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Myth and Guilt in the Other Europe: David Binder's Dissident
Reporting on the Collapse of Yugoslavia

An AHSS Agricola Summer Research Grant Research Report
by Matt Roge

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When Yugoslavia began its slow and violent collapse in 1990 the federation garnered newfound international interest. As civilian death tolls mounted throughout the Bosnian war and the “Western” community equivocated on the most palatable course of action to take, Yugoslavia began to make headlines in the international media. Republics and regions such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Kosovo, hitherto unfamiliar to the average—particularly American—reader, were thrust into the media spotlight as reporters from around the world struggled to make sense of the events unfolding in a distant country primarily known for its “third way” during the Cold War. Few western journalists were more qualified and informed than the *New York Times*’ David Binder. After covering the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Binder was then assigned by the *Times* to Belgrade in 1963 to cover Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia.¹ Despite leaving the country in 1966, he remained a scholar of the region. In the late 80’s Binder returned to cover the growing friction between ethnic Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, and the wars that broke out in the following decade.

Though Binder’s qualifications are certainly remarkable, even more notable is the stance he took in his reporting on Yugoslavia’s dissolution. With the outbreak of the war in Bosnia, the Serbs became an international pariah. As reports of death camps, ethnic cleansing, and genocide became commonplace, the discourse on the fragmentation of Yugoslavia became a polarized one on victims and aggressors. In this discourse the Serbs became the uniform villains, the Croats and Bosniaks the uniform victims. While this framing is not entirely false, the dichotomy of victim and aggressor falls easy prey to subjective interpretation of deeply complex conflicts. David Binder’s controversial interpretation of the collapse of Yugoslavia serves as an employable

¹ Robert D. McFadden, “David Binder, 88, Dies; Chronicled the Cold War and Its Aftermath,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2019.

corrective—albeit one that should be viewed with an educated, skeptical eye—to an oversimplified, dyadic narrative championed by the contemporary media that prescribed guilt to the Serbs alone. Though Binder’s autopsy of the Yugoslav wars is haunted by a personal and at times obstructive bias towards the Serbian nation, his writings get at something much deeper: an avalanche of what he deems to be a hasty, unethical and exceedingly subjective condemnation the Serbian people in a conflict that was in fact very complicated and filled with human rights violations on all sides.

The controversy surrounding Binder’s work on Yugoslavia was (and still is) part of a polarized discourse on Yugoslavia’s demise. While Binder’s harshest critics go so far as to even blame him for the violence in Croatia and Bosnia,² it is important to understand his credibility. He was no greenhorn journalist and was heavily invested in the country, both personally and professionally (unlike many journalists who were sent there in the 90’s). Simply put, Yugoslavia was his passion. His quasi-autobiography, *Fare Well, Illyria*, consists of fifteen chapters, each one dedicated to a different republic or region explored through Binder’s recollections of personal experiences there. As a reporter, Binder was interested in the human aspect of his subject matter, and much of his book fondly recounts interactions with the civilians of Yugoslavia: the warmth they offered him, their humor and culture, but also their pain.

The book closes with a “Coda” in which Binder elaborates on the experience of each republic’s (independent³ nations at the time of the book’s publishing) in the Yugoslav Wars. He admits his own personal, mournful interest in the federation’s dissolution, writing that:

“In 1991, some of us mourned the collapse of that Yugoslavia where our children had been conceived (two in my case), and whose songs we sang, whose *kolos* (Serb dance) we danced, whose novels we read, whose radio programs

² Correspondence accessed at the Newberry Library in Chicago.

³ With the complicated exception of Kosovo.

we heard, whose *rakija* we drank and in whose waters we swam. Communist as the system was, sometimes cruel and often foolishly self-destructive, we had come to see the Yugoslav experiment as a version of the American way—a crazy quilt of nationalities—fiercely independent, with equal rights for all citizens... We knew it could fall apart...

