not get media space, and according to one previously pro-Serbian journalist, Carrol Williams, the East European bureau chief for the *Los Angeles Times*, "If the world had gotten the picture earlier that what happened in Croatia was a one-sided war of aggression, action might have been taken to prevent the spread into Bosnia" (cited by Ricchiardi 1992:21).

George Kenney, who in August 1992 resigned from the State Department to protest the Bush administration's failure to address the genocide in Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina, had this to say on the aggressor/victim issue:

> Denying the overwhelming preponderance of evidence that Serbia was responsible for the conflict, senior officers (at the State Department) took every opportunity to find fault with Croatian and Bosnian efforts to defend themselves. (Kenney 1992:35)

To identify who was the aggressor and who the victim, European Community observers, dressed in neutral white jumpsuits and blue armbands with a circle of twelve golden stars, were sent in as referees. Because of their uniforms, these observers were referred to by the Croatian children as "ice cream men." The connotation of the name might have suggested that better days were ahead, but with the rupture of each cease-fire, the

war escalated and the number of civilian casualties increased exponentially. Since the beginning of war in Croatia, there had been on the average one peace conference every twelve days. During the peak of Serbian aggression, the following message was sent to a Croatian-American by an American journalist who was in Croatia at the end of September 1991:

> I haven't gotten my ass blown off yet, though not through any lack of effort on the part of the Serbians and the Yugoslav Army! The cease-fire that is reported to be holding despite some "minor skirmishes" has resulted in the biggest jet bombing of the war, damaging or destroying most of central Vinkovci and sending civilians to the hospital or morgue. Serbian snipers are even firing into hospitals.[1]

THE ETHNOGRAPHER IN THE WAR SITUATION

Soon after this message, realizing that I could not wait until the situation improved, in December 1991, during the peak of war, I left for Croatia. I had a standing invitation from the Croatian Ministry of Science to be the deputy minister in order to help them organize and head an International Department. As an anthropologist and as a Croatian-American, I saw this as an opportunity not just to witness but to be a part of history in the making: the formation of new nations in the post–cold war era.

Once I accepted the fact that I was going into a war zone, I accepted that reality to be my living situation. When I first arrived, there were no flights into Zagreb so I had to be picked up in Graz, Austria. It was after midnight and I had to drive across several borders to enter into Croatia. As I approached the Croatian border, the sky was pitch black and the air was very cold and still. I could see the dark outlines of the trees against the sky, and for a moment I thought, I could be attacked from anywhere. Yet at this point, I lost my fear.

In retrospect, I think surrendering my fear was a coping mechanism, because it is impossible to live with fear on a daily basis and continue to function. Even during the air raids or general emergency alerts in gloomy basements and semidark cellars, I tried to record my reality and the reality of the people around me (i.e., talked with people, took notes, shared my shortwave radio). The first time that Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, sounded the general emergency alert, I was in a cellar with fellow residents of Zagreb. They told me, "This is much worse than an air raid because the general alert means that they [Serbs] are using ground-to-ground missiles." And sure enough, a few minutes later on my shortwave radio I heard that Frog 7 missiles had been launched and some of them had hit the outskirts of Zagreb.

Is this the end? I thought. I happened to be in a cellar across from the famous Zagreb cathedral, which was high on the target list. As I looked

around, people were sitting quietly without apparent distress; no one was crying or shouting. One man was rocking his six-month-old baby on his knee and telling her, "My little girl, you are growing up like a mushroom in this subterranean cellar." It was during such scenes that I began to ask questions not as a Croatian-American or an anthropologist but as a human being: "Why is this happening?" "How does a person cope with this?"

