

Art and War  
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### Photojournalism in the Bosnian War: Ron Haviv and Tom Stoddart

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990's, over a decade of violence, war, genocide, and ethnic cleansing erupted in the Balkans. The Yugoslav wars were the first major conflicts in Europe since World War II and were particularly heinous due to the war crimes, and genocide that were committed. The war in Bosnia, which occurred from 1992-1995, was arguably the most violent, with over 101,000 mostly Muslim Bosnians killed and hundreds of thousands more displaced.<sup>1</sup> Bosnia's capital city Sarajevo was besieged by the Army of Republika Srpska from 5 April 1992 to 29 February 1996, and during this time Photojournalists from the United States and Europe were allowed to enter and exit the city while Bosnian citizens could not.<sup>2</sup> Through the work of photojournalists Ron Haviv, and Tom Stoddart, I seek to examine how each of these photojournalists individually were able to document the horrors of the Bosnian War. Each of these photojournalists produced iconic photographs that are still brought up in conjunction with the Bosnian war, but each of their work differed both stylistically, and in how they approached shooting conflict. Despite the differences in their approaches however, these photojournalists both produced photographs during the Bosnian War that helped unveil the truth of the atrocities that were committed to the rest of the world, and were committed to ceaselessly documenting the truth.

To understand the work of photojournalists in the Bosnian War we must first briefly examine how such an atrocious conflict arose. Following the death of Tito, the President of

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<sup>1</sup> Blood and Honey last page

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

Yugoslavia, economic problems arose in Yugoslavia and nationalist sentiment grew among Serbians throughout the 1980's, perpetrated by Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic.<sup>3</sup> In 1991 Croatia and Slovenia both sought independence, resulting in a brief so-called "10 Day War" between Slovenia and the Yugoslav People's Army, but as the name suggests quickly subsided.<sup>4</sup> Serbian nationalist forces backed by the Yugoslav People's Army began to invade Croatia, and executions of Croats and Muslims began, under the Serbian goal of seizing all Serbian land in the six former Yugoslavian countries, and an ethnic cleansing of Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

Being the most politically unstable, and ethnically diverse country, Bosnia was in an extremely vulnerable position and Serbian invasion seemed inevitable. Bosnia was divided roughly into three majority ethnic groupings: Muslim Bosniaks, Orthodox Serbs, and Catholic Croats. These populations had co-existed in Yugoslavia, but with Milosevic stoking nationalist sentiments among Serbs, Bosnian Serbs were soon executing Bosniaks and Croats. It is important to note that this was not a civil war as it is sometimes painted, but an ethnic cleansing perpetrated by war criminals. On April 6th 1992, 20,000 Bosnians gathered to peacefully demonstrate the growing division they were observing in their country, but tragically two protesters were killed by Serb snipers from a nearby building.<sup>6</sup> Beginning with the invasion of Bijeljina by paramilitary troops led by Zeljko Raznatovic (or Arkan), brutal executions swept across northern and eastern Bosnia.<sup>7</sup> These paramilitary troops were highly skilled and armed by the Yugoslav People's Army and the Serbians. Muslims and Croats who were not executed on the spot were rounded up and taken to detention camps, where prisoners would be raped, starved, and tortured.<sup>8</sup> The siege of Sarajevo by the Army of Republika Srpska, under the

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<sup>3</sup> Carmichael, 125

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 127

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 128

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 139

<sup>7</sup> Carmichael, 141

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

leadership of Ratko Mladic, began in 1992 and would last until 1996 the longest siege of a city in modern times.<sup>9</sup> During this time the Bosnian capital was completely enclosed, prohibiting Bosniaks and Croats from leaving their own city, and cut off from electricity and water. Journalists were permitted to enter the city by Serbian forces, but they attempted to control what was documented.<sup>10</sup> During this four year siege Ron Haviv, and Tom Stoddart, would travel to Sarajevo with the goal of documenting the human rights violations that were occurring through their photography. Many of the photographs that were produced, especially by Ron Haviv, directly defied the wishes of Serbian paramilitary troops and the Republika Srpska Army, but due to determination and perseverance were captured nonetheless.