We just did not want it to fall apart.”⁴

To Binder, reporting on Yugoslavia was not simply a work assignment or academic interest, but rather a deeply personal, meaningful experience, and he genuinely identified with the country, especially with Serbia.

Part and parcel of this passion for all things Yugoslavia is Binder’s scholarly understanding of the federation’s complex history, politics, and culture, marked by violence and foreign intervention. Binder addresses the dizzying ethnic diversity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the bad blood laid between Serbs and Croats⁵ by the Ustasha regime’s brutal massacres as a puppet of Nazi Germany, and the long history of national consciousness that had proved incendiary in Balkan history, especially when manipulated by the Great Powers. He understood the complex image of the Balkans in the West European consciousness, and the latter’s role in the development of the former, writing that “surely the most powerful curse placed on Southeastern Europe was branding it with the name “the Balkans.”⁶ Binder was close to Yugoslavia and all its peoples, namely the Serbs, and he had a very competent grasp on the manner in which Yugoslavia’s history, politics, and cultures continued—and continue—to affect the country on the eve of its downfall.

⁴ David Binder, *Fare Well, Illyria*, (Central European University Press, 2013), 189.

⁵ later manipulated by both in the 90’s, though perhaps not to the extent that Binder asserts

⁶ Binder, *Illyria* (Central European University Press), ix.

Unlike many news sources and their patrons at the time, Binder witnessed and meticulously followed the ever-growing manipulation of nationalist sentiment and ethnic tension that characterized the decade after Tito's death and that eventually erupted into war in 1991. His Christmas Day, 1983 article in the *New York Times*, titled "A Return to Yugoslavia," addresses the crisis of centralized leadership born of Tito's death, the re-emergent nationalisms in Yugoslavia's various republics (most consequentially in Serbia and Croatia), and the ever-increasing tension between majority ethnic-Albanians and ethnic Serbs in Kosovo where, in 1982, "it resembled an occupied territory."⁷ Binder was struck by the rising tide of change and volatility in Yugoslavia, itself in part a ripple of the changing geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe in the final years of the Cold War, and asked: "will Yugoslavia fall apart?"⁸ When it did, Binder was there, reporting for the *New York Times*.

While his reporting remained highly objective—that is, oriented around fact—during the short fighting in Slovenia and the longer war in Croatia, it garnered negative attention that is emblematic of the larger polarization over the conflict. Even in the earliest years of Yugoslavia's collapse, Binder is accused of pro-Serbian biases,⁹ biases that certainly existed but were not evidenced in his writing at the time. Binder understood the historical potential for animosity that existed between Yugoslavia's peoples well, potential energy that had been relentlessly suppressed along with any form of national expression under Tito. This animosity is, ironically, exemplified in the passionate letters he received criticizing his reporting, most of which came from from members of the Yugoslav diaspora in America.

⁷ David Binder, "A Return to Yugoslavia," *New York Times*, December 25, 1983.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Correspondence accessed at the Newberry Library in Chicago.

Binder's reporting took its most decisive turn from the mainstream in 1992 when the war in Bosnia broke out. It was the articles he attempted to publish concerning this phase of the conflict that generated the most friction with the *New York Times*. A specific statistic in *The Trial of Slobodan Milosevic*, by Michael Barrat Brown, Edward S. Herman, and David Peterson, speaks volumes to the stir Binder caused among his superiors, one that eventually resulted in his sidelining by the NYT. It reads as follows: "As for the dramatic drop off in the appearance of David Binder's byline in reports about the former Yugoslavia in the *New York Times*, a search of the Nexis database shows that for the years 1990-1993, the *Times* ran Binder's reports on Yugoslavia a total of 146 times, 51 of these having appeared during 1993 alone; and yet after 1993, Binder's reporting on Yugoslavia fell to only three times in 1994, and never more than twice during any subsequent year."¹⁰ During those subsequent years Binder published articles for *Weltwoche*, *The Nation*, *Foreign Policy*, and *Mediterranean Quarterly*, among others, in which he could voice his controversial take on the Bosnian conflict.