WAR RITUALS/RITUALS OF COPING

I witnessed strategies of coping with the fear through collective rituals on different levels (e.g., public gatherings in town squares as well as funerals of children and soldiers). Croatian ethnologists have written extensively on coping strategies in a war situation (Povrzanović 1992, 1993). The clearest affirmation of collective ritual on the national level occurred on January 15, 1992, when Croatia was internationally recognized. There was an all-night collective celebration in Zagreb during which traditional hierarchical boundaries dissolved. For the first time since his election, President Tudjman mingled with the people milling about in the main square. Later that night, a great "celebration" highlighting the struggle for independence occurred in the Croatian National Theater in Zagreb. During the event various cultural and national dramatic pieces were performed on stage. These offerings ranged from poetry readings and ethnic dancing to music by rock groups and new music groups formed by soldiers fighting on the front lines. One performance that stood out for me and the people sitting around me was a poem recited by its author, Stjepo Mijović-Kočan. The poem illustrates how the experience and meaning of war affects not just the soldiers, the wounded, and the refugees but the entire culture.

> Even I
> who shied away from every violence
> who withdrew from medical school
> because I could not cut into human flesh
> even if it was dead
> I who offended my mother
> because I refused to kill one of her chickens
> that she was fattening up for me
> the only riches she possessed
> when I returned for a visit from distant Zagreb
> I who was writing my useless verses
> yearning for tenderness, love, fraternity and reconciliation
> for every human being and for flowers and for the animals
> in front of the television tonight I sincerely rejoiced
> when I saw that my brave Dalmatians
> struck down those airplanes of the yugo-serbo-occupying enemy

above the gentle Adriatic near Šibenik
who like hundreds of others have showered with bombs
cities, villages, children, and even funerals
of my humiliated, wounded, worn-out, and tortured homeland Croatia
my heart stopped short in my throat
"both are shot, both are down" ["oba, oba"]
I applauded and jumped
not even thinking about the person who perished in the airplane.[2]

Even before I heard this poem, I had heard children and adults in private and public places yell "*oba, oba*" (both, both). When two Serbian airplanes were struck down in fall 1991, the entire event was filmed on video and shown on local and international news. The two airplanes were flying close to each other, and one of them was struck with a stinger. Sounds of rejoicing and "we got one" could be heard. Then the second airplane was struck and a Croatian soldier yelled, "*oba, oba*" (meaning that both were hit). The expression "both, both" has come to mean unbelievable good luck or good fortune and has entered into the daily discourse of the people.

The planes, among the first to be shot down, were the same ones that had been showering bombs for days before. War and the effects of war run deep through the culture. In such circumstances, even the person who detests violence, like the speaker in Kočan's poem, finds it impossible to remain neutral.

Perhaps it is because of this tolerance to violence that the world has stood silently by watching the atrocities labeled the "worst since World War II." It is not surprising then that the violence has become so virulent. We begin to accept what initially was "brutal" as "normal."

Communal experience of war and fear occurred during my first air raid, only a couple of days after my return to Zagreb. Along with the director of personnel from the Ministry of Science, I was waiting in a long line at the Ministry of Interior (Police Station) to obtain an identification card. Suddenly and without much commotion the enormous room emptied almost completely. I looked at my colleague and uttered, "What did we do to deserve no lines?" Her eyes opened wide and she said, "We have an air raid." I replied, "Are you sure? I did not hear a siren. Are you sure?" She said, "Yes, let's go across the street to the Ministry of Science because it will be less crowded in our bomb shelter."

After a couple of minutes in the basement of the Ministry of Science, I assessed my surroundings as well as the people whom I barely had a chance to meet. After several minutes the minister walked through the door of the bomb shelter and said, "Oh, here you are, I am looking for you." I thought, he must be crazy, he can't possibly ask me now to do anything because I am not budging outside of this shelter until this is over, if it is ever over.

He walked up to me, shook my hand, and said, "Congratulations, now you are one of us!" Thinking of that exchange, I cannot help but see it as a ritual of initiation—into the group and into the war context. Croatian friends and colleagues have told me, "My stomach was tied in a knot during the first air raid; then once the bombs began to fall, I was less afraid than when I was waiting for them." I am sorry to say that to this day, I am not as brave as they are. Nevertheless, the group cohesiveness during the peak of the war gave cultural coherence and provided yet another coping strategy in everyday life in wartime (Povrzanović 1993).

THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF ATROCITY

In one of the coastal hotels, women from the so-called temporarily occupied villages of the Dalmatian hinterland were gathered. Outside it was cold, and dusk was approaching. In the darkened room, the women were sitting on chairs that had been nailed against the wall, talking quietly and knitting.[3] Most of them were dressed in black, even the younger ones (women who were widowed in World War II wear black to this day).