Ron Haviv is an American photojournalist who traveled to Eastern Europe in 1991 following rumors of the imminent breakup of Yugoslavia.<sup>11</sup> Haviv documented the violence in Croatia, covering the destruction of the Croatian town of Vukovar, and captured some of the first crimes against humanity in the Bosnian War during his time in Bijeljina.<sup>12</sup> In his book *Blood and Honey: A Balkan War Journal*, Haviv cites a moment of inaction in his time in Vukovar as his motivation and guidance for the rest of his coverage of the Bosnian War. While in Vukovar Haviv was following Arkan and his paramilitary troops as they tore through Croatia executing countless civilians, and was about to capture a photo when a soldier yelled to him “no photo” before shooting a Muslim man in the street. This happened again, and Haviv again failed to capture the execution after being instructed not to take a photo.<sup>13</sup> When Haviv followed Arkan and his troops to Bijeljina, he captured three photos in particular that would continually be

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 145

<sup>10</sup> Blood and Honey

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> Blood and Honey

<sup>13</sup> Blood and Honey

associated with the Bosnian War and eventually be used to help indict war criminals at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia at the Hague.<sup>14</sup>

Haviv's photos are aesthetically pleasing, and his artistry shines through in his development and composition, but his photos particularly those from Bijeljina are raw and honest documentation of both the humanity and inhumanity of war. Comparing his work to Stoddart and Niedringhaus, there is an obvious stylistic difference being that Haviv shot the Bosnian War in color as opposed to Stoddart and Niedringhaus shooting black and white. This is of course a deliberate choice and one I read as Haviv's dedication to the content of the photograph outshining its aesthetic quality, as well as highlighting the reality of the war, and freezing moments of violence in time. In a 2015 interview looking back at his work in Bosnia, Haviv summarized his attitude towards the beauty of war photography as such: "My limitations are quite simple: The stylization cannot overcome the content to the point that one doesn't understand what is happening in the image... In short, for me, aesthetic qualities should never bury content."<sup>15</sup> The ethics of beauty in war photography is a recurring debate in the art world, the press, and the general public, since the rise of war photography in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>16</sup> The essay in Haviv's *Blood and Honey* contextualizes Haviv's aesthetic vision in a comparison to Sebastio Salgado, who's photographs of migrating refugees are so artistic and beautiful that they have long drawn criticism.<sup>17</sup> This comparison and Haviv's personal comments on the aesthetics of his work can inform a reading of his photographs as above all documentation to serve the public, in a hope to inform, and subsequently prevent such events in the future.

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<sup>14</sup> [https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/photography-in-the-docket-as-evidence/?\\_r=0](https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/photography-in-the-docket-as-evidence/?_r=0)

<sup>15</sup> "A Photographer Looks Back on the Horrors of the Bosnian War," Vice, , accessed May 06, 2017, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/photos-of-the-bosnia-war](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/photos-of-the-bosnia-war).

<sup>16</sup> Sontag, 21

<sup>17</sup> Haviv *et al.* 22

Haviv's most famous three photographs were all made in Bijeljina as Serbian paramilitary forces began to sweep through western and northern Bosnia. After failing to document two executions in Vukovar, Haviv was determined not to miss another execution so long as he could do so without putting himself at risk of death.<sup>18</sup> The first of the three photographs was captured after Arkan's "Tigers" removed a Muslim couple from their home and shot the man in front of his wife.<sup>19</sup> Haviv managed to capture this execution by positioning himself out of sight of the Tigers and photographed the man's wife bending over his lifeless body, putting her fingers to his open wound.<sup>20</sup>



(Fig 1.) Ron Haviv/VII A Bosnian Muslim woman attended to her husband after he was shot in Bijeljina, Bosnia, by Arkan's Tigers. She was shot moments later, as was her sister-in-law (1992)<sup>21</sup>

