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**Rape as a Weapon of War in
the Former Yugoslavia**

*Hastings Law School
Symposium*

**No Justice, No Peace:
Accountability for Rape and
Gender-Based Violence in
the Former Yugoslavia**

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Rape as a Weapon of War in the Former Yugoslavia

*Hastings Law School Symposium**

STEPHEN SCHWARTZ¹

I am honored to be here and very pleased for the invitation from Hastings and Hastings' students. I am a Berkeley alumnus myself, so I have a lot of pride in the University of California system. As a journalist I traveled widely in the former Yugoslavia. I have reported and spoken on the Bosnian war at academic meetings, on television, and radio. I have researched the background of the conflict and have written for scholarly and other publications.

The press and media have played a special role in the search for truth about this tragedy. Reporters from the United States, the European media, and the local media in the former Yugoslavia have been targeted for attack. Death and injury have taken a high toll in the profession. Reporters have also been responsible for revealing to the world the atrocities we associate

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1. Stephen Schwartz is a staff writer for the SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE and a frequent contributor to national periodicals including the WALL STREET JOURNAL and the FORWARD. He is the author of four books on 20th century politics. His most recent book is A STRANGE SILENCE (ICS Press, 1992), on the Nicaraguan revolution and its aftermath.

He was one of the first U.S. journalists to write on the recent Balkan conflict, with his earliest work appearing in the CHRONICLE several years before the war began, in 1987. He has visited the region twice and interviewed many of the leading protagonists. In 1992, he was a panelist at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. He also collaborates with the ALBANIAN CATHOLIC BULLETIN, a leading Balkanological journal.

He was the first American journalist to report on the victimization of Bosnian Jews through ethnic cleansing, and on the rape and sexual torture of men in the Bosnian war.

Mr. Schwartz was educated in linguistics and history. He has served as a research associate at the U.S. Institute of Peace and as a consultant for the U.S. State Department.

with the term "ethnic cleansing:" mass killings, multiple arrests, imprisonment camps, and collective expulsion. John Burns and Roy Gutman received Pulitzers this past week for their work directly in the line of fire in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bosnia). I have great admiration for Gutman, who went to north Bosnia to demonstrate the existence of the internment camps at great risk to himself.

The worst of the atrocities of the war has been the sexual terror against Bosnian, Croatian, Hungarian, and other non-Serbian people. Women, girls, children, and men have all been victims. I believe it is wrong to say the Serbian forces in this conflict have made rape a weapon of war. Rather the Serbs have made war a form of rape. Their intention from the beginning was not military but simply terroristic. The Serbs knew, and know, that they could not hold the sections of Croatia and Bosnia they claim, because of the difficulties presented by supply lines, communication, lack of infrastructure, and the thin population on the ground. However, they have been determined to carry on as much terror and destruction as they can accomplish. Rape — direct rape of the female population and related forms of sexual terror against men — is the essence of this war. The Serbian intention has been to rape whole cultures, to rape women and men, to rape social relationships going back five hundred years, to rape religion and art.

Serbs of conscience often seem non-existent, but do exist. Many of them, especially in the media, have cried out against this war. In the Serbian opposition journal *Vreme*, a tiny, weak voice of sanity in Belgrade, the television journalist Goran Milić recently noted that when the Serbian authorities first launched their propaganda campaign against their neighbors some years ago, one million Belgrade residents rallied to protest the alleged rape of one Serbian woman in Kosovo, the Albanian majority district in the south. Now he asks, how many gathered to protest the thirty thousand rapes of Muslim women in Bosnia? He points out that the truth of the accusation has been admitted by a Serbian Orthodox priest. Notwithstanding, I might add, a rather feeble argument of [Radovan] Karadžić and other Serbian leaders who claim that the rapes never happened. If you read the actual Serbian press and what they are telling their own people today, they are making no effort to deny the things that have gone on in Bosnia. What they are doing is trying to paint it in mythical terms as part of the struggle they are involved in, but they make no attempts to deny it to their own people.

