

When Frames Collide: 'ethnic war' and 'genocide'

Abstract

This article examines the problem of how to interpret competing, clashing or contradictory news frames in coverage of war and conflict, focusing on the reporting of the 1992—95 Bosnian war. 'Ethnic war' and 'genocide' featured as competing news frames in news coverage of Bosnia and several subsequent conflicts, and are often understood to be contradictory in terms of their implied explanations, moral evaluations and policy prescriptions. The article questions the assumptions that many journalists and academics have made about these frames and the relationship between them. It asks how we can make sense of clashing or contradictory scholarly analyses of these competing frames, and considers a number of broader issues for framing analysis: the significance of historical context for understanding the meaning of particular framing devices, the importance of quantification in framing analysis, and the role of influential sources in prompting journalists to adopt particular frames.

Keywords: framing, ethnic war, genocide, ethnic cleansing, Bosnia

'Ethnic war' and 'genocide' have featured as competing news frames in Western news coverage of several conflicts in the post-Cold War era. These two frames, and the contrasts between them, first became a topic of controversy in the 1990s, but have continued to appear in news coverage of conflict to the present day. Reporting violence in Myanmar in 2017, involving attacks on the Rohingya Muslim minority and an ensuing refugee exodus to neighbouring Bangladesh, for example, *Newsweek* described the situation as 'genocide' and (quoting a United Nations official) as a 'textbook case of ethnic cleansing' (Haltiwanger 2017). The *Washington Post*, in contrast, reported the same events as 'intercommunal violence' in 'a state prone to religious and ethnic conflict' (Freeman 2017). A decade earlier, campaigning American press coverage of Darfur characterised the conflict there in terms of 'ethnic cleansing' and 'genocide', as well as perpetuating misleading ideas about conflict arising naturally from 'ethnic' or 'racial' differences between 'Arabs' and 'Africans' (Mamdani 2007).

This article examines the problem of how to interpret competing, clashing or contradictory news frames in coverage of war and conflict, focusing on the reporting of the 1992—95 Bosnian war. The first section below briefly summarises this context, in order to indicate what is at stake in this debate. The main focus of the article, though – in keeping with the theme of this special issue – is on methodological issues. It therefore also asks how we can make sense of clashing or contradictory scholarly analyses of these competing frames, and in so doing, considers a number of broader issues for framing analysis: the significance of historical context for understanding the meaning of particular framing devices, the importance of quantification in framing analysis, and the role of influential sources in prompting journalists to adopt particular frames. Although there is a high level of agreement among scholars regarding the concept of ‘framing’ (as suggested by the near-universal acknowledgement of Robert Entman’s (1993) influential attempt to clarify the concept), in practice researchers can diverge markedly in how they actually conduct framing analyses. Sometimes investigations of news frames are largely or even entirely qualitative, and lack any quantitative dimension; while others are difficult to distinguish from a standard quantitative content analysis. Without wishing to be overly prescriptive, it is suggested here that a framing analysis generally ought to involve both qualitative and quantitative dimensions.

‘Ethnic war’ and ‘genocide’ as competing news frames

These two news frames are often understood to be contradictory in terms of the implied explanation of conflict that each offers – seeing violence as arising from a two- (or more) sided antagonism based on ethnic or ‘tribal’ differences, or as a one-sided campaign of expulsion and/or extermination; as a more or less spontaneous, bottom-up eruption of mutual hostility, or as a systematic, top-down operation targeting a minority group. These different explanatory framings are in turn often thought to imply different moral evaluations and different responses or policy prescriptions. ‘Ethnic’ or ‘tribal’ conflicts might more readily be understood to involve distributed blame, to be seen as complex and intractable (based on ‘ancient hatreds’, for example), and to invite an arms-length response from the international community, perhaps at most involving peacekeeping operations to separate warring factions and/or diplomatic efforts at mediation. Conversely, if violence is understood as ‘genocide’ or ‘ethnic cleansing’, it would demand not only a clear-cut attribution of

blame to one 'side' but also a more interventionist response, to rescue victims and punish the victimisers.