Binder's interpretation of Yugoslavia's fragmentation was based in the conviction that the conflict was a series of messy civil wars—rather than a war of Serbian aggression fueled by a quest for ethnic purity—in which Serbs,¹¹ Croats, Bosniaks,¹² Slovenes, and Kosovo Albanians all share guilt. The narrative Binder opposes, unilateral Serbian guilt, was largely adopted by the media and Western governments, particularly the U.S., as the war in Bosnia became increasingly

¹⁰ Michael Barrat Brown, Edward S. Herman, and David Peterson, *The Trial of Slobodan Milosevic* (Nottingham: Russell Press, 2004), 68.

¹¹ For the purposes of this paper, "Serb(s)" is used to refer to both combatants who identify ethnically as Serbs and live within sovereign nation of Serbia itself, as well as those combatants that fall into the category of national minority or diaspora, i.e. ethnic Serb combatants in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

¹² Bosnian muslims.

volatile. As such, Binder frequently excoriates the media and U.S. government in his writings for lackadaisically designating the Serbs as the pariah of the post-Cold War world.

Binder consistently maintains that no one side is more culpable than any other, both with respect to the conflict's origins and the violence that ensued. He is particularly emphatic about Serbian innocence—or, rather, the falsity of their unilateral guilt professed by the media. He states this explicitly in a piece he prepared for his presentation “Bosnia - How Did We Get There and Where is it Going?” given at the Baltimore Council on Foreign Affairs and broadcast by C-SPAN2. He writes that “all three ethnic leaders¹³ played what I call Balkan roulette, wagering not chips or coins, but human heads... True, Milosevic had started the chauvinism game in the late 1980's, but his actions were paralleled on a more subtle and less noisy level by the Slovenes and soon the Croats.”¹⁴ This analysis is on the mark. Ethno-nationalist aspirations were revived in each constituent republic during the tumultuous decade following Tito's death. Croatia, for example, adopted the checkerboard flag, once used by the Ustasha during its rule as a puppet state of the Nazis. To the average Serb, especially in Croatia, Ustasha rule was a “cosmic event,”¹⁵ but to the average outside observer of Yugoslav affairs it was simply a checkerboard.

Each of these reemergent nationalisms catalyzed the other, whose intensification then prompted the same process on the opposite end, creating a vicious cycle. Binder recognized this and knew Serbian nationalism to be the original catalyst that it was, though he does not necessarily condemn it. Additionally, he acknowledges Serbian nationalism's role in the

¹³ Slobodan Milosevic, Franjo Tujman, and Alija Izetbegovic.

¹⁴ David Binder, “Bosnia - How Did We Get There and Where is it Going?” for the Baltimore Council on Foreign Affairs, April 2, 1996.

¹⁵ Peter Brock, *Media Cleansing: Dirty Reporting—Journalism and Tragedy in Yugoslavia* (2005), 34.

repression of ethnic-Albanians in Kosovo and its co-optation by Milosevic to climb the ladder of power in the Serbian Communist Party.¹⁶ Still, he views this as one piece of the “Balkan roulette” puzzle. The beginning of Yugoslavia’s implosion was much more complicated than small republics wanting to escape Serbian chauvinism, but Serbian chauvinism certainly had a fatefully powerful hand in lighting the fuse. Binder understands this, though perhaps through slightly rose-colored lenses that favor the Serbs.