Moments after this initial photo, the woman was shot and killed as well. Haviv followed the Tigers as they dragged a Muslim man out of his home, knelt him on the ground, and held

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<sup>18</sup> Blood and honey

<sup>19</sup> Haviv et. al, 19

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>21</sup> James Estrin, "Photography in the Docket, as Evidence," The New York Times, April 02, 2013, , accessed May 06, 2017, [https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/photography-in-the-docket-as-evidence/?\\_r=0](https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/photography-in-the-docket-as-evidence/?_r=0)

him at gunpoint. Haviv captured a close in shot of the man's face as he knelt before the soldiers begging for his life, encapsulating the essence of this brutal war: civilians targeted for their religious beliefs forced to beg for their lives against heavily armed and expertly trained military forces. Moments after this photo the Tigers took this man into a building for interrogation before throwing him out of the window where he landed in front of Haviv on the street.<sup>22</sup>



Fig 2. A Muslim man begs for his life after capture by Arkan's Tigers. Bijeljina, 1992. <sup>23</sup>

In a 2001 interview Haviv discussed the situation in which this photograph was captured.

The man looked to Haviv in hopes that he would intervene, but Haviv was of course unable to a moral dilemma that photojournalists must repeatedly face.<sup>24</sup> Haviv sought to document these soldiers as “men of violence”<sup>25</sup> not to glorify them as warriors, which he accomplishes with the

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<sup>22</sup> Haviv *et al*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 59

<sup>24</sup> Vaipan, "Photojournalist Ron Haviv interview (2001)," YouTube, September 15, 2016, , accessed May 06, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ykm\\_MklxX8Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ykm_MklxX8Y).

<sup>25</sup> Haviv *et al*, 22.

raw documentation he was able to capture in Bijeljina. His portfolio in Bosnia is a blend of the views of all members of this conflict with images of civilian victims, and Serbian forces, but sought to document the crimes against humanity that were being perpetrated by Serbian forces. The Serbian paramilitary troops allowed Haviv to travel with them under the impression that he would be neutrally documenting the war, and weren't aware of many of the photos he took. However neutrality is impossible when documenting ethnic cleansing, genocide, and internment camps, therefore these photographs have gone beyond war documentation and become evidence in ongoing trials for the war crimes that took place.<sup>26</sup>

Haviv's most famous, and perhaps the most well-known photograph taken during the Bosnian war was also captured in Bijeljina. In a moment of true brutality and inhumanity, Haviv was able to capture a photograph of a Tiger kicking an executed Bosnian Muslim woman's dead body on the ground. This photograph is the one most often associated with the Bosnian War, and perhaps best encapsulates the essence of war photography: permanently freezing a moment of violence in order to inform the public and provide lasting documentation. When placed in the canon of iconic war photographs, many of those that stand the test of time do so out of shock. Compare this photo (fig 3) to the 1936 Robert Capa photograph *Falling Soldier* shot during the Spanish Civil War. These photographs are comparable in the way they permanently freeze a moment of action in war in a photograph, and have stood the test of time largely due to their shocking nature. In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag traces the role of war photography, beginning in the early 1900's with documentation of the horrors of trench warfare on the Western Front.<sup>27</sup> Photography in journalism had the goal of eliciting a greater response than merely the written or spoken word. "Conscripted as part of

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<sup>26</sup>Estrin, James. "Photography in the Docket, as Evidence." The New York Times. April 02, 2013. Accessed May 06, 2017.

[https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/photography-in-the-docket-as-evidence/?\\_r=0](https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/photography-in-the-docket-as-evidence/?_r=0)

<sup>27</sup>SUSAN SONTAG, *REGARDING THE PAIN OF OTHERS* (S.I.: PICADOR, 2017), 25



journalism images were expected to arrest attention, startle, surprise.”<sup>28</sup> Haviv’s image stays permanently associated with the Bosnian War because it was able to successfully arrest our attentions, like all iconic war photography.