There is a widely-held, but highly questionable, idea that the consensus about Bosnia at the time was that it was an ethnic conflict, but that it should have been understood, as it eventually was, as a one-sided war of aggression by the Serbs. Reflecting on his experience of covering Bosnia for the BBC, for example, Allan Little describes how he was 'bewildered' by what seemed to be the general consensus about the war:

That the Balkan tribes had been killing each other for centuries and that there was nothing that could be done. It was nobody's fault. It was just, somehow, the nature of the region. It was a lie that Western governments at that time liked. It got the Western world off the hook. When I and others argued that you could not blame all sides equally, the moral implications were that the world should – as it later did – take sides.

(Little 2001)¹

For Little, this 'ethnic' framing is wrong in three senses: it misrepresents the conflict as the inevitable and intractable outcome of Balkan history and culture; this false view then supports a mistaken moral judgement, failing properly to apportion blame for the violence; and this in turn then facilitates a weak and cowardly response from Western powers. Little was far from alone in seeking to put forward an alternative to this perceived consensus. *Washington Post* journalist Mary Battiata, for example, argued that 'There was only one story – a war of aggression against a largely defenseless, multi-ethnic population. It was very simple'. Similarly, CNN's Christiane Amanpour maintained that: 'sometimes in life, there are clear examples of black and white...I think during the three-and-a-half-year war in Bosnia, there was a clear aggressor and clear victim' (both quoted in Ricchiardi 1996). In addition to agreeing over the morally simple, black-and-white nature of the conflict, many also drew the same pro-interventionist conclusions as Little. Amanpour confronted President Clinton on live television in May 1994 for failing to articulate a tough policy on Bosnia (Ricchiardi 1996), for example; while the BBC's Martin Bell elaborated the view that journalists should abandon traditional ideas about objectivity² and should refuse to 'stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor' (Bell 1998: 16). As Alison Preston (1996: 113) notes, this style of reporting – what Bell called the 'journalism of attachment' – is 'intrinsically bound to a

wish to proselytise', and entails a deliberate effort to 'signal the extent of their commitment'.

There is of course a legitimate critique to be made of 'ethnic war' framings. The main problem with such accounts is that they take for granted that which they purport to explain: the mere fact of ethnic differences is seen as itself inevitably giving rise to conflict. Moreover, as Michael Ignatieff (1998: 56) notes, the term 'ethnicity' is often used as if it were a fixed biological category. Rather than seeing conflict as the inevitable, and essentially inexplicable, result of quasi-natural differences, commentators such as Ignatieff have instead emphasised the 'plasticity' of identity, arguing that, in the case of the former Yugoslavia, professed cultural divisions were often inauthentic and manufactured. Instead of treating ethnicity as a given which causes conflict, Ignatieff suggests that an exclusivist politics of identity was deliberately encouraged and manipulated by local political leaders and the media. While this critique of 'ethnic' explanations is persuasive, however, it is not an innocent one: it is usually tied to an argument about the necessity for Western governments to adopt a more interventionist foreign policy. Ignatieff's (1998: 98) complaint is that seeing the world as chaotic and riven by ethnic conflict means that there is no 'rationale for intervention and long-term ethical engagement'. Similarly, Mary Kaldor (1999: 147) rejects 'essentialist assumptions about culture' because they work against the operation of 'authority at a global level'.

It goes without saying that scholars are free to adopt whatever normative position they wish on foreign policy questions, but one might expect that academic critics would be sceptical of the rather self-flattering role that many reporters imagined for themselves in Bosnia, as brave advocates of muscular Western intervention, attempting to challenge the received wisdom about the war and put pressure on pusillanimous governments. Yet Little's view is echoed in scholarly accounts of the war's media treatment. David Keen, for example, argues that 'ethnic war' framings encourage a 'culture of disempowerment' in Western countries, in the sense that if 'the causes of wars...remain poorly understood, it may be relatively easy for some analysts...to insist that a proper response is an isolationist one' (1999: 81–82). Similarly, Jean Seaton (1999: 49) maintains that a 'mood of fatalism among many contemporary political leaders' is sustained by the 'notion that conflicts are caused by primitive ethnic identification'.

