

Srebrenica: a 'safe' area

Appendix VIII

Background and influence of media reporting of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia during the period 1991-1995: A study of views and methods of Dutch journalists

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Introduction

In 1998, the Amsterdam School of Communications Research (ASCoR), was asked by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) to contribute to the investigation being undertaken by that organization into the circumstances and events before, during and after the fall of Srebrenica. ASCoR was specifically asked to perform a study of the role and significance of media aspects in this regard.

Clearly, the term ‘media aspects’ can have many different meanings. However, given the terms of reference of the NIOD’s overall investigation, the priority was seen to be a consideration of the manner in which media may have influenced the formation or confirmation of general assumptions and prejudices on the part of the actors relevant to the study, and the extent of any such influence.

Much of the research this involved was difficult, if not impossible, to separate from that conducted by the NIOD itself. However, while the interaction with the NIOD study was in itself important, useful contributions could be made ‘from outside’ in two important areas, namely, an examination of the news process itself and a content analysis of some representative media.

These then were the areas of research undertaken by ASCoR. The analysis of news reporting in the national newspapers NRC Handelsblad, De Telegraaf, Trouw, and De Volkskrant and the NOS Journaal television news in August 1992, throughout 1993 and the first seven months of 1995 is reported in detail in *In Sarajevo wordt geschoten, in Genève gepraat* (‘They’re shooting in Sarajevo, they’re talking in Geneva’) and *Good guys, bad guys* by Otto Scholten, Nel Ruigrok and Pieter Heerma (2001a and 2001b).

The current report, *Srebrenica and journalism*, should be seen as a ‘companion volume’ to the Scholten, Ruigrok and Heerma study. Its primary purpose is to present and clarify the background to the reports from and about the former Yugoslavia. The first part of this document consists of an account (based on desk research) of the news production process, the context in which it is carried out, and the complex relationship between mass media, politics and public opinion. The second section is largely based on interviews with Dutch journalists who were involved in reporting the hostilities in the former Yugoslavia. The main purpose of these interviews was to gain an insight into the motives and working methods of the journalists, (and of the publications they represented at the time), their opinions concerning the conflict and those concerning the role and influence of the media. Given the aims and terms of reference of this part of the research, little or no attempt was made to ascertain the veracity of the statements made or to verify the opinions stated by comparing them to those of others.

Like the analysis conducted by Scholten et al., this component of the study is concerned with the media reporting in the period immediately prior to the deployment of Dutchbat forces in Srebrenica, and the events surrounding the fall of the enclave in July 1995.

It should be noted that no attempt has been made to arrive at a representative sample of Dutch journalists. Rather, those interviewed were selected because their position, or that of the media organizations which employed them, suggested that their influence on the process of providing information and forming opinion – might have been greater than average. To some extent, the selection was made on the basis of the results of the content analysis.

Because the scope of the NIOD study overlapped with that of this ASCoR report, it was decided that some of the journalists whose names appeared on both organizations’ lists would be interviewed jointly by Paul Koedijk of the NIOD and the author of this report. The main in-depth interviews were conducted between August 1999 and November 2000. They varied in duration from approximately ninety minutes to over four hours. The respondents were – without exception – remarkably willing to cooperate with the research, not only in answering our questions but in many cases also by providing additional information. We are grateful for their help.

Direct quotations from interviews and references to statements made in interviews are indicated in the footnotes by the name of the respondent and the date of the interview, e.g. ‘Zimmermann, 28

April 2000¹. Where comments were received by e-mail or by telephone, this is indicated in a similar manner. The following is a list of respondents, their date of interview, and (journalistic) position/affiliation:

- Anet Bleich, 16 September 1999. De Volkskrant; foreign editor since 1 October 1989.
- Raymond van den Boogaard, 5 November 1999. NRC Handelsblad; correspondent in Moscow and Berlin; correspondent in the former Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1994; currently media editor.
- Carolien Brugsma, 2 February 2000. Nova; November 1990, editor at NOS Laet; editor at Nova since 1992.
- Gerri Eickhof, 18 January 2000. NOS Journaal; as news editor since 1988; domestic news chief in 1992; reporter since 1992.
- Twan Huys (23 December 1999), 8 July 2000 (interviewed by Paul Koedijk, NIOD¹)Nova; reporter. Currently Washington correspondent for Nova and Radio 1.
- Mark Kranenburg, 13 September 2000. NRC Handelsblad; political editor and chief parliamentary editor. Editor of editorial and opinion page since 1996.
- Cees Labeur, 16 August 1999 and 21 August 2000 (with Roelof Schut). NCRV Hier en Nu (Netwerk); executive editor Hier en Nu (TV), now manager of current affairs unit.
- Hans Laroës, 18 and 24 November 1999. NOS Journaal; deputy editor, later joint executive editor.
- Harry Lockefeer, 30 November 1999. De Volkskrant; editor-in-chief until early 1995; now Professor of Journalism at Groningen University.
- Willem Lust, 19 July 2000 (interviewed with Paul Koedijk of NIOD). Reporter for RTL Nieuws 1990-1998. Now works on Nova.
- Peter Michielsen, 15 September 1999. NRC Handelsblad; Eastern European editor since 1982.
- Bart Nypels (with Fons de Poel), 28 October 1999 (interviewed with Paul Koedijk of NIOD). KRO Reporter, Brandpunt (Netwerk); reporter.
- Ewoud Nysingh, 14 September 2000 (interviewed with Paul Koedijk, NIOD). De Volkskrant; foreign editor 1990- 1994, political editor 1994 – 2000. Currently on the staff of Nova.
- Ab Pilgram, 27 September 2000 (interviewed with Paul Koedijk, NIOD). KRO Echo (later Radio 1 Journaal); parliamentary editor.
- Fons de Poel (with Bart Nypels), 28 October 1999 (interviewed with Paul Koedijk, NIOD). KRO Brandpunt (Netwerk), Reporter; 1982 reporter for KRO television's Brandpunt; executive editor and presenter of the Brandpunt editions of the Netwerk programmes since 1994.
- Linda Polman (with Eliaan Schoonman), 24 August 1999. Freelance journalist; war correspondent. Lecturer in overseas journalism at the School of Journalism in Utrecht.
- André Roelofs, 29 September 2000. De Volkskrant; Moscow correspondent until early 1991, then senior foreign editor.
- Jan Schoeman, 12 August 1999. Stichting Maatschappij en Krijgsmacht (Society and Armed Forces Foundation), information and public relations spokesman; currently working for Stichting Dienstverlening Veteranen (Veterans' Assistance Foundation).
- Eliaan Schoonman (with Linda Polman), 24 August 1999. Independent advisor to Issues Management Institute, lecturer at the School of Journalism in Utrecht.
- Roelof Schut (with Cees Labeur), 21 November 2000. NCRV Hier en Nu (Netwerk) editor; now journalist with the documentation department of NCRV.
- Othon Zimmermann, 28 April 2000 (interviewed with Paul Koedijk, NIOD). Algemeen Dagblad; foreign editor, Balkans specialist. Now parliamentary editor.

Bibliographic references are included in the text according to the conventions used in the social sciences (e.g. McQuail 1992), with the full title and publication details given at the end of the report.

¹ Paul Koedijk spoke alone to Twan Huys in Washington when it proved impossible to conduct a planned joint interview.

For practical reasons references to newspaper articles are usually given in footnotes. Quotations from respondents which are not germane to the text but which are nevertheless illustrative are also included as footnotes. Footnotes are used to provide any explanation of the main text considered necessary by the author. Translations of the titles of articles are provided for information only and the inclusion of the title in English does not infer that the entire article is available in translation. Translations of personal (spoken) accounts are, of necessity, periphrastic.

The bibliography and list of references contains both publications that have been cited in this report and others which have been consulted during research. Furthermore, books which have been named by respondents as being of particular significance to their work, such as Glenny's *The fall of Yugoslavia* and Rohde's *Endgame* (referred to as 'Nova's bible') are also listed. It should be noted that several publications of an academic nature, dealing with the former Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1995 and the role of the media, are somewhat apologist in nature (e.g. Mestrovic, 1996, with regard to the role of Croatia). This reflects the emotionally charged nature of the Balkans conflict.

The terminology used in relation to the Balkans conflict is also heavy with meaning. 'War' or 'civil war', 'serbs' or 'Bosnian Serbs': these and other seemingly neutral terms, may indicate a leaning towards one party or the other, or a preference for one or other definition of the conflict. However, throughout this report terms such as these will be used freely, and with no special meaning intended.

Chapter 1

Media: process and effects

Politics, media and public opinion

The media, public opinion and politics are closely interrelated. Provided the mass media are able to safeguard their own independence, this interrelationship works in the general interest. The media act as intermediaries between the state and its citizens, providing information which enables people to orient themselves within the society in which they live, and which they need to exert influence over the forces which control society. At the same time, the media also reflect and represent the existing power relationships and the prevailing ideas and values within a society.

In their role as intermediaries in the democratic process, it is essential that the media are reliable and trustworthy, which means that they must be seen as taking their task seriously, and doing all they can to ensure the greatest degree of care and accuracy as information providers. This is, of course, not to say that they can really be expected to provide a thoroughly objective or true picture of reality.

There is a considerable body of research (cf. Seymour-Ure 1969; Dahrendorf 1974; Mancini 1991) to suggest that another function of the media may be just as important. Media function not only as means of communication between political elites and the general public, but also facilitate communication, horizontally, between the elites themselves.

The need for the media to provide information which is credible and accurate has led to a number of journalistic conventions and practices, such as a separation of news and comment, presentation of both sides of a story, and the habit of checking and double-checking. However, various forces and developments within the media and within society itself may interfere with the application of such basic rules of good journalism (McQuail, 1992). This is even more true in wartime, when, as has been remarked, truth is often the first casualty.

The ideal situation is one of balance between media and (political) news sources. The media are largely dependent on news produced and by political and other official sources. Likewise, in a democracy, those with political power rely on publicity regarding their actions and dealings. When this relationship becomes too close, it can have a negative effect on both parties' ability to function independently and in particular on the assumed democratic function of the media.

However, this may not be the root cause of the 'democratic malaise' which some authors claim Western society now faces. This is attributed to other developments: such as more critical, more sensational and more ad personam forms of television journalism and the increasingly professional marketing of political parties which, taken together, are likely to give rise to a more cynical attitude on the part of the public (see Norris 2000; Schulz 2001). Various observers (e.g. Patterson, 1993) have identified a trend in political reporting whereby content has become less important than the question of who is going to win or lose.² Dahlgren believes that political culture has all but converged with that of television:

"The interaction between journalists and power holders, the ensemble of news values, the framing of events, the accepted modes of discourse, the style of interviews and so on, all express an integration of television and political culture." Dahlgren (1995: 45).

Interrelationship and mutual dependency is traditionally the greatest in the geographic centres of political power, which are usually also the centres of most media activity. In the Netherlands, The Hague is the centre of political power and decision-making and is hence the permanent focus of

² See also Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2000.

considerable media attention. Much has been written about the mutual relationship and occasional interference between political and journalistic interests in such centres. Works dealing specifically with the Dutch situation include Kaiser (1985) and, more recently Geelen (1998). Bernard Cohen's classic 1963 study *The Press and Foreign Policy*, characterizes the relationship as one in which journalists are heavily reliant on the official news issued by government sources (see also Gans 1980; Tunstall 1970, 1971; Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978, and others). Cohen (and later Kaiser in her study of journalistic practice in *The Hague*) concludes that there is a form of symbiosis between politics and journalism; each needs the other and each uses the other for its own purposes. Later studies point out that the official sources have actually become more important over time, especially with regard to foreign policy and security issues (Hallin 1986; Bennett 1994; O'Heffernan 1991,1994).

Representation

The ideal-typical image of the media as providers of a complete and unobstructed view of the real world is, needless to say, an illusion³, albeit one which is cherished and maintained not only by the media themselves but also by those whom the media address, their audiences (Ridell 1998). The media reinforce the illusion through the forms in which they choose to present news and information. These presentational styles deliberately create an impression of distance, impartiality and credibility. Newspapers, radio and television act as the intermediaries between ourselves and the events in the world around us, but mediation inevitably leads to distortion through selection, structuring, accentuation and processing. News can perhaps be better described as stories about events rather than as a reflection of reality itself. Furthermore, we must not lose sight of the fact that, trivia aside, there is no one single shared reality, recognizable to us all.

None of this is intended to suggest that the media will always act in a random, unpredictable manner, nor that the picture presented to us actually conflicts with reality. In the first place, the media must function within our culture, i.e. within a complex of shared habits, ideas and opinions which have been formed by a long historical process and under the influence of specific power relationships within a given community. The media are rarely ahead of their time, nor are they much behind. Where there is no difference of opinion, the media cannot be expected to voice dissent. Western cultures may have become increasingly heterogeneous, and therefore allow for a lot of different positions, but one is never completely out of touch with its central values. Our concepts regarding the role and function of the media and of journalists are part of this shared culture.

The media function not only within a specific culture, but also within a given social structure. Until a few decades ago, media were often directed from and targeted towards clearly defined social factions – a particular religious denomination or a political leaning, for example. Today, there is far greater market orientation. National and European deregulation policies, and the emergence of cable and satellite, have given rise to a new competitive structure in the world of broadcasting. Such developments are not restricted to the Netherlands but are to be seen throughout the West. Almost all Western European countries have seen their public broadcasting monopolies replaced by a dual system of public broadcasters operating alongside and in competition with commercial stations, who are in turn competing with each other. Relative scarcity has given way to an abundance of choices, but this does not necessarily mean diversity of choice. Some commentators believe that we are simply being offered more of the same.

Such developments have also had an effect on the provision of information via the mass media, since, at the end of the day, the only bottom line for a private broadcaster is the balance sheet. The need to make a profit implies an approach rather different to that of an organization devoted to public service. Even among public broadcasters, competition seems to have entailed a shift in focus from what the public needs to what the consumer (or advertiser) demands. In journalism in general, and in

³ As demonstrated already in one of the first studies of television news reporting, by Lang and Lang (1953).

television journalism in particular, some critics signal a ‘dumbing-down’ process, in which there is increased emphasis on lightweight, fast and sensationalistic reporting, more and more human interest, and various mixtures of serious information with pure entertainment in infotainment-type formats. This trend might be illustrated by comments reportedly made by Harm Taselaar, the executive editor of commercial television news programme RTL Nieuws (in the *Gooi- en Eemlander* newspaper, 3 January 2001). Referring to his programme’s lack of coverage of a fire in Volendam in the early hours of New Year’s Day 2001 (a news item which quickly took on the significance of a national tragedy) he allegedly remarked, “Having seen the ratings of the other channels, I have to admit that we made the wrong decision.”⁴

Nevertheless, matters are rather more complicated than they may seem. It is a little too easy to blame increased competition with commercial stations and ratings wars for everything that has gone wrong in the world of journalism. Comparative research has found little evidence to suggest a general trend of adaptation, in the sense of convergence between the public and commercial broadcasters. The media in general have certainly become less apodictic in their presentation, more accessible and understandable to a wide audience than was the case forty or fifty years ago (Wieten 1998). Research so far shows no harmful effects, in the sense of people being less well-informed now than they used to be (Norris 2000). Nevertheless, Schulz (2001) believes that increasing political cynicism, particularly among those who are better informed, could be attributed to a more critical and sensationalist style of television journalism. Those who glean their news from newspapers and those who watch television for entertainment rather than information do not display this tendency.

News as a matter of time, place and person

The media are professional organizations which are equipped to gather, organize, and process an endless amount of events and to turn these into understandable news messages, coherent stories about the actualities of the day and the world that we live in (cf. Schudson 1989). Over the course of their existence they have developed routines which enable them to bring order to the chaos of events in the short time available, and to select what is relevant. Journalistic routines provide the minimum required level of continuity, security and predictability in a field that, by its very nature, is unpredictable and insecure.

The ‘news’ that we see, hear and read, shaped as it is by this largely routine process of selection, editing and presentation, is coloured and biased news, not because it is deliberately slanted, but because bias is simply unavoidable. Nevertheless, most authors agree that the working methods of the media and of individual journalists result in some systematic distortion, in which some news and some providers of news have easier access to the media than others. The causes of this phenomenon can be classified according to factors of place, time and persons (see McQuail 1994, and Shoemaker & Reese – 1996 for overviews).

In news production, the time factor plays a significant role in several ways. News events are new events. The media rely entirely on actuality: they operate within a certain temporal framework and rhythm. In many cases they are published daily (or with even greater frequency), and they work to strict deadlines. This encourages the selection of events that fit neatly into such a schedule, but also entails a certain tendency on the part of the mass media to ignore long-term processes. Issues may be announced, but their development over time is rarely followed. The short time available for news production frequently means that there is little room for reflection or analysis. This is particularly true of television, a medium that in any case lends itself less well to the presentation of information with a high degree of abstraction. The tempo has increased significantly, with short ‘soundbites’ replacing the exposition and development of any sustained train of thought. This has now become so commonplace that newspaper articles of, say, fifty years ago are now seen as overly detailed and long-winded, while

⁴ See *Vrij Nederland* 3 February 2001

television news broadcasts of fewer than twenty years ago are experienced as pompous and excessively slow.

Sources can take advantage of the characteristic features of news production. An editor may be unable to carry a particular story without breaking his deadline, which enables the mala fide source to wait until the last moment to 'leak' a snippet of information, knowing that there will be no time to check the facts properly. This is the kind of thing that may have occurred on 10 July 1995, when the presenter of Nova, Maartje van Weegen, asked Joris Voorhoeve, then Minister of Defence, to comment on an incoming report about military casualties among the Dutchbat forces. The report later proved to be unfounded.⁵ But even when there is time to check the facts, there is a tendency not to do so properly. This was the case when a member of the German parliament, Stefan Schwarz, spread a story about Bosnian women having had canine fetuses implanted in their wombs, which later proved to be false. Various Dutch media, including *De Volkskrant*, carried the story. Few (e.g. the *Algemeen Dagblad*) took the time to check the story, first.⁶

In addition to the lack of time, competition between the media can play a role here. This is not confined to the commercial media. Indeed, the competition for prestige between current affairs programmes such as Nova and Netwerk⁷ can lead to lapses of judgement. At the same time, competition can also serve to increase news organizations' vigilance and critical appraisal. Hard news, i.e. that which is happening now and is unexpected, enjoys greater prestige than the less time-critical events, often qualified (or dismissed) as 'soft' news. The fact that some news is so current – every story having a 'tell-by date' – combines with the public function of the media to produce a desire to be first with certain, preferably contentious, revelations. This aim has been further enhanced by the increased competition and commercialization of the media. In fact, coming up with a 'scoop' is more a game enjoyed by journalists to impress their colleagues, than it is an achievement admired (or even noticed by) the general public.

Personalization, increased pace of reporting and presentation, diminished depth and a reduction in time for background analysis and commentary, all may well have to do with commercialization and competition between media, but there are other factors. These include technological innovations and the characteristics of the dominant medium of our times, television. Furthermore the popularization of the media is not based on business motives alone, but is to some extent a reflection of social change, as expressed in new leisure-time patterns, and the altered reading, viewing and listening habits of a more and more fragmented audience. It is also the result of the media having gained more insight into people's varying capacities to process information, for instance, or their interest in following the news.

Like any other organization, the media must devote their limited resources in as efficient a manner as possible. In the first instance, this means focusing attention on those events, places and institutions which are accessible and which, experience suggests, are likely to provide important news for a wide audience. The media have developed an extensive news-gathering net based on this very concept, and know how to cast it upon the waters in order to ensure that it comes back appropriately filled. Accordingly, the news net is particularly finely meshed and catches most in the established centres of power.

This effect is enhanced when journalists with specific areas of responsibility or in a particular location are expected to 'come up with the goods', i.e. to continue supplying reports and commentaries that meet with the media definition of news. In practice, this usually means that they are expected to report the same news that is being reported by prominent colleagues in other organizations. Correspondents and reporters are often instructed on the basis of information that their editors have gleaned from other media, both at home and abroad. The content of the media is therefore largely

⁵ Brugsma 2 February 2000; Groenhuijsen and Van Liempt 1995.

⁶ Willem Beusekamp, 'Artsen Servië doen proeven op moslimvrouwen' ('serb doctors perform experiments on Muslim women'), *De Volkskrant*, 4 January 1993 (see also *De Volkskrant*, 14 January 1993).

⁷ Both programmes have been known to boast of their successes on occasion. See articles in *Het Parool*, 26 August 1998 and *Vrij Nederland*, 10 July 1999.

determined by what other media and other journalists consider to be important, a situation that can occasionally result in ‘pack journalism’, possibly choreographed by the newsmakers themselves (Crouse 1972). During the 1994 Dutch general election campaign, the main evening television news resurrected an old story to the effect that the Christian Democrats (CDA) planned to freeze disability benefits. According to Geelen (1998:91) newspaper editors everywhere immediately instructed their political desks to carry that same story. Here, the guiding factor was not the actual content of the report, but the fact that a respected medium had carried the somewhat alarmist story. In general, the agenda of television news and current affairs programmes is still influenced by the content of the newspapers, while the newspapers will often choose to elaborate on a story introduced by television.

The task of ensuring a constant flow of news is partly delegated by the media to organizations which specialize in doing just that: the press agencies. The news net of a press agency is wider and/or more targeted than those of the individual media, but is nevertheless subject to similar limitations with regard to the sources from which information is derived. Television news and current affairs programmes often use the same footage when covering foreign news stories. The news media, wherever in the world they may be situated, have much in common. However, this does not detract from the fact that there can also be marked differences between the various types of media and between the media in different countries (Cook 1994; see also Wesselius 1999).⁸ Despite the use of the same video footage, the international news items on different stations or on the news programmes of different countries display significant differences, because the selection and editing of images and the content of the spoken news commentary will be adapted to the interests and knowledge of the target audience, or will stress a particular relevance to the country concerned (Näsi 2000; Gurevitch, Levy and Roeh 1991).