One of the under-reported parts of this tragedy is that the sexual terror has been directed against men as well as women. Serbian racism has always evoked hatred of the Balkan Muslims for their acceptance of gayness. In 1926, the Serbian writer Cedomil Mitrinović published a classic exposition of Serbian anti-Muslim ideology attacking the Bosnians' acceptance of homosexuality among them and recommending, in fact, one

solution: genocide. Today, almost seventy years later, in the camps Serbian guards have forced men, including fathers and sons, at the point of a gun before their assembled peers, to engage in sexual acts and genital mutilation. Such incidents appear in each of the four U.S. State Department reports on human rights violations in the former Yugoslavia, copies of which I have with me.

The Bosnian war will determine the fate of a small, obscure people — people of whom, until a year ago, very few individuals in this room had ever heard. Bosnian Muslims are people almost completely unknown outside of Yugoslavia, without powerful allies and with nothing but a great cultural and historic past.

First of all, the roots of the present war are not in Bosnian history but Serbian history. The problem is prejudice, hatred, bias, and racism. Serbia was under Turkish rule from the 14th and 15th century to the 19th century, almost five hundred years. When Serbia began to regain its national independence during the 19th century, it chose two aims for itself. The first was to assimilate, kill, or drive all Muslims out of the Balkans; in other words, "ethnic cleansing." The second was to assimilate all southern Slavs particularly the Croats, Macedonians, and, even at one point the Slovenes. They tried to force them all to become Serbs, to enlarge Serbia, to create a "Greater Serbia."

Serbia first "cleansed" itself, forcing all Muslims to leave, destroying mosques and other Turkish architecture, and killing Muslims in the area known as narrow Serbia in the aftermath of the Serbian national uprising of 1804. This continued in the Serbian-Turkish Wars of the 1870's with Serbian massacres in Bosnia. It continued in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 with Serbian massacres of Albanian Muslims and the Sandzak Muslims in an area called the Sandzak of Novi Pazar, which was later divided between Serbia and Montenegro. It continued during World War I, and even afterward in Serb-dominated, monarchist Yugoslavia, with Serbian massacres and deportation of Albanians.

During World War II, when monarchist Yugoslavia collapsed, a war of all against all with Croats, Serbs, and Muslims all killing each other horribly ensued. Under Tito there was less discrimination against Muslims, but it has been revived, as Serbia is bent on the expulsion of ten million Muslims from Europe. Now, lest you think this is some kind of exaggeration, Milosević has said over and over again that the Bosnian war was provoked by the Turks who seek to re-establish the Turkish empire. He said that the Bosnian leader Hakija Turajlić, who died this past week, sought to re-establish the Turkish empire from Vienna to the Chinese wall. So, this is the attitude of Serbia: in essence, of attempting to force ten million Muslims to leave Europe. This is no exaggeration or figure of speech.

No one can deny that Serbs had some legitimate grievances under the Turks. But they used these grievances as justification for a profound, racist hatred of Bosnian Slavs and Albanians who converted to Islam under the Turks. They hate the Bosnians, the Albanians, and even the Croats because these groups declined to become subjects of a "Greater Serbia." Likewise, nobody can deny that Serbs were the objects of massacres by the Croatian Ustashe fascist formation in World War II. But neither can it be denied that Serbs also carried out such massacres, and that both groups assisted the Germans against the Jews. Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, was declared the first Judenrein or "Jew cleansed" city in Europe in 1942.

No historical suffering can justify the atrocities and outrages of the present war, which include massacres, rapes, deportations, camps, the taking of hostages, and the destruction of thousands of churches and mosques, libraries, and museums. This does not mean that the Croats, by the way, are completely innocent. As we are seeing today in central Bosnia, the Croats and the H.V.O. (the group in Bosnia oriented towards Tudjman's nationalistic government in Croatia) seem absolutely prepared to work a rotten deal to the detriment of the Bosnian Muslims. No one is saying that the Croats are angels, but the Serbs started the war. I was there when they started the war. I saw them start the war. There was no fighting between Serbs and Croats in Croatia except for those instances created by Serbian volunteers. There was no aggression. They talked about the aggression of the Croatian government which, the Serbs said, consisted of waving a fascist flag and taking down road signs written in the Cyrillic alphabet. No road signs were taken down. The claim that the Croatian flag is a fascist flag is like saying that the stars and stripes is the symbol of the Ku Klux Klan. The same symbol that the Serbs are now objecting to in Croatia was used throughout the communist period in socialist Croatia. It was on the front of every police station in socialist Croatia, and yet the Serbs never protested at that time. These charges of Croatian aggression against Serbs were used as a propagandistic pretext for the assault on Croatia. I was there. I saw it.