Of particular interest for this discussion is Gregory Kent's major framing study of media coverage of Bosnia, discussed in more detail below. Kent finds – in line with Little's description of the 'consensus' about the war – that coverage was characterised by what he calls a 'Balkanist perspective':

the idea that the war in Bosnia was the result of ethnic hatred between the three main ethnic groupings was an explicit and dominant frame of the coverage in the opening months of the war; it instantiated moral equalisation between Bosnian and Serbian forces.

(Kent 2006: 255)

Journalists' adoption of this ethnic frame is wrong, he argues, because it allowed or encouraged inaction on the part of Western governments. Instead, Kent contends, using the 'appropriate' frame would have put pressure on states to 'take a stand':

genocide was an appropriate international framing of what was being done and...the use of the term 'genocide' by British news organisations would have had a great potential impact on the state's policy toward the war. Such definition and recognition of genocide would have placed clear legal duties on Western states generally to take preventive action.

(Kent 2006: 8)

Clearly, both for journalists and critics, much is at stake in this debate: reporters adopting the 'right' frame is seen as vitally important if genocide is to be recognised and averted by Western governments.

Given the often-repeated claim that an 'ethnic' framing of the war was endorsed by Western politicians, and only shifted when challenged by committed reporters, I was surprised to find in my own study of media coverage of Bosnia that, to the contrary, an understanding of the conflict as a one-sided, aggressive war waged by the Serbs was reported right from the start as the view of numerous influential sources (see further Hammond, 2007). In April 1992 the *Guardian* reported that the US government might sever diplomatic relations with Belgrade 'to emphasise its opposition to what it regards as Serbian aggression against Bosnia' (21 April 1992); that Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic had been 'identified by the US, Germany and others...as the prime culprit' (24 April); and that the US was 'leading the [verbal] attacks on Belgrade' (25 April). The *Independent* said that Bosnian President Alija

Izetbegovic's claim that 'Bosnia is the victim of classic aggression from outside' was 'backed by several foreign governments, including the United States, Germany and Austria' (15 April 1992); that State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler had 'singled out by name President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia and federal army leaders as the chief culprits behind Bosnia's violence' (16 April); that the European Community (EC) and the US 'agree in holding the Serbs responsible for the fighting' (22 April); and that German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher had 'described Serbia as "the aggressor" in the Bosnian conflict' (24 April). The *Times* reported that the British Foreign Office had 'said Serb paramilitary units bore the main responsibility for bloodshed and...deplored the activities of the federal army, which...had openly sided with terrorists' (17 April 1992); and that the EC's special envoy Lord Peter Carrington had said 'that the Serbs and the army were largely to blame for the violence' (22 April).

The idea that Serbian aggression was the cause of the war was not only widely articulated by several influential sources in the very first month of the conflict: it was also immediately taken up by journalists themselves, who reproduced it in news reports and explicitly endorsed it in editorial columns. Arguing that 'The root of the problem lies in Belgrade', the *Guardian's* editorial position was that Bosnia was an 'innocent multi-racial [*sic*] victim of Serbian malevolence' (13 April 1992). The *Independent* acknowledged that the Croats 'do not have wholly clean hands', but said that the Serbs had 'started the fighting' and suggested that more governments should be 'pressured into recognising that this is now a case of international aggression' (24 April 1992). According to the *Times* (23 April 1992), the 'pattern of Serbian expansionism in Croatia' was now 'being repeated on a potentially far bloodier scale' and the 'Serbian offensive' was 'nothing less than the invasion of an independent country'. These statements from editorial columns, taken together with the reported views of official sources, suggest that a powerful consensus was established quickly at the beginning of the war regarding how it was to be understood. In the news pages, the *Independent's* East Europe editor, Tony Barber, argued that 'Conquest is a national crusade for Belgrade' (17 April 1992), for example; a view reiterated by Anne McElvoy in the *Times* the following day in an article headlined 'Serb crusaders brush aside final warnings' (18 April 1992). The *Guardian's* East Europe correspondent, Ian Traynor, also took up the 'crusade' theme, suggesting that 'Serbians view Bosnia as the front line in a new holy war' (16 April 1992). Traynor explained the war as 'an increasingly aggressive Serbian campaign to take control of coveted territory and drive Muslims or Croats out' (6 April