The routine selection and processing of material also results in the media presenting more news about predictable events than about unexpected, unpredictable occurrences (cf. Galtung and Ruge 1981; Tuchman 1978). Much media content is planned in advance, which in practice means that it is determined by the most prominent national and international newsmakers. News management on the source side – that of the newsmakers – has become extremely professional over the years. Access to the media is greatly facilitated when the source is important and is able to supply relevant material to the media in an efficient manner (Gans 1980; Manheim 1994). The media may try to preclude this situation by inviting independent experts to speak, but in many cases these experts, or the organizations they represent, are themselves linked to the government or other prominent newsmakers.

Because events are linked to a particular location, in a war situation the authorities can be seen to enjoy greater control of access to the location, or can ensure that a particular location becomes the focus of a news event (McQuail 1994; Gow, Paterson and Preston 1996). In conflict situations, the freedom of the press is frequently restricted by the lack of transport facilities between locations, or (at the psychological level) by the risks involved in moving from one location to another.

The news net is also a social relations network between journalists and their sources. While the intention is usually to reveal previously undiscovered facts, the position of the parties can undeniably lead to the construction of news. The events at the location in which the network is based have a far greater chance of being accepted as newsworthy than those elsewhere. The news network operates according to a self-fulfilling prophecy: the media are to be found where the news is, and the news emerges where the media are. Newsmakers across the spectrum, from aid organizations to terrorist networks, are generally aware of the importance of the media presence.⁹

The news process relies heavily on personal contacts between journalists and their sources. Because such contacts are of great mutual benefit (and to a certain extent also in the public interest),

⁸ Harrison (2000) studied the British television news of 23 April 1993 and found marked differences in the coverage of events in Bosnia in terms of selection, editing and commentary accompanying film footage. These differences were observed between the various broadcasting companies – BBC, ITN Channel 4 and GMTV – but also between news broadcasts on one and the same channel.

⁹ See Ronald Ockhuysen: Overdrijven om bestwil (‘stretching the truth’), *De Volkskrant*, 8 March 1997; Von Merveldt 1998.

there is a degree of reciprocity implied in the services provided by one to the other. In such a situation the fact that newsmakers and independent journalists represent conflicting interests can easily be obscured. In the closed journalistic culture that existed until the 1950s, there was sometimes a tendency – even among journalists themselves – to consider secrecy more important to the public interest than openness.

The stronger emphasis on persons and personalities in the news process can also be seen as a consequence of the dominant role of television and the increased competition between the various media. By definition, television relies on visual material, while it is perhaps less able to convey abstract material than the print media.¹⁰ It is therefore inevitable that television news will take on a personal element, but this can also be deliberately exploited in the pursuit of audience ratings. More and more newsmakers, in politics and in other spheres, now try to meet the demand for such material themselves.

Compared to the print media, television works in more associative ways, inviting affective responses rather than cognitive or rational ones. The ‘personalization’ of social and political processes or developments is, however, not a new phenomenon and it is inherent in media reporting in general, only in television it is vital to the very existence of the medium.

In the editorial structure of news organizations, and in the print media in particular, the reliance on more or less permanent news sources is reflected in the internal organization, with separate ‘desks’ for domestic news, political affairs, foreign news, etc. In the print media, with their relatively large staffs, such specialist sections have been able to develop, fed by the continuity and predictability of certain news flows, a stable thematic interest, a defined set of news sources, or a certain procedure for handling the news. Under normal circumstances, this division of responsibilities is effective, but, for instance in case of a foreign conflict in which the Netherlands might become politically and militarily involved, this fragmentation into separate editorial departments can only impede the news production process. Editorial staff will inevitably be less able to deal with aspects of the news which cannot be fitted into one of the existing ‘pigeonholes’ or which fall outside their usual remit. An additional complication caused by a conflict of the type seen in Yugoslavia is that there will be tensions between the editorial staff at home and those who are more or less permanently involved in gathering the news some considerable distance away.

News values and frames

The cohesion and consistency of this system of news gathering and processing reveal a shared vision of what is to be regarded as important. There is a considerable degree of agreement on this point, at least in the Western world. The media announce what in the world we should think about and discuss (‘agenda-setting’), they report on the processes involved and they indicate which aspects are important (‘priming’), and beyond this, they tell us how issues should be seen and understood, in a process known as ‘framing’.

Although generally speaking, the media would not deliberately want to impose any one vision of actuality on their readers or viewers, when approaching topics and selecting sources, journalists will inevitably be led by their vision with regard to the issues, by their knowledge and expectations concerning the background to events, or at the very least by an idea concerning the context in which the events should be placed (Altheide 1974, Fishman 1980). But the contexts and interpretive frameworks in which facts are placed do open up certain interpretations while excluding others. Altheide and Snow (1976) use the term ‘media logic’ to indicate established ideas and conventions which govern form and content of certain categories of news in certain media.

¹⁰ NATO spokesman during the Kosovo crisis, Jamie Shea, expands on this idea in his explanation of the lack of media attention for the displacement of people from Kosovo in April 1999: “(...) why do the media not report on this? Because there are no pictures. And it is a fundamental lesson which all military personnel must learn. It is very simple: no pictures means no news.” (Shea 2000:53).

Readers, listeners and viewers also have clearly defined terms of reference, knowledge and understanding, 'frames', which, when activated, determine their interpretation (see Biocca, 1991). Without a common set of frames, any meaningful transfer of information from the media to their audience is all but impossible. Accordingly, the frames adopted must reflect a reasonably high level of social and political 'correctness'.

In mass communications the initiative always lies with the producers of the news. The frames reflect the visions held by the newsmakers with regard to the events, as well as the perspective from which the media and individual journalists interpret those events. They work as more or less compelling suggestions that a certain event should be understood in a certain manner. In a sense, frames add a historical element to messages that describe the actuality of the here and now, since they may serve to place the events in the sequence and context of past events. These ways of understanding are culturally defined. In Serbia, current events could be related to the mediaeval Battle of Kosovo, a significant event in Balkan history, marking the beginning of five hundred years of Ottoman rule. However, such an analogy would be lost on most Western Europeans, for whom the reference to a battle of more than 600 years ago, would merely place current events in an incomprehensible, primitive light.

Frames establish the values that are at stake. With a single term, keyword, example or picture, whole series of associations and meanings can be activated, the 'good guys' can be distinguished from the 'bad guys', the perpetrators from the victims. Cause and effect relationships become immediately apparent, responsibilities apportioned (Graber 1984). Here, 'responsibility' includes both that for the creation of the problem (blame) and its eventual solution. While the literature distinguishes between 'historical' frames and 'responsibility' frames (Bennett 1995; Ruigrok 2000), it is difficult to apply this distinction to the frames used in the coverage of the Bosnian conflict, since historical analogies are used which also indicate or suggest certain causal relationships and which separate the good guys from the bad ('genocide', 'concentration camps', 'appeasement', 'Vietnam').

The choice of a historical analogy restricts the number of policy options, including those open to the journalists themselves. Once a particular context has been assigned, information which points in any other direction is likely to be dismissed, consciously or otherwise, as irrelevant (Dorman & Livingston 1994). Journalism as a whole – and television in particular – has a general tendency to simplify political scenarios, by taking concrete examples to stand for complex situations (Burns 1996; Iyengar and Simon 1994; Caldwell 1995).

The news process in international conflicts

The process of selecting, editing and presenting international news is not greatly different from that for domestic news, although the role of intermediaries such as the international press agencies is noticeably more significant. Certain news values, such as distance (in a political, economic and geographical sense) and the relationship with the national interest, play an important part in the international news process (Galtung & Ruge 1981; Shoemaker & Reese 1996). Kleinnijenhuis (1990) states that the media's own expectations with regard to the manner in which relationships between countries will develop serve to explain the degree of coverage of those countries. Cohen's seminal 1963 study, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, concludes that the manner in which news is presented depends on such factors as the foreign policy of a country's government, with which the media will largely align themselves.

At first glance, this seems a rather remarkable conclusion, since in the conflict that has contributed most to defining this mutual relationship – the Vietnam War – the media rejected and railed against the foreign policy of their own government. This attitude eventually led to the USA's withdrawal from Vietnam. Although this view is not undisputed, arguably Vietnam was crucial in developing an idea about the role and influence of the mass media, particularly television, in armed conflict situations. The general view of the government, military apparatus and general public seems to be that the United States lost the Vietnam War partly because public opinion gradually came to decry all involvement in the conflict as a result of free and open television coverage.

Media policy in later military operations – Panama, Grenada, the Gulf War – shows that the American authorities learned from this experience. After Vietnam, the media were no longer allowed free access to the theatre of operations. The supply of information was carefully organized and rationed. The Somali conflict appeared to confirm what Vietnam had first revealed: that television is able to influence public opinion one way or the other – for or against a conflict – with evocative and shocking images. As soon as television showed the body of an American being dragged around the streets of Mogadishu, the US intervention in Somalia was as good as over.

A number of researchers have now expressed doubts as to whether the theory presented in the foregoing paragraph is based on an accurate analysis. The reality of the reports from Vietnam was, according to these authors, very different to the established image that has existed to date. American political leaders may have assumed that the general public have a low level of tolerance when it comes to casualties on their own side or for gruesome images of any type, but the actual situation is somewhat more complicated. During the Vietnam War, American television did not show all that many casualties, and a general decline in public support for a war has been seen in other armed conflicts as well (Strobel 1997). Moreover, at first, the American media were not remarkably critical of military interventions in Indochina at all (see Schoeman 1993). They only became so when the political consensus among the American elite began to show cracks.

According to Hallin (1986) and Gitlin (1994), American television news even tends to glamorise war. Vietnam was no exception. War is presented as drama: an exciting tale of combat between the forces of good and evil, presented as a show complete with supportive captions and graphics, dramatic music and carefully selected images. The media, especially the local and popular media, have a marked tendency to throw their support behind ‘our boys’, thus helping to form a national consensus (Hvitfelt 1992; Ottosen 1992). Media which choose to take a stance outside the general feeling of togetherness are likely to receive a hostile response from the public, as the BBC discovered during the Falklands conflict (Young and Jesser, 1997). In times of war, public opinion is usually on the side of the government rather than that of the critical journalist (Paletz 1994). Because television ‘belongs to everyone’ it is somewhat more vulnerable in this regard than a critical newspaper.

An interesting question is whether the relationships between the media, public opinion, governments and the military apparatus have changed since the end of the Cold War. Many authors believe they have. Until recently, most conflicts were placed in the context of East-West relations or, in the case of former colonies of the West, in that of their colonial pasts (Wall 1997a, 1997b). Any automatic political consensus between the media, the government and the general public is now a thing of the past. Today’s military interventions are of a different order, being primarily peacekeeping operations. They are unlikely to call on the total available (military and economic) potential, and are less likely to attract public attention as a matter of course. Public opinion is not mobilized. The country’s survival is not at stake. According to Strobel (1997), today’s media cannot be subjected to the same constraints that would apply in the war situations of old. Indeed, the division of roles between the political and military authorities on the one hand and the media on the other is reversed: the authorities need the media in order to drum up support, to explain their actions and even to gather information. In return, they have to provide facilities for the media to function. The end of a peacekeeping operation is often unclear and without demonstrable results, so considerable explanation is required. Hallin (1994) identifies an increasing tendency in the USA to regard post-Cold War conflicts as manifestations of pointless political anarchy and barbarism, from which America must distance itself completely. This may or may not be a uniquely American perspective. Wolberink (1995:79; see also Berghorst 1995; Bohr 1996) suggests that it was ‘a development in thinking brought about by the end of the Cold War’ that led to the almost unanimous willingness within Dutch political circles to intervene in the former Yugoslavia.

Influence of media reports and opinion in international conflicts

‘What is the influence of the media?’ When couched in such general terms, the question is rather meaningless. The pointless answer would be that media impact can be both big and small.¹¹ The media are not primary social actors: they are followers rather than leaders (McQuail 1992), embedded in and reliant on society (Dahlgren 1995). Television has been most people’s main source of information since the 1960s, or at least this is what almost all surveys suggest. In fact, there are indications that the role of television in this regard has diminished in recent years (Schoenbach & Lauf 2001).

The media’s influence on political decision-making depends on countless factors, many of which are specific to the circumstances of a given situation. The nature of the conflict, the phase it has reached, the extent of the national interest – all such factors will help to determine the influence of the media. Usually, many of the relevant environmental variables will be determined by the authorities themselves (according to Strobel 1997). In a clear two-sided war situation, such as the Gulf War, the authorities dominate the stage and the influence of the media is minimal. In situations which are less clear-cut, the media may be able to exert considerable influence on the political decision-making processes. This situation can be seen in many peacekeeping operations, which take place against a background of plentiful information and few opportunities for overall control.

The degree of control over circumstances is an important factor, but most researchers in this area (such as Bennett 1990; Hallin 1986; Paletz 1994; Sparrow 1999; Strobel 1997; Wolfsfeld 1997; Zaller 1994) see the influence of the media primarily as a function of the consensus and determination among the political elite. When the authorities are largely in agreement and when there are clear political objectives, it is unlikely that the media will be in a position to bring about a shift in policies. That is another lesson which may be learned from the Vietnam War. Only when cracks in the political consensus started to appear could the media step in. When there is no discussion and no criticism, the media are inclined to follow the government line.

Of course, this conclusion can be seen as self-evident. It would be highly surprising if, given a high degree of homogeneity within the political elite, this would not be reflected by (or be a reflection of) similar consensus among the media elite and the general public. After all, media and politicians work on the basis of similar assumptions and reference frameworks, whereupon they will arrive at conclusions which tend to be mutually reinforcing. The media can hardly be expected to take a dissenting position during times of great social consensus (such as that in the Netherlands during the civil war in the former Yugoslavia).

All such aspects bring the influence of the media into perspective and also serve to determine the role of public opinion, insofar as any discrepancy between the two exists. Under normal circumstances, public opinion is just that – ‘opinion’, not much more. In other words, no matter how strongly held, there is little likelihood that it will have its way, once those in power have made up their minds. However, in the eyes of the policy-makers themselves, there is often little difference between public opinion and media opinion. Aside from formal opinion polls or occasional personal contacts, politicians have little opportunity to gauge public opinion directly. Instead they have to assume that general public opinion is represented (and to a considerable degree also created) by the media.

Two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, as long as the political elite remains united, the likelihood of serious and effective public or media opposition is relatively small. Secondly, it is unlikely that the media would be able to single-handedly alter foreign policy or security decisions. That is not to say that there may not be some influence. The Bakker Committee (Report 2000: 444) distinguishes between media influence with a limited effect – mainly confirming and strengthening opinions – at the decision-making stage prior to the deployment of Dutchbat, and a very much more significant media impact in the wake of the fall of Srebrenica.

¹¹ The influence of Yugoslavian media prior to the dissolution of the state and during the (civil) war will not be considered here. (See La Brosse 1996, etc.).

Television and other media

Considerable influence is often ascribed to television. Ministers such as British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd and his Dutch counterpart Jozias van Aartsen complained that they were put under pressure by television reporting and television reporters. Some authorities just refer to a 'CNN effect', meaning certain forms of fast and direct on-the-spot reporting. Shocking images, beamed directly into the viewer's home, demand an immediate reaction, without time to consider the situation in depth. 'CNN' also stands for the selective nature of media coverage in general and television coverage in particular. Why was there so much coverage of Somalia, Lebanon, Rwanda, Kuwait, and Bosnia, and next to nothing about Sudan, Mozambique, Nagorno-Karabach or Liberia (Siccama 1993; Paletz 1994)?

While television does exert such pressure, quite a number of analysts, both academic researchers and journalists (Strobel 1997; Gowing 1996) ascribe greater influence to the quality (broadsheet) newspapers than to television. Strobel believes that newspapers may not have a great influence on the mass public, and hence on public opinion, but do clearly speak to the elite responsible for policy. Gowing (1996:86) believes that this is because senior politicians are unlikely to spend much time watching television, and react only when they are confronted with the opinions of editors, columnists and involved politicians who do indeed keep a 'weather eye' on the television. Their comments are avidly read and acted upon by the policy-makers, because they believe that such comments represent a 'direct line' to public opinion. Moeller (1999) points out that during any real crisis today the television is on, and watched by even the most senior officials, while at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy and his Defense Secretary McNamara still had to rely on internal channels for all their information. According to former US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, television sets much of the agenda, " '(...) and then the President and his Secretary of State have to deal with it. There's just no argument.'" (cited in Bell 1995:145).

Others ascribe an even more direct and important role to television, both in the creation of short-term 'hypes' and longer-term trends. One of the significant factors is the integration of television and political culture in the Western world, as discussed above (Dahlgren 1995).

Although policy-makers, or executives of aid organizations, for that matter, do complain about the disproportionate influence that the media seem to have on elected officials at all levels, they have nevertheless adapted their own behaviour to the laws of the media and are most indignant if the cameras and microphones should fail to turn out to cover any crisis or event they might consider important enough. Furthermore, they themselves – as 'stakeholders' – are to a significant extent responsible for the supply of information used by television and the other media, and they are certainly not averse to using the media for their own purposes. This may not always be admitted, but Major General Lewis Mackenzie for instance, the officer commanding Canadian UNPROFOR troops in Sarajevo, made no secret of the fact that the media occasionally performed a useful function for him:

"Whenever I went into negotiations with the warring parties, it was a tremendous weapon to be able to say: 'OK, if you don't want to do it the UN's way, I'll nail your butt on CNN in about twenty minutes.' That worked, nine times out of ten." (MacKenzie, quoted in Minear, et al. 1996:59).

The parties involved in a conflict increasingly rely on the services of professional news managers and public relations companies who try to take advantage of politicians' perceived susceptibilities. One of the most conspicuous instances was the case of the story manufactured by Citizens for a Free Kuwait and Hill & Knowlton, to the effect that babies were being taken from their incubators in Kuwait and routinely murdered (Luostarinen 1992; Manheim 1994; Bennett 1994).¹² Conversely, as Dirk Schumer

¹² The Croatian government seems to have enjoyed some success, also with Dutch journalists, using women of Croatian origin they had brought in from Canada and the United States as propagandists. Often fiercely nationalist, these women

relates in connection with the debacle in Srebrenica, politicians in our media society often approach military missions in such a fashion that they give the impression of being more concerned about their own public relations (and having a demonstrably clear conscience) than about any consequences of their actions.¹³

Bernard Cohen (1994) is among those who believe that the power and influence of television has increased enormously. The visual reports it carries are able to evoke such emotions among the viewers that the conscience of various public institutions is mobilized and governments may be forced to implement interventions on purely humanitarian grounds (as in Somalia and Bosnia), without careful consideration of the costs and risks.

The speed and emotion of the reporting are factors that may cause politicians to feel hard pressed into action. This was the case with Van Aartsen's public comments at the time of the East Timor crisis, and those of British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd in his famous speech at the Travellers' Club in London. Referring to recent events in Yugoslavia, Hurd said:

“There is nothing new in mass rape, in the shooting of civilians, in war crimes, in ethnic cleansing, in the burning of towns and villages. What is new is that a selection of these tragedies is now visible within hours to people around the world...” (quoted in Bell 1995:137)

Sometimes, sustained and focused media attention on certain events can lead to a ‘policy panic’, a situation in which governments feel constrained to take some form of action merely to avoid a public relations disaster. This was the case with Mogadishu. Such reactions mostly take the form of crisis management rather than policy change (Gowing 1996). Gowing (1995) describes them as ‘high profile responses (...) that produce rapid, visual evidence of action’. Minear, Scott and Weiss (1996) believe that even the sustained coverage of the war in Yugoslavia did not influence the strategic policy of the Western powers as such but that, at most, certain peaks in media attention would have led to minor adjustments in tactics on the part of governments and the UN.

Paletz (1994; see also Siccama 1993), however, cites a number of cases in which television coverage would indeed have influenced policy to the extent that an entirely different strategy, namely active intervention, was brought much closer (as in Lebanon, the Philippines, Yugoslavia and Somalia). Bennett (1995) cites cases in which the media forced governments to openly consider matters which they would rather have kept out of the public domain. For example, the conference on Yugoslavia held in London in the summer of 1992 would not, Bennett believes, have taken place at all were it not for the images of the camp at Omarska broadcast on Britain's Channel 4 and the ensuing commotion. Gowing (1996), cites the same Channel 4 report, the mortar attack on the market in Sarajevo, the scenes of an American soldier's body being dragged around the streets of Mogadishu, and Tony Birtley's reports of the bombardment of Srebrenica in March 1993, as ‘exceptions’ to the general rule that television news coverage is unable to influence policy. In these instances, journalists placed topics on the agenda which the politicians would have preferred not to have had to consider at all.

Burns (1996:97) believes that this makes the electronic media jointly responsible for ‘creating the conditions in which policy errors have been made’. When the media act as self-appointed advocates of certain forms of action, this interferes with their position as independent observers of conflict; they become a party, with a share in the responsibility for anything that may go wrong.

However, many researchers believe that the effect of spectacular television reports and film footage on public opinion is easily overestimated. Furthermore, any effect is unlikely to be long-lasting. Gowing (1996) cites the shocking scenes of the Croatian massacre of Muslims in Ahmici. These pictures temporarily rendered the Croats the ‘bad guys’ in public opinion, until that role was once again

spoke excellent English and could communicate well. However, many commentators (including Bleich) believe that the professionalism of the parties' information provision mechanism was less than impressive.

¹³ ‘Das richtige Gefühl für den Umgang mit Massakern.’ Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 23 September 1995.

assumed by the Bosnian Serbs. Findahl (2001) demonstrates that once one particular image has become dominant, its effect can be retrospective, leading to a reinterpretation of historical events. This is how the population of Umeå in Sweden came to blame the Serbs for the mass murders in the village of Stupni Do in the autumn of 1993, while in fact the atrocities had been committed by Croats.

Chapter 2

Yugoslavia and Dutch journalism

Actors

Various parties play a role in the media process of opinion forming about ‘the Netherlands and Yugoslavia’. Before going on to analyse the news process in any great detail, it is useful to identify a number of relevant actors, if only in outline. Moreover, we must remember that opinions and policies are influenced not only by Dutch actors, but also by international organizations such as the UN, the EU, the WEU (Western European Union) and NATO, by certain individual countries, the warring parties in Yugoslavia and, of course, foreign media. In general terms, the parties most closely involved in political decision-making in the Netherlands are the government (in particular the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence), the Lower House of Parliament and the political parties. In addition, we must consider the chiefs of the armed forces, opinion leaders and experts from outside the political arena or the military apparatus, ‘public opinion’ and the media.