The topic of their conversation, it did not matter. Over two years had passed since these women's homes had been "temporarily" occupied, and they had no new place of belonging. The space in which they had known how to live and survive had been taken away from them. For them, the present was just a wait. The loneliness and the fear of returning to their ruined (devastated) homes and their broken lives was their primary concern. "If we die, what will happen to our bodies?" one woman asked me. (It is the custom in the Dalmatian hinterland, as in other parts of the Mediterranean, to have one's funeral clothes all picked out, neatly folded, and stored in a hope chest.) As they waited in the semidark hotel hall, sitting on chairs and knitting the pieces of their broken lives, they were uneasy and uncertain about their road to death. They will remain there despite the Council of Security and Cooperation in Geneva, the United Nations, and all the bilateral and multilateral negotiations. The importance of home to them cannot be underestimated: one woman told me that they had to "touch the threshold once again" to be sane.

Throughout Croatia, loss of home and land is synonymous with the loss of identity. Once the land is lost, identity and self-esteem are also lost. The psychological relationship to the land is a fundamental trait in the whole conscious and subconscious behavior of the Croatian peasant. Land is considered sacred; its importance is seen in the plethora of linguistic terms that differentiate land by use, size of the field, how the soil is cultivated, and overall quality (Olujic 1991). During the war, parts of eastern Croatia, called Slavonia, have fallen to the Serbs. After the fall of Vukovar (a city in Slavonia), a song called "Do Not Touch My Fields Because I Will

Return" became so popular that it is now played during all social occasions, family gatherings, and weddings. The fertile fields of Slavonia, although occupied, are a symbol of identity for the people who are displaced. The following verse is an excerpt from a poem written by Ankica Petričević-Kozarac, a refugee woman from Vukovar.

> We have no soil and no grain
> No one is concerned about our pain
> We have no longer our beautiful costumes
> That our grandmothers have woven
> There are no more young tamburitza men
> There are no more daughters-in-law.[4]

Although the Western media refer to the war criminals as "Mr. Milošević," or "Mr. Karadžić," the victims, homeless old refugee women like those described in Kozarac's poem, remain a nameless, faceless group with no identity. Although they have lost their self-esteem, each one knows herself, her own story, her own personal experience. If they had been perceived as individuals from the beginning, one of them told me, perhaps the West would have been moved to intervene at that time: "If they had seen who we really are in pictures of the war, if they had valued us as people, the world would have much less of a headache with us now."

According to the latest reporting trend, a family's story is complete only when a child is wounded and the woman raped and pregnant. But this is not a suitable completion to survivors. How can a man react to the rape of his wife in a culture in which female honor depends on chastity? If he believes that she had sex with another, whether by force or not, a man must reject his wife to salvage his male pride. To whom will the woman be able to tell her story? To no one. If she was lucky and did not get pregnant, she will bury her story inside herself to spare her family the dishonor. Anything that forces her to be public will be her further tragedy. The fact that some women have committed suicide after giving their stories to Western journalists attests to this shocking situation. Being public further stigmatizes and traumatizes the victim. A woman's silence is her way of protecting her family, no matter what the emotional cost to herself. As researchers or reporters, we will go on to other types of stories as fads change, but the women will live their lives branded by the stigma of rape.

A woman activist in an informal women's group, speaking on the Zagreb radio, stated that women who are victims of rape have to be recognized as heroes by the culture so they can be free to tell everything. Unfortunately, this is not the case. In fact, husbands have killed or abandoned their wives when they learned the truth, and young unmarried women have been disowned by their families. Women of all ages are kept

from suicide only by sedatives, and others have been driven crazy by their experiences and the pressure on them to keep silent.

Stories of rape have come predominantly from women who were forced by their experience to choose isolation. Almost all have come from divorced women, widows, or unmarried women who do not have to contend with outraged husbands or other family members. The following testimony from such an unmarried woman reflects the pain of these family reactions.