Binder’s designation of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina’s bids for independence as *secession*,¹⁷ a term which implies subversion and even a lack of legal legitimacy, underscores the way he interpreted the conflict as a whole: civil war, not one-sided aggression. He employs the word mainly to point out that these republics were acting against the constitution of their mothership federation, much like the Southern States in the American Civil War acted in direct violation of a constitution to which Washington saw them still bound. This is not incorrect, but it inherently gives legitimacy to the federal (mainly Serb) cause while delegitimizing the cause of the secessionists. Rather than a war of conquest, Binder interprets the Yugoslav wars as being fought over borders and self-determination. In this conflict, Serbia and all Serbs outside her borders have the right to fight for the construction of a state that will support them, especially if they should find themselves in a new, breakaway state intent on their being second-class citizens.

This fits into a greater question of Binder’s: sovereignty. Does Yugoslavia (by 1992 merely Serbia and Montenegro) not have the right to stop the secession of its constituent

¹⁶ Interview with Misha Glenny, journalist and author of “The Balkans: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers.”

¹⁷ David Binder and Walter R. Roberts, “The Only Good Serb is a . . .,” in *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 3 (Summer, 1998), 2.

republics and determine its own borders? And who are we, as Americans, living a world away, to tell them no? Binder questions the legitimacy of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a country, explaining it—not incorrectly—as an invention of the U.S. and Western Europe as part of a greater political strategy for recognizing Slovenia and Croatia and ensuring Bosnia’s safety.¹⁸ He points out that “there had never been one [a sovereign, independent Bosnia and Herzegovina] in a thousand years of history...although the Serbs had plainly stated they could not abide such an entity,”¹⁹ alluding to an important yet largely eschewed question about self-determination, including that of the Serbs, during a conflict that involved so much international intervention. This questioning of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a legitimate state pokes holes in the aggressor narrative as well: rather than being a historically independent state under unprecedented invasion by the Serbs, Bosnia’s independence was forged by meddling external powers.

In addressing the much more polarizing and sensitive topic of violence during the conflict Binder holds fast to his conviction that no single republic, most emphatically Serbia, is exclusively to blame. He writes that “all sides were aggressors (although we Americans blamed only the Serbs). All were brutal. All sides were imbued with fear bordering on sheer terror of the other ethnic parties, even when it involved neighbors, friends and relatives.”²⁰ He quotes Gen. Charles G. Boyd, deputy commander in chief of the U.S.-European Command: “Serbian people have suffered when hostile forces have advanced, with little interest or condemnation by Washington or CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour.”²¹ The media largely ignored the

¹⁸ Binder, “Bosnia - How Did We Get There and Where is it Going?”, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Binder, “Bosnia - How Did We Get There and Where is it Going?”, 4.

²¹ Binder and Roberts, “The Only Good Serb,” 5.

suffering inflicted by the Bosniak or Croat forces on Serbs (or on one another), primarily excoriating the Serbians as the villains. It did not help that the Bosnian Serbs in particular made a mess of their PR.²²

In a piece titled “The Only Good Serb is a...”²³ Binder calls attention to the lexicon of Bosnian war coverage, lambasting the media for deliberately using “emotive terms” such as “death camps” and “genocide” to “denounce the Serbian side in the Bosnian conflict.”²⁴ Binder quotes Professor Philip Jenkins, who asserts that there was a “popular tendency to contextualize the brutalities of the Balkans with the horrors of the Holocaust that befell Europe’s Jews.” Jenkins goes on to say that “Bosnian reports struck the American consciousness at a uniquely sensitive historical moment, which could not but affect attitudes to what was portrayed as a similarly brutal series of atrocities in Sarajevo in 1993-1994, and the analogy was fully exploited by the pro-Bosnian publicists.”²⁵ Binder considers the employment of such analogies to be intentionally sensational at a time when many news reports were being based off of rumors yet presented to the public as undeniable fact.

Binder advocates for temperance when employing such polarizing and loaded terms. He staunchly opposes the media’s proclamations of “death camps” run by Serbs. Instead, he insists on recognizing the evidence that the camps are detention centers used to hold refugees and POWs where, as is the tragic reality of any war, brutalities occur with horrifying frequency. In the footnotes of “The Only Good Serb is...,” Binder writes that

²² Interview with Misha Glenny.