Of course, the position of the various actors in this process is, to a certain extent, predictable. Each represents certain interests and carries certain responsibilities which determine their position and policy. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was, under the leadership of Van den Broek, Kooijmans and Van Mierlo, a proponent of an active Dutch role in the context of the Netherlands’ membership of the UN, NATO and the EU. Human rights considerations were given high priority and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed taking firm action, particularly directed at the (Bosnian) Serbs. In the period prior to Dutchbat forces being sent to Srebrenica, the Netherlands became one of the first UN countries to advocate the Safe Area concept. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs pressed the Ministry of Defence to ‘do more’ in the military sense. In addition to these motives, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (and the government as a whole) apparently expected this role to raise the country’s international prestige and influence.

Under the stewardship of ministers Relus ter Beek and Joris Voorhoeve, the Ministry of Defence was rather more cautious, an attitude prompted in large measure by reservations held by senior staff in the armed forces. The Defence ministers themselves were not deaf to the arguments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and were especially attuned to pressure from Parliament and particularly the larger parties, which urged the maximum possible show of force.¹⁴ Even before his appointment as minister, when still director of the Clingendael Institute (the Netherlands Institute for International Relations), Voorhoeve had advocated a firmer approach to the Serbs and a more significant military contribution by the Netherlands. Within the armed forces themselves, an extensive post-Cold War process of restructuring and redefining tasks had resulted in considerable uncertainty regarding the future.

The nature, extent and scope of the events in Yugoslavia created a situation in which spokespersons for aid organizations, moral and opinion leaders of many sorts, as well as columnists and people with all kinds of relevant expertise, also chose to become involved in the process of opinion-forming, or were drawn into this process. Their views could be read on the editorial pages of newspapers and serious magazines or heard in the news and current affairs programmes on radio and television. Among the moral leaders who were frequently to be heard expressing firm opinions were representatives of the Netherlands Interchurch Peace Council (IKV), Pax Christi, Médecins sans Frontières and the Red Cross, but also politicians such as Minister Jan Pronk and Member of the European Parliament Arie Oostlander. Another group to take part in the public debate via the media

¹⁴ Surveys show that this view was shared by a majority of the Dutch population, although support for it gradually declined.

was formed by military experts (often retired senior officers), polemologists, representatives of the Clingendael Institute and experts in Balkan affairs.¹⁵

After the fall of Srebrenica, the public debate continued to be dominated by the same domestic actors, but by that time various roles and positions had shifted. Even before the fall of Srebrenica, we can identify various phases in which not only the degree of media attention varied, but also the role and prominence of the various actors. This is a reflection of the development of the situation itself and of the various players involved, both at home and abroad.

Coverage

For several years the war in the former Yugoslavia was among the major news topics in the Western media. The accompanying study of its coverage in some Dutch newspapers and television news programmes shows that this was also the case in the Netherlands, even before Srebrenica (Scholten et al. 2001a). Indeed, media attention was such that it made some people wonder why there should be so much coverage of events in Yugoslavia as opposed to, say, Rwanda, Sierra Leone or Afghanistan (see Polman 1997). Part of the answer has already been given: this is how the media work. Wall (1997b) points out that there are not only widely varying levels of coverage, but also differences in interpretation. The media presented the civil war in Rwanda as a pointless, primitive tribal conflict. The events in Yugoslavia, on the other hand, were depicted as dreadful but nevertheless understandable in their historical and political context. The BBC journalist Martin Bell (1995:271) disputes that the difference in approach could be the result of any ulterior motive. "It is not, as some have misinterpreted it, a racist argument; that the victims in Bosnia are white and the victims in Rwanda are black. It is a neighbourhood argument, that this is happening in our own backyard. It threatens the security of all of us, and we ignore it at our peril." André Roelofs, foreign editor of *De Volkskrant*, gave a similar answer although he did so in rather more words (here in translation):

"That is complicated, it goes quite a bit further actually, a sort of self-interest you could say. And I see Europe as a small region in the world as a whole, a reasonably small and diminishing proportion of the world population, and I believe that the first duty we owe ourselves is to stabilize Europe and the neighbouring region, to maintain this as a region in which there is a reasonably high degree of civilization. One in which this type of dreadful regime is given no opportunity. I also believe that it is in the interest of the rest of the world. If you let that go, we have lost everything. I am prepared to do everything I can for other parts of the world. Of course, it would be of great significance if we could ensure that the dramatic history of the unstable Balkan region could be stabilized and develop along more acceptable lines. Not remove the stark contrasts that exist there, but make them manageable."¹⁶

Another distinct paradox emerges, in that although the Balkan situation attracted what can only be described as widespread media coverage, this was in contrast to the impression that many journalists formed then and still hold today, namely that the general public did not attach great significance to the

¹⁵ For the standpoints they adopted, see Honig & Both 1996; Kees Schaeapman in *Vrij Nederland*, 19 September 1992; Willebrord Nieuwenhuis in *NRC Handelsblad*, 22 December 1993; Leonoor Meijer in *Trouw* 10 February 1994; Frits Baltesen & Alain van der Horst in *HP De Tijd*, 8 September 1995.

¹⁶ Roelofs, 29 August 2000. Hans Laroës (NOS Journaal) offers the same argument (Laroës, 24 November 1999). Linda Polman (19 August 1999) is noticeably more cynical: "(...) it was a very mediagenic expedition, What I mean is that all newspapers were prepared to send journalists to Yugoslavia, all the television companies were there, politicians could visit every weekend to have their photographs taken. There were thousands of journalists in Yugoslavia throughout the entire war. You could get to Sarajevo with a train Awayday ticket!"

Bosnian war, and that it also failed to stir the politicians sufficiently.¹⁷ As most of the interviews conducted for this study suggest, a large proportion of Dutch journalists did indeed feel fully involved. This is not merely a convenient reconstruction after the event (i.e. the fall of Srebrenica) since countless examples of media reporting published or broadcast before July 1995 demonstrate an intense concern. A few of these examples, including an appeal by four prominent journalists in late 1991 and the dramatic enjoiner with which the television current affairs programme *Hier en Nu* (Netwerk) ended each edition for several months, will be considered in greater detail below.

Another issue is that of the quality of coverage. Maggie O’Kane, who worked for *The Guardian* and Channel Four, and received plaudits for her reporting from Bosnia, states in an interview with the Australian magazine *Arena*: “in the Bosnian war, journalists made a good job of telling the truth, and made a good job of making Western governments uncomfortable with the reality in Bosnia”.¹⁸ But not everyone is equally convinced that journalists did such a good job. Linda Polman has already been cited above, but some of those who were closer to the actual events than she were not impressed either.¹⁹

Finally, the quality of the journalists themselves is also an issue. Even Maggie O’Kane did not escape controversy. She and Roy Gutman of *Newsday* were among the first to write about the Serbs’ prison camps.²⁰ Her reports from the former Yugoslavia, like the manner in which she had highlighted the use of depleted uranium warheads during the Gulf War, raised a number of questions. In 1992, former radio reporter Wouter Kurpershoek described her thus: “...and then there’s this Irish journalist Maggie O’Kane, who works for a number of British media, because she takes the most amazing risks. She was the first journalist to enter Gorazde, scene of weeks of fighting. [She is] completely crazy!”²¹

O’Kane personifies various controversies to which the coverage of the war in Yugoslavia gave rise. What should we make of this breed of war correspondent, who is apparently only interested in the thrill of danger, and what must we make of this style of reporting from one who is so engaged, or has even openly taken one side or the other? BBC correspondent Martin Bell coined the term ‘journalism of attachment’, referring to a form of journalism which does not attempt to be impartial, but which clearly takes the side of the victims, of the ‘good guys’ rather than that of the ‘bad guys’. Apart from Bell himself, well-known proponents (and exponents) of this approach (from outside the Netherlands) include O’Kane, Gutman and Ed Vulliamy. Others, such as Bell’s BBC colleague John Simpson, are very much against such ‘slanted’ journalism (Simpson 1998; Broer & Kleijwegt 1999; see also Vulliamy 1999).

It is a controversy concerning the journalist’s task that is almost as old as journalism itself. Most journalists have a foot in each camp, combining a little of both types: those who attempt to be objective observers and those who take sides because objectivity does not exist (see also Weaver & Wilhoit 1996²²). In Bosnia, a preference for the ‘attached’ form of journalism may have been prompted by the situation on the ground. Confronted with the scenes they found there, many journalists concluded that impartiality would be wholly inappropriate.

¹⁷ Brugsma believes that this is not applicable to the period following the fall of the enclave: “(...) since strangely enough there is not yet any Srebrenica ‘fatigue’ in the Netherlands, although everyone believes this to be the case.” (Brugsma, 2 February 2000).

¹⁸ ‘Covering Bosnia’, *Arena Magazine*, no. 20, December/January 1995-1996, pp. 33-36 (interviewer Eddy Jokovich); also <http://members.optusnet.com.au/~contempa/publications/int01mo.html>. See also Gjelten 1999.

¹⁹ E.g. Bart Rijs, ‘Journalist leek meer op Dutchbatter dan hij wil toegeven’ (‘Journalist was more of a Dutchbatter than he cares to admit’), *De Volkskrant*, 22 August 1998; Theo Klein, ‘srebrenica ook journalistieke les’ (‘srebrenica also a lesson in journalism’), <http://www.volkskrant.nl/achtergronden/extra/355022294.htm>, 7 October 2000. See also Westerman & Rijs, 1997.

²⁰ *Newsday* 19 July and 5 August 1992. Fame is distinctly ephemeral. By the time Roy Gutman began to write about Srebrenica in 1995, his name had already been forgotten at the Ministry of Defence in The Hague. At ITN, interest was excited by Maggie O’Kane’s report in *The Guardian* of 29 July 1992 (Moeller, 1999:267).

²¹ Judit Neurink, *Angst en stress in Sarajevo*, (‘Angst and stress in Sarajevo’) *De Journalist*, 28 August 1992.

²² Also: Deuze (2000b) <http://home.pscw.uva.nl/deuze/publ14.htm>; Van Schuur & Vis (2000) <http://www.egroups.com/files/JourNL/PAPERjourcul.htm>

The media's interest in Yugoslavia was clear from the presence of a large number of journalists from all over the world. Some were there more or less full-time, various large news organizations having established a permanent presence. Others came when something particularly newsworthy took place, or accompanied fact-finding missions made by foreign dignitaries. Most journalists went no farther than Sarajevo. However, a notorious element in situations such as this are the 'parachutists', desperately seeking 'someone who's been raped and speaks English'. Unencumbered by any deep background knowledge of the situation, they send their reports home to their editors and disappear as quickly as they arrived. The parachutists are not purely a 'foreign' phenomenon. Algemeen Dagblad journalist Thomassen recounts the tale of several Dutch journalists who were parachuted into the war zone, did a quick 'stand-upper' in which they dissected the war in all its complexity in a few seconds flat, and then hopped rapidly back onto the safe aircraft, no doubt to pass themselves off as true Yugoslavia experts thereafter.

Often, the first to report from a region will be the correspondents under whose aegis it falls. Depending on the intensity and extent of the events, the involvement of press bureaus and the media will increase, whereupon other journalists – some specialists, others not – will be assigned to the story. An increasingly common phenomenon is the independent (television) news production company, such as Zolcer TV from which Netwerk/Hier en Nu took a large number of reports. Large and reputable news organizations, such as BBC World, function from the very beginning as an orientation point for many fellow journalists, just as the editorial desks at home will look to influential foreign media such as The Guardian, The Independent, The New York Times, Le Monde and Die Zeit.

Besides the specialists and dyed-in-the-wool war correspondents, military conflicts such as that in the former Yugoslavia will also attract inexperienced, adventurous journalists who throw themselves completely into the situation. They go where others dare not, yet are often unable to place the events in any broader perspective due to this close involvement. Many allow themselves to rely on local informants who may well have ulterior motives. However, some do develop into valuable and reliable war reporters (Rijs 1998; Rathfelder 1998; Burns 1996; Karskens 2001; Pedelty 1995). Without the journalistic mavericks in the O'Kane mould, many aspects would go unreported altogether. The majority of Yugoslavia reporters fell somewhere between the two extremes.

When covering a complex war situation, the reporters attached to foreign media are frequently dependent on local interpreters, 'stringers' and 'fixers' to arrange meetings and other matters. In a long-term conflict, such stringers may develop extensive and very effective networks. In retrospect, we can observe that the media were not in attendance at a number of crucial moments, such as the fall of Srebrenica itself, often because the combatants prevented them from being there. On occasion, it may also have been due to pure laziness, fear or a combination of the two, or because editors or insurance companies imposed certain minimum standards with regard to personal safety.²³ It has been suggested – usually in the form of an accusation levelled at the media – that the outcome would have been different had (non-Serbian) media been there to cover the assault on Srebrenica.²⁴ The suggestion sounds plausible. However, little more can be said about this without entering the realms of pure speculation.

²³ See also Karskens, 2001. After a news team including Harmen Roeland had suffered a serious accident in early 1992, TV reporters from the *NOS Journaal* were expected to ride in convoy during official trips. This became so routine for Hilversum that, when Gerri Eickhof sent a report of a journey with the Transport Battalion to Busovaca from Split, the news presenter automatically assumed that the whole battalion had returned to Split. (E-mail Eickhof 21 January 2000.)

²⁴ Apart from the camera crews and possibly a few other journalists who entered the enclave on the heels of the Serbs, no journalist was an eye witness to the fall of Srebrenica. It has been suggested that the outcome might have been different had the press been there. (Among those making this suggestion are Michael Williams, media advisor to Akashi, during the 'Conference on media and crisis management: the lessons of the Bosnia and Kosovo crises', organized by the Reuters Foundation Programme and held in Oxford in October 1999.) Nova editor Carolien Brugsma is personally convinced that an appeal from the enclave to CNN would have made a difference (Brugsma, 2 February 2000; also Labeur, 16 August 1999).

The description above applies to journalism in general, and also includes Dutch journalistic involvement in Yugoslavia. The newspapers examined as part of the current study reveal almost constant attention for the events in Slovenia, then Croatia, then in Bosnia-Herzegovina, although intensity varies. The same pattern is found in the content of television news programmes on the public channels and on the commercial channel RTL4, as well as various current affairs programmes. The latter also reflect something of the fluctuating level of activity in Yugoslavia, episodes of intense hostility being interspersed with those of comparative calm, and probably also a growing level of fatigue as the civil war dragged on. For example, between July 1991 and July 1995, the Hier en Nu programme covered the Yugoslavian conflict in one out of three of its weekly editions on average. In 1993, the conflict was reported in 46 broadcasts, i.e. almost every week.

Table 1. Coverage of the war in the former Yugoslavia by NCRV's Hier en Nu*

Year	> 7/1991	1992	1993	1994	< 7/1995
Yugoslavia – broadcasts	8	15	46	17	7

*figures supplied by Hier en Nu

There were a few extended periods which saw no Yugoslavia coverage at all in the programme: 14 October 1991 to 27 April 1992, 18 April to 17 October 1994 and 2 January to 1 May 1995.²⁵ During the periods in which coverage was at its most intense, the items recurring most often were the weekly summaries (25 January 1993 to 21 February 1994), which always closed with the same phrase: ...and still no intervention. We shall return to this subject later.

That prominent Dutch media devoted continuous and extensive attention to the war in the former Yugoslavia does not mean that they maintained any permanent presence of reporters or camera crews, nor that they shared resources to ensure ongoing coverage. A few of the problems which occurred as a result may be related here.

The structure of the Dutch broadcasting system, in which air time on three public TV channels is divided among a number of broadcasters, results in each of those broadcasters attempting to offer different perspectives and backgrounds to the news, based on the ideology (political or religious) of the company concerned. In itself there is nothing strange in this: it is, after all, also common practice among newspapers. Differences in ideology between the various Dutch broadcasting companies have become less important, however, and nowadays public broadcasters have to compete with commercial stations. This has resulted in growing cooperation between the broadcasting companies who share air time on the public service channels. This cooperation is perhaps more advanced in radio (Radio 1), but even television now has current affairs programmes which are either jointly produced by several companies, or produced by each of the partners in turn. The three companies which share the Nederland 1 channel (AVRO, KRO and NRCV) broadcast their current affairs programmes under a joint name (Netwerk) although each produces its own programme.

It is a rare occurrence for all the companies to work together though, seen only during major disasters of short duration (Groenhuijsen and Van Liempt, 1995). In a conflict lasting somewhat longer, no editor would be willing to endorse such joint efforts.²⁶ Groenhuijsen and Van Liempt (1995:61) found that the number of foreign trips made by news reporters from the different broadcasters has increased since NOS and RTL have been in competition, and especially at the time of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. However, the news departments of the individual broadcasting companies are too small to allow a permanent presence in a war zone or any concentration on a particular region. Critics believe that the quality of journalism remained below par as a result: 'ten school newspapers

²⁵ Ten Cate (1998:14) found a similar pattern in the proportion of factual reports, commentary, leader opinion, analyses and background articles in *De Volkskrant* between 1992 and 1995.

²⁶ Labeur & Schut, 23 November 2000.

rather than two serious broadsheets'.²⁷ During the monthly meetings of the editors of the current affairs programmes of the public broadcasters, which have been held for a number of years under the chairmanship of Cees Labeur of NCRV, plans for joint coverage of the Yugoslavian conflict were discussed, but eventually did not materialize.²⁸

Around the same time, i.e. early 1993²⁹, the main Dutch television news programme NOS Journaal was planning to cover Yugoslavia on a semi-permanent basis. The idea was to send a small team of reporters, together with a cameraperson and an editor and equipped with a suitable vehicle and all necessary equipment, into the field for periods of six weeks at a time. Gerri Eickhof was the first to be dispatched, followed by Harmen Roeland. However, in April 1993 the experiment was abandoned. The returns in terms of interesting material were not great enough to justify such an expensive undertaking, and perhaps more important, the level of 'Yugoslavia fatigue' in the Netherlands had been underestimated. 'Yugoslavia is a dead horse,' was one opinion heard.³⁰ Thereafter, reporters were sent out only when there was something definite to do. This is how Gerard Arninkhof, Paul Grijpma, Tim Dekkers and Maria Henneman came to join Roeland and Eickhof on the list of correspondents to the war in Bosnia.³¹ In 1992 and 1993, Dick Verkijk also sent back a number of reports, mostly from Belgrade.

Table 2. Reports from Yugoslavia for NOS Journaal*

-	Roeland	Eickhof	Verkijk	Dekkers	Grijpma	Arninkhof	Duchaisne	Henneman	Total
1992	4	3	2	2	-	-	-	-	11
1993	17	10	4	-	1	-	-	-	32
1994	10	7	-	4	4	3	-	-	28
1995	5	2	-	-	1	10	1	5	24
total	36	22	6	6	6	13	1	5	95

* information supplied by NOS Journaal

When measured by the number of reports from Yugoslavia sent by its own correspondents, the NOS Journaal coverage of the Yugoslavian conflict was at its most intensive in 1993, whereupon it began to decline somewhat. However, there is no really marked variation. Interestingly, most reports in 1992 and 1994 were made in the spring; there was then an interval of some months before the reporters returned to capture the Christmas and New Year's spirit among the Dutch troops.³² In 1994, the war in the former Yugoslavia changed from being more or less the exclusive domain of Harmen Roeland and Gerri Eickhof to one in which several other journalists were active. Unsurprisingly, this is most noticeable in 1995.

The more restricted resources and the size of the news team at RTL rendered a roster system such as that adopted by the NOS out of the question. RTL4's coverage of Yugoslavia was first provided by Herman van Gelder, but was soon taken over by Willem Lust.³³ This situation meant that

²⁷ Lust, 19 July 2000; also Michielsen 14 September 1999.

²⁸ Peter l'Ami, 'Nederlandse pers nog onvoldoende "ingeschoten" op grondoorlog' ('Dutch press not yet fully fired up for ground war'), *De Journalist*, 21 May 1993.

²⁹ During a meeting on 7 January 1993 (Eickhof e-mail, 18 January 2000). For a comprehensive account of the news production process, in particular that of the *NOS Journaal* programme (in 1994) see Hermans (2000); cf. Bardoel 1996; Lohmann and Peters 2000.

³⁰ Eickhof 18 January 2000.

³¹ Information provided by *NOS Journaal*.

³² In April 1992, Harmen Roeland and cameraman Jan van Eijndhoven suffered a serious car accident during a visit to Bosnia.

³³ Later (after the fall of Srebrenica and on various other occasions) Jaap van Deurzen also went to the region on a more regular basis.