1992), and as a 'land grab campaign to dismember the newly independent state of Bosnia' (16 April). He acknowledged that 'radical Croats' were 'probably' also 'bent on unravelling Bosnia's complex weave of interlocking and intermingled communities' (13 April 1992), but identified Milosevic as 'the main villain of the piece' (25 April). Such reports indicate that an interpretation of the conflict as a largely one-sided war of Serbian aggression was shared by journalists rather than only reported as the view of sources.

These findings are clearly at odds with the conventional story of how the British and other Western media framed the Bosnian war. It may therefore be useful at this point to examine how the evidence has to be handled in order to allow that conventional story still to get told.

Methodological differences

Kent (2006: 310—11) found that two frames – which he dubs the 'Balkanist or moral equalisation' frame and the 'Serbian aggression' frame – were the most dominant (indeed, he does not mention the existence of any others). He found that the first one was present, wholly or partly, overtly or implicitly, in 'every single report' (2006: 310). Kent arrived at this finding by taking any mention of terms such as 'the Serbs', 'the Croats' or 'the Muslims' as indicators of the 'Balkanist' frame (2006: 310), though it is difficult to imagine how reporters could have avoided such terms altogether. Instead, he suggests, journalists should have used phrases such as 'Serb Bosnians' or 'Croat Bosnians' which, he argues, emphasise shared 'Bosnian-ness' rather than ethnic differences (2006: 70). This, it must be said, is somewhat idiosyncratic: the terms 'Serb Bosnians' and 'Croat Bosnians' were rarely used at the time because the people to whom such terms would have been attached did not, on the whole, identify with the breakaway Bosnian state. Quite the reverse: they contested and rejected the formation of such a state, seeking instead either to break away in turn and/or to attach themselves to larger entities such as the remaining Yugoslav state or the newly-independent Croatia. In this context, emphasising the 'Bosnian-ness' of people who had little or no sense of affiliation with the Bosnian state would have been nonsensical and tendentious. It would have made no more sense than describing secessionists in Slovenia and Croatia in 1991 as 'Slovenian Yugoslavs' and 'Croatian Yugoslavs'.

More significantly, it is doubtful whether the use of labels such as 'Bosnian Serbs' or 'Bosnian Croats' implies an understanding of the war as essentially an ethnic conflict, in a way that terms such as 'Serb Bosnians' and 'Croat Bosnians' might not. If one were to adopt Kent's approach, not only every report from Bosnia, but just about any report from any conflict anywhere could be understood as an example of 'ethnic' framing. Yet to say that 'the British' fought 'the Germans' in the Second World War does not imply that the conflict was caused by ethnic differences. It seems likely that Kent failed to discover evidence to support his presupposition that the media must have framed Bosnia as an 'ethnic conflict', and so resorted to the doubtful measure of assuming that if reports mentioned 'Serbs' and 'Croats' this must be evidence of 'Balkanism'. This raises a familiar problem of content analysis, whereby if the categories of analysis are determined in advance, the danger is that data will then simply be sliced in such a way as to confirm the researcher's initial hypothesis. The potential advantage of framing analysis – that quantifiable textual features are derived from close contextual qualitative analysis of data – is thereby lost.