> A few days after my release from a concentration camp I received an affidavit of support from Germany, so I came to Zagreb. I stayed in Zagreb and underwent one medical examination. That was a gynecological exam because only a friend knew all that has happened to me, and she gave me a telephone number I could call. The lesions on my thighs were getting worse. They had become infected, and I had to see a doctor because of that as well. Because of all the fear I did not tell the doctor what was really the matter with me. After one and a half months the lesions on my leg had healed, but even now I have two scars. After a couple of days in Zagreb my uncle came to pick me up. Immediately after greeting me, he told me that he would prefer to kill me now. Because of his rudeness I did not tell my family about anything that happened to me. Even so, after twenty days they kicked me out.

Today this woman is on welfare, has psychiatric problems, and is looking for a job, but she is afraid of contacts with people. She was brought up in a culture in which rape is so shameful that she could not even tell a physician the real cause of her condition. She could talk about her problems only with friends who had experienced the same aggression. Her life and her suffering are more than just a transient experience.

Reporters put great pressure on the women not only to tell their stories but to identify themselves publicly. They offer to pay them DM 200 for their stories alone and up to DM 5,000 or more if they consent to be identified. For refugee women, homeless, unable to work, and rejected by their families, these are unbearable temptations.

By consenting to participate in the currently popular war coverage, these women are raped again. Their shocking tales of survival thrill readers and television viewers, and we use them for our own purposes. For the reporters, this is just another war, in a series of wars, but the life these women describe is the only life they have. A woman who survived the concentration camp said, "Once again I feel like an object, but now in different hands. They are stirring up the wounds in my soul. Our tragedies are their stepping-stones [ladders] in their careers."

I share these stories because there is a level of human understanding that transcends national boundaries and because the stories are "truths" or "partial truths" of the war mosaic (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

Nevertheless, the question remains, how does one depict war without objectifying the people?

Ironically, the systematic way in which sexual atrocities are committed against victims attests to the fact of the objectifying of people as political tools. There is evidence that Serbian soldiers are coerced into committing sexual atrocities (*New York Times,* 9 January 1993 and 27 November 1992; European Community Investigation Mission 1992; *Die Welt,* 1 October 1992). Women victims range in age from six to eighty. Attempts to rape women in front of male family members point to rape as a means of humiliating men. In addition, there is a deliberate attempt to impregnate women and hold them as prisoners until it is too late to abort. The raped women and their children become constant reminders of suppression and domination of violence. The strongest evidence that rapes are committed for political reasons comes from the victims themselves. Numerous testimonies from raped women reveal that they were told by the aggressors, "You are going to have a *chetnik* [Serbian extremist] baby, and we will wipe out the Muslim blood." Occupying a woman's uterus is synonymous with occupying territory. Rape is used to pollute and dilute the bloodline. In the Balkans, *soil* and *blood* are metaphors for male honor. If a man cannot control them, he has no honor. Through the use of rape in war, armies can violate not only the territory (soil) but the bloodlines of their enemies, exacerbating the humiliation of loss.

The political uses of rape have changed as the war progresses. Although the first rapes occurred during 1991 in Croatia, the Croatian government kept very quiet about the whole matter. In spring 1992, I was told by a gynecologist at a teaching hospital in Croatia that an *ethics committee* in Croatia was discussing the cases of Croatian women who were pregnant and could not abort their fetuses because they were "too far into the pregnancy." This information was kept a *private secret,* away from the press. When the same atrocities occurred in Bosnia-Hercegovina, albeit on a greater scale, the matter became a *public secret.* Why the difference of treatment? Is it because the atrocities occurred on a much larger scale in Bosnia-Hercegovina than in Croatia? Or is it that Muslim women are more valued in Bosnia than Christian women in Croatia? The answers are not as simple as they may first appear.

During the war in Croatia, the rape of Croatian women symbolized the castration of Croatian men by the Serb forces. There is an expression in the Croatian language that means that the men were feminized, made weaker (*napraviti pizdu od muškarca*—"to make a pussy out of a man"). In fact, when the Serb forces burned and pillaged the villages around Dubrovnik, they left signs all over the ruined houses which read, "*Gdje ste sada Ustaške piške?*" (Where are you now Ustasha pussies? Ustasha were Croatian extremists during World War II.) Thus keeping quiet about the rapes of

Croatian women meant that the Croatian men saved their honor and their face, for public admission would be an admission of weakness.

