

The Banality of “Ethnic War”

John Mueller

On December 7, 1941,

as it is commonly put, “the Japanese” attacked Pearl Harbor. No one of course takes this expression literally to suggest that the entire population of Japan, or even a major portion of it, directly participated in the assault. Rather it is understood to mean that some of Japan’s military forces, ordered into action by Japan’s government and perhaps supported to varying degrees by the Japanese population, launched the attack. In discussions of ethnic war, by contrast, such distinctions are often missing. When we say “the Serbs” and “the Croats” are engaged in ethnic war, the implication frequently is that those two groups have descended into a sort of Hobbesian war of all against all and neighbor against neighbor.

In this article I assess the violence that took place in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda in the 1990s and argue that the whole concept of “ethnic warfare” may be severely misguided. Specifically, insofar as it is taken to imply a war of all against all and neighbor against neighbor—a condition in which pretty much everyone in one ethnic group becomes the ardent, dedicated, and murderous enemy of everyone in another group—ethnic war essentially does not exist. I argue instead that ethnic warfare more closely resembles nonethnic warfare, because it is waged by small groups of combatants, groups that purport to fight and kill in the name of some larger entity. Often, in fact, “ethnic war” is substantially a condition in which a mass of essentially mild, ordinary people can unwillingly and in considerable bewilderment come under the vicious and arbitrary control of small groups of armed thugs.

I consider first the violent conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia. These were spawned not so much by the convulsive surging of ancient hatreds or by frenzies whipped up by demagogic politicians and the media as by the ministrations of small—sometimes very small—bands of opportunistic marauders recruited by political leaders and operating under their general guidance. Many of these participants were drawn from street gangs or from bands of soccer hooligans. Others were criminals specifically released from prison for the purpose. Their participation was required because the Yugoslav army, despite years of supposedly influential nationalist propaganda and centuries

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of supposedly pent-up ethnic hatreds, substantially disintegrated early in the war and refused to fight.

A group of well-armed thugs and bullies encouraged by, and working under rough constraints set out by, official security services would arrive or band together in a community. Sometimes operating with local authorities, they would then take control and persecute members of other ethnic groups, who would usually flee to areas protected by their own ethnic ruffians, sometimes to join them in seeking revenge. Carnivals of often-drunken looting, destruction, and violence would take place, and others—guiltily or not so guiltily—might join in. Gradually, however, many of the people under the thugs' arbitrary and chaotic "protection," especially the more moderate ones and young men unwilling to be pressed into military service, would emigrate to safer places. In all this, nationalism was not so much the impelling force as simply the characteristic around which the marauders happened to have arrayed themselves.

To explore the possibilities for generalizing from the Yugoslav experience, I assess very briefly the extreme case of Rwanda in 1994, when ethnic Hutus engaged in genocidal massacres of ethnic Tutsis. In recent history this is probably the instance in which the Hobbesian all-against-all and neighbor-against-neighbor idea of ethnic warfare is most likely to hold. Nevertheless, even in this case, it seems clear that the main momentum of the killings was carried by a relatively small number of specially trained Hutus who, allying themselves with often-drunken criminal and hooligan opportunists, went on a murderous rampage coordinated by local officials acting on orders from above. By contrast, the vast majority of Hutus seem to have stood by in considerable confusion and, often, indifference.

The mechanism of violence in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda, then, is remarkably banal. Rather than reflecting deep, historic passions and hatreds, the violence seems to have been the result of a situation in which common, opportunistic, sadistic, and often distinctly nonideological marauders were recruited and permitted free rein by political authorities. Because such people are found in all societies, the events in Yugoslavia and Rwanda are not peculiar to those locales, but could happen almost anywhere under the appropriate conditions. On the other hand, there was nothing particularly inevitable about the violence: with different people in charge and with different policing and accommodation procedures, the savagery could have been avoided.

Because the violence in Yugoslavia and Rwanda was carried out chiefly by small, ill-disciplined, and essentially cowardly bands of thugs and bullies, policing the situation would probably have been fairly easy for almost any

organized, disciplined, and sizable army. An extreme aversion to casualties and a misguided assumption that the conflicts stemmed from immutable ethnic hatreds, however, made international military intervention essentially impossible until the violence appeared to have run its course.¹

Ethnic Warfare in Croatia and Bosnia

Two explanations are commonly given for the wars in the former Yugoslavia. One is that elemental and ancient ethnic hatreds had only temporarily and superficially been kept in check by communism and that with its demise, murderous nationalism erupted. This perspective has been developed most famously and influentially by Robert Kaplan, who described the Balkans as “a region of pure memory” where “each individual sensation and memory affects the grand movement of clashing peoples,” and where the processes of history and memory were “kept on hold” by communism for forty-five years, “thereby creating a kind of multiplier effect for violence.”² The other explanation holds

1. I am concerned here with ethnic violence and warfare—a condition in which combatants arrayed along ethnic lines seek to kill each other—not particularly with ethnic hatreds. It is important to distinguish common, knee-jerk, and sometimes hateful ethnic slurs—no matter how unpleasant and politically incorrect their expression may often be—from prejudice that is expressed in violence. As James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin have pointed out, ethnic violence is actually exceedingly rare when one considers how many Archie Bunkers there are in the world and how many opportunities there are for it to occur. Fearon and Laitin, “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (December 1996), pp. 716–717. Some analysts argue that “conflicts among nations and ethnic groups are escalating.” Samuel P. Huntington, “Why International Primacy Matters,” *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), p. 71. Others believe “there is a virtual epidemic of armed civil or intranational conflict.” See David A. Hamburg, *Preventing Contemporary Intergroup Violence* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1993). But such wars and conflicts did not increase in number or intensity in the 1990s. See Yahya Sadowski, *The Myth of Global Chaos* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1998); Ernest J. Wilson and Ted Robert Gurr, “Fewer Nations Are Making War,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 1999, p. M2; Steven R. David, “Internal War: Causes and Cures,” *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (July 1997), pp. 552–576; and James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Weak States, Rough Terrain, and Large-Scale Ethnic Violence since 1945,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, Georgia, September 25, 1999. Rather, what is new is that some of these wars and conflicts have taken place in Europe, an area that had previously been free from substantial civil warfare for nearly half a century. However, militant nationalism—whether violent or not—may well already have had its day in Central and Eastern Europe. Hypernationalists (and even some that are not so hyper), who sometimes appeared threateningly formidable at the polls in the early 1990s, have been reduced in elections in many places to the point of extinguishment.

2. Robert D. Kaplan, “A Reader’s Guide to the Balkans,” *New York Times Book Review*, April 18, 1993, pp. 1, 30–32. See also Robert D. Kaplan, “History’s Cauldron,” *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1991, pp. 93–104; and Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1993). For Kaplan’s more recent doomsaying, now focused also on Africa, see his “The Coming Anarchy,” *Atlantic*, February 1994, pp. 44–76. For a devastating critique of the argument, see Noel Malcolm, “Seeing Ghosts,” *National Interest*, Summer 1993, pp. 83–88. See also V.P. Gagnon, Jr., “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3

that the violence was a reaction to continuous nationalist propaganda spewed out by politicians and the media, particularly on Serbian television, that played on old fears and hatreds. As a Belgrade journalist put it to an American audience, "You must imagine a United States with every little television station everywhere taking exactly the same editorial line—a line dictated by David Duke. You too would have war in five years."³

THE SHALLOWSNESS OF MILITANT NATIONALISM IN YUGOSLAVIA

Actually, support for militant nationalism in Yugoslavia was not all that deep even at the time of its maximum notice and effect in the early 1990s. The rise of some militant nationalists in elections during that period stemmed less from their wide appeal and more from their ability to manipulate the system and from the disarray of their opposition. In their key victories in 1990, Franjo Tudjman's nationalists in Croatia massively outspent the poorly organized opposition, using funds contributed by well-heeled militants in the Croatian diaspora—particularly in North America. And their success was vastly exaggerated by an electoral system, foolishly designed by the outgoing communists, that handed Tudjman's party 69 percent of the seats with only 42 percent of the vote. In the same election, less than a quarter of the Serbs in Croatia voted for their nationalist party. The same sort of distortions, though to a lesser degree, took place in the elections in Bosnia. In early elections in Serbia, Slobodan Milošević controlled the media and essentially bought the vote by illegally using public funds—hardly a sign of enormous public appeal, and an act that was foolhardy as well because it greatly accelerated the breakup of the country. Moreover, like Tudjman's party, Milošević's party was comparatively well organized and widely based and had an enormous advantage under the election rules. Although it garnered less than half

(Winter 1994/95), pp. 133–134; Russell Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), chap. 6; Sadowski, *Myth of Global Chaos*; and Brian Hall, "Rebecca West's War," *New Yorker*, April 15, 1996, p. 83. For Kaplan's more recent reflections, see his "Reading Too Much into a Book," *New York Times*, June 13, 1999, p. 4-17.