²³ The implied full title is “The Only Good Serb is a Dead One.”

²⁴ Binder and Roberts, “The Only Good Serb,” 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

“the term genocide was applied first by American and British reporters to the events in Bosnia in August, 1992 after the discovery of Serbian-run detention camps in the vicinity of Prijedor where torture and killings took place. They dubbed these “concentration camps,” although subsequent investigations failed to establish that they were constructed in the manner of those created by the Nazi SS during World War II. Nor were Muslim or Croat detention camps for the Serbs where killings and torture occurred ever called ‘concentration camps...’ In effect, the court has decided that there was genocide in Bosnia simply because it says there was genocide.”²⁶

Here Binder strives to make evident the line between the brutality that is characteristic of war—especially one so chaotic as the Bosnian conflict—and genocide in its most familiar terms. The phrase “death camps” is inextricably linked to the Nazi’s genocidal program, and while Serb-run camps were certainly nightmarish, they did not resemble the efficient extermination factories designed by the Nazis. This is precisely what Binder urges his readers to recognize.

Even before the media and Western governments decisively turned against the Serbs,²⁷ Binder was bringing attention to evidence that cast doubt on the nature of Serb-run detention camps. On August 23rd, 1992, the *New York Times* published an article by Binder titled “U.S. Finds No Proof of Mass Killing at Serb Camps,” in which he reports that “two weeks after President Bush ordered American intelligence agencies to determine whether Serbian forces were systematically killing prisoners at detention camps in Bosnia, Administration officials say they have found no evidence to authenticate such allegations.” He continues that “a 40-page report by two staff members of the Senate Foreign Relations on atrocities in Bosnia, released on Tuesday, concluded that there was ‘evidence of organized killing’ in some detention camps run by Serbs...a week of interviews with survivors of the Serbian campaigns in northeastern and southeastern Bosnia yielded ‘no evidence of a concerted plan to kill *systematically* (italics added)

²⁶ Binder and Roberts, 7.

²⁷ This shift began in 1992 with the outbreak of war in Bosnia.

the Muslim population.’ ”²⁸ Here Binder focuses on an apparently *confirmed* lack of proof, rather than a *suspected* presence of it, and addresses the nuanced but critical difference between organized killing at the hands of individual captors, and systematic, state-sponsored killing.

Various interesting dynamics are at play in this article. First, Binder acknowledges torturing and organized killings being perpetrated by Serbs which directly contrasts his critic’s accusations that he is irreconcilably biased. Second, Binder addresses the clear line between the kind of brutalities endemic to war and mass displacement, and state sponsored plans of genocide in an attempt to characterize the nature of the violence for his readers and prevent misconception. Third, it is hard to imagine this article being published in 1994 or 1995, when Binder’s focus on ballistic experts’ dissenting opinions on the Markale massacres got him sidelined by the *New York Times* (this will be addressed later in the paper). The fact that this article *was* published is indicative of a shifting media narrative and slant. However, this slant may not have been as profound as Binder thought it to be, and as more and more reports came out about Serbian atrocities—especially once Ratko Mladic was handed control of the Bosnian-Serb military operation—evidence mounted that the Serbs were in fact guilty of horrible human rights violations.

As with the case of Srebrenica,²⁹ Binder’s conviction that Serbia was unfairly and unjustifiably condemned—and that substantially damning proof was absent—sometimes misses the mark. Rather than acting as a corrective in this specific instance, his affinity for Serbia seems to obscure his judgement. In a piece written for the Spring 1996 publication of *Mediterranean*

²⁸ David Binder, “U.S. Finds No Proof of Mass Killing at Serb Camps,” *New York Times*, August 23, 1992.

²⁹ Between July 11 and 19, 1995, Bosnian-Serb forces massacred 8,000 Bosniak men and boys in the UN designated safe-haven of Srebrenica—a Bosniak enclave in Eastern Bosnia—scattering the corpses among various mass graves.