Fig. 4, The Tigers and their victims during the attack on Bijeljina. Spring 1992.<sup>29</sup> Haviv often reflects on his personal frustration with the world’s response to the Bosnian

War. Haviv along with Stoddart and other photojournalists who were there could not believe that such atrocities were being committed with so little response from international powers, and sent their photographs to European governments and the UN in a desperate hope for intervention to prevent further wars.<sup>30</sup> Photojournalistic efforts often go unrecognized during the time of the conflict they are documenting, but as evident by the use of these photographs in trials years later, documentation must exist. In a 2015 interview Haviv reflected on his frustration with the lack of international response, and his motivation to continue despite this inaction.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 23

<sup>29</sup> Haviv *et al.* 60

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 183



“Even as our work failed, day in and day out, it needed to exist, in order to function, someday, as a body of evidence to hold people accountable for their actions and more importantly their inactions. As a journalist, the idea is to bring information to the surface, to shed light on what much of the world can't see in person. In this case, my realization was that most of the time that work fails in the present, but I also understood that such work takes on a new life as an evidentiary record of events—and that insight fostered my commitment to spending over five years of my life documenting the dissolution of Yugoslavia.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite their common photojournalistic goals of documenting truth, and inciting action through photography, Haviv and Stoddart's Bosnian portfolios differ greatly both stylistically and in the impact they leave behind. Tom Stoddart is a British photojournalist who arrived in Sarajevo in 1991 as the siege began. Some of his best and most iconic work came from a photo essay he was comprising about the women of Sarajevo living through war.<sup>32</sup> Where Haviv's photographs have served as documentation of the crimes against humanity that occurred during the war, Stoddart's photographs serve as documentation of people, primarily women, living through the war, attempting to carry on their lives in the seized city of Sarajevo. Stoddart felt called to give a voice to the women of this war, as women would be excluded from combat photographs.<sup>33</sup> Although they are not typical war photographs, Stoddart's work still captures moments of action in the war, without directly depicting violence. Many of his best photographs

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<sup>31</sup>"A Photographer Looks Back on the Horrors of the Bosnian War." Vice. Accessed May 06, 2017. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/photos-of-the-bosnia-war](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/photos-of-the-bosnia-war)

<sup>32</sup> "Tom Stoddart: The photo I took that meant the most to me." InFocus. Accessed May 06, 2017. <http://infocus.gettyimages.com/post/tom-stoddart-the-photo-i-took-that-meant-the-most-to-me#.WQ4FtlUrKUK>.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.srebrenica.org.uk/what-happened/witnessing-genocide/tom-stoddart/>

came from documenting Sarajevans as they attempted to cross “sniper alley” an open intersection of roads that was surrounded by Serbian snipers.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Tom Stoddart Photography. Accessed May 06, 2017.  
<http://www.tomstoddart.com/gallery/siege-of-sarajevo>



It is clear in this photo (Fig 4) that we are witnessing a moment of action due to an unusual circumstance, but unlike Haviv's work these photos do not immediately inform the viewer that they are witnessing war. Stoddart's photos are a different type of war photography, but equally as important as documenting the violence of soldiers is bearing witness to the civilians who were forced to live through this conflict. In Ron Haviv's book the essayist David Rieff cites the clarity of Haviv's photographs, and their difficulty to misinterpret or appropriate them as the reason of their success.<sup>35</sup> This poses the question of what the very role of photojournalism, particularly war photography is. For Haviv's book to attribute success of images to clarity, or difficulty of misinterpretation suggests that war photography remain pure documentation, with the goal capturing the violence. Stoddart's work was created with the goal

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<sup>35</sup> Haviv *et al.* 22.

of showing the humanity in war, leading to the documentation not of moments of explicit violence to shock and insight reaction, but how war invaded and disrupted every part of Bosnian life.