Although both Croatian and Muslim women were raped in Bosnia, the majority of the victims were Muslim. The sheer scale of the violence against women made it impossible to hide the atrocities. In fact, the Bosnian government has tried to benefit politically from the aggression. Women who have been victims of mass rapes in Bosnian *rape camps* have become bargaining tools of the Bosnian government: they have been used to entice or persuade the West to intervene militarily.

THE REACTION OF THE WEST: WAR AS FAD

There is often a delay and distance between the time an atrocity occurs and the time it is reported in the Western media. Selective reporting and the distance from events shape the image of and reaction to atrocities of war. Reporting is itself shaped by fads or fashions as reporters respond to market pressures such as television ratings and newspaper sales. Viewers and readers in the West follow the same hierarchy and learn to accept this process of *normalization* as violence escalates in sync with routinization.

The *progression of violence* can be described as follows: first there were massacres and expulsion of people; after that churches and cultural monuments were bombed and destroyed; then domestic animals were slaughtered; and then the children, first Croatian, then Bosnian children. I was told about cows whose living skin was carved with Serbian logos, also of domestic pigs eating the bodies of killed children in burned villages. Then came the floods of refugee stories, followed by accounts of life in concentration camps, starvation, and tortures, all in the name of "ethnic cleansing." And now, stories of mass rapes of women are in fashion. As violence escalates, events that initially appeared to be brutal become normal. The raped women were victims before attention from the West, and they will continue to be victims even after war rapes become unfashionable in the foreign press. While on the one hand, media attention helps to pressure politicians into taking action, on the other, women are further victimized by their objectification under scrutiny. Several journalists visited a group of thirty-eight women who were located in one refugee center near Zagreb. After the journalists took their pictures and recorded their stories, seven of the women who had survived the worst aggression and violence committed suicide. The women became "cases." The Western journalists were helping the women to relive their stories but did not prepare the women for the trauma that often accompanies the telling.

Recorders of human suffering should keep several issues in mind when collecting such stories. The first is the traumatic nature of the experiences and the pain of repeating the stories. Can a man easily talk about his life

in the concentration camp, about his mother who was raped and killed, about the same fate of his baby sister, about a burned house or abandoned animals, or about pigs eating dead human flesh?

Second, social scientists, going into high-conflict areas, need to be concerned not just with objectivity but with respondents' reliability and thus with the reliability of collected data. The relationship between the interviewer and the victim-informant is crucial. For example, will the victim give every detail of his or her testimony to the Red Cross official, or to any other agency if the interviewer is known to be or might be a Serb?

The reliability of the collected data is closely related to the issue of confidentiality and personal safety when so many are still missing or held prisoner. Informants worry that their relatives will be harmed if their witness to the atrocities they have experienced is broadcast. In addition, how much will the victims' stories be shaped by researchers' and reporters' response to what is currently in fashion, and how much will come out of the victims' need to communicate? If they agree to give testimony, what will they talk about? Will that also be decided by what is in fashion?

Media and journalists are not the only ones who are influenced by fashion. We, the social scientists, the gatherers and recorders of human affliction, are also influenced. We may not be concerned about whether our story will be published on the front pages of leading newspapers, but we care about status and academic position. According to Michel Foucault (1977), all institutions "normalize" or allow for individual differences on a preestablished continuum. Thus they recognize the differences so as to "homogenize" them. Are these institutions (i.e., media, academia) establishing the hierarchy and normalization of violence in the same way? Are individuals who are affected by war only important inasmuch as their "story" or "case" is concerned? By "observing" and "recording" as if in a panopticon, researchers and reporters become a one-way mirror through which the power and domination are visible, yet unverifiable.

MAKING SENSE OF CHAOS: INTERPRETATION OF VIOLENCE

As a Western-trained anthropologist and also a native Croatian, I see conflicting perspectives on the violence. A partial explanation for the unimaginable atrocities lies in the Serbian war victory. According to Carrol Williams, the government-controlled Serbian media was setting the stage even before the fighting started.