Quarterly, Binder asserts that "this media slant on Srebrenica was but a repetition of the pattern of the coverage of the entire Bosnian conflict: regurgitating horror stories and numbers of victims solely on the basis of allegations from the Muslim side...without the slightest effort to solicit the Serbian version of the events."³⁰ His accusations of media slant are founded, (journalists almost exclusively interacted with Muslim officials) but with regard to Srebrenica he is clearly wrong. A genocidal massacre did occur. It took time for the reported "disappearance" of Srebrenica's 8,000 Bosniak men and boys to be confirmed as a massacre (and as a genocide soon after), and the accusations of genocide did, in fact, precede the proof, but Binder's staunch persistence that the claims are embellished seems to ignore emerging evidence. If anything, the grisly nature of the Bosnian war and its calling card of ethnic cleansing is enough to make such a brutal massacre believable.

Binder questions the reported number of the massacred, something that his critics would be quick to point out as a quintessential tactic used in genocide denial. In a piece titled "The Court of Last Resort"—a polemic aimed at the war crimes tribunal based in the Hague—Binder writes that

"concerning Srebrenica, the tribunal has been all over the place with its allegations of Muslim massacre victims, ranging from 8,000 to 3,000. Characteristically, in early April John Gerns, its representative on the scene had plenty to say as teams of investigators probed possible massacre sites around Srebrenica and nothing to say when he went to a mass grave site in Mrkonjic Grad where the corpses of 181 Serbs massacred by Croats last summer had just been exhumed."³¹

³⁰ David Binder, "Beyond the Pale: Perspectives from the Two Serbias," in *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Spring, 1996), 92.

³¹ David Binder, "The Court of Last Resort," 3.

Still, it is evident that Binder is not denying the occurrence of brutality, or even genocide. His reference to inconsistent reports on casualties is one of many efforts made to pump the brakes on what he saw as a blind, ruthless, and unjustified vilification of the Serbian people by the media. While he was, of course, wrong in the case of Srebrenica, his contestation of reports coming out at a time when relatively little was still known for sure was part of a greater effort to expose bias in the media and call attention to a spiraling condemnation of an entire people. His reference to atrocities committed by Croats and Bosniaks against Serbs testifies to his temperance, as he both attempts to defend them and recognizes their faults. Binder sees Srebrenica as a “genocidal event,” an occurrence that resembles genocide or employs tactics emblematic of a greater, systemic program for mass extermination, but is not, in fact, backed by such a program. Srebrenica was an isolated act of brutality, planned out by its perpetrators, yes, but not part of a greater, state-sponsored plan for the extermination of Bosnian Muslims.

Still, skepticism he expresses about the genocide in his book *Fare Well, Illyria*, published in 2013 (by which time the massacre at Srebrenica had been confirmed and the evidence was empirical), hints that, despite his much needed discourse on the sufferings of Serbs during the 1990’s, as well as his tempered analysis of atrocities committed during the conflict, Binder was unable to accept that forces tied to the nation with which he identified so deeply were capable of committing such a heinous crime.³² Naturally, the contemporary narratives of denial

³² He writes “On July 11, Serbian forces overran the town of Srebrenica in Eastern Bosnia. Several thousand Moslem males were killed in the ensuing days (Moslems claimed ‘8,000 men and boys’ were killed—the Serbs said that number was greatly exaggerated), (178).

with respect to the genocide at Srebrenica come mainly from ethnic Serbs,³³ and some of Binder's points evoke such narratives.