Lust was probably in a better position than his NOS counterparts to develop in-depth knowledge and permanent contacts upon whom he could call each time he returned.³⁴

Table 3. Lust's reports from Yugoslavia for RTL Nieuws*

1992	37
1993	47
1994	24
1995	6
Total	114

* information provided by RTL Nieuws

Only now and then did Hier en Nu send reporters to Yugoslavia. The first reports in the NCRV current affairs programme of 1991 and 1992 were products of a short-lived collaboration between the public broadcasters right at the beginning of the conflict and link-ups with on-the-spot radio journalists Wouter Kurpershoek and Gert van Wijland. Harald Doornbos began to make regular contributions in early 1994, including a factual item (broadcast on 5 June 1995) about war correspondents, in which he himself was the central figure. Like the regular news bulletins and the other current affairs programmes, Hier en Nu made extensive use of the Eurovision exchange system through which various European public service broadcasters (including those of the combatants themselves) and the major television press agencies World Television News and Reuters TV (formerly Visnews) make footage available to each other. In addition, Hier en Nu regularly purchased third-party material from foreign producers, including much from the German production company Zolcer TV.³⁵

The regular news bulletins aside, there is little direct competition between public and commercial broadcasters in the Netherlands in the field of news and current affairs. Unlike some other European countries, the Netherlands imposes practically no requirements with regard to the quality of service provided by the commercial stations. As a result, there is little need for them – unlike their counterparts in, say, Britain, Sweden and Finland – to provide serious current affairs information. The

³⁴ Even Lust was completely unprepared the first time: “(...) I assumed that there was peace by that time. They had signed a treaty. We were not prepared for war. We just didn't realize it was possible – a ceasefire had only just been declared. Why should a treaty concerning Croatia create any extra commotion in Bosnia? I was only sent to cover for Herman van Gelder who was on holiday. ‘Just pop over to Zagreb to cover the arrival of the troops’, that's what they said. It wasn't such a big deal. (...) Then everything went wrong in Bosnia and we were not prepared. The Dutch troops who arrived there were stationed at the Rainbow Hotel, that colourful building (...). They were not prepared either. They thought it would be a sort of holiday resort. Far from the turbulence in Croatia. Then it all began in Bosnia. There was that demonstration at which shots were fired by the SDS, Karadzic's supporters. That is when things got out of hand. Then at one point it looked as if it was going to be a little quieter again. We left and we ran into the tanks coming from Belgrade.(...) We really were not prepared. We had a nice shiny car from Vienna, and nothing else. The tanks were coming from Belgrade. You could see them just coming down the road. So many, and formations that I have never seen since. All neatly on trucks. They came back-to-back into the town from Krajina. That's when it all started in Krajina. Arkan was already active there. That's where it all came from. I really thought, ‘Good lord, what's going on here?’. I was really shocked. I was not prepared for this, either mentally or physically. I came home in a rather shocked state. ‘The things that happened there! You saw it all with your own eyes as it got out of hand’. (...) I knew very little about the conflict. It was really not a primary concern for me up until then. (...) I was absolutely unprepared for what was to happen. It happened before your very eyes. In Sarajevo, in the city, it was then even more dangerous than later, in my view. I did not know the city, I did not know the situation. I had enough difficulty telling the Serbs and Croats apart. (...) I went back several times that year. Let me see... in any case, I can count two or three trips here. You find out more as you go along.” (Lust, 19 July 2000.)

³⁵ “Zolcer hat Abnehmer in ganz Europa, in Deutschland arbeitet er für ARD und ZDF, aber auch für taff, Exklusiv oder Explosiv, Boulevard-Magazine, deren Titel Reißerisches versprechen. “In Holland reicht es aus, wenn wir eine Geschichte mit mehreren Interviews erzählen. In Deutschland wollen sie zu jedem Thema noch Szenen, da darf kein Statement länger als 20 Sekunden sein.” Zolcer, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 29 January 1996.

competition in this area is therefore mainly between the current affairs programmes of the public broadcasting companies.³⁶

At the time of the war in Yugoslavia the public broadcasting system in the Netherlands underwent considerable organizational change, whereby companies lost part of their autonomy. These changes were not entirely unconnected with the emergence of the commercial stations. In the early 1990s the programmes NOS Laat and Achter het Nieuws merged to become Nova, and the cooperative alliance known as Netwerk developed between Televizier, Brandpunt and Hier en Nu, while the companies EO and TROS took on joint production of 2Vandaag. Together with the political round-up Den Haag Vandaag, Nova rapidly rose to become the most prestigious of these programmes – in the eyes of politicians and journalists alike – closely followed by Netwerk (and in particular the Brandpunt section provided by the KRO). Other programmes followed at some distance.

Reports from staff correspondents or reporters are a more permanent feature of newspaper coverage than of television coverage. This was even the case in 1993, the year in which the television companies' deployment of staff correspondents was at its greatest. In that year, NRC Handelsblad published 129 articles by its correspondent Raymond van den Boogaard, while De Volkskrant ran 99 pieces by Frank Westerman and 60 by Ewoud Nysingh. In some months – January in Van den Boogaard's case and May for Westerman³⁷ – their work appeared on an almost daily basis. This distinction can largely be attributed to the logistic, technical and budgetary differences between the print media and the electronic media, as well as the kind of journalism each entails. In part, it is also due to the greater degree of specialization within newspapers, with their separate 'desks'.

In general, the media pay their own travelling costs. On occasion, however, if it is regarded as a matter of national importance that the people are informed about a situation, the government will make a contribution. During the Yugoslav conflict, the most significant cost components were insurance policies, rental of armoured vehicles and, for the TV teams, satellite relay time and link-ups, available only in Vitez and Sarajevo. In addition, the United Nations was not exactly lavish when it came to providing facilities; journalists were not allowed to travel in UN vehicles, for example. Only those who

³⁶ However, the impact of the competition with the private broadcasters should be brought into perspective. Twenty years ago, when public broadcasters still had a monopoly, C. Boef stated, "Because people are trying to meet the demands of the majority, programmes with low viewing figures are broadcast late at night or are scrapped altogether. Those programmes, which are found interesting by relatively small groups of viewers, are the main casualties. A conspicuous example is current affairs, with all such programmes now broadcast very late in the evening. A broadcasting company used to be able to permit itself the luxury of broadcasting less popular programmes." (Boef 1981:218.)

³⁷ In May 1993, Westerman made a lightning visit to the Srebrenica enclave, where Canadian forces were then stationed. He returned in June 1994. His articles for *De Volkskrant* included a profile of Naser Oric: 'De sheriff van Srebrenica is nog niet verslagen' ('The sheriff of Srebrenica is not yet beaten'), 23 June 1994; see also Westerman and Rijs 1997. ABC News reporter Tony Birtley succeeded in entering the besieged enclave in March 1993, just before French general Morillon made his incursion (Strobel 1997). At around the same time, the German photographer Philip von Recklinghausen and the Bosnian journalist Haris Nezirovic (of *Slobodna Bosna*) spent several weeks in Srebrenica (articles in *The Guardian*, 11 and 15 April 1993).

That few journalists managed to penetrate Srebrenica was not entirely the fault of the Ministry of Defence. *Nova* reporter Twan Huys recalls:

"(...) actually, they [Nicolai and Van Baal] both did everything they could to get me into the enclave. In fact the Ministry wanted me there. The Ministry's frustration at the time was that none of the good things that Dutchbat soldiers were doing within the enclave could be filmed. At one stage, the Ministry's Department of Information even talked about putting me in a military uniform to get me in. But it was not possible because the Ministry was operating under the UN flag. (...) I gained the impression that the Ministry wanted to take as many people as possible. Let's just say that before it all went wrong, they wanted far more press presence than was actually possible."³⁷

A group of journalists comprising reporters from Radio 1, GPD, ANP, *NOS Journaal* and RTL, together with an RTL cameraman, travelled with the first Dutchbat troops but were pulled out of the convoy by the Serbs before it reached Srebrenica and held in Bratunac.

Because Srebrenica remained inaccessible, the Ministry of Defence arranged for a fairly regular flow of camcorder pictures and photographs from the enclave. NOS and RTL agreed to share the videos, while the stills were passed on to the print media through the ANP photo library.

had been accredited by the Directorate of Information at the UN's crisis headquarters in New York were accorded the status of 'official visitor'.

Official visits by ministers provided opportunities for larger groups of journalists to be shown Yugoslavia in a more or less organized fashion. For the Dutch media, it was important to cover such occasions in person, since the large international news organizations were unlikely to do so.

Nevertheless, the UN usually granted only some of the applications. In order to

In November 1993, when Minister Ter Beek visited Dutch troops in Italy and Yugoslavia, he was accompanied for part of his tour by Willebrord Nieuwenhuis (*NRC Handelsblad*), Leo de Rooy (*Defensiekrant*), Hennie Keeris (*Defensiekrant*), Frans Stultiëns (*KRO Echo*/broadcasting coalition), Teun Lagas (*Trouw*) and Marion Busstra (*Friesch Dagblad*), and on another leg of the trip by Willem Lust (RTL4), Keith Tayman (RTL4), Harmen Roeland (NOS), Wim van de Pol (NOS) and Jeroen van Eijndhoven (NOS).

avoid problems, the Ministry of Defence introduced a pooling system for the newspapers and broadcasters. Every official visit would be accompanied by one ANP reporter, one radio reporter (on behalf of all stations and companies) and a number of journalists from the national dailies according to a roster system in alphabetical order. For television, a complicated system for sharing certain facilities was devised (which led to many altercations).

In addition to their own in-house expertise, television, radio and newspapers regularly call upon external third parties. In today's newspapers, 'forum' items are given a much more prominent place than in the papers of a few decades ago. The opinion pages of the leading newspapers feature analyses by a wide range of experts. Some articles are commissioned, others are written and submitted 'on spec'. The editors of these pages attempt to arrive at an appropriate balance between control and spontaneity. In addition to obtaining expert opinion or establishing an authoritative and relevant standpoint, one of the prime aims of editorial direction is to promote an exchange of views on important issues. In television news and current affairs programmes, external contributors are invited primarily to explain a situation, whereupon their analysis is often treated as a final word instead of the beginning of a debate (unless an opposing expert is invited to put the other side of the story).

In the current affairs programmes made by the NCRV (and in others) external experts were mainly called upon during the early phases of the conflict in Yugoslavia. New and unfamiliar situations had to be explained and rendered comprehensible to the audience. Eventually however, a conflict acquires its appropriate interpretative framework and then there is little left to add (Labeur).³⁸ From then on pictures were allowed to speak for themselves and viewers were expected to be able to judge the events for themselves. This is not to say that events were not placed in a historical or political context, but rather that this process was largely confined to a particular period. In the case of *Hier en Nu*, that period was 1991-1992, with a similar phase occurring during and after the fall of Srebrenica.

The gradually diminishing role of the experts should not therefore be ascribed to any 'Yugoslavia fatigue' but rather to the establishment of an agreed-upon interpretation of the conflict among media and the public.

Background I (prior to Dutchbat)

How the media dealt in practice with the major events in Yugoslavia can best be illustrated by a number of examples. Reporting, analysis and commentary concerning a military conflict in which the Dutch government and Dutch troops are involved transcends the boundaries between certain areas and fields of interest within journalism: Parliament, domestic affairs, foreign affairs, defence, etc. Newspapers in particular apply a clear demarcation between such specialisms and there is unlikely to be much internal communication between, say, the parliamentary desk and the foreign desk.³⁹ At the *Algemeen Dagblad*,

³⁸ Labeur and Schut, 23 November 2000.

³⁹ Roelofs 29 September 2000; Nysingh 14 September 2000; Kranenburg 13 September 2000.

the Yugoslav conflict itself fell under the heading of ‘foreign news’, while aspects specifically involving the Netherlands as well (e.g. Dutch troops in Yugoslavia) were within the domain of the domestic news staff.⁴⁰

Working methods and news values may diverge greatly between the various departments. For parliamentary journalists, reporting standpoints and statements is more or less second nature, while foreign news editors are more likely to concentrate on issues. The content analysis conducted as part of the present study indicates that from time to time this may result in differential reporting of facts and opinions (as in the case of *De Volkskrant*), although the influence of such conflicting views on the overall picture may not be all that great.⁴¹

Not all specialisms within the media are developed to the same degree. The radio and television news departments have little knowledge of military matters ‘in house’. Specific knowledge of the Balkan region was, at the beginning of the hostilities, relatively thin on the ground throughout the media, although there were some journalists with experience in Yugoslavia, or at least Eastern Europe. They included Peter Michielsen and Raymond van den Boogaard (*NRC Handelsblad*), Othon Zimmerman (*Algemeen Dagblad*) André Roelofs (*De Volkskrant*) and Dick Verkijk (radio and television).

Like the broadcasters, Dutch newspapers were ill-prepared for a long-term conflict in Yugoslavia. After the departure of Frits Schaling, the *NRC Handelsblad* had been without a correspondent in Belgrade for many years. Another Eastern Europe expert, Raymond van den Boogaard, was dispatched to the city. He was the newspaper’s Berlin correspondent when the secession of Slovenia began to take shape. He would remain in the region on an almost permanent basis until 1995. Later, other journalists took up longer postings there: Alfred van Cleef (mid-1993 to April 1994), Coen van Zwol (February 1994 to mid-1995) and Marjon van Royen (March 1994 to late 1995).⁴² Nicole Lucas (*Trouw*) went to Yugoslavia for the first time at the end of 1990.

De Volkskrant already had a correspondent in Yugoslavia – Marianne Boissevain – although the focus of the newspaper has traditionally been on regions somewhat farther afield. When hostilities broke out, she immediately moved from Ljubljana to the somewhat safer Trieste, in line with the paper’s policy. Later, André Roelofs paid occasional visits to the country. Ewoud Nysingh reported from Zagreb, while Frank Westerman and Bart Rijs entered the war zone for longer periods.

Newspapers maintain fairly close contact with their overseas staff, particularly in situations such as that in Yugoslavia. There will usually be daily telephone contact to discuss the situation in depth. In general, the correspondents have little influence on the editorial position of their newspaper (or broadcast organization). The degree of control exercised by editors over their staff in the field differs widely from case to case.

Today’s media tend to speak less with only one voice than those of the past. Journalism has become more personal, which also means that newspaper, radio and television speak with less authority than they used to. A newspaper is no longer one anonymous gentleman, but a collection of recognizable ladies and gentlemen. It is now far more usual for articles to bear the writer’s name (as a signature rather than as a by-line) which implies that the writers, no matter how much prestige and trust they may enjoy, lose some of their unassailability. It is now also less unusual to find varied, even contradictory, opinions in the same newspaper, even outside the domains of the regular columnists. At one Dutch newspaper – *NRC Handelsblad* – this individuality has become almost a matter of principle, while at others – such as *De Volkskrant* – internal discussions about important issues, and hence about the position of the paper, remain part of the journalistic culture.

While it may have become smaller over time, newspapers still have a space in which their own opinion can be expressed: the editorial leader. This is much less the case in television. According to

⁴⁰ Zimmermann 28 April 2000.

⁴¹ See Scholten, Ruigrok & Heerma.

⁴² Information provided by Peter Michielsen (*NRC Handelsblad*).

Hans Laroes, the ‘leader which sets the world to rights’ is about the only thing which really sets television and newspaper journalism apart.⁴³

Newspapers now give more room to divergent views. The need to advocate one particular opinion on a matter is less acutely felt than it once was. A certain inconsistency between the editorial line and the foreign correspondent’s has been tolerated for a long time, but many newspapers now also allow various desk editors to provide their own analysis of news events. In the case of the NRC Handelsblad, the newspaper’s liberal attitude is reflected in a loosely organized form of consultation between the regular leader-writers. Editor-in-chief and commentators usually meet once a week in an informal setting in Amsterdam. At these meetings, they discuss current affairs and prospects, but without the express intention of arriving at a joint position.⁴⁴ De Volkskrant has rather more formal meetings, the original intention of which was undoubtedly to set the editorial course of the paper and to devise appropriate means by which to express this course. But even at De Volkskrant, this does not have the priority it used to have.⁴⁵ We shall return to this point later, partly because at one stage there were rather marked differences of opinion among the foreign editors at De Volkskrant with regard to journalistic coverage of the Yugoslav conflict.⁴⁶

Unlike the leader writers at the NRC Handelsblad, those of De Volkskrant attend a daily meeting chaired by the editor. For almost the entire period covered by this study (until early 1995) Harry Lockefer was editor of De Volkskrant. At the time, the meetings included Jan Luyten, (senior foreign leader-writer) and Jan Joost Lindner (home affairs.) The chief of Forum, the section in which the paper’s editorial leaders appear, would also have been present. As a rule, only the broad outline of the editorials is discussed during these meetings, but because they are a daily ritual, some sort of consensus on issues often emerges. However, in the case of a foreign policy issue, the real discussion about which line to follow usually takes place in a consultation between the foreign editors (just as at NRC Handelsblad), right after the meeting of the editorial writers. Editors who fundamentally disagree with the main editorial are given the opportunity to have their opinion aired in the newspaper. Lockefer was not the type to impose his own ‘stamp’ on the newspaper. On the other hand, he had long been of the opinion that his sub-editors should not contribute to the opinion pages.⁴⁷ Even that standpoint came to be abandoned.

Engagement – December 1991

Opinions among the foreign affairs staff of De Volkskrant diverged prior to the summer of 1992, because the editors held widely different ideas about the desirability of Yugoslavia’s division into separate states. As at NRC Handelsblad, the arguments were prompted by various human rights issues, but were no doubt also due to the fact that there was a strong leaning to the old left among the foreign affairs staff dating from Cold War times. The Yugoslav model had, certainly after the death of Tito, lost much of its appeal but it still stood for such humanistic values as multi-ethnicity and social justice. The re-emergence of nationalism on the other hand brought with it nasty memories of a not too distant past.⁴⁸

At the end of 1991, the division of the country became unavoidable, partly due to German insistence on international recognition for each of the separate republics. The ethnic conflicts reached a climax at this time, with the capture of Vukovar by the Yugoslav army. This was a situation which De

⁴³ ‘Kritiek op tv-journalistiek te gemakkelijk’ (‘TV journalism criticized too easily’), <http://www.nrc.nl/W2/Nieuws/1998/03/03/Med/05.htm>.

⁴⁴ Kranenburg, 13 September 2000.

⁴⁵ See also Van Westerloo, 1996; Van Vree, 1996.

⁴⁶ See Ten Cate, 1998.

⁴⁷ Lockefer, 30 November 1999.

⁴⁸ Bleich and Boissevain, unlike say, Nysingh and Roelofs, were extremely concerned about the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Bleich, 16 September 1999; Nysingh, 14 September 2000; Roelofs, 29 September 2000).

Volkskrant was not yet able to diagnose satisfactorily, which, of course, made it impossible to render any unequivocal advice to its readership and the politicians, except in a general moral sense. However, amid the awareness that a disaster could well be impending, the extent of which no one could foresee, a remarkable journalistic initiative emerged.

There are several reasons to consider this initiative by four journalists a bit more closely here. Firstly, their action (like some others which were taken at the time of the war in Yugoslavia) raises the question of how much caution journalists should exercise in using the resources at their disposal to influence opinion, both within and outside media circles. However, even more important for the purposes of our analysis is that this initiative provides an insight into the high degree of personal engagement of a few prominent opinion-makers in the world of journalism. We believe that this involvement continued to be a determining factor. At the same time, their campaign demonstrates that prominent Dutch journalists assumed a high degree of indifference and cynicism among the general public and politicians, both at home and abroad. This is also relevant in view of what was to come later. Finally, the events demonstrate that a clearly defined interpretative framework had yet to be developed, other than that which could be derived from the history and symbolic significance of the country concerned. With hindsight, the action was more significant for the spirit it revealed rather than for its impact, which would seem to have been extremely limited outside the realms of journalism itself.⁴⁹

On 31 December 1991, the leader pages of the NRC Handelsblad and De Volkskrant carried articles of almost identical tenor.⁵⁰ The article in NRC Handelsblad had been written by Elsbeth Etty (opinion page sub-editor) and Peter Michielsen (editor Eastern Europe desk), while the one in De Volkskrant was the work of two foreign editors, Anet Bleich and Ewoud Nysingh. The idea for the pieces originated with the Volkskrant journalists.⁵¹ A meeting had been held (in the restaurant at Amsterdam's Central Station) to discuss what they as journalists could do about the civil war in Yugoslavia. According to Michielsen the frustration and anger he felt about what was going on were such that he was willing to consider making an unprecedented appeal. He fully realized that it would appear to be over-emotional and extremely naive.⁵² Harry van Wijnen, editor of the NRC Handelsblad's opinion page, did not object to publication, but the editor-in-chief, Ben Knapen, was extremely unhappy with the idea and was unwilling to allow publication of a joint appeal signed by Volkskrant staff as well.⁵³ The piece in De Volkskrant bore the names of Anet Bleich and Ewoud Nysingh and was headed 'Yugoslav war cries out for action by European citizens', while Elsbeth Etty and Peter Michielsen had given their piece in NRC Handelsblad the title 'European peace initiative is what Yugoslavia needs'. Each piece concluded that if no one was prepared to intervene, unarmed civilians should place themselves between the warring factions if need be. Despite the objections from his editor, Michielsen claims that he never received any negative reaction to the piece from his own newspaper. Etty's experience was somewhat different. At De Volkskrant not everyone welcomed the initiative either, although there were no objections to its publication as such. Foreign editor, André

⁴⁹ Mient-Jan Faber gave a tart response in both the *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant* to criticism of the peace movement 'by a couple of disappointed, biased foreign editors and one or two isolated former communists'. 'Juist de media laten het afweten in Joegoslavië' ('Media fail in Yugoslavia'), *De Volkskrant*, 3 January 1992 and 'Media lijden aan beeldversmalling over de oorlog' ('Media suffer from restricted vision of Yugoslavia'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 7 January.

⁵⁰ Particularly noteworthy is the uncompromising tone of the introduction to the piece in *NRC Handelsblad*, about pictures which television failed to show: '...eyes gouged out, legs ripped off, the wounds caused by a dum dum bullet or a glowing hot iron. Or a dead child, *en face* – not these, for these scenes offend the dignity of the person and the conscience of the viewer.' No similar introduction appeared in *De Volkskrant*.

⁵¹ Michielsen, 6 December 2000 (e-mail); according to Nysingh it was actually mainly attributable to Etty and Bleich. Bleich was the main author (Bleich, 30 March 2001).

⁵² Michielsen, 6 December 2000 (by e-mail). Nevertheless, these journalists would normally be hesitant to champion any cause not directly connected with the profession. Of Michael Stein, who declared he would use the cheque he received as part of the Scherpenzeel Prize for journalism to buy weapons for the Bosnian Muslims, Michielsen says "(...) I know him well, and I know he means well. In one way I found this most admirable. On the other hand, it is something that I as a journalist would never do." (Michielsen, 14 September 1999; also Bleich 16 September 1999).

⁵³ Etty, 16 March 2001 (telephone).

Roelofs, recalls, “I was also against it, it seemed deadly dangerous to me. I am not so naive and was not labouring under this delusion. I believe it would have turned into a bloodbath”⁵⁴

In a piece submitted to the NRC Handelsblad, Henri Beunders let his displeasure be known in no uncertain terms.⁵⁵

That the journalists required to cover the earliest stages of the conflict lacked a clear interpretive framework is confirmed by Raymond van den Boogaard, NRC Handelsblad correspondent, who points out that the first foreign journalists in Yugoslavia tended to assess the conflict in a more balanced way than those who came later.⁵⁶ This is a view also held by Peter Michielsen, who states that it took time before any clear idea of what this conflict actually entailed was formed.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, there is a remarkable difference in interpretation. Van den Boogaard does not believe that a clearer understanding of the conflict came about, but, on the contrary, that the complexity of the situation came to be obscured. The journalists who arrived years later had the idea that they knew what was going on; the morality of right and wrong had been apportioned by then.