As well as pointing up the problems that can arise from prejudging analytical categories rather than developing them from close qualitative analysis, Kent's study also illustrates very well the importance of the quantitative dimension of framing analysis. Having found 'Balkanist' ethnic war framing in 'every single report', Kent also found that the 'Serbian aggression' frame featured in '*many* but by no means all reports' (2006: 311, original emphasis). Unfortunately, he does not disclose how many constitutes 'many but by no means all'. Instead of quantifying his findings, Kent gives brief examples and explains that such illustrations are to be read as indicating that 'there was at least one and usually more examples of this feature, but...rarely more than five examples' (2006: 447, n75). Such a formula makes it very difficult to assess the weight of the examples he does choose, and produces a rather hazy picture of the overall patterns of coverage. Possibly this is because a clear quantitative measure of the extent of 'Serbian aggression' framing would have undermined the conclusion that the dominant theme was 'ethnic conflict': these are logically 'mutually exclusive frames' (2006: 9). In trying to square the circle, Kent resorts to the argument that 'the Serbian aggression frame...implicitly supported the Balkanist contention that the "different sides" could not live together and there had to be war between them' (2006: 311). Hence, despite finding the 'Serbian aggression' frame to be the second most common, Kent nevertheless complains of 'a journalistic aversion to attribution of responsibility' (2006: 312). Black, in other words, is white: blaming one side is the same as not blaming anyone. Such contortions become

necessary because of a twin methodological failure: a failure to derive analytical categories from close qualitative analysis; and a failure properly to quantify findings.

A clear illustration of these problems is provided by Kent's discussion of a term that first rose to prominence in the reporting of Bosnia and has since entered into common usage: 'ethnic cleansing'. He argues that:

It reinforced the framing as ethnic war not only because it included the word 'ethnic' but also because of the vague definition of the term – apparently meaning, in the early stages of its use, different things to different journalists – it chimed well with the overarching theme of incomprehensible ethnic war.

(2006: 255)

Kent also argues that the phrase was used as a way of avoiding the term 'genocide', which in his view would have been much more appropriate. In principle, these may seem like logical conclusions to draw: reports of 'ethnic cleansing' might well be thought to imply an 'ethnic conflict' framing, and be seen as a euphemistic way of avoiding the term genocide. Yet from my analysis, the coverage of the war supports very different conclusions.

Firstly, a quantitative survey of the coverage indicates differences in usage of the term as applied to different perpetrators. I looked at coverage of the war in four UK national dailies (the *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Daily Mail* and *Times*), over four four-week periods between 1992—95, resulting in a sample of 999 articles.³ Of these, 162 mentioned 'ethnic cleansing', with over 70% of articles identifying this as something carried out by Serbs (116 out of 162 articles). 'Ethnic cleansing' by Croats (25 articles) and by Bosnian Muslims (8 articles) was mentioned far less frequently (13 articles did not specify a perpetrator). The fact that the term was used much more frequently to describe the actions of the Serbs suggests that this phrase was not used as part of an 'ethnic war' frame which implied 'moral equalisation'. It is also notable that while (Bosnian) Croat and Bosnian Muslim forces were sometimes said to be engaged in 'ethnic cleansing', their actions were never discussed in terms of genocide, whereas of the 41 articles mentioning 'genocide' in the samples of coverage I examined, 90% named the Serbs as the perpetrators (37 of 41 articles: the remaining four did not specify a perpetrator). Again, this does not indicate any kind of 'moral equalisation' in the way the violence was framed.

Secondly, in terms of contextual qualitative interpretation, while the term 'ethnic cleansing' was indeed used in different ways it is nevertheless possible to discern quite consistent patterns of usage. Where the term was elaborated or described, striking differences emerged which depended less on which journalist was using the term than on who was identified as the perpetrator. In articles reporting 'ethnic cleansing' carried out by Serbs, qualifying terms such as 'policy', 'plan', 'aim', 'objective', 'goal', 'systematic', 'campaign' and 'strategy' were used to suggest the consistent pursuit of a deliberate policy. While similar terminology was sometimes used in news reports of 'ethnic cleansing' by Croats and Muslims, more often their actions were described differently. Here, rather than a conscious policy or strategy, 'ethnic cleansing' was described using terms such as 'insanity', 'frenzy', 'crazy' and 'epidemic', suggesting irrationality or illness; or else it was explained as mutual recrimination (as 'tit-for-tat cleansing', or as an attempt to 'exact revenge'). It was occasionally argued that the behaviour of all sides was similar, as when Conor Cruise O'Brien said that 'ethnic cleansing is not just a Serbian idea [but] a fancy recent label for standard practice in a Balkan civil war' (*Independent*, 23 April 1993). More often, however, it was suggested that 'ethnic cleansing' by Serbs possessed 'a quality...which is fundamentally different' (*Mail*, 18 April 1993). So in the case of the Serbs, 'systematic ethnic cleansing was the aim...not an incidental by-product of the fighting' (*Times*, 9 November 1995); whereas for actions by Croats and Bosnian Muslims there was said to be '[no] proof of "orchestrated mass killings"' (*Guardian*, 21 April 1993). The latter quotation is from a report by Ian Traynor on 'ethnic slaughter around Vitez' by Muslims and Croats, which acknowledged that the Serbs were 'not involved this time' but still managed to depict 'ethnic cleansing' as an essentially Serbian practice by describing them as the 'architects' of 'ethnic cleansing'. Looking back at the end of the war, Traynor also recalled these events in terms of the Croats having 'aped Serb tactics' (*Guardian*, 21 November 1995).