> There has been a brainwashing in Serbia for the last three to five years. The Serbian media, in particular, have demonized their ethnic enemies the same way Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda chief, demonized the Jews in World War II. The propaganda lowered the victims, the Muslims and Croats, to something subhuman so it was no longer a crime to rub them out. (Ricchiardi 1992:21)

Another explanation for such intense violence lies in the specific emic meaning of aggression and dominance. This point is best illustrated by the war rapes. As noted earlier, the experience and the meaning of sexual coercion is played out and manipulated for political gain on both sides. Women are the primary victims of rape, but their tragedy is manipulated by men on both sides. The enemy uses women as a weapon against their own men, who must simultaneously try to protect them while guarding themselves against the shame that rape brings. Thus beneath the discourse about the immoral and destructive behavior toward women lies a repressed realization of the political and moral significance to their men. When both warring parties share the same cultural meanings, rape affects not only the individual but the entire family, community, and nation.

The experience and the meaning of war can be viewed and summarized on three levels: individual, sociocultural, and historical. The individual level is represented by the people who are the targets of the war—soldiers, civilians, families, and kin groups. The sociocultural level comprises the practice of urbanocide, environmental destruction (ecocide), and the destruction of entire peoples (genocide) through "ethnic cleansing" and mass rapes. The historical level consists not only of the actual events but also of the complicating interpretations of events used as propaganda by the various sides. Finally, the experiences of war can be seen through rituals that pervade not only individual lives but also the entire culture. The writing and reciting of war poetry, the "independence ritual," and the initiation ritual during air raids are examples of this phenomenon.

The following story illustrates my conflict as both insider and outsider. I went to a little fast-food restaurant that is known for excellent *čevapčići* (rolled ground meat in the shape of small sausages), which is eaten with pita bread. The place was packed and there was nowhere to sit. I looked around and saw three young Croatian men in camouflage uniform and black army boots. I went to their table and asked, "Would you mind if I share your table?" From the start our conversation was strained. When I asked if they were in the army, they thought I was being sarcastic. As I heard snippets of their conversation, I almost choked on my food. "He was sent out with only 200 bullets." "I select with whom I go out on the front line." Hearing such remarks, I felt inadequate and almost guilty about my earlier question, which was not meant as an insult or as a sarcastic comment but was perceived as such. I had to hold back tears as I thought of their sacrifices. Pictures of refugee children whom I met on

several occasions in a camp outside of Zagreb flashed in front of my eyes. At the same time I thought of my family left behind in California and the Croatians outside of Croatia. I thought of my return to war-torn Croatia a few days before Christmas. When I apologized to them for my earlier remark, explaining that I had just arrived from California, they realized I was in fact no longer a native and they began to warm up to me.

They said that they had come to the fast-food place before the war. The little house was a memory of lost peace, a symbol of carefree life. I asked them, "What will happen to the lost Croatian territory? Are we going to get it back? Why don't we go on the offensive?" One of them replied, "We cannot attack because we would be like them [Serbs]. We value human life. It means something to us."

During this brief exchange, I was struck by the realization that these young men were here for only a few minutes, after which they would return to the front. Why? I kept asking myself silently. Why are they going, why did I come here? I knew that my situation and theirs were not the same. And exactly because of that I could not hold back the tears any longer. The tears rolled down my face in front of these strangers with whom I felt a sense of belonging and separation. As my tears fell, all three men became quiet. One of them said, "Do not worry, you will see your family soon. We will all be okay and we will all return [alive]." I could not explain my dilemma because of the gulf between us. The young men left for the front, and I went to a wake for the European Community observers in the cathedral.

Four coffins draped with blue flags with a ring of golden stars were lined up in the center of the cathedral (One is missing, I thought. Which one? Probably the French officer's body was returned to his homeland; the four Italians were here). On either side of the coffins, four men dressed all in white, a blue band with the same golden ring of stars tied below their left shoulders, stood facing the altar. I moved closer to look at their faces. They were solemn, full of emotion. What were they thinking? Were they asking themselves the same questions I contemplated? Outside the cathedral a priest friend told me, "The deaths of these five observers will mean more to Europe and the whole world, more than all of the deaths of the thousands of Croatians thus far."