The articles by Anet Bleich and Ewoud Nysingh and by Elsbeth Etty and Peter Michielsen are heavy with historical analogies. There are references to the Greek and Spanish civil wars, to Vietnam, to the demonstrations against Cruise missiles. However, there are no references to the Second World War.

The picture – Omarska, August 1992

An interpretation of a conflict develops gradually and to a large extent independently of the events themselves. This applies both to the image established in public opinion and the view developed by and among journalists. Nevertheless, there are certain specific moments which can later be recognized as turning points in the process of shaping opinions. Concrete events, mostly mediated by media, then act as catalysts in that process. This is what happened in the summer of 1992, by which time (civil) war had broken out in Bosnia. Once the general picture has been established, it will remain largely unaffected by any further events which do not fit within the general pattern.⁵⁸ The threshold for messages which confirm the established idea will be lowered, and vice versa.

By mid-1992, the dissolution of Yugoslavia was accepted as a *fait accompli*. Some may have welcomed it, others may have seen it as inevitable, still others as regrettable, but from that time on the old undivided Yugoslavia did not play much of a role in the ideas about what should be done. This also held for the foreign department of De Volkskrant. A new situation emerged in which there was only limited room for diverging opinions as to the correct interpretation of the conflict. This is no doubt why a television programme such as Hier en Nu/Netwerk no longer felt much need to bring in experts to explain the situation to the viewers.

In mid-1992, as noted by Ten Cate (1998), De Volkskrant and more especially the NRC Handelsblad demonstrated a radical shift in their assessment of the situation.⁵⁹ Dissent could still be heard, but the tenor of editorial comment had clearly changed. The change of direction was too acute to be attributed to any ‘normal’ variation in a newspaper’s standpoints. Parallel to this, there was a comparable shift in the opinion-based articles contributed by prominent outside parties such as the Clingendael Institute.⁶⁰ Military intervention in Yugoslavia suddenly became a serious policy option and perceptions of the conflict changed accordingly.

⁵⁴ Roelofs, 29 September 2000.

⁵⁵ In his piece *Een roekeloos initiatief voor Joegoslavië* (‘A reckless initiative for Yugoslavia’), NRC Handelsblad, 7 January 1992, Henri Beunders dismisses the appeal out of hand and calls into question the motives of its authors.

⁵⁶ Van den Boogaard, 5 November 1999.

⁵⁷ Michielsen, 14 September 1999.

⁵⁸ In the newspapers examined, the general tenor of editorial comment in certain periods deviates from the impression created by the factual reports.

⁵⁹ See Scholten, Ruigrok and Heerma 2001a.

⁶⁰ Observed at the time (in *De Volkskrant* of 5 August 1992) by André Roelofs.

On 16 June 1992, the NRC Handelsblad published an editorial entitled *Twee burgeroorlogen* ('Two civil wars'). It stated that experience had shown that the outside world is, unfortunately, unable to influence conflicts such as those in the former Yugoslavia and in Nagorny Karabach.

Less than two months later, on 5 August 1992, the same newspaper's editorial was headed *Ingrijpen noodzakelijk* ('Intervention necessary'). It stated that the objections to military intervention which are based on experience gained in Vietnam, Lebanon and Ulster ('the conflict is too large and the background too complex') or in Cambodia, Angola and Afghanistan ('a solution will emerge once the warring factions are exhausted') do not hold up to scrutiny. The 'values for which Europe stands' are at risk, and there must therefore be intervention, stated the editorial. 'With every day that passes, there is less to protect.'

On 14 May 1992, Lt. Col. Van den Doel, in his capacity as researcher with the Netherlands Institute for International Relations (Clingendael), wrote a piece for NRC Handelsblad entitled *Militair ingrijpen in Bosnië-Herzegovina niet de oplossing* ('Military intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina not the solution'), which contended that peacekeeping operations were not a viable option and that such action would inevitably lead to further loss of life. There was, in the colonel's view, no comparison with the Gulf War and the international community would have to prepare itself for 'long-term guerrilla warfare' if it opted for military intervention.

On 1 August 1992, the same newspaper published another article by Lt. Col. Van den Doel. This was headed *Westen dient snel te interveniëren in conflict Balkan* ('The West should quickly intervene in Balkans conflict'), but went on to state that, despite the increasing weight of public opinion, intervention was not feasible. Nevertheless, just a few days later, in *De Volkskrant* of 5 August 1992, Lt. Col. Van den Doel joined Joris Voorhoeve (then still director of the Clingendael Institute) in calling for armed intervention 'to limit the extent of the bloodshed'. Such intervention would be geared towards 'creating safe havens under international control', 'liberating the inmates of concentration camps' (using 'commandos' and 'special forces') and 'securing the supply and distribution of humanitarian aid.'

On 10 August 1992, they wrote, again in NRC Handelsblad:

'There is a very real risk that doing nothing will result in a major war in the Balkans. The world is prompting a new bloodbath out of fear of the risks of humanitarian intervention'⁶¹

(see also Scholten, Ruigrok and Heerma 2001a, Chapter 8)

A second remarkable phenomenon is that the analysis of what was happening in Yugoslavia and what should be done about it was placed more than previously in the historical context of the Second World War, and that the terms used referred directly to the events of the 1940s. Voorhoeve and Van den Doel open their article on the Forum page of *De Volkskrant* of 5 August 1992 thus:

It is unimaginable that, 46 years after the genocide of the Jews, there should once again be a systematic hunting and killing of an ethnic group in a European country, while no authority or international organization can do anything whatsoever about it.

The subtitle of the article states: 'If international law does not force us to take action against the genocide in Bosnia, then ethics should force us to act against mass murder, torture, starvation and displacement ...'. The mention of international law refers to the international treaty of 1948 which deals explicitly with the question of genocide, while the suggestion that moral obligations now weighed

⁶¹ During this period Van den Doel appeared three times on the current affairs programme *Hier en Nu* (on 22 and 29 June and on 31 August).

more heavily than the objections to intervention was based on the idea that ‘evil’ would triumph if ‘good people’ decided to do nothing.

Elsewhere in the same edition of *De Volkskrant*, André Roelofs wrote in a commentary⁶²: “The Serbs have now started an ‘ethnic cleansing’ of a type not seen in Europe for the past forty-five years.”⁶³ The *NRC Handelsblad* also applied a World War II analogy, albeit less direct: “Europe has seen all this before”.

Which events occurring at this time could have functioned as catalysts in the process of forming public attitudes? Since April 1992, there had been fighting throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina, with particularly heavy activity in and around Sarajevo. On 15 May, the Bosnian Foreign Minister, Silajdzic, asked the Security Council to create ‘safe havens’ such as those provided for the Kurds in northern Iraq. On 24 May, the US Secretary of State (Baker) announced that the United States would call upon the UN to apply the same sanctions against Serbia as it had imposed on Iraq. He accused the Serbs of using Nazi-like methods in their ‘ethnic cleansing’ of regions. Three days later in Sarajevo, a number of people queuing for bread were hit by (what was in all probability) artillery fire. Sixteen people were killed, 140 injured. In the American newspaper *Newsday* of 19 July, Roy Gutman reported that the Serbs had deported thousands of Muslims and Croats from north-western Bosnia, under conditions reminiscent of the transports of Jews during World War II.⁶⁴ He described the situation in a prison camp in Manjaca, while *The Guardian* of 29 July carried a report by Maggie O’Kane about concentration camps at Omarska, Trnopolje and Bratunac. In an interview for the BBC aired on 31 July, President Izetbegovic of Bosnia-Herzegovina compared Serb leader Karadzic to Hitler because of the ‘ethnic cleansing’ being carried out. On 2 August, another article by Gutman in *Newsday* was headed ‘Serbs’ death camps’, in which he reported that the Serbs had set up concentration camps in which hundreds of people were likely to starve to death or be executed. A day later, the American government admitted to having known about the concentration camps for some time. In the Dutch television news programme *NOS Journaal* of 4 August, Sacirbey, the Bosnian Ambassador to the United Nations, confirmed the existence of concentration camps where citizens were tortured and killed by the Serbs. British reporters Ian Williams and Penny Marshall (ITN) together with Ed Vulliamy (*The Guardian*) visited camps in Omarska and Trnopolje. The resulting film footage was broadcast in Britain on 6 August and was picked up by the Dutch news bulletin the same day. It was then shown again the following day on *NOS Laat*.⁶⁵ Having seen the film, the American president George Bush Sr. declared, “No one can see the pictures or hear the accounts of this human suffering and not be deeply moved (Seib, 2000:60). In *NOS Laat* Dutch Minister of Defence Ter Beek stated: “When you see the terrible pictures of those poor wretches in Yugoslavia, you cannot as a world community just stand back and do nothing.”⁶⁶ The Dutch Parliament interrupted the summer recess for an emergency debate.

The picture of the emaciated Fikret Alic behind the barbed wire of the Trnopolje camp (usually referred to as Omarska) has become an icon of the war in Bosnia.⁶⁷ On the day after the television broadcast, the British tabloids needed few words to describe the situation. *The Daily Star* wrote simply, ‘Belsen 1992’ while the *Daily Mirror*’s headline was ‘Belsen 92’.⁶⁸

The associations with concentration camps which the ITN footage evoked certainly had a major influence. These are pictures which practically everyone remembers to this day. However, the

⁶² ‘Kunnen we nog blijven zuchten en protesteren?’ (‘Can we just carry on sighing and protesting?’)

⁶³ On 4 August, *De Volkskrant* had published an article by Anthony Lewis of *The New York Times*. Headed ‘Violence in the Balkans’, it presented a clear historical analogy with World War II. Lewis was one of the few proponents of military intervention writing in the American media at the time.

⁶⁴ The headline to the article read, ‘There is no food, there is no air’. Two days later, *Newsday* ran the headline: “‘Like Auschwitz’”. Serbs pack Muslims into freight cars’. See also Gutman, 1993.

⁶⁵ On 10 August 1992, *NOS Laat* broadcast part of a British television interview with Ed Vulliamy.

⁶⁶ In Kees Schaepman, ‘De vredeshaviken willen actie’ (‘The peacehawks want action’), *Vrij Nederland*, 19 September 1992.

⁶⁷ The controversy concerning the footage itself (were the scenes deliberately staged?) is not unimportant but of less relevance here.

⁶⁸ *The Economist* of 15-21 August ran the headline ‘Not quite Belsen’. For an analysis, see also Halonen 1999.

chronology of De Volkskrant and NRC Handelsblad's changing editorial positions demonstrates that it could not have been these images alone which led to the revision of August 1992.⁶⁹ In fact, the reports about the camps did not lead to any immediate forceful intervention in the conflict either.⁷⁰

It seems that it was the combined effect of the news coverage, in both words and images, and the historical associations which this directly evoked, which led to a powerful effect in the short term, and to a more long-term influence on many people's view of the conflict. According to Michielsen in the NRC Handelsblad, Jewish organizations in the United States had stated from the outset that the term 'Holocaust' was applicable to the situation in Bosnia and that names of camps such as Omarska belonged alongside those of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Dachau.⁷¹ 'Holocaust imagery', writes Moeller (1999:223) 'reverberates for Americans as the extreme benchmark of atrocity. The Holocaust has been appropriated as a cultural icon unequivocal in its meaning.' In Newsweek,⁷² Charles Lane asked whether the same outcry would have been prompted had Gutman not used the term 'death camps'.

It seems not unlikely that terms and symbols such as these may have had an even greater effect in countries such as the Netherlands and Germany, where the Second World War is still very much part of a comparatively recent past, with an ongoing psychological effect.⁷³ In Barcelona, a Dutch radio journalist attempted to persuade the Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers that he really could not watch an Olympic football match so soon after the pictures of Omarska had been on television. According to Kees Schaepman in Vrij Nederland (19 September 1992), the general desire to "teach the Yugoslavs, and particularly the Serbs, a lesson only really emerged after the television scenes of skinny men behind barbed wire [were shown]. Concentration camps!"⁷⁴

Perhaps with the dramatic call he and his colleagues had made still reverberating in his mind, Peter Michielsen observed somewhat sourly, "there is something remarkable in all this, since conscience is only now speaking out. Fighting has been going on in the former Yugoslavia for a year. There have been prison camps for a year. People have been tortured and murdered for a year, and cities reduced to rubble. (...) People seem to think that the human rights abuses only began when that British television crew managed to get inside Omarska and the term 'concentration camps' was used for the first time."⁷⁵

Like his NRC Handelsblad colleague J.H. Sampiemon⁷⁶, Michielsen proved himself aware of the radicalization of the terminology used and the possible consequences:

"And so at a given moment those Bosnian camps were discovered and we saw those emaciated skeletons on television. Then it was suddenly 'concentration camp' this and 'concentration camp' that. We had deliberately tried to avoid the term, since we believed and still believe that those camps are not

⁶⁹ cf. Shaw 2000.

⁷⁰ A few years later this seems to have been forgotten. On the VARA/NPS programme MiddagEditie of 9 June 1997, Inge Diepman introduced a discussion about possible manipulation of the Omarska footage between Cees Labeur of Netwerk and Cees Hamelink, Professor of Communication Science, with the words: "Government leaders such as Bush and Major decided that the situation in the former Yugoslavia could not be allowed to continue and responded by intervening."

⁷¹ In: Peter Michielsen, 'Het geweten spreekt wel wat laat' ('Conscience speaks out a little late'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 13 August 1992. The term 'Holocaust' was explicitly linked to the camps in Bosnia on a number of other occasions, such as the 17 December 1993 edition of the KRO television programme *Reporter* (KRO 17 December 1993), dedicated to the failings of European politicians with regard to Bosnia.

⁷² Charles Lane, 'When is it genocide?', *Newsweek*, 17 August 1992.

⁷³ See Ward op den Brouw, 'Televisiebeelden uit kampen hebben invloed op beleid' ('Television pictures from camps influence policy'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 13 August 1992. Op den Brouw points out that willingness to receive refugees in Germany and the Netherlands suddenly increased. 'The pictures from the Serbian refugee camps had their effect'.

⁷⁴ This may well serve to explain the anti-Serb feeling in the Netherlands (see Honig & Both, 1996), although the country has no historical leaning toward either of the demographic groups (unlike Britain and France which have traditionally been pro-Serb, and Germany which has traditionally been pro-Croat). See also Grundmann, Smith and Wright 2000.

⁷⁵ 'Het geweten spreekt wel wat laat' ('Conscience speaks out a little late'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 13 August 1992.

⁷⁶ J.H. Sampiemon, 'Het gevaar van historische analogieën' ('The danger of historical analogies'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 13 August 1992.

comparable to camps such as Auschwitz, for which we have reserved the epithet ‘concentration camp’.’⁷⁷

Indeed, the content analysis performed as part of this study reveals NRC Handelsblad to have been somewhat cautious in its use of the term ‘concentration camp’, but this does not mean that the reports, analysis and commentary in the newspaper were totally devoid of a World War II corollary. In De Volkskrant, this interpretive framework is somewhat more apparent, however, since there appear to have been fewer qualms about using emotionally charged terms. In the case of the more popular newspapers (such as De Telegraaf) and the television news, the selection of appropriate terminology may have been an even more complex undertaking (both in the semantic sense and that of legal accuracy) since clarifying an issue to a large audience without resorting to long-winded explanation is difficult if one’s choice of words has to be guarded.⁷⁸

Placing events in Yugoslavia in the authorized context of the Second World War (whether rightly or wrongly- it matters little for our purposes) appears to have had major consequences in terms of opinion-forming with regard to intervention in the conflict and any Dutch involvement. It may also have had an influence on public opinion with regard to subsequent events (after Srebrenica). Placing the Yugoslav conflict in a similar interpretive framework to the Second World War would certainly have increased the urge to ‘do something’. The atrocities shown on the television and in the newspapers had in themselves been enough to invoke the ‘something must be done’ mentality (Hurd), but their insertion into the WWII context increased and intensified their impact. The warring parties in Yugoslavia were fully aware of this effect, and exploited it to the full in their propaganda. The Second World War means ‘never again’. The WWII context makes clear what is right and what is wrong, who the oppressors are and who the victims are. It is important for what is to come, that this frame contradicts the official United Nations standpoint which rejected such a distinction between the parties.

The Second World War also provides ready-made recipes for solutions: no appeasement, no Munich, no Chamberlain.⁷⁹ Anyone who gives way makes himself morally culpable as an accessory. A criminal regime responds only to violence and can be stopped only by hard and effective military intervention.

It is this interpretation of the conflict in Yugoslavia which also helps to explain why the call to intervene was heard from some unexpected quarters: not from the generals but from those whom Kees Schaepman referred to as the ‘peacemakers’.⁸⁰ Prior to the summer of 1992, comparisons with the Second World War were usually made to refer to the complexity of the conflict in Yugoslavia, or to point to the failure of the Germans to defeat Tito’s partisans and used as evidence of the impossibility of effective military intervention. Ten Cate (1998) shows that other historical analogies, the history of the Balkans, Vietnam, Afghanistan, etc. – were also raised later on in the intervention debate. De Volkskrant also continued to publish statements opposing intervention,⁸¹ but internally it was ‘politically correct’ to be in favour of intervention.⁸²

On the other hand, not everyone needed the analogy with World War II to be in favour of intervention. When Jan Pronk, then Minister of Development Cooperation, stated in Trouw (22 August

⁷⁷ Michielsen, 14 September 1999. See also: Peter Michielsen, ‘Excessen in Bosnië: wel aanwijzingen, maar geen bewijzen’ (‘Excesses in Bosnia; indications but no evidence’), *NRC Handelsblad*, 3 August 1992, and Peter Michielsen, ‘Het geweten spreekt wel wat laat’ (‘Conscience speaks out a little late’), *NRC Handelsblad*, 13 August 1992.

⁷⁸ Also Pilgram, 27 September 2000. The *NOS Journaal* made efforts to avoid long words (Laroes, 18 November 1999).

⁷⁹ See Biolley (1993) for the use of this historical analogy (e.g. by Bosnian president Izetbegovic).

⁸⁰ Kees Schaepman, ‘De vredeshaviken willen actie.’ (‘The peacemakers want action’), *Vrij Nederland*, 19 September 1992.

⁸¹ Joris Cammelbeeck, ‘Mislukte interventie is erger dan niets doen’ (‘A failed intervention is worse than doing nothing’), *De Volkskrant*, 28 April 1993. Laroes (18 November 1999) believes that there was no mass call for action (of the type later seen in Kosovo) at this time.

⁸² Pilgram, 27 September 2000.

1992) that the West should intervene because “Hitlerdom had seized power in Yugoslavia”, his colleague Relus ter Beek responded: “I don’t need Hitlerdom for that.”⁸³

Perhaps the most conspicuous change to take place in the summer of 1992 was that the military intervention that many had seen as morally essential, was now also considered practically feasible, provided the political will was there.

During the summer of 1992, the interpretation of the facts in the newspapers ran more or less parallel with the reporting itself. Serbs and Muslims were in the roles of perpetrators and victims respectively, in line with the events of those months. This interpretation, this image, was reflected in commentaries, editorials, columns and external contributions and continued to hold throughout the media for a number of years thereafter, despite changing circumstances, despite changes in events reported, and despite differences between the various newspapers. In 1993, the newspapers reported atrocities committed by various parties, not only the Serbs but also the Croats and Muslims. Nevertheless, the editorials continued to cast the Serbs in the role of the ‘bad guys’ to a greater extent than the events reported in 1993 would seem to justify. In 1995, when most news related to the cruelties on the Bosnian-Serb side, there appeared to be a greater correspondence between the reported facts and the editorial commentary based upon them.⁸⁴

This is the interpretation of the conflict that the ‘second generation’ of Dutch journalists to arrive in Yugoslavia would have had: of (Bosnian) Serbs and Muslims in the position of villain and victim respectively, with the Croats occupying some vague role somewhere in between.⁸⁵ However, even these journalists appreciated that the Serbs might have to be regarded as the main villains, but certainly not as the only ones. This broad outlook could be attributed to almost all Dutch journalists, although major differences could be detected between them. In many cases, a certain vision would seem to correlate with an individual’s interpretation of the journalist’s role: distant or involved, neutral or engaged.

The German parliamentarian Stefan Schwarz (CDU) said in an interview with Willem Beusekamp⁸⁶ when the latter was *De Volkskrant*’s correspondent in Bonn, that all sides in Yugoslavia were guilty of atrocities, but that those committed by the Croats and Muslims should be compared with the acts of the Polish resistance during the Second World War, while those of the Serbs could be compared to the actions of Nazi Germany itself. One solicits understanding, the other is beyond contempt. Dutch freelance journalist Harald Doornbos agreed with this appraisal. As one of four war correspondents interviewed by Wendy Traa⁸⁷, he admitted that he had taken sides, but:

⁸³ Wio Joustra & Jan Trom, ‘Er bestaan geen militaire operaties zonder risico’s’ (‘There are no risk-free military operations’), *De Volkskrant*, 15 September 1992.

⁸⁴ This does not in itself mean that the dominant interpretation was false. In fact, the discrepancy is much greater in the case of the opinion columns and external contributions (see content analysis).