While Binder may be wrong about Srebrenica, the uncertainty he voiced is not the credence of present-day dark-web revisionists. In fact, there is still controversy surrounding the massacre at Srebrenica and the nature of Serbian camps. In April of 2012, the Srebrenica Debate was held in Amsterdam. Deceptively, the debate dealt with much more than Srebrenica alone, addressing the Bosnian War as a whole and the authenticity of the iconic August 6th, 1992 TIME Magazine cover of an emaciated Bosniak man, Fikret Alic, standing, apparently, behind barbed wire, accompanied with the caption: "Must it Go On?"³⁴ In the debate, the speakers address the way in which the photo was taken and the evidence that the reporters worked meticulously and intentionally to create a sensational image overtly evocative of the Holocaust. While the massacre at Srebrenica cannot be doubted, Binder's perspective fits into a larger, present-day narrative of questioning (though in the case of Srebrenica questioning and denial can be hard to distinguish from one another) the complex realities of the Yugoslav wars.

Like the Massacre at Srebrenica, the Markale Marketplace Bombings worked to shift the tide of public opinion against Serbia. Binder, however, contests the contemporary interpretation in defense of the Serbs. On the morning of February 5th, 1994, a shell exploded in the Sarajevo marketplace, killing 68 civilians. The grisly images were broadcast on TV stations across the world. In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, the Clinton administration and much of the

³³ Julia Masur, " 'No Room For Denial'? : Historical Memory and the 1995 Genocide at Srebrenica" (BA thesis, University of Puget Sound, 2018).

³⁴ DocsOnline, "The ITN video about the Bosnian war that shocked the world," *the Srebrenica Debate*, accessed September 19, 2021, https://www.docsonline.tv/18-a-the-itn-video-about-bosnian-war-that-shocked-the-world/?_fs=4e765846-935e-4c74-bc61-45f793498f65

media asserted that the shell came from Bosnian Serb positions outside the city. In his piece *Anatomy of a Massacre*, which appeared in “Foreign Policy’s” 1994-1995 Winter publication, Binder denounces this as a pre-mature conclusion, and points to the evidence that the Bosniak forces could have in fact shelled their own people in an effort to gain international sympathy and foreign intervention, additionally denouncing the “majority perception”³⁵ that the Serbs were to blame as part of the larger developing anti-Serb narrative.

Binder writes that “the international responses to the Markale massacre developed along a political fault line. Within hours of the explosion, the Clinton administration, while acknowledging there was no definitive culprit, pointed the finger of blame for the massacre at the Serbs. Amplifying the message were television broadcasters—especially on CNN—...who flatly charged that the Bosnian Serbs had perpetrated the massacre.”³⁶ Despite UNPROFOR’s largely inconclusive investigation into the bombing,³⁷ Binder’s own *New York Times* attributed the bombing to the Serbs the following day.³⁸ Binder points out “the suspicion of Muslim perpetrators” by referencing the departing words of the UNPROFOR head in Bosnia, quoted on February 9th, 1994: “In Sarajevo, the [Muslim-led] BiH army provoked the BSA [Serbs] on a daily basis. This is very easy for us to notice as the BiH mortars are generally located near UNPROFOR units.”³⁹ He also makes mention of UNPROFOR reports that Muslim forces had repeatedly fired on their own people in an attempt to create incidents for which Serbs could be

³⁵ David Binder, “Anatomy of a Massacre,” in *Foreign Policy*, no. 97 (Winter, 1994-1995), 72.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Jim Fish, “Sarajevo massacre remembered,” BBC News, February 5, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3459965.stm>.

³⁸ John Kifner, “66 Die as Shell Wrecks Sarajevo Market,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1994.

³⁹ Binder, “Anatomy,” 73.

blamed. Binder acknowledges the “Serb’s brutal track record,”⁴⁰ and how this understandably serves as a pretext for culpability, but refuses to place blame on them, just as he does for the Muslims. *Anatomy of a Massacre* does not indict but rather it examines little acknowledged yet critical facts pertaining to the first Markale Marketplace bombing, facts that certainly complicated the West’s burgeoning anti-Serb stance.