In the samples of news coverage I examined, 'ethnic cleansing' by Bosnian Muslims was said to part of a strategic 'plan' only once, when this view was attributed to a spokesman for the Croatian Defence Council (*Independent*, 2 April 1993). 'Ethnic cleansing' by Croats was sometimes explicitly linked to strategic policy goals, as a 'cold-blooded...strategy' involving an attempt to 'establish [an] ethnically pure mini-state' or to 'ethnically [purify]' their territory, for example, but almost all examples of this were in reports from 1995 when the war was over. The only exception was an article by Tim Judah in the *Times* (15 April 1993) reporting the view of a 'senior UN official' that a double standard was being applied to Serbs and Croats. Judah noted

that the existence of a 'Zagreb-controlled puppet state' in Bosnia was 'regularly ignored' and, even more unusually, wrote that it 'permits no dissent from its Muslim minority and its Serbs have been "ethnically cleansed" or killed'. This was exceptional because Serbs were almost never said to be the victims of 'ethnic cleansing', even when they clearly were. Retrospective accounts of the war in 1995, for example, often mentioned 'Operation Storm', the US-backed Croatian offensive against Serbs in the Krajina region, but there was disagreement over whether this could be described as 'ethnic cleansing'. A commentary by Michael Ignatieff in the *Independent* (22 November 1995) candidly stated that US 'permission to drive the Serbs from Krajina' amounted to American 'ratification of Croatian ethnic cleansing'. In the *Mail* (23 November 1995), Mark Almond obscured the issue by arguing that 'the return of refugees usually leads to a renewed wave of ethnic cleansing as the defeated flee possible revenge (as happened in the Krajina in August when the Croats turned the tables on the Serbs)'. Here, the violent expulsion of Serbs by the Croatian military is portrayed as a flight, prompted by returning refugees, from the mere possibility of 'revenge'. In other cases, reporters seemed to go out of their way to avoid describing Croatian actions against Serbs as 'ethnic cleansing'. In the *Times* (24 November 1995), for example, Michael Binyon noted 'the expulsion of Serbs from Krajina', but described Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević as the 'mastermind of "ethnic cleansing"'. More pointedly, the *Independent's* Tony Barber wrote that the Serbian community in the Krajina had been 'ruined by its armed revolt against Zagreb and by Croatia's military revenge last August, which triggered the flight or expulsion of more than 150,000 Serbs' (18 November 1995). While the Bosnian Muslims were said to have been victims of 'savagely "ethnic cleansing"', the Serbs had only brought 'ruin' on themselves by provoking 'revenge'.