⁸⁵ Van den Boogaard, 5 November 1999. In the eyes of the UN, all parties were equally guilty. Officially, the Dutch peacekeepers also maintained this ‘blue’ standpoint. However, some commentators believe that the troops would have been tutored in pro-Serb arguments by such authorities as the cultural anthropologist Rene Gremaux and the historian Abe de Vries. See Frank Westerman, ‘VN-soldaat krijgt les in Servische argumenten’ (‘UN soldier given lesson in Serb arguments’), *NRC Handelsblad*, 29 July 1995; Petra de Koning, ‘Docenten Clingendael leerden soldaten hún lesje’ (‘Clingendael professors taught soldiers their lesson’), *Vrij Nederland*, 15 March 1997; Rene Gremaux and Abe de Vries, ‘De term “genocide”’ (‘The term “genocide”’), *Vrij Nederland* 29 March 1997; Westerman & Rijs 1997:119). See also: Ewoud Nysingh, ‘Couzy was tevoren op de hoogte van tekst overste Karremans’ (‘Couzy had been informed of Col. Karremans’ text in advance’), *De Volkskrant*, 11 August 1995: “‘The media’ are accused by the military of putting forward the one-sided image that “only the Muslims are to be pitied.” This is what they are taught during their training in Ossendrecht.’ Since the summer of 1995, Ewoud Nysingh has repeatedly pointed to anti-Muslim sentiments among Dutchbat troops. (Ewoud Nysingh, ‘Chef Dutchbat 2 geeft hekel aan Moslims toe’ (‘Dutchbat II commander admits a dislike of Muslims’), *De Volkskrant*, 1 September 1995; Nysingh 14 September 2000.

⁸⁶ ‘Duitse parlementariër Schwarz inventariseert misdaden Serviërs’ (‘German parliamentarian Schwartz takes stock of Serbian crimes’), *De Volkskrant*, 14 January 1993.

⁸⁷ ‘Vier oorlogscorrespondenten in de frontlinies van het vak’ (‘Four war correspondents in the front line of the profession’), *De Journalist*, 24 September 1999. See also Willem Offenbergh, ‘De CNN-factor’ (‘The CNN factor’), *Wordt Vervolg*, December 1999/January 2000.

“...if you compare this war with the Spanish Civil War, you see that all the great journalists of that time – Hemingway and Orwell, for example – also took sides. The factions were clear: fascists and anti-fascists. I found Sarajevo very similar to the Spanish Civil War. A real anti-fascist struggle. Of course, then I know which side I am on. And I let other people know, too.”

Fons de Poel and Bart Nypels of Netwerk/Brandpunt also saw the Yugoslav war as a struggle between fascism and democracy, rather than as an ethnic conflict, which means that “...you have to make choices”⁸⁸

Most journalists seem to have applied a similar line of reasoning to RTL4 reporter Willem Lust:

“I consider it improper to tar all sides with the same brush. (...) The Serbs were to blame for that conflict. (...) The idea that the Serbs were the main villains of the piece – that they were in any event the only people who could have prevented the war. If they had wanted no war, there would have been no war. But they wanted a war. That’s why the war started. What happened later through the actions of the Muslims and the Croats is all bad. But the root cause was that the Serbs wanted the war to start, and that they thought they could win it within a couple of weeks.”⁸⁹

Or as Cees Labeur, editor of *Hier en Nu*, puts it:

“... the tenor was, as far as we were concerned, that of course they were all doing the most dreadful things, but that the Serbs were doing so on a much larger scale with very much more force and with many more resources. We established that over a long period and it was indeed the case.”⁹⁰

At the other end of this spectrum were reporters such as Nicole Lucas (*Trouw*), Raymond van den Boogaard and Marjon van Royen (*NRC Handelsblad*) and the foreign news editor of the *Algemeen Dagblad*, Othon Zimmermann:

“I always take the position that the Balkans conflict was started by the Serbs, but was eagerly embraced by the Muslims, the Croats, the Slovenes, etc. The Kosovars too, later on. In my view, responsibility lies with the regime. But there is a lot more [to consider] besides.”⁹¹

Eventually, this standpoint came under criticism. Lucas and her ilk were reproached for their neutrality, or for ‘seeking an objectivity which does not exist’ and for ‘always placing the blame somewhere in the middle’.⁹² “Every little shade of meaning,” said Zimmermann, “makes you into a pro-Serb journalist.”⁹³ According to Van den Boogaard, fellow journalists on the same paper wanted him to side more with the oppressed Muslims. This is one of the reasons, he believes, that the *NRC Handelsblad* considered it necessary to send other journalists, such as Alfred van Cleef, to Yugoslavia.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ De Poel and Nypels, 28 October 1999.

⁸⁹ Lust, 19 July 2000.

⁹⁰ Labeur, 16 August 1999.

⁹¹ Zimmermann, 28 April 2000.

⁹² Wendy Traa, ‘Vier oorlogscorrespondenten in de frontlinies van het vak’ (‘Four war correspondents on the front lines of the profession’), *De Journalist*, 24 September 1999.

⁹³ Zimmermann, 28 April 2000.

⁹⁴ Van den Boogaard, 5 November 1999. According to Peter Michielsens this conclusion is unfounded (e-mail, 6 December 2000).

Once a certain view of a situation has become a general assumption, there is a danger that facts which do not coincide with that vision will be ignored, while others which fit easily into the pattern will automatically be accepted at face value.⁹⁵ This is an additional problem in the quest for accurate reporting, alongside the demands of speed, the competition between the media, and in the case of Yugoslavia, the local obstacles preventing the use of normal methods of journalistic reflection and control.

Although both the news-gathering process and the reports about prison camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina were extremely controversial, paradoxically the danger that facts will not be checked is comparatively small in the case of events with undisputedly high news value and corresponding media exposure. Truth is protected to some degree, precisely because everyone has to ‘discover’ the camps for themselves.⁹⁶

The creation and worldwide dissemination of the Omarska footage demonstrates how this particular journalistic process works. ITN’s decision to send Williams and Marshall to film prison camps was not based on any ‘hunch’ but was prompted by Maggie O’Kane’s earlier reports of such camps in *The Guardian*. RTL reporter Willem Lust was given a similar assignment, and for similar reasons, when he found himself in Croatia in late July and early August 1992 to cover the presidential elections and the departure of Bosnian refugees to the Netherlands.⁹⁷ So the process in which news about an event is hyped and made to spread like wildfire, brings with it the likelihood that a possible hoax will eventually be disclosed. Lust saw the camps for himself and was therefore able to assess the previous reports and the pictures in the light of reality. As a matter of fact, his own impressions coincided with these reports.

“During that initial period, we produced a report about the concentration camps which were to be found around Banja Luka. That was after Omarska. A couple of days later, I think. My advantage over the people that had been there before me is that I speak German. They did not speak German, but a lot of the people in the camps did. The guards did not speak German but the prisoners did because they had been migrant workers. I was therefore in a better position to talk to these people.

I also went inside the camps. They were not extermination camps, but concentration camps. You cannot describe them as normal prison camps. It was really dreadful there. People ask themselves whether you can really term them concentration camps – perhaps they think that the barbed wire was just there for decoration. Nonsense. Of course not.

I did not go into the camp at Omarska, but into a camp close to Banja Luka or at least in that general direction. As far as I could see, the people there did not have enough to eat. They were being mistreated. They were corralled within the barbed wire which was there solely to keep them in. It was not Omarska. It was Manjaca or something like that.

⁹⁵ See also Vasterman 2000.

⁹⁶ Of course, there is the danger that everyone will come down on the side of one and the same party. It is not always helpful for a story to come from a source which is generally considered to be reliable, since this will reduce the natural inclination to check it: “When the pictures are so straightforward and you see them on ITN, and again in *The Guardian*, you just assume that this must be the situation.” Nova editor Brugsma, 2 February 2000. Laroes (24 November 1999): “In these circumstances, you cannot say that you will not broadcast something until you know its exact background, because in that case we would still all be waiting.”

⁹⁷ His interviews with former prisoners were broadcast as part of the *RTL Nieuws* programmes of 4 and 5 August 1992.

From what I remember of the pictures I had seen, this was very much in the same league. Except that in the camp I saw, the people would not have dared come anywhere near the barbed wire. The atmosphere there was too harsh for that, and the people themselves were far too timid. They had to sit, all in long rows. They sat like that the whole day.”⁹⁸

The pattern repeated itself for Lust when he returned to Yugoslavia in late 1992, at a time when stories were reaching the Netherlands about atrocities in Serbian ‘rape camps’. “My editors were constantly on the phone asking me to investigate the atrocities,” recalls Lust. “And so (...) trips that were planned to last a couple of days would sometimes go on and on, because there was something new to investigate every time.”⁹⁹

NRC Handelsblad journalist Mark Kranenburg describes the pack journalism that results: “Something happens. We must all focus on it. That one image, that one restricted image. That receives all the attention. This flywheel effect. (...) There is no one who says, ‘let’s ignore this for a moment and go and have a look at things from the other side’.”¹⁰⁰ In fact, this is not just an example of the type of pack journalism which gives rise to ‘hypes’ but also demonstrates how low the threshold can be for news which fits into a certain expected pattern.

Lust’s assignment had been prompted by rumours (propagated by the German politician Stefan Schwarz) of Mengele-type experiments on Bosnian women. Having first appeared in *Bild Zeitung* and on Sat1 television, the story was eagerly seized upon by the Dutch media, including *De Volkskrant* (through its Bonn correspondent Willem Beusekamp) and Willem Lust’s employers RTL Nieuws.¹⁰¹ The rumour eventually proved to be unfounded.¹⁰² It seems likely that a story like this would have been more carefully checked and managed had it not fitted so neatly into a long series of known atrocities and into the established image of the situation in Yugoslavia. This may also be said to apply to the numbers of casualties reported, sometimes vastly exaggerated (possibly at the instigation of the aid organizations¹⁰³) and to the rumours of the Serbs having the wherewithal to start World War III.¹⁰⁴ This could also explain why some images and facts were given an unwarranted ‘anti-Serb’ bias in an evening-long KRO programme devoted to Yugoslavia. Not because of any malicious intent, but probably due to lack of care prompted by an established assumption about the situation.¹⁰⁵

Manipulation and influence

There is considerable controversy surrounding the manner in which the ITN footage of the camp at Trnopolje was obtained. Had Fikret Alic and his companions been asked to pose behind the barbed wire? Was Alic’s physical appearance representative of that of the prisoners in general? Was the camp enclosed by barbed wire or not? On which side of the wire were the prisoners filmed – inside or outside the camp?¹⁰⁶ Is it acceptable for journalists to manipulate the facts, or to stage a reconstruction

⁹⁸ Lust, 19 July 2000.

⁹⁹ Lust, 19 July 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Kranenburg, 13 September 2000.

¹⁰¹ Willem Beusekamp, ‘Artsen Servië doen proeven op moslimvrouwen’ (‘serb doctors perform experiments on Muslim women’), *De Volkskrant*, 4 January 1993; *RTL Nieuws* 4 January 1993. See also Anstadt 1999:194.

¹⁰² Beusekamp himself more or less retracted this during an interview with Schwarz in *De Volkskrant* of 14 January 1993.

¹⁰³ Ronald Ockhuysen, ‘Overdrijven om bestwil’ (‘stretching the truth’), *De Volkskrant*, 8 March 1997. See also Moeller 1999; von Merveldt 1998; Schoeman 1997.

¹⁰⁴ Wendy Traa, ‘Vier oorlogscorrespondenten in de frontlinies van het vak’ (‘Four war correspondents in the front lines of the profession’), *De Journalist*, 24 September 1999.

¹⁰⁵ Findings of the Raad voor de Journalistiek (Dutch Press Council) URL: <http://www.rvdj.nl/uitspraken/1993-14.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ See the proceedings of the case brought by ITN against the magazine *Living Marxism* following publication of an article by Thomas Deichmann (*The picture that fooled the world*; *Living Marxism* no. 97, February 1997) which accuses the makers of the ITN report of deliberate manipulation. The article had previously been published (in Dutch) in *De Groene Amsterdammer* of 22 January 1997

of an actual situation? Were journalists themselves being manipulated – by the Bosnian Muslims in this instance?¹⁰⁷

Television reporters frequently face the problem of there being no actual footage of an event, perhaps because the camera crew was unable to reach the location in time. Should they accept this as a fact of life, even when it may be possible to ‘rectify’ matters? Further dilemmas arise when using library footage to illustrate current events: is it permissible to use footage of a roadblock at Travnik from the archive to illustrate a report about a roadblock at Vitez, for example? After all, no one will spot the difference. It is the direct reference to the reality of television images which causes the problem. Life is a bit less complicated for radio and print journalists.

Most reporters who were actually in Yugoslavia faced such problems, up to and including the creation of (false) media events. In July 1992, *Algemeen Dagblad* journalist Othon Zimmermann came across thousands of despondent, apathetic refugees from Srebrenica in the town of Tuzla.

“Suddenly, a television crew arrived. A car with a camera on the roof. They were filming. Someone from that team called out to the women: ‘You should protest and shout things.’ Then came: ‘We want our men back!’ This was transmitted that evening wherever. Later, my editor phoned me and asked whether I had missed the demonstration. ‘What?’ ‘That demonstration – we just saw it on the news.’”¹⁰⁸

The journalists have no ready-made answer to the questions about the gathering of the Trnopolje footage.¹⁰⁹ Television journalists are, like the radio reporter Ab Pilgram, maybe somewhat more flexible and tolerant than their newspaper counterparts. Othon Zimmerman questions whether you can even alter a camera angle in order to include some barbed wire in a shot.¹¹⁰ André Roelofs considers it a ‘particularly thorny’ problem: what should you as a television reporter do if you are convinced that by means of just a small ‘tweak’ reality might be better represented?¹¹¹

Pilgram, political editor of the Radio 1 news service (and previously of KRO’s *Echo*), takes a different view:

“If it has been firmly established that there is genocide, based on the actual dominant position of one party, and you are given the opportunity to present that in a strong manner, you must be prepared to edit a little here and there. But you must actually have something to work with. My criterion would be to be absolutely sure that there is genocide or something equally dreadful (I can’t think what) if you intend to manipulate what you have, and you then edit it so that it immediately becomes very apparent in the film what is going on. In a sense, the television reporter is like any other artist, hired to make clear what certain pictures are about, whether those pictures are shown left to right or right to left. However, there are of course limits and this is an area in which there are many question marks.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ In *MiddagEditie* of 9 June 1997, Professor of Communication Science Cees Hamelink discussed the methods of the ITN team with Cees Labeur, editor of *Hier en Nu/Netwerk*. They failed to reach agreement.

¹⁰⁸ Zimmermann, 28 April 2000. In August 1992, *NOS Journaal* reporter Gerri Eickhof found more than one thousand refugees in Capljina who, according to the Bosnian Hassan Huremovic (speaking on TROS radio on 15 August) desperately wanted to go to the Netherlands. However, the refugees themselves knew nothing of this ambition (Eickhof, e-mail of 18 January 2000).

¹⁰⁹ The possibility of deliberate misinformation on the part of ITN journalists is left aside here.

¹¹⁰ Zimmermann, 28 April 2000.

¹¹¹ Roelofs, 29 September 2000.

¹¹² Pilgram, 27 September 2000.

Carolien Brugsma (Nova) does not believe that she, or anyone else from Nova or Netwerk, would actually set up a scene: if the film showed a fence around the camp, then there was a fence around the camp. However, the footage of Omarska prompted a discussion within the editorial team, and eventually throughout the field of television journalism. “It is a commonly held misconception that television journalists will only seek out the sensation in a shot and will simplify the other aspects,” says Brugsma.¹¹³

The first part of the report produced by the Bakker Commission describes the influence of reports and images from Yugoslavia as follows:

“With regard to the UNPROFOR/UNPF operation, a number of people involved in decision-making processes refer to the poignant pictures and reports in the media when recounting their motives for sending troops to the former Yugoslavia (or supporting others in this decision). However, they state that such pictures and reports served only to reinforce opinions and standpoints which they already held. Incontrovertibly such reports and pictures contributed to the creation of support for the decision to deploy forces in the former Yugoslavia.”¹¹⁴

Journalists themselves might see things rather differently. After all they are professionals; they know how the news-gathering, editing and presentation processes actually work. This leads one to expect that they will experience the influence of media messages somewhat differently than ‘mere mortals’ such as politicians and the general public. Indeed this expectation is held by many journalists, including Pilgram:

“I have always been somewhat sceptical about these kinds of pictures, I do not know who has made them, how it has been manipulated, what part of the actual situation I am being shown. But I believe that for any other people it will be very different and I think that the effect will be very different on people who have not been trained in journalism or in information.”¹¹⁵

However, the effect was also different on some people who had been trained in journalism. Mark Kranenburg describes the development in his attitudes thus:

“At the time I was part of the Journalists’ Forum on radio. When it all started in the early 1990s. The question then was, ‘should something be done?’. At first, the answer was no. There is so much history. Let it just fizzle out of its own accord. Don’t get involved. Later, I stopped saying that. You can’t just ignore something like that. But right at the very beginning, it was all a long way away. A civil war. We should not interfere. I was influenced, and by those pictures I think.”¹¹⁶

Kranenburg has strong ideas about the political influence of television:

¹¹³ Brugsma, 2 February 2000. As exemplified also by the discussion between Cees Labeur of *Netwerk/Hier en Nu* and Cees Hamelink, Professor of Communication Science, in *MiddagEditie* of 9 June 1997.

¹¹⁴ Report of the Special Commission on decision-making with regard to deployment of armed forces, Part 1, Lower House of the Dutch Parliament, session 1999-2000, 26 454, nos. 7-8, p. 444. *De Volkskrant* journalist Anet Bleich (16 September 1999) takes the view that: “the media certainly played a part, but would not have succeeded in forcefully persuading a Parliament and a government which knew better.”

¹¹⁵ Pilgram, 29 September 2000.

¹¹⁶ Kranenburg, 13 September 2000. Brugsma (2 February 2000) also explicitly cites the Omarska images.

“Images are very dominant. The images are so very important. Certainly in this case. You have emotion. In a newspaper it is not possible to convey this to the same degree. The odd photograph perhaps. But the pictures on television [are different]. Television is also a crucial source of information for The Hague, for the politicians and the bureaucracy. This is how they see the world and how the world sees them. How should they respond? But then, how will their response be presented? First of all they see the mortar attack on the market in Sarajevo – the pictures that are shown on television. They know that this will cause an emotional shockwave. They think, we must respond. Then, the manner in which they formulate their reactions is also shown on television. You have to show your involvement. That is very important. There has to be a statement on television. Newspapers play a subordinate role in this regard, I believe.”¹¹⁷

Television journalists are inclined to be somewhat reticent when asked about the influence of their medium. Newspaper journalists are rather more forthcoming. They give little credence to the view of Strobel (1997) and Gowing (1996) that the quality newspapers are important in terms of influencing political opinion.

Some older political editors and reporters have seen how television has usurped the printed media in terms of political influence, and they regard this as a good indication of the major influence which politics itself ascribes to television. Geelen (1998) suggests that the print media are contributing to this development by hiding more and more behind television reporting.

The permanent presence of a much larger number of media than used to be the case has given more prominence to the hierarchy among them: a piece on the opinion page of the NRC Handelsblad is seen to carry more weight than a piece in the *Algemeen Dagblad*. Appearing on Nova is more important than appearing on Netwerk. Politicians have a much more calculating approach to such matters than they once did. For some non-television journalists, politicians now appear to be less accessible, even aside from the insulation provided to those in authority nowadays by their communications people.

Ewoud Nysingh believes that the favouritism shown towards television journalism may, remarkably enough, also be a result of the TV’s dependence on images. It is much easier to confide detailed background information to a television journalist, knowing that in all probability he or she can’t do much with it anyway.¹¹⁸

In contrast to people such as Ewoud Nysingh¹¹⁹, Peter Michielsen, who has become sadder and wiser as a result of his experiences over the last ten years, no longer believes that the printed press has any influence on political decision-making at all:

“Television has influence, but only if the pictures are shocking enough and public opinion also makes itself heard. But print media have not a shred of

¹¹⁷ Kranenburg, 13 September 2000. See also Mark Kranenburg, ‘Beeldreligie bestaat’ (‘The religion of images exists’), <http://www.avtmz.nl/Pages/MarkKranenburg.htm>. Zimmerman: “That has frustrated me more than once of late. I thought, ‘People, just read it! Do something about it!’ Things only became important two or three days later. Sometimes there was some delay before the pictures appeared on television, while the events had long been reported in the newspaper. In this sense, the visual media are dominant. Not even the opinion pages in the newspapers can claim the same influence. It is the images that evoke emotions and politicians respond to emotions. You see that here more than anywhere else.” (Zimmermann, 28 April 2000).

¹¹⁸ Nysingh, 14 September 2000.

¹¹⁹ Nysingh (prompted by a case in which the Ministry of Defence scuppered a Ministry of Foreign Affairs plan by leaking it): “And you know that the longer you’re in The Hague, the more likely you are to be used. Sometimes you have to decide whether you’re going to allow yourself to be used. You know exactly what is going on. You write something and then something might happen – it usually does if you write for *De Volkskrant*. In a certain way, you are a factor and you know it.” (Nysingh, 14 September 2000)

influence. I am convinced of this. Perhaps the odd Member of Parliament will read something and think, 'I really must do something about that', and perhaps he actually will. But not in the sense that print media have influence on politics as such, I simply do not believe it. Not after the last ten years. I believe that television with its shocking pictures, first of bombed-out cars at Ljubljana airport, then Vukovar and all the dreadful events in Croatia, then Bosnia with the most memorable example of those skeletons in Omarska – I believe that this has an enormous impact, a positive impact, I think, since otherwise there might have been nothing and there might have been nobody in The Hague who was affected in any way at all."¹²⁰

Most journalists have little sympathy for politicians such as the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Jozias van Aartsen or his British counterpart Douglas Hurd who complain about politics being constantly put under pressure by television.¹²¹

In a speech made at Duisburg in 1999¹²², Van Aartsen referred to a tendency he had noticed among Dutch parliamentarians to react to whatever they had just seen on television or just read in the newspapers. He might have had a point there, also as far as the war in the former Yugoslavia is concerned. According to Geelen (1989:12), the weekly question time in Parliament "has become illustrative of the current relationship between politics and the press. It is largely concerned with issues that have been elevated to the status of 'hot items' by the press. Furthermore, those politicians who are seen to be involved in such issues will attract publicity more readily." However, this is not a new phenomenon. Over twenty years ago, Ton Planken (1980:49) observed that members of the House at the time of the 'Ultracentrifuge' affair, "referred directly to articles published in the mass media on no fewer than 160 occasions", even though the quality of much of the information provided by the media had been highly questionable, in his view.