3. Quoted in Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), p. 252. On this argument, see, for example, Christopher Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. viii, 10, 242; Warren Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe: Yugoslavia and Its Destroyers* (New York: Times Books, 1996), pp. 120–122; Christopher Cviić, "A Culture of Humiliation," *National Interest*, Summer 1993, p. 82; Jack Snyder and Karen Ballentine, "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Fall 1996), pp. 25–30; Michael Ignatieff, "The Balkan Tragedy," *New York Review of Books*, May 13, 1993, p. 3; Noel Malcolm, "The Roots of Bosnian Horror Lie Not So Deep," *New York Times*, October 19, 1998; Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 285, 309; and Peter Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War* (New York: Vintage, 1996), p. 227.

the vote, it gained 78 percent of the seats. Milošević's fortunes were further enhanced because Kosovo Albanians boycotted the election, allowing his party to win that area.⁴

A poll conducted throughout Yugoslavia in the summer and autumn of 1990, even as nationalists were apparently triumphing in elections, more accurately indicates the state of opinion after centuries of supposed ethnic hatreds and after years of nationalist propaganda. The question, "Do you agree that every (Yugoslav) nation should have a national state of its own?" elicited the following responses: completely agree, 16 percent; agree to some extent, 7 percent; undecided, 10 percent; do not agree in part, 6 percent; and do not agree at all, 61 percent.⁵

At times, particularly in Serbia during the rise of Milošević, militant nationalists were able to orchestrate huge public demonstrations, which have often been taken to suggest their popular appeal. But in general it is unwise to take large, noisy crowds, which clearly are heavily self-selected, as representing public opinion more generally.⁶ Moreover, much of the crowd behavior in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s was manipulated—Milošević's party often paid mobs with free food, transportation, and liquor.⁷ And if crowd behavior is to be taken as indicative of wider attitudes, it should be pointed out that even

4. On Tudjman's spending, see Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1995), pp. 119, 229; Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, p. 199; Lenard J. Cohen, *Broken Bonds: Yugoslavia's Disintegration and Balkan Politics in Transition*, 2d ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995), p. 95; Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 222; and David Binder, "Gojko Susak, "Defense Minister of Croatia Is Dead at 53," *New York Times*, May 5, 1998, p. A25. On Tudjman's electoral success, see Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, p. 127; Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, pp. 117–119; Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 90; and Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, pp. 99–100. On the Serb vote in Croatia, see Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict," p. 155; and Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, p. 127. Somewhat similarly, a large portion of those Serbs in Bosnia who lived outside areas controlled by Serb nationalists voted with the Muslims for independence from Serbia in a 1992 referendum; see Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict," p. 163. On Bosnia, see Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 50–51, 57. On Serbia, see Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict," p. 154; Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, p. 121; Brian Hall, *The Impossible Country: A Journey through the Last Days of Yugoslavia* (New York: Penguin, 1994), p. 48; Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, pp. 130, 448–449; Mladjan Dinkic, *The Economics of Destruction* (Belgrade: Video Nedeljnik, 1995), pp. 30, 61–66; see also Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 260. On vote percentages, see Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, p. 158. On the Albanian vote, see Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, p. 121.

5. Laslo Sekelj, *Yugoslavia: The Process of Disintegration* (Highland Lakes, N.J.: Atlantic Research and Publications, 1992), p. 277.

6. Thus, because anti-Vietnam War demonstrators in the 1960s in the United States were predominantly young, most commentators came to hold that young people were more opposed to the war than older people; yet poll data clearly show the opposite to have been the case. John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973), pp. 136–140.

7. Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, p. 98.

the poorly organized opposition was able to mount massive demonstrations in 1991 and 1992 in Zagreb, Belgrade, and Sarajevo.⁸

Finally, the casual notion that each ethnic or national group in Yugoslavia (or indeed anywhere) is united by deep bonds of affection is substantially flawed. Serbs in Serbia have expressed little affection for the desperate and often rough rural Serbs who have fled to their country from war-torn Croatia and Bosnia.⁹ Indeed, as Christopher Bennett argues, in profound contrast with Kaplan, after World War II the "great divide within Yugoslav society was increasingly that between rural and urban communities, not that between peoples."¹⁰

ARMED THUGS AND THE BANALITY OF "ETHNIC WARFARE" IN YUGOSLAVIA

The violence that erupted in Yugoslavia principally derived not from a frenzy of nationalism—whether ancient or newly inspired—but rather from the actions of recently empowered and unpoliced thugs. Politicians may have started the wars, and they may have whipped up a fair amount of hatred. But the effective murderous core of the wars were not hordes composed of ordinary citizens ripped loose from their repression or incited into violence against their neighbors. Rather the politicians found it necessary to recruit thugs and hooligans for the job.

Significantly, the Serbian (or Yugoslav) army substantially disintegrated early in the hostilities. There may well have been hatreds, and there surely was

8. On Zagreb, see "Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation," Discovery Channel, 1995. On Belgrade, see Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict," pp. 157–158; Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, chap. 9; Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 174; and Chuck Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance: One Family's Story of the War in Bosnia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), p. 85. On Sarajevo, see Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 211; and Robert J. Donia and John V.A. Fine, Jr., *Bosnia and Hercegovina: A Tradition Betrayed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 1.

9. Christine Spolar, "Lesser Serbs in Greater Serbia: Refugees of Croatia Fighting Find Little Welcome from Fellow Serbs," *Washington Post*, May 15, 1995, p. A36; Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, p. 364; Stephen Kinzer, "Yugoslavia Departs Refugee Serbs to Fight for Rebels in Bosnia and Croatia," *New York Times*, July 6, 1995, p. A6; and Roger Cohen, *Hearts Grown Brutal: Sagas of Sarajevo* (New York: Random House, 1998), p. 296.

10. Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, p. 63. See also Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, pp. 238, 241; Ignatieff, "Balkan Tragedy," p. 4; John R. Bowen, "The Myth of Global Ethnic Conflict," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (October 1996), pp. 3–14; and Sadowski, *Myth of Global Chaos*, pp. 78–80. Interestingly, in his discussion of the Bosnian war, Peter Maass observes that "to a surprising extent, this was a war of poor rural Serbs against wealthier urban Muslims, a *Deliverance* scenario." Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, p. 159. Donia and Fine note that it was the "relatively uneducated armed hillsmen, with a hostility toward urban culture and the state institutions (including taxes) that go with it" who proved "susceptible to Serbian chauvinist propaganda," "allowed themselves to be recruited into Serb paramilitary units," and formed a significant portion of those shelling Bosnia's cities. Donia and Fine, *Bosnia and Hercegovina*, p. 28. See also Fearon and Laitin, "Weak States, Rough Terrain."

propaganda. But when ordinary Serb soldiers were given an opportunity to express these presumed proclivities or to act in response to the ingenious televised imprecations in government-sanctioned violence, they professed they did not know why they were fighting and often mutinied or deserted en masse.¹¹ Meanwhile, back in Serbia young men reacted mainly by determined draft-dodging. Some 150,000 or more quickly emigrated or went underground. In one city, only two of the 2,000–3,000 “volunteers” expected in a call-up showed up, and in several towns there were virtual mutinies against conscription. Overall, only 50 percent of Serbian reservists and only 15 percent in Belgrade obeyed orders to report for duty.¹²

Because Serbs from Serbia proper were unwilling to fight outside their own republic, Belgrade had to reshape its approach to the wars in Croatia and Bosnia in major ways. As a Serbian general put it, modification of Belgrade’s military plans was made necessary by “the lack of success in mobilisation and the desertion rate.”¹³ Part of the solution involved arming the locals, particularly in Serb areas of Croatia and Bosnia.¹⁴ But in general the fighting quality of the militaries, especially initially, was very poor: There was a lack of disci-

11. Norman Cigar, “The Serbo-Croatian War, 1991: Political and Military Dimensions,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (September 1993), pp. 317–319; Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, p. 238; Bennett, *Yugoslavia’s Bloody Collapse*, p. 167; Ed Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia’s War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 19; Miloš Vasić, “The Yugoslav Army and the Post-Yugoslav Armies,” in David A. Dyker and Ivan Vejvoda, eds., *Yugoslavia and After: A Study in Fragmentation, Despair, and Rebirth* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 128; Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 51; Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict,” p. 162; Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 177; Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 269; and Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 185, 189.

12. Jasminka Udovicki and Stojan Cerovic, “The People’s Mass Murderer,” *Village Voice*, November 7, 1995, p. 27; Stipe Sikavica, “The Collapse of Tito’s Army,” in Jasminka Udovicki and James Ridgeway, eds., *Yugoslavia’s Ethnic Nightmare* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1995), p. 138; Cigar, “Serbo-Croatian War,” p. 315; Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 270; Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 185; and Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 51. See also Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 177; and Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict,” p. 162. See also Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 177. In all communist countries, certainly including Yugoslavia, people were determinedly subject to decades of communist propaganda in the media. Yet, as history has shown, many—probably most—failed in the end to be convinced by it. If media promotion could guarantee lasting impact, all Yugoslavs would today be worshiping Tito, and all Americans would be driving Edsels. For a discussion, see John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 129–136. Warren Zimmerman observes, “My most difficult task has been to convey the conviction that all Yugoslavs weren’t the bloodthirsty extremists so ubiquitously visible in Western news accounts. Most of the people my wife and I met in six years of living in Yugoslavia were peaceful and decent, without a trace of the hostility on which nationalism feeds. . . . What amazed me was how many Yugoslavs resisted the incessant racist propaganda.” Zimmerman, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, p. xi; see also pp. 209–210.

13. Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 269. See also United Nations Commission of Experts, *Final Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), Annex III.A Special Forces*, ed. M. Cherif Bassiouni, December 28, 1994, par. 29.

14. Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 130; and Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 170–172, 192–195.

pline, ineffective command and control, and, especially in the case of the Serbs, a reluctance to take casualties. Such deficiencies, as Steven Burg and Paul Shoup observe, "led all sides to rely on irregulars and special units."¹⁵

The appearance in the wars of the paramilitaries was caused in part by the collapse of army morale, but their presence may also have helped to aggravate that collapse. An internal Yugoslav army memo from early in the conflict found them to be dangerous to "military morale" because their "primary motive was not fighting against the enemy but robbery of private property and inhuman treatment of Croatian civilians."¹⁶

The most dynamic (and murderous) Serbian units were notably composed not of committed nationalists or ideologues, nor of locals out to get their neighbors, nor of ordinary people whipped into a frenzy by demagogues and the media, but rather of common criminals recruited for the task. Specifically, the politicians urged underworld and hooligan groups to get into the action, and it appears that thousands of prison inmates, promised shortened sentences and enticed by the prospect that they could "take whatever booty you can," were released for the war effort.¹⁷ Thus, to a substantial degree the collapse of the army led to a privatization of the war, and loot comprised the chief form of payment. The releasees, together with other criminals and like-minded recruits, generally worked independently, improvising their tactics as they went along. However, there does seem to have been a fair amount of coordination in Serb areas mainly by Milošević's secret police. The army, such as it was, enforced an overall framework of order and sometimes directly participated in the deprivations as well.¹⁸

Some of the thugs and hooligans joined and bolstered what remained of the Yugoslav army. According to Miloš Vasić, a leading Serb journalist, however, "they behaved in a wholly unsoldierly way, wearing all sorts of Serb chauvinist insignia, beards, and knives, were often drunk (like many of the regular

15. Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 137. There were at least eighty-three of these groups operating in Croatia and Bosnia: fifty-six Serb, thirteen Croat, and fourteen Muslim, with 36,000–66,000 members. See UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 14.

16. UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 100.

17. Julian Borger, "The President's Secret Henchmen," *Guardian Weekly*, February 16, 1997, p. 8; Cohen, *Hearts Grown Brutal*, pp. 192, 410–411; UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 3, 30; and David Firestone, "Serb Lawmaker Is Called Vicious Killer," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 3, 1993, p. 1A. See also Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, pp. 238, 249, 265; Vasić, "Yugoslav Army," p. 128; Udovicki and Cerovic, "People's Mass Murderer"; and Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), p. 132.

18. Vasić, "Yugoslav Army," p. 134; Borger, "President's Secret Henchmen"; Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 177–178; Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 245; Judah, *The Serbs*, chap. 9; and UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 18, 24.

soldiers, too), looted, and killed or harassed civilians. Officers rarely dared discipline them."¹⁹

Others joined semicoherent paramilitary groups like Vojislav Šešelj's Chetniks²⁰ and Arkan's Tigers, organizations already heavily composed of criminals, adventurers, mercenary opportunists, and, in the case of the Tigers, soccer hooligans. Arkan (Zeljko Ražnjatović) had been the leader of Delije, the official fan club of Belgrade's Red Star soccer team, which, not unlike other soccer clubs, had become a magnet for hoodlums and unemployable young men; the Tigers seem to have been built from that membership.²¹ Arkan's forces seem to have functioned essentially as mercenaries: As one Bosnian Serb government official put it, "He is very expensive, but also very efficient."²²

Still others seem to have gone off on their own, serving as warlords in the areas they came to dominate. These independent or semi-independent paramilitary and warlord units, estimates Vasić, "consisted on average of 80 per cent common criminals and 20 per cent fanatical nationalists. The latter did not usually last long (fanaticism is bad for business)."²³ There were also many "weekend warriors," men who joined the war from Serbia and elsewhere only intermittently and then mainly to rob and pillage, enriching themselves in the process.²⁴ Similarly, the initial fighting forces of Bosnia and of Croatia were also substantially made up of small bands of criminals and violent opportunists recruited or self-recruited from street gangs and organized mobs.²⁵

19. Vasić, "Yugoslav Army," p. 128.

20. One of the most fanatical of Serb nationalists, the political scientist Šešelj, who spent a year teaching at the University of Michigan in his younger years, later seems to have become mentally unbalanced as the result of the torture and beatings he endured while in prison in Yugoslavia for counterrevolutionary activities. One academic colleague described him as "disturbed, totally lost, and out of his mind." See UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 107, 108; see also Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 187.

21. UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 129; Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 186; and Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, p. 98. The overlap between soccer hooligans and criminals seems to be very high. See Bill Buford, *Among the Thugs* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), p. 28. Also associated are racist attitudes, a proclivity for extreme right-wing politics; a capacity to imbibe huge amounts of liquor; a strident and vicious boorishness; a deep need for camaraderie and for being accepted by the "lads"; and an affinity for, even a lusting after, the thrill of violence. On the war-anticipating pitched battle between supporters of the Zagreb and Belgrade soccer clubs in 1990, see Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 228.

22. UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 23, 26.

23. Vasić, "Yugoslav Army," p. 134.

24. Sikavica, "Collapse of Tito's Army," p. 137. There was one paramilitary group, identified as "The Weekendlers," that ventured from Bijeljina to Brčko each weekend over a three-year period to plunder and vandalize. See UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 317.

25. Particularly in the case of Croatia, as Bennett notes, many of the most extreme fighters were emigré adventurers from abroad. See Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, p. 165. See also Hall, *Impossible Country*, p. 11; David Rieff, *Slaughterhouse* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 66. Tony Horwitz met German skinheads in Zagreb who had come "for a bit of graduate training." See Horwitz, "Balkan Death Trip: Scenes from a Futile War," *Harper's*, March 1993, p. 41.

Arkan began as a juvenile delinquent and later developed into a skilled bank robber, plying his trade mostly in northern Europe (dashing, he often left the tellers bouquets of roses). He also became a prison breakout artist, escaping from jails in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. Returning to Belgrade, the fugitive became a respected member of the criminal underground, enjoyed a special relationship with the police and with the internal affairs ministry, and ran a successful ice cream and pastry shop.²⁶ Another Serb paramilitary leader, who called himself "Captain Dragan," had reportedly been a pimp in the Sydney underworld (working in the Knin area, his men were known as "Knindjas" after the cartoon characters).²⁷ For their part, the Muslims were protected by Celo, a convicted rapist, and by Juka, a former mob boss, racketeer, and underworld thug.²⁸ And the Croats had Tuta, a former protection racketeer, the mere mention of whose name could "cause an entire village to panic."²⁹

As Warren Zimmermann observes, "the dregs of society—embezzlers, thugs, even professional killers—rose from the slime to become freedom fighters and national heroes." Robert Block notes that "gangsters, outlaws, and criminals have had a special place in the war in the former Yugoslavia. Their skills in organizing people and their ruthlessness made them natural choices for Balkan rabble-rousers looking for men to defend cities or serve as nationalist shock troops." And David Rieff points out that "one of the earliest, deepest, and most pervasive effects of the fighting" was "to turn the social pyramid on its head. . . . Simple boys from the countryside and tough kids from the towns found that their guns made them the ones who could start amassing the Deutschemarks and the privileges, sexual and otherwise."³⁰

26. UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 125–128; see also Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 97–98. He was assassinated gangland-style in Belgrade in January 2000.

27. UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 206; and Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 245. There was also a group identified as the "Knindža Turtles," but it is not clear whether this is the same band as the one led by Captain Dragan. See UN Experts, *Final Report*, n. 493. For completeness, it should be reported that a paramilitary unit in Bosnia was led by a man calling himself "Commander Turtle." See *ibid.*, par. 311.

28. Cohen, *Hearts Grown Brutal*, p. 280; Robert Block, "Killers," *New York Review of Books*, November 18, 1993, p. 9; UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 74; and Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, p. 31.

29. Block, "Killers," p. 9. On these issues, see also Anna Husarska, "Rocky-Road Warrior," *New Republic*, December 4, 1995, pp. 16–17; Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 245; Rieff, *Slaughterhouse*, pp. 131–132; Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell*, pp. 314–316; Ignatieff, *Warrior's Honor*, p. 131; Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp. 137–139; and Sadowski, *Myth of Global Chaos*, p. 163.

30. Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, p. 152. Block, "Killers," p. 9. Rieff, *Slaughterhouse*, p. 130. Reportage by Peter Maass is peppered with such phrases as "drunken hillbillies," "death and thuggery," "they don't wear normal uniforms, they don't have many teeth," "the trigger fingers belonged to drunks," "the Bosnians might be the underdogs, but most of their frontline soldiers were crooks," "bullies," "a massive oaf," "a foul-smelling warlord," "mouthing the words, 'Bang,

There was also Rambo-like affectation: Each fighter dressed as if “he had been cast as a thug by a movie director,” observes Block. Indeed, one Serbian paramilitary unit called itself “the Rambos” and went around in webbed masks and black gloves with black ribbons fetchingly tied around their foreheads.³¹ Naser Orić, a muscular and charismatic former bodyguard who became the Muslim warlord of Srebrenica, and, until 1995, its protector, liked to wear leather jackets, designer sunglasses, and thick gold chains. Members of the Muslim paramilitary group the “Black Swans,” which sometimes served as the bodyguard for Bosnia’s president when he ventured outside Sarajevo, wore a round patch depicting a black swan having intercourse with a supine woman.³²

Thus, as Susan Woodward notes, “paramilitary gangs, foreign mercenaries, and convicted criminals roamed the territory under ever less civil control.” And “war crimes,” observes Norman Cigar, were their “primary military mission.”³³ Vladan Vasiljević, an expert on organized crime, says that most of the well-documented atrocities in Bosnia were committed by men with long criminal records. And a United Nations (UN) commission notes a “strong correlation” between paramilitary activity and reports of killing of civilians, rape, torture, destruction of property, looting, detention facilities, and mass graves.³⁴

you’re dead,’ through rotten teeth,” “an unshaven soldier would point his gun at a desired item and grunt,” “only drunks and bandits ventured outside,” “goons with guns,” “Serb soldiers or thugs—and the difference is hard to tell.” See Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, pp. 6, 7, 16, 30, 42, 48, 61, 69, 77, 79, 80, 85. Reporter Ed Vulliamy describes them as “boozy at their best, wild and sadistic at their worst” or as “toothless goons” with “inflammable breath.” See Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell*, pp. 19, 46.

31. Block, “Killers”; UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 291; and Cohen, *Hearts Grown Brutal*, p. 126.

32. Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 137; and UN Experts, *Final Report*, at par. 142.

33. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, pp. 254, 356, 485; and Cigar, “Serbo-Croatian War,” p. 323. See also Mischa Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (New York: Penguin, 1993), p. 185; Chuck Sudetic, “A ‘Wild East’ Revival in Serbian-Held Croatia,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1992, p. A6; Cheryl Benard, “Bosnia: Was It Inevitable?” in Zalmay M. Khalilzad, ed., *Lessons from Bosnia* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1993), pp. 18–25; Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell*, pp. 307–316; and Bob Stewart, *Broken Lives: A Personal View of the Bosnian Conflict* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 318–319. See also Rieff, *Slaughterhouse*, p. 83; Ignatieff, *Warrior’s Honor*, p. 131; and Sikavica, “Collapse of Tito’s Army,” p. 138. Vulliamy quotes Reuters reporter Andrej Gustinčić: “Gangs of gun-toting Serbs rule Foča, turning the once quiet town into a nightmare landscape of burning streets and houses. . . . Some are members of paramilitary groups from Serbia, self-proclaimed crusaders against Islam and defenders of the Serbian nation, others are wild-eyed local men, hostile towards strangers and happy to have driven out their Muslim neighbors. No one seems to be in command, and ill-disciplined and bad-tempered gunmen stop and detain people at will.” See Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell*, pp. 90–91. Many of the “wild-eyed local men,” according to another report, were local criminals who “donned uniforms and took part enthusiastically in the subsequent looting.” See Julian Borger, “Friends or Foes?” *Guardian Weekly*, January 19, 1997, p. 23. Similarly, the town of Bosanski Novi was ruled by five roaming Serbian armed groups, the most brutal of which was a well-known local mafia known as the “Spare Ribs” that had donned uniforms. See Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 227.

34. On Vasiljevic, see Firestone, “Serb Lawmaker Is Called Vicious Killer.” UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 21.

THE STAGES OF WAR AND ETHNIC CLEANSING

What passed for "ethnic warfare" in Bosnia and Croatia thus seems to have been something far more banal: the creation of communities of criminal violence and pillage.³⁵ In the end, the wars rather resembled the movie images of the American Wild West or of gangland Chicago, and often had far less to do with nationalism than with criminal opportunism and sadistic cruelty, often enhanced with liquor—liquid courage. There seem to have been four stages to the process: takeover, carnival, revenge, and occupation and desertion.

TAKEOVER. Recruited and encouraged by leading politicians, and operating under a general framework of order provided by the army, a group of well-armed thugs—or skinhead or redneck or soccer hooligan or Hell's Angels types—would emerge in an area where the former civil order had ceased to exist or where the police actually or effectively were in alliance with them. As the only group willing—indeed, sometimes eager—to use force, they would quickly take control. Members of other ethnic groups would be subject to violent intimidation at best, atrocities at worst, and they would leave the area in despair. Because there was no coherent or unbiased police force to protect these victims, their best recourse was to flee, and it would not take much persuasion to get them to do so—indeed, rumors or implied threats could often be sufficient. Once the forces of Arkan and Šešelj had established their murderous reputations, for example, the mere warning that they were on their way was often enough to empty a village of its non-Serb residents.³⁶

Any co-ethnics who might oppose the thugs' behavior would be subject to even more focused violence and would either be forced out, killed, or cowed into submission. One unusually candid Croatian ex-militiaman recalled that his unit had killed mostly Serb civilians but also unsympathetic Croats.³⁷ And

35. A partial exception to this pattern was the slaughter of thousands of Muslim men by Serbs after they successfully invaded the "safe area" of Srebrenica in 1995, a seemingly calculated and rather orderly massacre that was carried out by what appears to have been the regular army. On this issue, see Sadowski, *Myth of Global Chaos*, p. 133. Given that the army had become increasingly thuggish by this time, a formal distinction with less-organized bands of thugs may be somewhat strained. Nevertheless, this murderous episode does seem to show more method and less madness than the more capricious and improvisatory killings that had taken place during the main period of ethnic cleansing in 1992. As was typical in this war, however, the killing squads at Srebrenica were often shored up with generous quantities of liquor. See Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 241. Although in no way excusing the massacre, it may be relevant to point out that the Serbs were deeply bitter because, although they had allowed the city to become a UN safe area in 1993 under an agreement that it would be demilitarized, it had repeatedly been used as a base for attacks on Serb civilians. David Rohde, *Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica, Europe's Worst Massacre since World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), pp. xvi, 215–216, 409.

36. UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 104.

37. Chris Hedges, "Croatian's Confession Describes Torture and Killing on Vast Scale," *New York Times*, September 5, 1997, p. A1.

a UN report notes, “In places where the local Serb population was initially fairly friendly, once Arkan’s thugs arrived the situation changed, and they were intimidated into ostracizing the Muslims and behaving toward them with hostility.”³⁸

In many cases, the dominating forces could be remarkably small. The Bosnian town of Višegrad on the Drina River, for example, was substantially controlled for years by a returned hometown boy, Milan Lukić, and some fifteen well-armed companions including his brother, a cousin, and a local waiter who often went barefoot. Using violent and often sadistic intimidation, this tiny band forced the 14,500 Muslims in the town to leave and suppressed any expressions of dissent from local Serbs—many of whom took advantage of the situation to profit from the Muslim exodus.³⁹ Then there is the town of Teslić, controlled, it is estimated, by “five or six men, well placed and willing to use violence.”⁴⁰ The violence that in 1992 tore apart Srebrenica, a town of 37,000 people, was perpetrated by no more than thirty Serb and Muslim extremists. Orić, the Muslim warlord who controlled Srebrenica for several years (and who was mysteriously absent with his gang when Serb forces overran the town in 1995), led an armed band with a nucleus of only fifteen men.⁴¹ Arkan’s much-feared forces consisted of a core of 200 men and perhaps totaled no more than 500–1,000.⁴²

The most common emotion among ordinary people caught up in this cyclone of violence and pillage seems to have been bewilderment rather than rage. Working with Muslim refugees early in the Bosnia war, Cheryl Benard found them “to be totally at a loss to explain how the hostility of the Serbs was possible. All of them, without exception, say they lived and worked with and were close friends with Serbs.” Far from seeing the violence as the delayed

38. Quoted in Husarska, “Rocky-Road Warrior,” p. 16; see also Bennett, *Yugoslavia’s Bloody Collapse*, p. 191; Mike O’Connor, “Nationalism Checkmates Pawns, Too, in Bosnia,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1996, p. A3; Rieff, *Slaughterhouse*, p. 110; Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 195; and Peter Maass, “In Bosnia, ‘Disloyal Serbs’ Share Plight of Opposition,” *Washington Post*, August 24, 1992, p. A1.

39. Chris Hedges, “From One Serbian Militia Chief: A Trail of Plunder and Slaughter,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1996, p. A1. Ed Vulliamy, “Bloody Train of Butchery at the Bridge,” *Guardian*, March 11, 1996, p. 9. Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, pp. 12–14, 157. UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 246–250, 540–556. Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 120–125. Lukić is reported to be spending the postwar years in Serbia, a wealthy man. Vulliamy, “Bloody Train of Butchery.” Other reports, however, indicate that he has sought psychiatric care, has become unhinged, sleeps with all the lights on, and drives around in a different car all the time. Still, he claims to be proud he killed so many Muslims in the war and says he has an almost uncontrollable urge to kill again. Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 355–356, 358.

40. Mike O’Connor, “Moderate Bosnian Serbs Plot in Secrecy for Unity,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1996, p. A3.

41. Rohde, *Endgame*, pp. xiv, 60, 354, 355.

42. Vasić, “Yugoslav Army,” p. 134; and UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 92, 138.

eruption of ancient hatreds and as evidence of the strength of ethnic ties, Benard suggests that "one could argue that Bosnia shows how weak and how fluid political identity really is."⁴³

CARNIVAL. The thugs often exercised absolute power in their small fiefdoms and lorded it over their new subjects. Carnivals of looting and destruction would take place, as would orgies of rape, arbitrary violence and murder, and roaring drunkenness; pay often came in the form of alcohol and cigarettes.⁴⁴

Sadists may make up a small percentage in any population, but in these circumstances, they rose to the occasion and reveled in it. In a number of places, notes Tim Judah, "real psychopaths were rampaging across the countryside indulging in cruel, bizarre, and sadistic killings." Peter Maass reports "an odd enthusiasm on the part of the torturers, who laughed, sang, and got drunk while inflicting their crimes. They weren't just doing a job, they were doing something they enjoyed," and "there were plenty of Serbs who enjoyed killing civilians and eagerly sought the opportunity to do so....These killers never had so much fun."⁴⁵

In the words of a UN official, in this unrestrained new world run by "gunslingers, thugs, and essentially criminals," others might opportunistically join the carnivals and orgies. After all, if the property of a local Muslim is going to be looted and set afire (like the store of a local Korean during the Los Angeles riots of 1992), it may seem sensible to some—even rational—to join the thieves: No high-minded moral restraint about such vulture-like behavior will do the departed owner any good. Additionally, various adventurers, mercenaries, and revenge-seekers—often belonging to the police—might join in. And so might some of those (particularly teenagers) who find excitement, comradeship, clarity, and theatricality—not to mention material profit—in war and in its terrifying, awesome destructiveness.⁴⁶ In the process, many ordinary residents might become compromised, sometimes willingly: For example, one Bosnian Serb policeman used his position, Schindler-like, to save the lives of

43. Benard, "Bosnia," p. 24. See also Malcolm, "Roots of Bosnian Horror." Halina Grzymala-Moszczynska, a Polish sociologist working with Muslim refugees in Poland, reports that the refugees she has interviewed never refer to their persecutors as "Serbs," but always as "criminals." Personal conversation.

44. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, p. 249.

45. Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 233; and Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, pp. 52, 111. See also Julian Borger, "Day of Reckoning for the Men of Death," *Guardian Weekly*, July 20, 1997, p. 7.

46. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, p. 249; and Sudetic, "A 'Wild East' Revival." On the phenomenon more broadly, see John Mueller, *Quiet Cataclysm* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), chap. 8; J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959); William Broyles, Jr., "Why Men Love War," *Esquire*, November 1984, pp. 55–65; and Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

several Muslims, but under the extraordinary conditions of the time, he also probably raped two or more of them—in at least one instance after proposing marriage.⁴⁷

REVENGE. Some among the brutalized might wish to fight—and to seek revenge against—their persecutors. In general, they found that they were best advised not to try to improvise local resistance, but rather to flee with their fellow ethnics and then to join like-minded armed bands in more hospitable parts of the country. Thus the special Muslim unit, Black Swans, was supposedly made up of volunteers aged twenty to twenty-two who had been orphaned by the war. And the Muslims' "elite" Seventeenth Krajina brigade was labeled "the angry army of the dispossessed," though questions have been raised about how adequately it actually fought.⁴⁸

Members of each group would quickly find, sometimes to their helpless disgust, that their thugs at least were willing to fight to protect them from the murderous thugs on the other side. Often the choice was essentially one of being dominated by vicious bigots of one's own ethnic group or by vicious bigots of another ethnic group: Given that range of alternatives, the choice was easy.

OCCUPATION AND DESERTION. Life in areas controlled by the thugs could be miserable, as the masters argued among themselves and looked for further prey among those remaining, whatever their ethnic background.⁴⁹ As Rieff observes, the involvement of gangsters on all sides meant that the "political aims of the war became hopelessly intertwined on a day-to-day level with profiteering and black market activities."⁵⁰

Corruption and nepotism in the Serb areas of Croatia and Bosnia, including the Bosnian Serb capital of Pale, were so endemic that the war effort was substantially harmed.⁵¹ Meanwhile, in the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica, men loyal to Orić controlled the few jobs in town, lived in the larger homes, and

47. Borger, "Friends or Foes?"

48. Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 137.

49. Some of this behavior surfaced early—in the fighting in Croatia in 1991. As one Serb from the area recalled, "I don't deny that I myself did some shooting, but the worst crimes were committed by the irregulars who came in from Serbia. First they looted the homes of Croats. When they came back a second time they started looting Serb houses, because the Croat houses had already been robbed clean." Another Serb from the same village reports that after defending their homes for six months (and never seeing a single regular army officer or soldier), they were ordered, together with some of their Croat neighbors who had joined them in home defense, to evacuate for resettlement in Bosnia. On the way, they were all robbed by the Serbian forces of Šešelj. Ejub Šitkovic, "Croatia: The First War," in Udovički and Ridgeway, *Yugoslavia's Ethnic Nightmare*, p. 160.

50. Rieff, *Slaughterhouse*, p. 132.

51. Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 221–223, 252–255.

had more food than others. They prospered by exaggerating the population size in order to get excess humanitarian aid, and then hoarding it to drive up prices before selling it on the black market at a killing. When three opponents to this feudal arrangement come forward, they were ambushed and, in one case, killed. Because the refugees were essentially being used as human shields to protect the property and income of Orić and his men, Muslims were not allowed to leave, yet little effort was made to improve the lives of the people, especially the refugees, unless it brought personal profit to the ruling gang.⁵²

In war-torn Sarajevo, Juka's men, who had defended the city from the Serbs in 1992, soon began plaguing the defended without regard to ethnicity. They stole automobiles; extorted money and valuables; abducted, abused, and raped civilians; and looted the city's warehouses and shops, making off with 20,000 pairs of shoes in one venture. In addition, they monopolized the black market that made up the city's only trade, earning fortunes in a city where many people spent their days scavenging for water and bread.⁵³

Gradually, many of the people under the thugs' arbitrary and chaotic "protection," especially the more moderate ones and young men unwilling to be impressed, would manage to emigrate to a safer place. And in time the size of the "protected" group would be substantially reduced—by half or more.⁵⁴ The remnants ever more disproportionately consisted of fanatics, economic marauders, militant radicals, common criminals, opportunistic sycophants, embittered revenge-seekers, and murderous drunks.⁵⁵

52. Rohde, *Endgame*, pp. 107–109; and Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 223, 244.

53. UN Experts, *Final Report*, par. 84, 86; John F. Burns, "2 Gang Leaders in Sarajevo Face Crackdown in Bosnia," *New York Times*, October 27, 1993, p. A6; and Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, p. 31.

54. Vasić, "Yugoslav Army," p. 133; Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, p. 246; Charles G. Boyd, "Making Peace with the Guilty: The Truth about Bosnia," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 5 (September/October 1995), p. 29; Noel Malcolm, "Bosnia and the West: A Study in Failure," *National Interest*, Spring 1995, p. 9; Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 223, 237, 296; Chuck Sudetic, "Serbs of Sarajevo Stay Loyal to Bosnia," *New York Times*, August 26, 1994, p. A6; and Maass, "In Bosnia, 'Disloyal Serbs' Share Plight of Opposition." The population of the once thoroughly integrated city of Mostar declined from 130,000 to 60,000. Chris Hedges, "A War-Bred Underworld Threatens Bosnia Peace," *New York Times*, May 1, 1996, p. 8. Sarajevo declined from 450,000 to something close to 280,000, including some 100,000 refugees from ethnically cleansed areas of the country. Chris Hedges, "War Turns Sarajevo Away from Europe," *New York Times*, July 28, 1995, p. A4. By September 1992, only nine months after their brief war for independence had ended, the number of Serbs from the Krajina section of Croatia who had moved to Serbia was reaching "disastrous proportions," according to a Belgrade daily, a situation it blamed on the endemic corruption of Krajina officials. Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 283.

55. For a portrait of the clearly deranged Branko Grujić, a Serb who reigned as the mayor of Zvornik after the Muslim majority had been driven from the city, see Cohen, *Hearts Grown Brutal*, pp. 296–298.

Those in the right positions quickly discovered a lucrative opportunity to trade with the enemy, and hundreds of millions of Deutschemarks' worth of weaponry, ammunition, fuel, and goods were exchanged across the front lines. The Serbs in Bosnia, after all, enjoyed a major military advantage in that, because of the deft manipulations of Milošević and crew early in the war, they inherited masses of weaponry from the Yugoslav national army. Once the war settled down a bit, many of the Serb leaders in Bosnia went looking for buyers and found them nearby: The Croats and the Muslims were eager for weapons with which to attack the Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia (and, for a time, each other). There were opportunities in the other direction as well; the speaker of the Bosnian Serb assembly, for example, made millions buying fuel from Croatia and then selling it to Croatia's Serb enemies in Bosnia. One senior Serbian commander in Bosnia sold a Muslim village some heavy artillery and then retired with his family to Serbia. Croats could sometimes rent tanks from the Serbs at a going rate of DM 1,000 per day.⁵⁶ Whether they had to pay extra for insurance is not recorded.

The relationship of such banal behavior to "nationalism" and "ethnic hatred," ancient or otherwise, is less than clear as is its bearing on the notion of "clashing civilizations." Its relation to common criminality, however, is evident.⁵⁷

A Comparison: Rwanda

I have stressed the importance of vicious and opportunistic, but often substantially nonideological, criminals and criminal-like elements in the development of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia. This approach seems much sounder than ones that seek to explain the wars as conflicts in which murderous communal rage, exploding from pent-up ancient hatreds or the cynical manipulation of

56. Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 242–252; and Ed Vulliamy, "Croats Who Supped with the Devil," *Guardian*, March 18, 1996, p. 8. See also Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 138; and Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, p. 90. Serbia itself was also substantially criminalized during the war. Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 255–256.

57. Although there are differences, the Serb rampages in Kosovo in 1999 often resembled those seen earlier in Bosnia and Croatia. The army provided a sort of generalized support, it participated directly in some areas, and it hardly escapes blame for the results in any case. But, as one report puts it, "in hundreds of interviews," Kosovo Albanians "have said that nearly all the killings of civilians were committed by Serbian paramilitary forces and not by the regular army." Blaine Harden, "Reservists a Crucial Factor in Effort against Milosevic," *New York Times*, July 9, 1999, p. A1. Released criminals formed an important component of Serb forces. See Michael R. Gordon, "Civilians Are Slain in Military Attack on a Kosovo Road," *New York Times*, April 15, 1999, p. A1; and Charles Ingrao, "It Will Take More Than Bombs to Bring Stability," *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1999, p. B11.

malevolent, shortsighted politicians, induces a Hobbesian conflict of all against all and neighbor against neighbor. There are doubtless instances, however, in which the Hobbesian vision comes closer to being realized. The 1994 genocide inflicted by ethnic Hutus against Tutsis in Rwanda may be a case in point. Closer examination, however, suggests a number of similarities with the wars in Croatia and Bosnia.

Much of the writing about the genocide, in which some 500,000 to 800,000 perished in a matter of weeks—mostly by being hacked to death with machetes or hoes—gives the impression that the conflict was one of all against all, friends against friends, neighbors against neighbors, even Cain against Abel. Friends and neighbors (and even brothers perhaps) did kill each other, but it seems that by far the greatest damage, as in Croatia and Bosnia, resulted from the rampages of murderous thugs.