A qualitative investigation of the coverage, then, suggests that the use of the term 'ethnic cleansing' cannot be assumed to have supported a 'Balkanist', 'ethnic war' or 'moral equalisation' frame. Quite the reverse: the term was used differentially in a way that reinforced the opposite understanding of the war, which blamed it on Serbian aggression. The final piece of the picture is supplied if we compare the pattern of journalists' use of the term 'ethnic cleansing' and the views of influential sources. In terms of quantitative patterns, it is notable that there was a sharp rise in journalists' use of the phrase after Assistant Secretary of State Margaret Tutwiler mentioned it in a 14 May 1992 press briefing.⁴ In the four UK newspapers I examined, there were a total of 560 items mentioning the term in 1992: one published before 14 May (a letter to the *Independent* (20 April 1992) from a

representative of the Croatian Aid Organisation), and 559 afterwards. It is also significant that the intention of those in the US State Department introducing the term was not to engage in 'moral equalisation' but precisely to elicit sympathy for the Bosnian Muslims. The previous month, Bosnian Muslim Foreign Minister Haris Silajdžić, had met with Secretary of State James Baker, who in turn asked Tutwiler to speak to Silajdžić about 'the importance of using Western mass media to build support in Europe and North America for the Bosnian cause' (Baker 1995: 643–4). Tutwiler herself was reputedly already sympathetic to this cause (Neuman 1996: 236), and certainly the official who wrote the phrase 'ethnic cleansing' into her press briefing, George Kenney, was keen to encourage greater US involvement in the Balkans.

The differential application of the term in media coverage then mirrored the views of official sources, although this agreement appears to have been mutually-reinforcing. The UN Security Council established a Commission of Experts in 1992, to investigate war crimes in Bosnia, and specifically directed it to examine 'ethnic cleansing'. The Commission explicitly rejected any 'moral equivalence' argument and said that while all sides had committed 'grave breaches' of the Geneva Conventions, 'ethnic cleansing' by Serbs was different because it was 'the result of a highly-developed policy' (UN Commission of Experts 1994: 21). As discussed above, press usage of the term was broadly in line with this official view but it is not clear who followed whose usage: one would expect journalists to have picked up the language of official sources, but the latter also seem to have been influenced by media reports. In the section of the Commission's report dealing with 'Assigning Responsibility for "Ethnic Cleansing"' (1994: 32–6), for example, the majority of the sources cited are news reports.

Certainly in the final stages of the war, the media were perfectly in tune with official sources in efforts to minimise the 'ethnic cleansing' of Serbs from Croatia in Operation Storm in August 1995. This is remembered in some quarters as 'the biggest single instance of ethnic cleansing in the Yugoslav Wars' (Malic 2015), yet at the time, as noted above, Western journalists were reluctant to acknowledge that the assault – which drove over 200,000 Serbs out of the country, killing around 2,000 in the process – could even be described as 'ethnic cleansing'. This was exactly the view of influential sources. The US Ambassador to Croatia, Peter Galbraith, for example, was asked by the *New York Times* whether this was 'another round of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans'. His response was that 'Ethnic cleansing is

something that is organized, and carried out systematically with rape, murder, torture, things like that'. But, the Ambassador reportedly maintained, 'whatever blameworthy things the Croats did – including shunning the last-minute peace plan that he brokered and not doing more to persuade the Serbs not to flee – it was not that' (Bonner 1995). There is a kind of grim absurdity in Galbraith's mild rebuke that, by actively burning people out of their houses, the Croats did not do 'more to persuade the Serbs not to flee'. Since the operation was carried out with the approval and support of the US, it is perhaps not surprising that the American Ambassador would take such a view. Yet British journalists went even further: the *Guardian's* Martin Woollacott wrote that the attack was 'to be welcomed', describing the killing and mass expulsion of civilians as 'a hold on Serbian aggression' (5 August 1995), for example; while the *Independent's* editorialist said it was 'tempting to feel euphoric' (7 August 1995).