Few parliamentarians now balk at the sight of a camera, whether they have had media training or not. Quite the reverse. When BBC's television news department moved to Television Centre in White City, away from Westminster and the centre of London, several years ago, concerned journalists wondered whether MPs would be willing to travel all the way to the studios. In practice, there proved to be no problem at all.¹²³ Experience in the Netherlands has been similar. As Carolien Brugsma (of Nova) puts it: "they're in make-up before we've even phoned them!"¹²⁴

Ab Pilgram too finds politicians far too hungry for publicity:

"With some regularity over the past twenty years, I have looked at politicians and thought, 'well, why allow yourself to be interviewed at all? You could say to Wouke van Scherrenburg, 'excuse me – did we have an appointment?' I wish they would say that, or ask why they are expected to have an opinion on that particular issue. They could tell her to come back tomorrow. But so very few do, even though it is perfectly acceptable practice in America and England. Here, everyone immediately starts answering even the most banal questions."¹²⁵

In Pilgram's view, this says something about a particular way of practising politics as well as about a style of journalism. On the one hand, drawing attention to issues and stating one's standpoint is part of the politician's job, but the desire for publicity often outweighs the legitimate desire to contribute to the

¹²⁰ Michielsen, 14 September 1999.

¹²¹ Lockefer, 30 November 1999; Brugsma, 2 February 2000 and others.

¹²² At the opening of the fifth Netherlands-Germany conference on 9 September 1999.

¹²³ Carey Clark, deputy editor *BBC Breakfast News*, 16 December 1998.

¹²⁴ Brugsma, 2 February 2000.

¹²⁵ Pilgram, 7 September 2000.

public debate. Similarly, the desire to ‘score’ can sometimes overshadow the journalist’s duty to provide relevant information. As Geelen (1998:143) notes in the rather sombre conclusion to his book on the relationship between press and politics: “Every journalist will tell you the one thing that counts is ‘content’, but there is little evidence of this in practice.”

Journalists who come to parliamentary journalism from some other specialism have to get used to the lack of distance between politics and journalism, and the ‘under the counter’ culture in which news items and information are planted, leaked and passed on. They arrive in a setting in which everyone tends to think in ‘what if’ scenarios. Nothing merely happens of its own accord. Politicians always regard an item in the press as having an ulterior motive: it will not be there by accident or coincidence.¹²⁶ Similarly, the journalist is inclined to believe that nothing is brought to his attention by accident or coincidence. There must be a purpose.

This too is nothing new and it is not confined to the Dutch situation (see Tunstall 1970,1971). The system relies on a common interest in publicity, on certain unwritten rules of conduct and on a mixture of calculated mutual trust and suspicion. If the desire or temptation to ‘score’ is too great, the rules may occasionally be broken. The market forces which served to forge the relationship in the first place have become distorted in recent decades, as spokespersons and spin doctors have elbowed their way in between the journalists and their political targets. This professionalization of communication on the part of the politicians is partly a response to the increasing swiftness and the sheer ubiquity of the media.

Critics believe that the politicians’ desire for publicity and, more especially, the journalists’ desire to score have combined with the effects of increasing competition to bring about an impasse in political reporting. It is an impasse to which no one can find a solution (Geelen 1998; cf. Kaiser 1985). This is probably too sweeping a conclusion, but it is certain that the degree of interdependence between journalists and politicians in The Hague makes it practically impossible to determine who is influencing whom and to what extent. The questions to the House, the submissions to the podium pages in the newspapers give a clue, but no more than that. They are, after all, part of the toolbox of standard parliamentary practice, ritualistic reactive actions from which little can be deduced one way or the other. They belong to the public face of politics and offer no conclusive evidence that politicians’ decisions are in any way led by ‘primary emotions’ and images.

Between ‘something must be done’ and Yugoslavia fatigue

In the eyes of some people in the media, even Omarska achieved little more than to prompt a few of these ritual dances in politics and to briefly break through the lethargy of the general public. Even fellow journalists kept demonstrating a lack of ongoing motivation. One month after the concentration camp images were aired, Henk van Hoorn expressed surprise (in an opinion column in *De Journalist*) that news about Yugoslavia had not moved to the inside pages of the newspapers or the ‘other news’ section of the TV news, despite it being so predictable and ‘more of the same’.¹²⁷ Many journalists remember the cartoon (which has been on display for a long time in the NOS Journaal newsroom) showing a television salesman promising his prospective customers that the model they had in mind would ‘automatically switch channels as soon as pictures of Yugoslavia were shown’.¹²⁸ Even the editorial desks seem to have suffered this ennui, as *Algemeen Dagblad* editor Othon Zimmermann recalls:

“As I came in there would be a large pile of all sorts of reports to sift through. Nobody had much interest in Yugoslavia. So every day you were working on

¹²⁶ Kranenburg, 13 September 2000: “Thank heavens you do not know that [reason] while you are actually writing the piece. You get to make that up later.”

¹²⁷ ‘strijdlust’ (‘Bellicosity’), *De Journalist*, 11 September 1992.

¹²⁸ Cartoon by Jos Collignon in *De Volkskrant* 7 July 1993. See also Scholten, Ruigrok & Heerma (2001a), para. 9.8.

this, while in the back of your mind you were fairly certain that there was very little interest at the news desk. Nevertheless, you believed that you should keep it up. Lots of little, regular items and then some major coverage every now and then. There was not very much interest. And so you would concentrate on the little incidents. Incidents? Of course they weren't incidents. But you used them and sometimes you may have been inclined to blow them up a little."¹²⁹

On 6 December 1992, *Brandpunt*, *Reporter* and *Kruispunt*, the current affairs programmes made by KRO and RKK, presented a special edition of almost three hours' duration, entitled 'Yugoslavia Exit'. The theme of the programme was 'should we intervene or not?' The format was derived from successful television charity campaigns (such as the one to raise money for the famine in Ethiopia), with reports, testimonials from Dutch celebrities, commentary and explanations (with Dick Verkijk at the map of Yugoslavia), and a 'swingometer'-style presentation of the number of callers for and against military action (eventually over 90% of callers were in favour).¹³⁰ Various external experts both for and against intervention were interviewed in the studio. They included Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek and BBC reporter Jeremy Bowen. The programme was not intended to collect money or goods – at least, this was not the prime intention – but to answer the question of whether there should be military intervention. Although the programme avoided pushing only one opinion, Milo Anstadt (1999a), one of the people taking part, has accused the makers of being extremely one-sided. It is true that the general tone of the programme was very much in line with public opinion, i.e. in favour of intervention.¹³¹ At a quarter past midnight, editor and presenter Fons de Poel closed the programme with the rather cryptic words: "Intervention or not? Let's hope we never have to say, 'Wir haben es nicht gewusst'."¹³²

Later, De Poel commented "If we were to do this again, we would probably be a little more reserved in our presentation. There were oppositional voices, however, but right from the start, the feeling in the country was 98% for intervention and 2% against or something like that, so our opinion poll was not too informative. We would do it rather differently today, perhaps with Internet discussions to broaden the public debate. There are so many more opportunities now."¹³³

Some weeks after the programme, on 25 January 1993, the NCRV broadcast its first weekly overview of events in the former Yugoslavia, mainly compiled from news footage from both the Netherlands and elsewhere. It was to be the first of 54 editions in all, the final one being aired on 21 February 1994. The most memorable feature of these weekly summaries is that they all closed in the same manner, with a caption appearing across the full width of the screen reading: [Date] and still no intervention.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ "Everyone was fed up to the back teeth with it. People just didn't want to talk about it, they didn't want to read about it. I would really have to push just to get small items printed in the newspaper." (Zimmermann, 28 April 2000). This is a widely recognized phenomenon, which was seen even during the short Gulf War. Wober (1991:46) writes in an article about British public opinion during that conflict: "One problem that the suppliers of news and information face is that the public rapidly showed signs of fatigue. There were many complaints to the broadcasting organizations of excessive news coverage." See also Moeller 1999.

¹³⁰ On 9 May 1993, *Brandpunt* ran another edition focusing on the public mood. This revealed that 66% were in favour of intervention, a figure which was broadly in line with other opinion polls of the time. The 88-90% of the *Yugoslavia Exit* programme suggests that interest in this broadcast was greatest among those who were in favour of intervention in the first place.

¹³¹ The Dutch Press Council upheld a complaint made by the Serbian Information and Cultural Centre, which claimed that 'facts had been presented accompanied by images which were not appropriate to those facts'. See <http://www.rvdj.nl/uitspraken/1993-14.htm>.

¹³² Serbian television later broadcast an edited version of this programme to show how prejudiced the media in the Netherlands were. See also Verkijk (1997:62).

¹³³ De Poel and Nypels, 28 October 1999.

¹³⁴ Preceded by the date.

In contrast to the appeal made by the four journalists from NRC Handelsblad and De Volkskrant (now remembered almost exclusively by those directly involved), the campaign waged by the makers of the NCRV's current affairs programme *Hier en Nu* still prompts a (critical) response today. Nevertheless, the two forms of action seem to have been prompted by very similar motives. In any event, the *Hier en Nu* team's idea was not an entirely new one. Walter Cronkite did something very similar at the time of the Iran hostage crisis (Bliss 1991). The fact remains that it is a highly unconventional means of drawing attention to a situation, and one which raises a number of critical questions. Some fellow journalists tend to mock this form of action, dismissing it as a trick that one would not use if one's journalistic qualities were up to the task of covering the story in a serious manner. Others have their doubts about the admissibility of this kind of moral pressure in a journalistic programme.

Minister of Defence, Relus ter Beek, clearly demonstrated his annoyance. In an interview with Willem Breedveld and Leonoor Meijer of *Trouw*, he said: "What am I supposed to make of a current affairs programme which ends each edition with the dramatic call, 'and still no intervention'? I understand that it serves to assuage their conscience, but I cannot be led by emotional outbursts."¹³⁵

Executive editor Cees Labeur is still unable to appreciate that response. "It was certainly not focused on the Netherlands alone. We were pointing out that all of civilized 'old' Europe was standing by, watching what was happening in its backyard, and the Netherlands was part of that. And when Mr Ter Beek said, 'what am I supposed to make of that', well of course he would. Everyone was thinking 'what are we supposed to make of it?' but we could have gone on that way for years."¹³⁶

"This was a unique moment in the history of what was then still *Hier en Nu*. Given what we could all see, the helplessness of the politicians – helplessness above all – while all these dreadful atrocities were going on before our very eyes. That was the entire situation in essence. And no matter what was said at the political level, it just went on. Then we took a conscious decision: 'Listen, we have to tackle that helplessness.' It was a deliberate action, with the idea of influencing Dutch public opinion. Experience has shown that the greater the pressure of public opinion, the more politicians are likely to give way in certain situations. Based on this, on genuine concern as journalists, but also because we were in a position to do something in prime time, this is how we decided to go about it."¹³⁷

There was no measurable effect on public opinion. Though the general level of support for military intervention cannot be unequivocally ascertained by the surveys, and there was seemingly little immediate and ongoing increase in such support, except perhaps among the supporters of the Groen Links party. A significant majority of the Dutch people were already in favour of intervention in 1992, and this remained the case between 1993 and 1995, although there may have been a slight decline in support (Cras & Wecke 1996; Van der Meulen 1998; Scholten, Ruigrok & Heerma 2001a: para. 9.11).¹³⁸ Certain peaks in pro-intervention sentiment may be attributed to the influence of certain events in Yugoslavia which attracted considerable media coverage, but are difficult to relate to the actions of any

¹³⁵ He made similar complaints against Mient-Jan Faber and his fellow minister Jan Pronk. See 'Hoe zo ingrijpen? Waar dan en hoe?' ('What do you mean, intervene? – Where and how?'), *Trouw* 15 January 1994. In the same interview, Ter Beek comments on the differences between Bosnia and the Gulf War: "there [the Gulf], we saw cross-border aggression whereupon it became obvious at once who the 'good guys' and 'bad guys' were."

¹³⁶ Labeur, 16 August 1999.

¹³⁷ Labeur, 16 August 1999.

¹³⁸ According to surveys conducted by Stichting Maatschappij en Krijgsmacht (Society and Armed Forces Foundation), the proportion of people in favour of Dutch participation in the UN mission fell from 68% in 1993 to 54% in late 1994 and to 41% by mid-1995. See 'Twijfel over VN Missie' ('Doubts concerning UN mission'), *Algemeen Dagblad*, 5 July 1995). See also Scholten, Ruigrok & Heerma (2001a), para. 9.17.

one current affairs programme or any one newspaper. Even in the case of the increased support for military action among Groen Links members, media influence (from *De Volkskrant* for example) cannot be distinguished from the impact of support for such a policy from the peace movement, from Groen Links MPs, or from that of specific issues which may or may not have attracted media coverage.

Was there any observable effect on the politicians? In 1993, Mient-Jan Faber and Pronk called upon the public to overwhelm the government with postcards condemning the scandal of non-intervention.¹³⁹ However, Christian Democrat MP Ton de Kok found little evidence of outraged public opinion:

“No doubt the Dutch public is not unmoved by events in the former Yugoslavia, but I have not heard any ‘loud outcry’. A few weeks ago there was a pro-intervention demonstration in Amsterdam. Only about three hundred people turned up.”¹⁴⁰

According to De Kok, Faber’s criticism of the passive attitude of Dutch politicians unfairly placed them in the same category as their counterparts elsewhere in the EU. The Dutch government and the Dutch parliament had been in favour of intervention for some time. Shortly after publication of De Kok’s article, Parliament took a definitive step towards the deployment of Dutchbat when it voted in favour of the Van Traa/Van Vlijmen motion. Later that year, the decision to send the Dutch Airmobile Brigade to Srebrenica was made.

In the period following Omarska, the most prominent of the Dutch media called for military intervention in the former Yugoslavia, each doing so in its own way. Following the decision to deploy troops, the mood appeared to be one of satisfaction – not that the goal of effective military intervention had been attained, but that at least the Netherlands had understood its moral duty. More than that was not attainable. Hier en Nu withdrew its weekly ‘... and still no intervention’ caption shortly before the departure of Dutchbat I.

In the decision-making phase, which eventually ended with the deployment of Dutchbat, the desirability of a role for the Netherlands was primarily assessed from a moral perspective. Practical objections were occasionally dismissed as being prompted by irrelevant or even questionable motives.

With hindsight, most journalists approached to contribute to the current study agree that there was too little critical or in-depth analysis during this period, or that they themselves had failed in this respect. However, not all journalists consider this part of their task. The political desk of a newspaper and the television news departments will usually restrict themselves to recording and reporting standpoints; they are usually not in a position to flesh out an issue. Carolien Brugsma (*Nova*) does not believe it is part of a television news programme’s remit to present the dissenting voices:

“We report facts, we do not state opinions. That is my view of journalism. I certainly do not believe that *Nova* should have to present all the divergent opinions, asking people why they believe there should or should not be intervention and exploring all the objections. If you invite a proponent of something into the studio, then the presenter should play devil’s advocate in order to test the validity of that person’s arguments.

I believe that the newspapers have a different role to that of television. We do not provide editorial comment. You should let critical voices be heard, but only when there are critical voices... You must take care not to become involved in opinion leading, although eventually this is inevitable no matter how objective

¹³⁹ The campaign resulted in 160,000 postcards being sent in the Netherlands (*Trouw*, 14 March 1993).

¹⁴⁰ Ton de Kok, ‘Haagse politici valt over Bosnië geen passiviteit te verwijten’ (‘Politicians in The Hague cannot be accused of passivity with regard to Bosnia’), *De Volkskrant*, 25 March 1993.

you are. You are an opinion maker, but this is a role you should fulfil by exploring as many different sides of an issue as possible.”¹⁴¹

Was there a total lack of reservations during the decision-making process, and did the media fail to point out the precarious situation in which Dutchbat forces would soon find themselves, as Polman (1998) and others suggest? No, that is not the case. As early as 1993, the newspapers regularly carried articles examining the restricted mandate of the UN troops in Srebrenica, the possible inadequacy of their arms and equipment, and suchlike.¹⁴² Television did likewise.¹⁴³ January 1994 saw a spate of articles examining the risks of the operation, although this was, of course, after the die had been cast. Nevertheless, the media – like the politicians – give the impression of not having ever expected that expressing a need for military intervention could eventually materialize in a Dutch mission to Srebrenica.¹⁴⁴

Until the spring of 1995, when reports about the lack of supplies and about serious misconduct on the part of Dutchbat troops began to appear, the Dutch media did not devote intensive coverage to the town of Srebrenica or its people. The total failure of the press mission to Srebrenica which accompanied the first Dutchbat contingent in early 1994 and the general isolation of the area in the months which followed undoubtedly played a part, as did the recurring Yugoslavia fatigue on the part of the public. Moreover, Sarajevo seemed much more important, and there were other theatres of war where more was happening than in Srebrenica or its immediate vicinity. Dutch troops were actively deployed at various locations in the former Yugoslavia.

‘Good guys’

In the period following the Omarska revelations, the nature of the Balkans conflict was clear and there was broad social consensus that only forceful military intervention could solve the problem. In this climate, the government took one small step at a time in a direction which would eventually lead to the deployment of the Dutchbat forces in the Srebrenica enclave.¹⁴⁵ This was not entirely intentional and was indeed rather an unexpected development. During the whole process there was severe criticism, both in the media and elsewhere, of the international community and of various Dutch organizations which had failed to respond to their moral duty with appropriate celerity.

The UN was seen as powerless and not daring to take sides (although it was quite clear who were the perpetrators and who were the victims). Countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Germany and the USA were accused of not daring to act at all, or (unlike the Netherlands) acting out of self-interest. The Dutch Minister of Defence was seen to waver, while the senior ranks of the armed forces were comparing Yugoslavia (mistakenly) to Vietnam; perhaps they had forgotten what the role of the armed forces actually is? In overly simplistic terms, this is the attitude held by many politicians and the general public, and one which appeared to be confirmed by a seemingly endless stream of

¹⁴¹ Brugsma, 2 February 2000.

¹⁴² See Scholten, Ruigrok & Heerma 2001a.

¹⁴³ Such as the *Nova* edition of 17 December 1993, which was prompted by comments by the Netherlands Federation of Officers (NOV) to the effect that the deployment of the brigade was ‘irresponsible’. On 27 January 1994, *Nova* featured the commanding officer of the Canadian troops relieved by Dutchbat, who stated that it was almost impossible to defend Srebrenica.

¹⁴⁴ Fons de Poel: “[The deployment decision was] based on the realization that people were being driven out of their homes and murdered, and that we must therefore play a role in protecting these people. That it took place under an idiotic mandate – of course that story was put forward, but when it all started to go wrong in Srebrenica, only then could the idiocy of the mandate and the sheer impossibility of actually doing anything be seen. Together, we created an illusion of safety, and only later was the proper analysis made” (De Poel and Nypels, 14 July 2000).

¹⁴⁵ The political decision-making aspects were examined in the KRO *Reporter* programme of 25 November 1999. See also Honig & Both 1996.

reports in the media. Following the fall of Srebrenica, some of these assumptions came to be examined in a different light altogether.

A (simplified) reconstruction may demonstrate how this vision (most apparent in *De Volkskrant*) came to be formed. The basis is the perceived moral obligation to act and to provide an example to others in doing so. This is a role which the Netherlands has not been reluctant to take on in the past, but on this occasion it was presented as an inevitable choice, forced upon the Dutch because other countries were failing to do the right thing. The international community was thus the fly in the proverbial ointment. According to Ben Knapen, editor of *NRC Handelsblad*, dissatisfaction with our allies was "...displayed with disarming honesty as far as Bosnia was concerned. The Germans are incapable, the British are cowards, the French only care about themselves and the American president is only interested in opinion polls, etc."¹⁴⁶ Ton de Kok (a Christian Democrat MP) responded to criticism from Mient-Jan Faber by saying that Dutch politicians should not be 'tarred with the same brush' as those elsewhere in the EU.¹⁴⁷ Anet Bleich agreed, writing in *De Volkskrant*: "...in the criticism of the international response to the atrocities in Bosnia, an honourable exception should be made for Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hans van den Broek. For some time they have been urging military action to stop the mass murder and to create safe havens in Bosnia."¹⁴⁸

However, not only the moral aspects were subject to scrutiny; the practical feasibility of intervention was also examined in this discourse. Military intervention was not only the appropriate response in moral terms, it was practicable and it could be efficient. The circle of the argument is then closed by disproving the practical arguments against intervention. Such objections to intervention were primarily heard from senior military personnel and the Minister of Defence. Bleich termed this 'the disastrous pacifism of the generals',¹⁴⁹ while Nysingh commented "...where do people get the idea that generals want to fight? They are bureaucrats interested only in acquiring new hardware."¹⁵⁰ The generals' fear of becoming embroiled in another Vietnam or a partisan struggle is a specious argument, according to Nysingh: "Drunken Serbs with rifles are not partisans."¹⁵¹

Background II (Srebrenica and beyond)

The events leading up to 'srebrenica' and those which followed the fall of the enclave are closely interrelated. The image of the conflict in Yugoslavia that was held by the media, politicians and the general public, the historic place which it had acquired – even before Srebrenica – among the century's great humanitarian dramas, and the resulting view of the responsibilities of the international community and of the Netherlands itself, go some way towards explaining the Dutch response to the fall of the enclave and to the massacre which ensued. The self-image held by the Dutch contrasted strongly with the reality of Srebrenica. This may well have served to heighten the traumatic effect. It also seems to form an important consideration in any analysis of the role of the media after July 1995. While an

¹⁴⁶ Ben Knapen, 'Wie bij de wereld wil horen, hoort nergens bij' ('Anyone who wants to be part of the world will be part of nothing'), *NRC Handelsblad*, 4 September 1993. One example is the 17 December 1993 edition of the KRO television programme *Reporter*, which dealt with the failing politics of the EU and of the British in particular, in which the Minister of Foreign Affairs, P.H. Kooijmans, vented his frustrations. See also Rozemond in *De Volkskrant* of 14 August 1993 (Scholten, Ruigrok & Heerma 2001a, para. 9.10.2). *De Telegraaf* wrote in an editorial (31 March 1995) "...that there are still countries such as the Netherlands proves that feelings of human compassion still exist".