Far from a spontaneous eruption, the basic elements of the genocidal process had been planned for years by Hutu extremists who were substantially in charge of the ruling party, the government bureaucracy, and the police.⁵⁸ Throughout the country Hutus and Hutu police were urged—or ordered—to engage in the killing, and many do seem to have responded enthusiastically. Joining was the Presidential Guard, numbering 700–1,500 men, and the Hutu army, which consisted of some 50,000 men, most of them hastily recruited in the previous few years from landless peasants, the urban unemployed, and foreign drifters who had chiefly signed up not for ideological reasons, but rather for the guaranteed food and drink (each man was entitled to two bottles of beer a day, a luxury by Rwandan standards) and for the opportunity to loot, because pay was low and irregular.⁵⁹

Finally, there was the Interahamwe, militia bands that had been created and trained by Hutu extremists. As Philip Gourevitch points out, the Interahamwe had its genesis in soccer fan clubs, and it recruited jobless young men who were "wasting in idleness and its attendant resentments," and who tended to see the genocide as a "carnival romp."⁶⁰ Moreover, their ranks were expanded by hordes of opportunists once the genocide began. Gérard Prunier notes that a "social aspect of the killings has often been overlooked": As soon as the killing groups "went into action, they drew around them a cloud of even

58. Gérard Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 169; and African Rights, *Rwanda: Death, Despair, and Defiance*, rev. ed. (London: African Rights, 1995), pp. 51–52.

59. Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, pp. 113, 242–243; and African Rights, *Rwanda*, pp. 49, 65.

60. Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), p. 93.

poorer people, a *lumpenproletariat* of street boys, rag-pickers, car-washers, and homeless unemployed. For these people the genocide was the best thing that could ever happen to them. They had the blessings of a form of authority to take revenge on socially powerful people as long as these were on the wrong side of the political fence. They could steal, they could kill with minimum justification, they could rape, and they could get drunk for free. This was wonderful. The political aims pursued by the masters of this dark carnival were quite beyond their scope. They just went along."⁶¹ "Drunken militia bands," notes Gourevitch, "fortified with assorted drugs from ransacked pharmacies, were bused from massacre to massacre."⁶² There were about 1,700 "professional Interahamwe" who received training and uniforms, and thousands or tens of thousands joined up (sometimes under coercion) after the genocide began.⁶³

As in Yugoslavia, criminals were released from jail to participate in the destruction,⁶⁴ and the prospect for enrichment by looting was vastly escalated during the genocide and was used as a specific incentive by the leaders—many of whom were happy to take booty as well.⁶⁵ The killers were fully willing to murder fellow Hutus suspected of not being loyal to the cause, and they often forced other Hutus, on pain of instant death, to join the killings.⁶⁶ Others participated by manning roadblocks or by pointing out local Tutsis to the marauding *génocidaires*. "I didn't have a choice," one cooperating priest pointed out, "It was necessary to appear pro-militia. If I had had a different attitude, we would all have disappeared."⁶⁷

Many Hutus, however, did hide and protect Tutsi neighbors and sometimes strangers despite the pressure, and despite the fact that the punishment for such behavior could be instant, brutal death.⁶⁸ The number of Hutus who did so probably was as high as the number who, under pressure from the often-drunken and always-murderous *génocidaires*, indicated where some Tutsis might reside or be hiding.⁶⁹ Most of the others, it appears, simply withdrew

61. Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, pp. 231–232. See also Allison Des Forges, "Leave None to Tell the Story": *Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), pp. 11, 261.

62. Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You*, p. 115.

63. African Rights, *Rwanda*, pp. 55, 61–62, 114.

64. Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You*, p. 242.

65. African Rights, *Rwanda*, pp. 55, 61–62, 114.

66. Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, p. 247; African Rights, *Rwanda*, chap. 14; and Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You*, pp. 307, 309.

67. Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, pp. 253–254; and Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You*, p. 136.

68. African Rights, *Rwanda*, pp. 1017–1022.

69. Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, p. 253; and Des Forges, "Leave None to Tell the Story," pp. 11, 260–262.

whether in approval or disapproval of the cataclysm surrounding them: "We closed the door and tried not to hear," said one.⁷⁰

Although an extensive study by Human Rights Watch ventures no direct estimates, it does suggest at various points that the killers numbered in the "tens of thousands."⁷¹ A study by African Rights in London amasses a detailed listing of those in the Hutu elite who directed the genocide and comes up with 600 or 700 names.⁷² As indicated earlier, the Presidential Guard comprised some 700–1,500, the army perhaps 50,000, and the Interahamwe militias another 50,000. A year after defeating the genocidal regime, Tutsi forces had 33,000 people incarcerated under suspicion of participating in the genocide—a figure that later rose to at least 125,000.⁷³

It may be reasonable to suggest from all this that there were some 50,000 hard-core killers. This would easily be enough to have accomplished the genocide: If each of these people killed one person a week for the course of the 100 day holocaust, more than 700,000 would have perished. This number would represent some 2 percent of the male Hutu population over the age of thirteen. That is, 98 percent of the male Hutu population older than thirteen was not in this group.

It is possible that 200,000 participated in the massacres, though this is likely to be a rather high figure that would include people who, under pressure from the hard-core *génocidaires*, did nothing more than point out where local Tutsi lived or simply manned roadblocks under orders. This would still represent less than 9 percent of the Hutu male population over the age of thirteen. (Though by all accounts very much outnumbered by men and boys, women and girls did join in the genocide. In addition, boys younger than thirteen also often participated.⁷⁴ If these groups are added to the base, the percentages would be much lower.)

In some sense, of course, these are astoundingly high figures. In a normal year, by comparison, the proportion of males older than thirteen who committed murder in Rwanda was probably something like 1 in 2,000. Nonetheless, a situation in which more than 90 percent of the over-thirteen male Hutu population did not participate in killings hardly seems to justify the notion that the situation was one of all against all or neighbor against neighbor. As

70. Des Forges, "Leave None to Tell the Story," p. 262.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 16, 260, 262.

72. African Rights, *Rwanda*.

73. Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You*, p. 242.

74. Bill Keller, "In Mozambique and Other Lands, Children Fight the Wars," *New York Times*, November 9, 1994, p. A14.

in Croatia and Bosnia, the chief dynamic of the depredations seems to have been furnished by marauding bands of violent, opportunistic, and often drunken thugs.

Conclusions

This analysis of the experiences in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda suggests that ethnicity is important in “ethnic wars” more as an ordering device than as an impelling force; that the violence would probably have been fairly easy to police; that the wars did not necessarily derive from the ethnic peculiarities of those regions; and that the wars were by no means inevitable. In addition, some of the wars’ key dynamics may have considerable applicability to other violent conflicts.

ETHNICITY IS IMPORTANT ONLY AS AN ORDERING DEVICE

Michael Ignatieff compares the conditions that prevailed in the former Yugoslavia to a Hobbesian state of nature.⁷⁵ But the experience in Yugoslavia and in Rwanda calls this image into question. People did not descend into the war of “every man against every man” that Hobbes so vividly depicted and so ardently abhorred. What happened in Croatia, Bosnia, and Rwanda did resemble a Hobbesian state of nature, but it came about not because people generally gave into murderous enmity, but because they came under the arbitrary control of armed thugs. Ethnicity proved essentially to be simply the characteristic around which the perpetrators and the politicians who recruited and encouraged them happened to array themselves. It was important as an ordering device or principle, not as a crucial motivating force.

The same sort of dynamic could hold if the thugs’ organizational principle were class or ideological allegiance or even handedness or loyalty to a specific soccer team. If they took control in a town determined to cleanse it violently of, say, left-handers or of supporters of an opposing team, those in that group would quickly find it in their interest to leave. Meanwhile right-handers or fans of the thug-favored team would, often reluctantly, come to recognize that the thugs had become their only protection against revenge-seeking thugs of another group. And as they hunkered down behind their protecting thugs, or as they sought gradually to flee the war zone, members of each group would probably reflect in bewilderment from time to time that before the thugs came, they often did not even know the handedness or the soccer loyalties of their

75. Ignatieff, “Balkan Tragedy.”

friends, neighbors, and schoolmates. Under such conditions, identity, as Chaim Kaufmann notes, "is often imposed by the opposing group, specifically by its most murderous members."⁷⁶

None of this is to argue that no neighbor ever persecuted a neighbor in these conflicts. Some locals did join in the process, sometimes out of ethnic loyalty, sometimes to settle old scores, most often, it seems, opportunistically to pursue profit in the chaos. In many cases, the war conditions did bring out the worst in some people, and victims did sometimes know their victimizers—though this is something that happens in most civil wars, not just ethnic ones. And, of course, once the thugs took over, former cross-ethnic relationships were often warily broken off because the thugs were likely to punish such sympathies. The crucial dynamic of the wars, however, was not in the risings of neighbor against neighbor, but in the maraudings of comparatively small groups of thugs recruited and semicoordinated by politicians.

INTERNATIONAL POLICING COULD PROBABLY HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE

Hobbes's greatest mischief comes from his solution to the problem he invents. He assumes that *every* person is, at base, "radically insecure, mistrustful of other men, and afraid for his life." Therefore the only way out of the mess is for everyone permanently to surrender to an authoritarian ruler, one who primarily values glory and stability over doctrinal orthodoxy or ideological purity, and one who will maintain the necessary force to keep all people from once again giving in to their natural proclivities for isolation, hostility, and insensitivity to the rights of others.⁷⁷

But the experience in the former Yugoslav and Rwanda suggests that this monumental—perhaps even impossible—task is hardly required. Most people most of the time do not have much difficulty getting along and creating useful rules and patterns of conduct that allow them to coexist peacefully.⁷⁸ Police may be needed, even necessary, to maintain order, but they need not normally be numerous. Nor does their control need to be Leviathan-like, because they mainly need simply to protect the many from the few, rather than everyone from everyone else as Hobbes would have it.

76. Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Wars," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), p. 144.