In two of his most powerful and well-known photographs Stoddart had the unique experience of being able to reconnect with his subjects years after the war. In a 1992 photograph (Fig. 5), Stoddart captured a rare moment in which children were allowed to be bussed out of the city of Sarajevo.<sup>36</sup> The photograph shows the moments before a teary mother must give up her son in the hopes that him leaving the city will increase his chance of survival. This photograph encapsulates Stoddart's viewpoint as a photojournalist: "When I'm talking to young photographers, I always say it is my kind of image: black and white, and you look into their eyes, trying to read what's going on in their minds, without them even noticing you."<sup>37</sup> This photograph captures a moment unique to the brutality of war, as a mother's worst nightmare of losing her child becomes reality, and leaves the audience feeling that they have invaded a private moment. With Stoddart's Sarajevo portfolio the pictures are emotionally charged and powerful, but the viewer can gain more with additional information about each photo. For example in 2006, ten years after the war Stoddart received a phone call from a friend in Australia telling him that the woman in this photograph was her neighbor. Stoddart was able to meet the woman and her son who were both able to evacuate Sarajevo that day, a uniquely special experience that influences the reading of this photograph, if known.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Benedictus, Leo. "Tom Stoddart's best shot." *The Guardian*. October 01, 2008. Accessed May 06, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/oct/02/photography>.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*



Fig. 5. Tom Stoddart, Sarajevo, 1992

As one of the photographs from his photo essay on women surviving in Sarajevo Stoddart captured an iconic image of an impeccably dressed Bosnian woman, confidently strolling past an armed soldier (Fig. 6), Stoddart encapsulated the story of so many women living in Sarajevo at the time. From the image alone we begin to gather our impressions of this woman. She seems confident and defiant of the forces attempting to break her people, and refuses to acquiesce to her circumstances. Stoddart was able to find the woman to interview her, who explained her situation at the time when the photograph was taken.

“I didn’t want to show that pain in my face,” she said. “My mother had a heart attack – she was not wounded, not killed, but what happened to her was because of the war, because there was no medicine, no drugs and no food.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "Tom Stoddart: The photo I took that meant the most to me." InFocus. Accessed May 06, 2017. <http://infocus.gettyimages.com/post/tom-stoddart-the-photo-i-took-that-meant-the-most-to-me#.WQ4FtlUrKUK>.



Fig. 6. Tom Stoddart, Sarajevo, 1993.

Susan Sontag citing Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* addresses the issue of objectivity in photography, contradicting Woolf's claim that photographs "are not an argument; they are simply a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye."<sup>40</sup> Sontag argues that photographs are not "simply" anything, and that photography holds the contradiction "to be both objective record and personal testimony, both a faithful copy or transcription of an actual moment of reality and an interpretation of that reality."<sup>41</sup> I use this to contextualize the comparison between Haviv and Stoddart's approaches, in saying that both these photojournalists used their camera as a means to document objective record, but like any artist carry a personal testimony in each photograph. Perhaps Stoddart's photos could be read as being more influenced by personal testimony, but Haviv was driven to document the war the way he did after the experience of failing to do so in Croatia. Despite photojournalism being the practice of documentation, it is inherently influenced by the vision of the journalist behind the camera. Both Stoddart and Haviv entered Bosnia in the

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<sup>40</sup>SUSAN SONTAG, *REGARDING THE PAIN OF OTHERS* (S.I.: PICADOR, 2017), 26.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

early 1990's with the goal of showing the world the atrocities that were occurring so close to so many major European cities, but their executions of bearing witness to this war speak to each of their viewpoints as artists. I would be unable to name one of the photographers more successful than the other in his endeavor, due largely to the fact that each of these photographer's work has affected me in different ways. Perhaps one could argue that Haviv captured the truly brutal and horrific nature of this conflict, but the stories of the women and children of Sarajevo are told through Stoddart's emotional portraits. Regardless both men provide documentation to ensure that the Bosnian War will not be forgotten, with the hope that documentation will help to prevent future atrocities from occurring.



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