Conclusion

Perhaps, as these comments indicate, some journalists felt that they had played a part in encouraging a tougher interventionist policy by arguing, like Little (2001), for the world to 'take sides'. By the end of the decade, the full might of NATO was aligned with the perspective of advocacy journalists, as the final act of the Yugoslav tragedy played out. In coverage of the 1999 Kosovo conflict there was very little sign of 'moral equalisation' or 'ethnic war' framing: to the contrary, NATO bombing was explicitly justified in the black-and-white moral terms of halting 'genocide' (Hume 2000).⁵ Yet the idea that adopting the 'right' sort of news framing can trigger such armed intervention by placing 'clear legal duties on Western states...to take preventive action' (Kent 2006: 8) is doubtful. It is noteworthy that in the case of Darfur the use of 'genocide' framing had no such effect, contrary to the expectations of activists who 'pressured the US government to "call Darfur by its rightful name": genocide' (Verhoeven et al. 2016: 25). In 2004, both houses of the US Congress declared that genocide was happening in Darfur, as did then Secretary of State Colin Powell and President George W. Bush.⁶ These ringing declarations did not precipitate military intervention, but they did lead to a noticeable take up of this framing in news reports.⁷ Rather than the adoption of genocide framing driving intervention, it seems more likely that, as Alex de Waal (2007: 8) observes, 'The Congressional and independent activists who campaigned... for the US government to declare Darfur "genocide" did so because they wanted an

intervention....Interventionism drove advocacy for the label “genocide” as much as vice-versa’.

This is probably the light in which we should understand the view not only of ‘attached’ journalists, but also that of scholars lamenting that if conflicts are framed in the ‘wrong’ way then intervention will not happen. There is indeed much at stake in this debate, but the link between news framing and foreign policies is not a causal one: rather, it is a question of promoting explanations for conflicts that assert a righteous moral stance and legitimise or affirm an interventionist policy orientation. What is at stake for the analysis and understanding of the media treatment of conflict is whether such position-taking interferes with the critic’s ability to evaluate the evidence accurately. In that effort, framing research is a valuable tool, involving as it should both quantitative and qualitative analysis, and a sensitivity to contextual meanings, including those suggested by influential news sources.

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Notes

¹ Another BBC correspondent, Fergal Keane, described a similar consensus about Rwanda around the same time. See: Keane 1995: 6–8.

² Amanpour worried that 'In certain situations, the classic definition of objectivity can mean neutrality, and neutrality can mean you are an accomplice to all sorts of evil' (quoted in Ricchiardi, 1996), while Bell (1998: 18) admitted that he was 'no longer sure what "objective" means'.

³ The periods sampled were: the week before the onset of hostilities and the following three weeks (30 March – 27 April 1992), the same period for 1993 and 1994, and the three weeks preceding and one week following the ending of the war (31 October – 28 November 1995). The most commonly accepted date for the beginning of the war is 6 April 1992, when the European Community recognised Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent state (see 'Bosnia War Marks Anniversary', *BBC Online*, 6 April 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1914133.stm>). The war

ended on 21 November 1995 when a peace agreement was reached by the main parties at Dayton, Ohio.

⁴ Tutwiler said that: 'We are concerned about reports that Serb forces...have begun to remove non-Serbs in an ethnic, quote, "cleansing", unquote, operation.' US Federal News Service, *State Department Briefing*, 14 May 1992.

⁵ Hume was formerly the editor of *LM* magazine, which closed after a libel case brought against it by ITN News, over the magazine's questioning of news reports drawing parallels between Bosnia and the Holocaust. The original *LM* article (Deichmann 1997) is reproduced at www.whatreallyhappened.com/RANCHO/LIE/BOSNIA_PHOTO/bosnia.html. For an account of the trial by the magazine's publisher see Guldberg 2000.

⁶ See: Charles W. Corey, 'US Congress Terms Situation in Darfur "Genocide"', US State Department Website, 23 July 2004 [<http://usinfo.state.gov/is/Archive/2004/Jul/26-233176.html>]; ('The Crisis in Darfur' (Secretary Powell's testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee), US State Department Website, 9 September 2004 [<http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/36042.htm>]); and 'President and South African President Mbeki Discuss Bilateral Relations', White House Press Release, 1 June 2005 [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/06/20050601.html>].

⁷ The number of articles in UK national newspapers mentioning the terms 'Darfur' and 'genocide' rose from 14 in June 2004 to 53 in July, 36 of these 53 articles appearing after Congress's 22 July declaration that genocide was occurring. The number of mentions fell again to 29 in August 2004, but rose again to 37 in September, following then Secretary of State Colin Powell's declaration of genocide in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 9 September 2004.