77. Robert P. Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 165, 176, 179.

78. On this issue, see Bruce L. Benson, "The Spontaneous Evolution of Commercial Law," in Daniel B. Klein, ed., *Reputation: Studies in the Voluntary Elicitation of Good Conduct* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 165–189; Robert C. Ellickson, *Order without Law: How Neighbors Settle*

It follows that policing the situation in Yugoslavia and in Rwanda would not have been the major challenge often anticipated. Essentially, the intimidating, opportunistic thugs were successful mainly because they were the biggest bullies on the block. But, like most bullies (and sadists and torturers), they substantially lacked organization, discipline, coherent tactics or strategy, deep motivation, broad popular support, ideological commitment, and essentially, courage.⁷⁹ Consequently, if confronted by a military force with these qualities, their most likely reaction would be to flee. And, to a considerable degree, this seems to be what happened both in Yugoslavia and in Rwanda.

While Serb forces remained criminal-dominated, their opponents began to develop real armies. Unprepared and badly outgunned at the beginning, independent Croatia, despite an international arms embargo, gradually built up and trained a conventional military force using Western advisers.⁸⁰ And an important step in building *its* army was the Bosnian government's risky but successful military operation in October 1993 to destroy the criminal gangs in Sarajevo that had helped defend the capital in 1992 but that had then taken control in various areas of the city, terrorizing non-Muslims and Muslims alike.⁸¹

As early as January 1993, only a year after Serbs had effectively partitioned the country, the new Croatian army launched an attack on several important targets in Serb-held territory in Croatia and encountered little resistance.⁸² In May 1995, it achieved the same success in another Croatian area, taking control in thirty-two hours. Then, over three or four days in August, using plans partly devised by retired American generals, the army pushed from most of the rest

Disputes (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); and John Mueller, *Capitalism, Democracy, and Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), chap. 4.

79. Judah observes of Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladić that "his war was a coward's war. He fought few pitched battles but managed to drive hundreds of thousands of unarmed people out of their homes," and he also questions Mladić's mental stability. Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 230–231. On this latter issue, see also Robert Block, "The Madness of General Mladic," *New York Review of Books*, October 5, 1995, pp. 7–9; and Jane Perlez, "A Grim Turn for 2 Embattled Serb Leaders," *New York Times*, December 15, 1995, p. A1.

80. Vasić, "Yugoslav Army," pp. 134–135; Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 360; Ken Silverstein, "Privatizing War? How Affairs of State Are Outsourced to Corporations beyond Public Control," *Nation*, July 28/August 4, 1997, pp. 11–17; and Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 284.

81. Vasić, "Yugoslav Army," p. 136; Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 217–218; Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, p. 33; Chris Hedges, "Postscript to Sarajevo's Anguish: Muslim Killings of Serbs Detailed," *New York Times*, November 12, 1997, p. A1; Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp. 138–139; Burns, "2 Gang Leaders in Sarajevo Face Crackdown in Bosnia"; and John F. Burns, "Bosnian Forces Kill Reputed Gang Chief in Sarajevo Gunfight," *New York Times*, October 27, 1993, p. A6. See also Rieff, *Slaughterhouse*, p. 132.

82. Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, pp. 228–229; and Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 353. Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 288.

of Croatia the remaining Serb opposition, which for the most part followed the example of its erstwhile "protectors" and simply ran. As Marcus Tanner puts it, "As soon as the bombardment started the Serb troops fled the frontlines, provoking a panicked flight into Bosnia by thousands of civilians, who left their houses with washing on the lines and meals half eaten on kitchen tables." Similar results were soon achieved in neighboring Bosnia by organized Croat and Bosnian forces.⁸³

As in Yugoslavia, the marauders in Rwanda were put down fairly easily when confronted with a reasonably coherent military force. Several thousand refugees were saved in a Kigali stadium because the United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda, which Prunier characterizes as "the powerless UN 'military' force," simply forbade the murder squads entry. And when the Tutsis eventually were able to get their comparatively capable army into the country, they had to battle for the capital city, but took over the rest of the country with a minimum of fighting. For the most part, Hutu authorities, like their counterparts in the former Yugoslavia, simply ordered their forces to flee when confronted with military force.⁸⁴

Thus it seems likely that a large, impressively armed, and well-disciplined international policing force could have been effective in pacifying the thug-dominated conflicts in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The approach could have resembled the technique used to suppress riots in U.S. cities or those successfully applied by the U.S. military in Haiti in the mid-1990s or by Australian and other international policing troops in East Timor in 1999: Well-armed and disciplined troops would occupy an area; the thugs would either flee or blend back into the population; and the troops would then gradually be reduced in number. The thugs would still exist of course, and many might remain in the area, as they do in U.S. cities. But, insofar as they remained unpacified, the thugs would be reduced to sporadic and improvised crime and violence, not town mastery.

There seem to be two reasons why such a force was never put together by concerned members of the international community. First, they assumed that the wars were essentially inexplicable Kaplanesque all-against-all conflicts, rooted in old hatreds that could hardly be ameliorated by well-meaning, but

83. Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 294–297; Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 353–360; see also Vasić, "Yugoslav Army," p. 135. In victory, however, the discipline of the Croat forces often broke down in arson, destruction, and looting. Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 298.

84. Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, pp. 254, 268, 377; Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You*, pp. 156–157; and Alan J. Kuperman, "Rwanda in Retrospect," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (January–February 2000), pp. 94–118.

innocent and naïve, outsiders.⁸⁵ As the discussion above suggests, this explanation, so convenient to those favoring passivity, was substantially flawed. But, as Brian Hall observes, “Literary clichés do not die easily, especially when informed by superficialities.”⁸⁶

Second, the international community had, and has, an extremely low tolerance for casualties in peacekeeping ventures in which clear national interests do not appear to be at stake. The international mission to Somalia in 1993 saved many lives, but U.S. policy there is held to be a “failure” in large part because eighteen Americans were killed in the process. In essence, when Americans asked themselves how many American lives peace in Somalia was worth, the answer came out close to zero.⁸⁷ The general reluctance to become involved in the fighting in Bosnia (despite, incidentally, years of the supposedly action-pelling “CNN effect”) suggests that Americans and others reached a similar

85. On this issue, see also Malcolm, “Bosnia and the West,” pp. 4–5; and Sadowski, *Myth of Global Chaos*, pp. 24–25, 66–68. On President Bill Clinton’s seduction by Kaplan’s book, see Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 157; on his belated, regretful public recantation in 1999 of the Kaplan perspective, see Katharine Q. Seelye, “Clinton Blames Milosevic, Not Fate, for Bloodshed,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1999, p. A12. Talking about the Bosnian conflict on national television on June 5, 1995, Vice President Al Gore had allowed as how the tragedy had been unfolding, “some would say, for five hundred years.” Clinton, not to be outdone, opined in the same interview that “their enmities go back five hundred years, some would say almost a thousand years.” Cohen, *Hearts Grown Brutal*, pp. 397–398. The exact identity of the hyperbolic “some” was not specified, but one source perhaps was Henry Kissinger, who has noted authoritatively that “ethnic conflict has been endemic in the Balkans for centuries” (as opposed to gentle, trouble-free Western Europe presumably), and, patronizingly and absurdly, that “none of the populations has any experience with—and essentially no belief in—Western concepts of toleration.” Henry Kissinger, “No U.S. Ground Forces for Kosovo,” *Washington Post*, February 22, 1999, p. A15. At the source of many of these perceptions is Rebecca West’s two-volume *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (New York: Viking, 1941). The work was written after the author had made three visits—the longest of which lasted less than two months—to Yugoslavia between 1936 and 1938, and it often propounds views that are essentially racist. For a superb assessment, see Hall, “Rebecca West’s War.”

86. Hall, *Impossible Country*, p. 68. In the case of Yugoslavia, outsiders also tended vastly to overestimate the fighting tenacity of the defenders under the assumption that Serbs, in particular, were fanatically dedicated fighters. This notion derives from a World War II myth that maintains that the occupying Germans, confronted with a dedicated guerrilla opposition, were forced to divert a huge number of forces to maintain their control in Yugoslavia. Even assuming the situations are comparable, the Germans occupied the country in a matter of days and rarely found the Yugoslav occupation much of a diversion. Bennett, *Yugoslavia’s Bloody Collapse*, pp. 49–50; and J.P. Mackley, “The Balkan Quagmire Myth: Taking On the Serbs Would Be More Grenada than Vietnam,” *Washington Post*, March 7, 1993, p. C3. In Bosnia, suggests Mackley, no Yugoslav combat unit, regular or irregular, could successfully compete with the U.S. military “in anything but a drinking contest.”

87. John Mueller, “The Common Sense,” *National Interest*, Spring 1997, p. 83. On the other hand, this is not such an unusual position for humanitarian ventures. If Red Cross or other workers are killed while carrying out humanitarian missions, their organizations frequently threaten to withdraw no matter how much good they may be doing. Essentially what they are saying, then, is that the saving of lives is not worth the deaths of even a few rescuers.

conclusion for that trouble spot. By 1997, after Spain had suffered seventeen deaths policing the Bosnian conflict, it withdrew from further confrontation. Similarly, when ten of its policing troops were massacred and mutilated early in the Rwandan genocide, Belgium abruptly withdrew—and, to save face, urged others to do the same. It seems clear that policing efforts will be politically tolerable only as long as the cost in lives for the policing forces remain extremely low—and perhaps not even then.⁸⁸

WHAT HAPPENED IN YUGOSLAVIA AND RWANDA COULD HAPPEN ANYWHERE

If my assessment is essentially correct, it suggests that what happened in Yugoslavia and Rwanda is not unique, but could happen just about anywhere. The Serbian writer Aleksandar Tisma has gloomily concluded from his country's tragedy that "there are civilized people and less civilized people. Here in the Balkans, people don't belong to the civilized but to the less civilized."⁸⁹ But the wars in Yugoslavia did not break out because the peoples there are "less civilized." When criminals and sadists are given free rein, they can easily debase the conditions of life.