In closing, I find myself responding to the violence in three ways. First, as a Croatian, I am expected, because of my ancestry and my history, to have a particular allegiance in this conflict, and in many ways, I do. Second, as a human being, I cannot justify or simply observe and record atrocities on both sides. I realize that war naturally implies that two or more parties are involved. I think we all have an aversion to human suffering, and I am horrified by the lack of international concern about the genocide and the

"ethnic cleansing" that is occurring on the ground. Third, and most important for my purpose here, I must examine my role as an anthropologist who is ostensibly trained to have an objective stand—to record what is happening, to observe. However, our method in ethnography is participant observation, but in a high-conflict situation, how does one participate in human suffering and violence?

We need to see these people in all of their humanity. We need to search our own motives in collecting and reporting their reality. A poster of a Vukovar survivor with the statement "*Nikog ne bole Vaše rane*" (Your pain is felt by no one) reminds us that our task is a never-ending struggle with no easy answers. When we are dealing with violence and human suffering, this struggle is even more intensified.

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NOTES

1. An excerpt from a letter sent to me by an American journalist.
2. "*Oba, Oba,*" by Stjepo Mijović-Kočan, a prominent Croatian writer, in 1991. My translation.
3. It was the practice during the Communist regime to nail chairs to walls. This was a means of enforcing order: people were unable to sit in a circle.
4. Excerpt from the poem "Refugees" (*Prognanici*), by Ankica Petričević-Kozarac. My translation.

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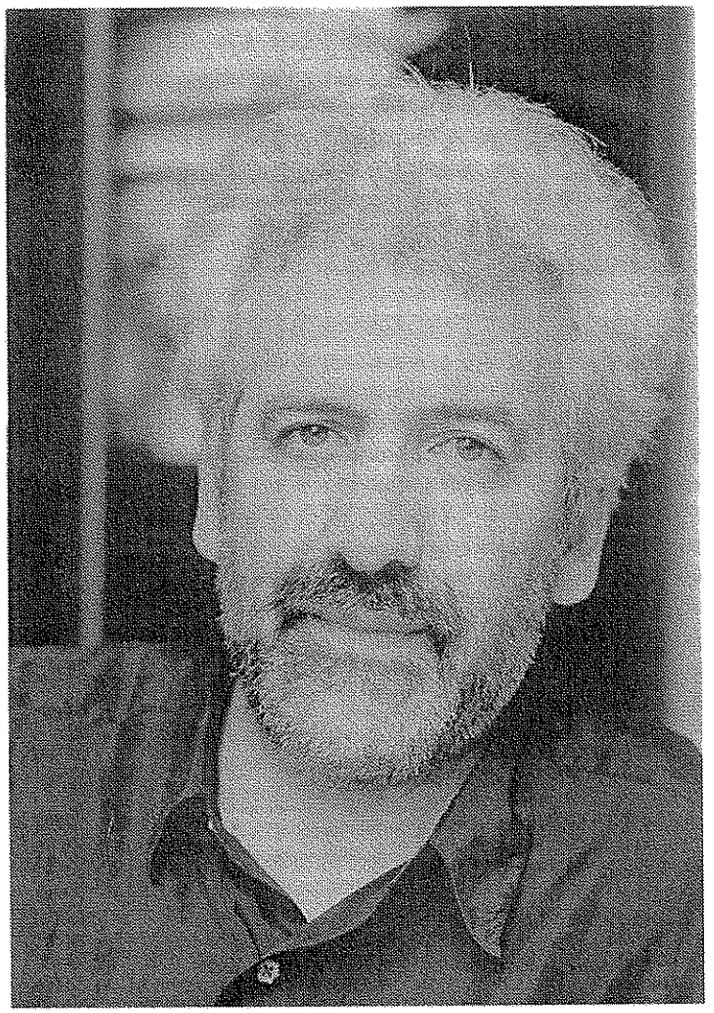
FACE



The Face of Joseba Zulaika
(Photo: Iñak Insausti)