A year and a half later, the second marketplace bombing occurred, killing 43 civilians. As was the case in February of the previous year, the Serbs were quickly blamed. While UNPROFOR reports were certainly more conclusive in identifying the shell as a Serbian one, Binder again pokes holes in the final report. He calls attention to the four ballistic specialists who have raised “serious doubts...about General Smith’s⁴¹ ‘beyond all reasonable doubt’ conclusion—suggesting the possibility the mortar was fired not by the Serbs but by the Muslim government forces.”⁴² While the four dissenters (one Russian, two Americans, and one Canadian) were in the minority, the evidence they cited in opposition to the shell coming from a Serb position was significant, such as the Serb positions being so far from the marketplace as to make it near impossible to land a mortar shell there.

Again, Binder’s piece is inconclusive, much like the evidence he contests, but, given the approaching Dayton Accords at the time of both the bombing and writing of his article, Binder’s questioning of a hasty condemnation of the Serbs is important. The Markale Marketplace massacres prompted NATO strikes against Serb positions around Sarajevo and played a large role in shaping the power dynamics of the Dayton Accords. Given the gravity of that diplomatic

⁴⁰ Binder, “Anatomy,” 77.

⁴¹ UNPROFOR Lieutenant General in Bosnia overseeing the investigation of the bombing.

⁴² David Binder, “Mortars and Bombs” in *The Nation* (October, 1995), 1.

mission in Ohio and the public opinion that, by that point, had almost completely turned against the Serbs, the voice Binder gives to contradicting evidence about the bombings is a valuable one. As Serbs came to be increasingly seen as uniform villains, it naturally became easier to believe reports of their exceedingly violent conduct without questioning it. Binder, however, never ceases to question the hefty condemnations and accusations set against the Serbs, whether they were deserved or not.

Binder's dissident reporting on Yugoslavia's collapse is far from a definitive account of the conflict. He was not always correct in his analyses of the wars fought in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia, or of what catalyzed and accelerated them. As happens with many regional scholars, his affinity for the lands to which he dedicated his life occasionally clouded his ability to objectively interpret the events of the 90's in Yugoslavia. However, his staunch opposition to the widely accepted unilateral and exclusive narrative of Serbian aggression fueled by a mission for ethnic purity reminiscent of Hitler's Third Reich remains valuable. As the media increasingly focused on Serbian atrocities (in part because atrocities became more common) while ignoring those committed by Croats and Bosniaks against one another or against Serbs, Binder relentlessly called for accountability and objectivity on the part of the press. Recognizing the influence media held—and still holds—over public opinion and government policy, journalism was critical in shaping the memory of war in Yugoslavia.

Serbian villainy and Croatian and Bosnian innocence persists as the dominant narrative in the historiography of Yugoslavia's dissolution. This is not so much to say that Serbia is remembered as the pariah that it was in the 90's, but rather that heinous acts committed by the other combatants, and their policy-maker's culpability in catalyzing war are largely written out

of the tragedy that was Yugoslavia's collapse. To use Binder's words, the conflict has been significantly simplified down to the "ethnic cleansers, and the ethnically cleansed."⁴³ Of course, Bosniaks and Croats were all too frequently the victims of horrible crimes committed by Serbian forces. Some, like Srebrenica, were of genocidal proportions, but guilt is not mutually exclusive. This is what makes Binder's work valuable: he insists on recognizing the complexity of the conflict. Though examining it through the lens of protagonists and antagonists or victims and perpetrators is convenient, it functions to condemn entire peoples and nations without addressing the nuance that exists in all conflicts. With the advent of mass media, the press shoulders ever more responsibility in explaining the complicated conflicts of our world to its patrons. In turn, we as citizens bear the responsibility of developing an understanding of the world in which we live, or at least we must try. It is precisely Binder's remarkable understanding of and dedication to Yugoslavia that made his work the corrective that it is, imperfect as it sometimes may be.

⁴³ David Binder, "Why the Balkans?" *The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, March 1, 2000.

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