And thugs are everywhere—at least in small numbers—and only small numbers are necessary if the conditions are ripe. England may seem rather tranquil and well ordered in many respects, but it is also the home of some of the world's most notorious soccer hooligans. Canada often seems to be a nation of eminently reasonable people, but that is not the conclusion one would draw from watching a hockey game. Denmark may today remind people mainly of Hans Christian Andersen and little mermaids, but it once was the home of world-class marauders, and it seems unlikely that that propensity has been

88. On Spain, see Chris Hedges, "On Bosnia's Ethnic Fault Lines, It's Still Tense, but World Is Silent," *New York Times*, February 28, 1997, p. A1. On Belgium, see Des Forges, "Leave None to Tell the Story," pp. 618–620; Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You*, pp. 114–150; and African Rights, *Rwanda*, p. 1112. Poll data demonstrate that President Clinton (in part because he confronted vocal Republican opposition on the issue) was never able to increase the numbers of Americans who saw wisdom or value in sending U.S. policing troops to Bosnia even though it was expected that there would be few casualties. In fact, six months after the venture began, support for it had *still* not risen even though it was completely successful: Bosnians had stopped killing each other (even if they had not come to love each other) and, most important, no Americans had been killed. Americans have a deep concern for U.S. casualties and very little for foreign ones, and they have never had much stomach for losing American lives in humanitarian ventures. On the other hand, it seems likely that, if they are not being killed, U.S. troops can remain on peacekeeping missions almost indefinitely. See Mueller, "Common Sense"; and John Mueller, "Public Opinion as a Constraint on U.S. Foreign Policy: Assessing the Perceived Value of American and Foreign Lives," paper presented at the annual convention of the International Studies Association, Los Angeles, California, March 14–18, 2000.

89. Quoted in Jane Perlez, "Balkan Voice of Reason and Despair," *New York Times*, August 14, 1997, p. B1.

fully bred out of the race in the intervening centuries.⁹⁰ Moreover, as various studies have suggested, it is often possible to get ordinary people to participate in acts of considerable cruelty when they are placed, voluntarily or involuntarily, in a supportive environment—ideological or ethnic hatred is by no means necessary for this capacity to emerge.⁹¹ Under the right conditions, thugs can rise to a dominant role, others can lend a hand or withdraw into terrified isolation or studied indifference, and any place can degenerate into a Bosnia or a Rwanda.

WHAT HAPPENED IN YUGOSLAVIA AND RWANDA WAS NOT INEVITABLE

The catastrophes that engulfed Bosnia, Croatia, and Rwanda did not have to happen. They emerged not out of inevitable historic necessities, but were instigated and orchestrated by designing politicians and local extremists who, however, often did not know how to control the violent processes they had set into motion.

Yahya Sadowski finds that cultural strife is found about as much in developed countries as in poorer ones, but that such strife is less likely to turn violent in prosperous societies. From this he concludes that economic advancement tends to reduce cultural violence.⁹² But it seems, rather, that the actions of leading politicians and police organizations are most important in keeping ethnic and cultural conflict from leading to major violence. Prosperous societies do seem to do better in this regard than poorer ones (which in fact is probably one of the reasons for their comparative prosperity). Prosperity may therefore be beneficial if it helps to develop competent governments and police forces, but wealth itself is not the key operative factor. Thus it is entirely possible to imagine Bosnian-like chaos in prosperous Quebec or Northern Ireland if the Canadian or British authorities had attempted to deal with cultural conflicts by encouraging murderous rampage rather than through patient policing and political accommodation.

90. On the murderous rivalries of motorcycle gangs in tranquil Denmark, see Stephen Kinzer, "Biker Wars in the Land of 'The Little Mermaid,'" *New York Times*, May 6, 1996, p. A4. In this case, however, the thugs are taken to be an aberrant "social pathology," and they are not held to be typical of the entire national spirit as so often happens in Kaplanesque discussions of the Balkans.

91. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975); Philip G. Zimbardo, Craig Haney, Curtis Banks, and David Jaffe, "The Mind Is a Formidable Jailer," *New York Times Magazine*, April 8, 1973, pp. 38ff; Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998); and Fred E. Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguilings of Evil* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

92. Sadowski, *Myth of Global Chaos*, pp. 174–176.

On the other hand, because of sound political policies, ethnic violence has been avoided in Bulgaria and Romania even though those countries are hardly more developed than Serbia or Bosnia. And the experience in Macedonia, where political leaders have sought calm accommodation, suggests that the disasters in the more prosperous areas of the former Yugoslavia, far from being inevitable, could almost certainly have been avoided if politicians and police had behaved more sensibly.⁹³

EXTRAPOLATIONS

The degree to which this analysis can be transferred to the dozens of "ethnic wars" taking place in any given year remains to be seen. But ideas developed in an analysis of the wars in the former Yugoslavia do have at least some bearing on the extreme, genocidal war in Rwanda. This suggests that an approach that applies as a crucial mechanism the elite-encouraged rampages of opportunistic and often drunken thugs may, in many cases, more adequately explain what passes for "ethnic war" than one that envisions such conflicts as Hobbesian all-against-all upheavals stemming from previously suppressed ancient ethnic hatreds or from media- or politician-induced mass frenzies.

Michael Ignatieff finds the "new architects" of "postmodern war" in "the paramilitaries, guerrillas, militias, and warlords who are tearing up the failed states of the 1990s." Similarly, Martin van Creveld has proclaimed that we have entered a "new era," in which "war will not be waged by armies but by groups whom we today call terrorists, guerrillas, bandits, and robbers."⁹⁴ Banditry and

93. In 1991 Robert Kaplan declared that "Macedonia is once again poised to erupt. Never in half a century has there been so much anger in Macedonia, as its people wake up from a Communist-imposed sleep. . . . Unable to stand on its own, like its more populous and historically grounded neighbor Serbia, Macedonia could implode under the pressures of Albanian nationalism from the west and Bulgarian nationalism from the east. And this is to say nothing of the pressures of Greek nationalism from the south. . . . The various popular convulsions in the Balkans are inexorably converging on Macedonia. . . . It is a tragic yet fascinating development. Rarely has the very process of history been so transparent and cyclical." Kaplan, "History's Cauldron," p. 104. See also his "Ground Zero: Macedonia: The Real Battleground," *New Republic*, August 2, 1993, p. 15. Inspired by such wisdom, applications of the now-popular notion of "preventative diplomacy" would have concentrated on exactly the wrong place in the early 1990s. On Bulgaria, see Venelin I. Ganev, "Bulgaria's Symphony of Hope," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (October 1997), pp. 125-139. On Romania (and also Slovakia), see Robert H. Linden, "Putting on Their Sunday Best: Romania, Hungary, and the Puzzle of Peace," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (March 2000), pp. 121-145.

94. Ignatieff, *Warrior's Honor*, pp. 3, 5-6; and Martin L. van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991), pp. ix, 197. On banditry in Chechnya, see Anatol Lieven, "A Trap for Russia," *New York Times*, November 30, 1999, p. A31. On the connection between crime and the Irish Republican Army, see Linda Grant, "Where Hard Men Face Hard Choices," *Guardian*

depredations by roving militias are hardly new of course, but Ignatieff and van Creveld may be correct in suggesting that regular soldiers are no longer engaging in combat nearly as much as they used to. It is not, as van Creveld would have it, that low-intensity conflict has risen to “dominance.” Rather it is that, increasingly, warfare of that sort is the only kind still going on—war by thugs is the residual, not the emerging, form.⁹⁵

Moreover, if some states (like Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Rwanda) came to depend on irregulars, it is not because they find this approach preferable, but because they are unable to muster an adequate number of recruits to field a real army. And if, again like Serbia and Rwanda, but unlike Croatia and Bosnia, they continue to rely on such corrupt, opportunistic, inept, and often cowardly forces, they are likely eventually to go down in pathetic defeat.

In the end, the basic operation—and the fundamental banality—of much ethnic violence is neatly summed up in a Bosnian expression: “Teško narodu kad pametni učute, budale progovore, a fukare se obogate.” That is, “It is difficult for the people when the smart keep quiet, fools speak out, and thugs get rich.”⁹⁶ The mistaken—even racist—notion that an entire ethnic group is devotedly out to destroy another ethnic group can in such cases shatter any ability to perceive nuance and variety, and it can be taken to suggest that efforts to foster elite accommodation are essentially irrelevant and therefore bound to prove futile. Further, the all-against-all image can discourage policing because it implies that the entire ethnic group—rather than just a small, opportunistic, and often cowardly subgroup—must be brought under control.

Weekly, April 26, 1998, p. 32; on connections in Algeria, see Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” *Rationality and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (August 1999), p. 268. On the role of criminals, alcohol, drugs, and armed children in war in Mozambique, see Keller, “In Mozambique and Other Lands, Children Fight the Wars”; in Cambodia, see Stephen J. Morris, “Pol Pot’s Lingering Influence,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1998, p. A25; in Liberia, see Howard W. French, “Liberia’s Teen-Age Soldiers Find Civil War Is Over but So Is Hope,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1995, p. A1; and in Sierra Leone, see Judith Miller, “U.N. Monitors Accuse Sierra Leone Peacekeepers of Killing,” *New York Times*, February 12, 1999, p. A10. See also David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*, Adelphi Paper No. 320 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998); and Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), chap. 9.

95. Van Creveld, *Transformation of War*, p. 205. On the trend, see also John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); and Mueller, *Quiet Cataclysm*, chap. 9. Those seeking to identify a truly new form of war might better focus on the economic warfare that has become more effective because the end of the Cold War allows major countries to coordinate their efforts more fully. See John Mueller and Karl Mueller, “Sanctions of Mass Destruction,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (May/June 1999), pp. 43–53; and John Mueller and Karl Mueller, “The Methodology of Mass Destruction: Assessing Threats in the New World Order,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, forthcoming.

96. Cohen, *Hearts Grown Brutal*, p. 297.