As I said there have always been Serbs who opposed the fantasy of a "Greater Serbia." Today, thousands of Serbs support the Bosnian government against the terrorism of the Chetniks [the Serbian nationalist aggressors]. Svetozar Marković, the founder of modern Serbian populism, said a century ago, the fantasy of "Greater Serbia" would lead the nation to a fate worse than they experienced under the Turks. He was correct.

I have recently done some research and spoken at the University of Pittsburgh on these topics and described the regime in Serbia as a fascist regime. I was challenged on that description on various sociological, political, and ideological grounds. I am not going to go into the whole discussion of why the Milosevic regime is a fascist regime, but I would like to make a comment on the ideology of the regime which I think is

reflected, along with the homophobia and misogyny, in the attacks on women in Bosnia. I have been reading the Serbian sources, the press that goes out to the Serbian people. One of the major items in the ideology of the present regime is the issue of the so called "white death." This is the low birth rate and high emigration rate in rural Serbia, in the areas of eastern Serbia that are the main modern heartland of the people. The Serbs have a very low birth rate in that area, people are leaving, the area is in crisis. Right next to the Serbs are the Muslims of Sandzak and the Albanian Muslims, who have a high birth rate. What we are talking about is one society that is having trouble adjusting to modernity, that is unable to modernize its agriculture, and whose families are in crisis, versus another society that is not having so many problems adjusting to modernity, whose families remain strong, and whose birthrate remains high. This brings out violent anger in the Serbs in the areas of so called "white death".

The high rate of emigration, the low level of agricultural investment, and other aspects of the crisis of Serbian rural life have created a class of frustrated people. You find this in the propaganda. They say, "Handsome, rich, peasant, Serbian boys cannot find wives, since all of the rural Serbian women have fled the farm regions for the cities. Serbian women no longer take pride in living where cows are milked."

To repeat, what it comes down to is society suffering from what they call "white death;" that is, family instability, low birth rate, emigration from the rural areas. This society arms itself and launches itself against its neighbor whose agriculture is more productive, whose birthrate is higher. The most interesting thing is that this reproduces the pattern of the Balkan Wars at the beginning of the century and in the 19th century. Nothing has changed in Serbia. We can talk all we want about what happened in World War II, but this pattern has been going on since the middle of the last century.

I am going to make a quick conclusion about Bosnia. What is Bosnia? Bosnia is a borderland. Its inhabitants include: Croats who comprise about twenty percent of the population; Serbs who comprise about thirty five percent; and then the Bosnian Muslims, who comprise about forty five percent. At various times, Croats and Serbs have claimed the Bosnian Muslims to be Croats or Serbs who abandoned the Christian faith for Islam. They all speak essentially the same language, but they don't like to hear that said. It is now called Serbian, Bosnian, or Croatian; but from a linguistic point of view, it is the same language. These arguments, in the past, took place all over Europe. Nobody any longer says Danish and Norwegian are the same language, even though they basically are.

The Bosnians have always aspired to a separate identity. Before they became Muslims, they had their own independent, heretical church: "the Bosnian Church." They live in the mountains, they want to be left alone, they have their own culture, their own folklore, their own identity. Above

all, they don't want to be Croats and they don't want to be Serbs. They don't want anyone coming in and killing them for not wanting to be Croats or Serbs.

I don't think there is anything to add to this. I could talk about this subject for hours, but the bottom line is that we are privileged today to be undergoing the experience of my parents and your grandparents: to live in a world challenged by the evil of fascism, where we have the opportunity to rise up and protest against it. Thank you.