¹⁴⁷ *De Volkskrant*, 25 March 1993. Faber observed in late 1993 (notably in *De Volkskrant* of 18 November) that Dutch public opinion was turning against the Bosnians (Scholten, Ruigrok & Heerma 2001a, para. 9.14).

¹⁴⁸ Anet Bleich, 'Het funeste pacifisme van de generaals' ('The disastrous pacifism of the generals') *De Volkskrant*, 11 December 1992. See also Anet Bleich 'safe havens in Bosnië: een zinnig voorstel' ('safe havens in Bosnia: a sensible suggestion'), *De Volkskrant*, 24 November 1992.

¹⁴⁹ *De Volkskrant*, 11 December 1992.

¹⁵⁰ Ewoud Nysingh, 'Tijdrekken voor volkenmoord?' ('Wasting time in the face of genocide') *De Volkskrant*, 18 December 1992.

¹⁵¹ *De Volkskrant*, 14 August 1992.

investigation of the journalistic process and of reporting in this period falls outside the remit of the current study, the interviews with the journalists who were involved may shed some light upon the nature of the media coverage of Srebrenica, and on the methods, assumptions and motives of these journalists and the media for which they worked.

A number of aspects will be examined in some detail here. The most important factor is the ‘dossier’ itself, the extent and nature of the drama and the direct involvement of the Netherlands in that situation. Other factors that have been influential include the relationship between the media and ‘Defence’, the influence of competition between the media (and between journalists), the discrepancy between the official interpretation of Srebrenica and the observations of journalists, and finally official information policy concerning Srebrenica. After 11 July 1995, Srebrenica very rapidly took on a new status as a news story – the ‘srebrenica Affair’ – whereupon the role of the day-to-day news reporters became rather less important, the focus shifting to research journalists working for current affairs programmes and the more serious dailies and weeklies.

The media and the military

Aside from the comments of Bleich and Nysingh reported elsewhere in this document, it is useful to examine the relationship between the Dutch media and the country’s armed forces, since it has been suggested that this poor relationship accounts at least in part for the journalists’ tendency to lay blame for Srebrenica at the door of the Dutch military.¹⁵²

To what extent do journalists’ views and prejudices play a role in determining attitudes towards the armed forces? In the Netherlands, Linda Polman (1998, 1999a) has been among the most outspoken critics of the manner in which the media dealt with Srebrenica and Dutchbat. She points to *Volkskrant* journalist Joris Cammelbeeck to demonstrate how prejudiced Dutch journalists can be with regard to any matter connected with the Ministry of Defence or the armed forces. At a meeting to which former Dutchbat soldiers had also been invited, Cammelbeeck countered accusations of biased and incomplete reporting in his newspaper in a somewhat clumsy manner, pointing out that *De Volkskrant*’s journalists were of the Vietnam generation and hence anti-Defence Ministry and anti-military.¹⁵³

A significant proportion of the prominent journalists at the time of the civil war in Yugoslavia were indeed of the Vietnam generation, but this does not automatically imply any anti-military tendency. Rather, it is noticeable (at least among those approached for this study) that many choose to distance themselves from the traditional Dutch ‘culture of tolerance’, although none goes as far as Jan Blokker in his rejection of the glorification of the 1960s as a whole. Where these journalists fail to give the Dutch military much credit, they tend to blame the cultural changes of the 1960s for having permeated the military mentality, an accusation which also features regularly in international assessments (including those by the military counterparts) following the fall of Srebrenica, and one which may be shared by a considerable number of Dutch journalists (even if it is seldom aired in public). It is a view which even enjoys some currency within the Dutch forces themselves.¹⁵⁴ From here

¹⁵² Polman 1998, 1999a.

¹⁵³ According to Ten Cate (1998), Cammelbeeck, along with Hans Moleman, was among those who expressed doubts concerning the pro-intervention attitude of colleagues such as André Roelofs, Anet Bleich and Ewoud Nysingh.

¹⁵⁴ Schoeman, 12 August 1999. An example of this line of thinking can also be found in a Finnish television interview with Lieutenant General Ensio Siilasvuo (retd.), a veteran of UN peacekeeping operations. Interviewer Sakari Kilpelä: “The Dutch failed badly in Srebrenica. The people of Srebrenica sought protection in their camp but the Dutch soldiers were so afraid that they dared not defend them. When the Serbs entered the compound, they took all boys and men over the age of twelve and murdered them within days. Between six and eight thousand men. Would the Finns have allowed this to happen?” Lt. Gen. Siilasvuo: “It is a tragic story. Because I was not there, I cannot comment on the behaviour of the Dutch troops. But I am absolutely convinced that Finnish troops would not have permitted this to happen. Force would have been met with force.” (Sakari Kilpelä and Liisa Riekkö in discussion with Ensio Siilasvuo in *Huomenta Suomi*, MTV3, 19 October 1996; transl. Sari Näsi).

it is only a small step to establish a link between ‘typical’ statements by the Dutch military who, for instance, complained about the personal risks they had to face when deployed in Yugoslavia (as broadcast, for example, in the VARA television programme *Met Witteman* of 28 January 1993), and the later failure of Dutchbat to offer adequate protection to the people of Srebrenica.¹⁵⁵ If such analyses were indeed made, it would be interesting to know why these doubts did not lead to more critical comments in the media at the time when increased military involvement by the Netherlands was still being discussed.

Even under normal circumstances, the relationship between the military and the journalist is a complicated one. This is inevitable since, almost by definition, each will have a different idea about the expediency of secrecy or disclosure. However, there are other, more concrete factors which can be identified as having had an influence on the relationship during the conflict in Yugoslavia. Some were of a temporary nature, others more permanent. Some were, at first glance, quite trivial. We shall mention a few. For example, one minister – Relus ter Beek – was able to communicate somewhat more readily with journalists than another – e.g. his successor Joris Voorhoeve. Even in defence matters, some journalists get to hear things sooner than others, and stories may be deliberately ‘planted’.¹⁵⁶ As one of the main national news organs, public broadcasting’s NOS Journaal maintains a special relationship with the Ministry of Defence; its journalists will always be present when an event of national importance occurs, whether an official visit of a minister or the homecoming of a Dutch contingent. In this specific situation commercial RTL Nieuws also enjoyed a special status, certainly among those troops on the ground, because RTL could be received (by satellite) in Yugoslavia, whereas the Dutch public service channels could not. Furthermore, RTL Nieuws tends to focus on stories about ‘ordinary people’.¹⁵⁷ Such special positions may have led to real or imagined forms of favouritism in certain situations, so that at one time RTL was seen to enjoy an advantage over the NOS Journaal,¹⁵⁸ or, at another time, that pleasing the NOS Journaal took priority over dealing fairly with a current affairs programme such as *Nova*.¹⁵⁹

Compared to most other government departments, the Ministry of Defence is a closed and impenetrable stronghold. Not only are there the usual ‘spokespersons’ barring the way to the people responsible for decisions, but the Ministry covers a range of different military departments, each of which has its own interests and strategies. None enjoys a high reputation for openness. The war in Yugoslavia took place at a time of great change, as the focus of the armed forces shifted from active defence to a peacekeeping role, with a parallel shift in the social view of the armed forces’ position. This was also a time of cutbacks in government spending and the formulation of new tasks, accompanied by conflicts of interests between the various divisions of the armed forces. More sceptically inclined journalists could then be easily tempted to place contradictory statements made by senior officers (e.g. about the desirability of deploying the new Airmobile Brigade or about the level of acceptable risk within a certain operation) within the perspective of these interests.

Much information is provided by the Ministry’s own press and public relations department. The Defence spokesman with whom political editors had most contact at the time was H.P.M. (Bert) Kreemers, the Deputy Director of Information. Many journalists working on the Srebrenica case came

¹⁵⁵ e.g. *Labeur*, 16 August 1999.

¹⁵⁶ In his memoirs, Ter Beek (1996:179) recalls the successful insertion in *De Volkskrant* (via Wio Joustra) of a summary of Dutch contributions to UN peacekeeping missions, on the eve of a debate in Parliament. This is particularly ironic in that *De Volkskrant* was pushing for greater military efforts in Yugoslavia (*De Volkskrant*, 10 March 1993).

¹⁵⁷ Lust: “In any case, this was probably more so at RTL than at the NOS Journaal. We always wanted to cover the war from the point of view of ‘the man in the street’, the ordinary soldiers and citizens, and from that of the people actually there on the ground. The human story, the ‘micro-story’ if you will. Of course, we received the big items through the press agencies just like everyone else.” (Lust, 19 July 2000)

¹⁵⁸ Eickhof, 18 January 2000.

¹⁵⁹ Huys, 8 July 2000.

to cast Kreemers in the role of ‘evil genius’ and auctor intellectualis of much misinformation.¹⁶⁰ His immediate superior, the Director of Information H. van den Heuvel, remained somewhat in the background.

The most serious complaints regarding the quality of the information services, and hence regarding the pressure exerted on journalists and their potential sources, date from the period after the fall of Srebrenica. Until then, most criticism from the reporters and correspondents in the field concerned poor organization and a lack of cooperation on the part of the Ministry during press visits to Yugoslavia.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, even in this earlier phase a gradual build-up of irritation could be perceived. A few examples may be given by way of illustration.

In the period prior to the fall of Srebrenica, the Ministry went to great lengths to inform the media about the work being done by ‘our boys’. But not all publicity is favourable, and the media were expected to keep things positive. There was no need for reports about the risks of the operations which could serve to cause disquiet on the home front.

Eickhof: “And then I arrived in Busavaca. The first thing that I heard was that there was a reconnaissance party of about eleven men from the quartermaster’s unit here. They told me that they had been threatened a couple of days earlier while out buying provisions. They had come face to face with the business end of rifles. I interviewed these men and phoned in a report for the ten o’clock news bulletin. No sooner had the programme finished than the Ministry of Defence was on the line. The local commanding officer. They gave me such a dressing down. Apparently, I was not allowed to make this kind of report because it might worry families at home.”¹⁶²

Obviously official quarters wished to present a somewhat brighter picture of the situation facing Dutch troops in Yugoslavia than was actually the case. This may well be a relevant factor when considering events after July 1995 as well.

The journalists who were in Yugoslavia, whether on a short-term or long-term assignment, were generally able to compare the Dutch Ministry of Defence’s information provision with that of the other countries and UN organs involved. They could also compare the level of service provided to the various countries’ troops. Some assessments of the Dutch organizations are favourable¹⁶³, others quite the reverse.

Particularly conspicuous are the recurring complaints about the inflexibility and lack of improvisational ability or initiative on the Dutch side.¹⁶⁴ The examples cited range from an anecdote

¹⁶⁰ See Frank Westerman, ‘srebrenica wel in de doofpot’ (‘srebrenica was to have been hushed up’), *De Journalist*, 13 November 1998.

¹⁶¹ Bart Nypels (KRO Netwerk): “I think that the military information was reasonably accurate before and during the fall, in other words what was happening and who was doing what, etc. Things started to go wrong during the fall itself, but more especially afterwards. The army in particular was at fault.” (De Poel/Nypels, 28 October 1999).

¹⁶² Eickhof, 18 January 2000. “Although I seldom received any feedback from my editor, except remarks made about my report of events in Lukavac, the only ones I remember, the second line – the desk chiefs and the foreign news coordinator – were somewhat more communicative. They were glad to receive complaints from the Ministry whenever I mentioned anything that the people ‘back home’ might not have liked. They regarded it as a real score.” (Eickhof, e-mail 21 January 2000).

¹⁶³ Zimmermann (about his contact with European observer Jan Ballast): “The ECMM [European Community Monitor Mission in Former Yugoslavia] are real soldiers but on a sort of temporary posting. My experience with them was very good. I was always welcome, there were always facilities available to me and they were always available for comment.” (Zimmermann, 28 April 2000).

¹⁶⁴ Eickhof, 18 January 2000; Huys, 8 July 2000; Lust, 19 July 2000; Nysingh, 14 September 2000. Lust: “That was often the problem with the Ministry of Defence. The people had difficulty getting on with us. They just didn’t understand. Journalists are a race apart. They do not fall under military authority. They have minds of their own and their own idea of what they are

about how a British officer helped take revenge on a Dutch unit which had simply abandoned a journalist at the roadside (because “we’re not supposed to help the press”¹⁶⁵) to a more serious account of how Dutch soldiers placed the same journalist in a potentially life-threatening situation.¹⁶⁶

The failed press expedition to Srebrenica with the first battalion of Dutchbat was another major source of frustration, usually blamed on the Ministry of Defence and the spokesman who accompanied the journalists during the journey and during their forced stopover in Bratunac. During that same trip, there was a major argument between the NOS Journaal crew (with Eickhof) and the RTL4 team (with Lust) concerning the system of pooling resources that had been imposed on them by the Ministry of Defence.¹⁶⁷ It is difficult to assess whether this had any impact on the way in which Srebrenica and its aftermath were dealt with (the news programmes and their reporters were not the most prominent players in this) but as this was not an isolated incident, it may have made a contribution to the reputation that the Ministry enjoyed among journalists. However, more significant in terms of the events following the fall of Srebrenica is that other journalists seem to have shared their conviction that Dutch forces were less able to deal with the media effectively than those of other countries or that they did not wish to cooperate because they had been encouraged to avoid all contact with the press.¹⁶⁸

going to do. They are occasionally difficult. Things went rather better at the transport battalion I visited a couple of times. It was a lot more relaxed there.”

¹⁶⁵ Eickhof: “They regularly got stuck in the mud. They then liked to announce how they were going to resolve the situation. But then, when we got bogged down they just drove on past. At a given moment we saw two locals emerging from the woods. They hadn’t shaved for a couple of days. Then along came a Dutch vehicle. An officer got out and told us that we were not to allow these people to help us. So I asked if he was going to help us instead. ‘No, we’re not allowed to help the press’ he replied. ‘Well, drive on then, matey’ I said. We eventually got going again and at one point I realized that we had only ever seen other vehicles from behind – let’s film them from the front for a change. There were three groups somewhere behind us, and we decided to wait for them. For safety’s sake we stopped by a control post manned by the British. Having learned from experience, I told them that there was no guarantee that the Dutch would allow us to join the convoy. ‘Oh?’ said the British officer, ‘We’ll see about that.’ He made a quick call to some of his men further along the road. They moved a crane into the middle of the road. No matter what happened, the Dutch would be unable to pass before he was certain that we were safely in the convoy. He went forward and spoke to one of the drivers. ‘These are journalists from your country. They will be travelling behind you.’ That’s how the British do these things.” (Eickhof, 18 January 2000).

¹⁶⁶ Eickhof: “We went with them to Santici. The chap from the Red Cross, who was actually the son of the former Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, asked Pronk how long we would be staying. ‘One hour,’ was the reply. ‘Oh good, because I have run out of fuel. I shall go and fill up,’ and he disappeared. Pronk wandered around the compound for a while. We had an interview with him. Suddenly, we heard shots and the commanding officer of the base shouted, ‘Get the Minister out of here – get him out! There will be crossfire and I cannot be held responsible for the consequences.’ The military police literally picked Pronk up and bundled him into the back of the nearest car, together with his official spokesman. We just stood there thinking: ‘Our car isn’t back yet, we’ll have to go with the Minister. ‘No,’ said the military policeman, ‘we are not supposed to help the press. We are not taking any civilians with us’. So we replied, ‘We are not civilians as such – on this trip we’re with the UN.’ ‘No, you are press and we are not taking any journalists!’ The door closed and they drove off. After a few yards, before they turned the corner, he stopped and called back to us, ‘if it gets really dangerous, here’s a tip – lie flat on the ground!’ And with that they were gone. We were rescued because the transport battalion was a joint operation involving both Dutch and Belgian troops. If a Dutch minister was visiting, he would be shown around by Dutch troops under the command of a Belgian officer, while a Belgian minister would have a Dutch officer. In this case, the Belgian officer looked in his mirror and realized that something was amiss. He stopped and told us to get in, quickly!” (Eickhof, 18 January 2000).

¹⁶⁷ Eickhof: “But that was the case with Kreemers. He was the main man behind the Srebrenica operation. He was the man who decided in The Hague that RTL should be given every possible assistance. The man behind Schenkers. He told RTL to sue NOS *Journaal* if they would not share a cameraman, and then told them to sue again if we wouldn’t all share the edited footage.” (Eickhof 18 January 2000) Lust: “Then we said that we weren’t happy with that. We would take our own camera crew and our own vehicle. We did not particularly want to be arrested by the military, since we had already had some bad experiences in that context.” (Lust, 19 July 2000). The argument between the two broadcasting companies was partly the result of poor communication between Hilversum and the NOS and RTL4 teams (Eickhof, 18 January 2000; Lust, 19 July 2000).

¹⁶⁸ This refers to the (first) ‘Journalists in Wartime’ training course, which included instructions to soldiers on how to deal with the press. The general gist was to avoid all contact wherever possible by referring journalists to the official spokesman. Eickhof believes that the British had a better understanding and a better feel for good relations with the press. “We were on the Busavaca side of the path, where we had to wait for a convoy to pass. The British commanding officer came over and

Turning point

The first days following the fall of Srebrenica set the tone for what many journalists regard as ongoing attempts by the authorities to trivialize the nature and extent of the Srebrenica drama, to disclaim responsibility, to shift blame, or preferably to cover up the entire affair. According to the official account of the events, there were no ‘good guys’ or ‘bad guys’, there was no genocide, and Dutchbat forces did all that was humanly possible to defend and protect the people of Srebrenica. At first, reporters went along with this interpretation of events, if only to protect those Dutchbat troops still in the compound at Potocari. However, even at that relatively early stage, this ran counter to the observations of many of the eye-witness journalists. They could muster little tolerance for legalistic nit-picking over terminology, such as when mass murder should be called ‘genocide’. Some had difficulty placing themselves in the position of the authorities, who must themselves have lost track in this disastrous situation, but who also gave the impression that they just wanted to play down its gravity.

RTL reporter Willem Lust was probably the first Dutch journalist on the scene. Immediately prior to the assault on Srebrenica, he was in Split reporting the arrival (on 11 July) of Dutch marines of the Rapid Reaction Force. From there, he moved on towards Tuzla.

“It was just a lucky coincidence that we were already in Split. At the time, I did not realize how important that was. As we left Split, we did not realize that there were such large numbers of refugees on the move. Nothing had happened up until that point. On the day we left, the buses were leaving Srebrenica. We were cut off from everything. We had no radio – nothing. We arrived in Tuzla completely unaware that anything out of the ordinary was about to happen. It was the day before everything started in earnest, but there were already buses full of people streaming in. We were the only Western media crew, there was no one else. We were the only reporters in all Tuzla. We had no satellite transmitter with us. We had to move heaven and earth to get our material out that day. The Bosnian television was there and had filmed people coming over the border. We were the first in Tuzla. I think it took two days altogether. There was complete pandemonium. The women getting off the buses. I just couldn’t believe my eyes. A horde of totally hysterical people. Those women cornered us and told us that their menfolk were missing. They wanted to take it out on someone. There were no UN soldiers there as the buses emptied, only Bosnian forces. The women told us that we had to go and look for their husbands and sons. That became reasonably clear after only a few minutes. There was a lot of ill feeling toward the Dutch – that was also quickly apparent. We were advised to say we were Belgian or something like that. That was already the situation: the Dutch had betrayed them. Looking back, I am not sure whether I understood everything clearly enough on that first day. I don’t think I realized what had actually happened.”¹⁶⁹

On his arrival in Tuzla, Lust first went to speak with Colonel Brantz, the UNPROFOR commanding officer in that sector. He gained the impression that Brantz was also unaware of exactly what was going

asked if we were making a report for that day’s news. When we told him that we were. He asked what our deadline was. We told him that it was eight o’clock. He looked to see what convoys were on the road ahead, had a number of them stopped and then passed on the registration number and description of our vehicle. He told them that we were Dutch reporters in a Volvo with such-and-such a registration and a sign saying ‘NOS’ behind the windscreen, and that they should wait for us. They could carry on once we had passed. We easily made the deadline that day.” (Eickhof, 18 January 2000). Lust: “I met up with the British battalion at Vitez, after we had been there for some time. That was a complete change from what we had been used to.” (Lust, 19 July 2000)

¹⁶⁹ Lust, 19 July 2000.

on at that time. For Lust, ‘the penny dropped’ on 15 or 16 July, when Bosnian soldiers arrived on foot. “They told us what they had seen happening en route. They described the massacre and told us how many people they had lost. This was all part of this story, even though the word ‘executions’ had yet to be used.”¹⁷⁰

On 13 July the *Algemeen Dagblad*’s foreign news editor, Othon Zimmermann, and his Croatian stringer were stranded in Zenica on the way to Tuzla.

“It quickly became clear what was going on and what our situation was. You knew that it was very serious, that everything was going horribly wrong, if I can put it that way. You knew and you felt the seriousness of the situation. There was a lot of tension and there was a lot of commotion. And there was a lot of aggression as well, even at the roadblocks manned by the Bosnian soldiers. Of course, the rumours were flying thick and fast. In most cases, they had been prompted by the BBC reports – the radio news, that was the catalyst, not CNN. It was another time. There were no mobile phones. Ordinary telephones didn’t work. A shortwave radio receiver then becomes a sort of lifeline.

There were no journalists in Zenica but there were already refugees, and there were stories. It is difficult to say – and you have to be cautious doing so – but to my mind the stories were less serious at that time. We knew that the situation was serious but we didn’t yet know the exact extent. Of course, there were stories of deportations, right from the very beginning. That was very quickly established. The numbers quoted varied widely, from four thousand to twenty thousand people. We soon heard about executions and that violence had been used, but we still did not know the exact extent. Nevertheless, we had the idea that it was all very serious. Firstly, from the manner in which I had been sent to cover the location. You could sense the urgency from the instructions given by my newspaper. It was a question of responding to the statements made in The Hague. Then there were the local contacts and the radio reports that I have already mentioned. We heard all sorts of stories, both on the radio and from the people on the ground. There were people in the ECMM who had contacts throughout the country. Everything started to add up. In Tuzla the true extent of the drama became apparent within five minutes. The total tragedy in its full scale. We spoke to about fifty or sixty people. These were the women who had arrived without their menfolk. Few had any confidence in a satisfactory conclusion, I can assure you of that. No one thought, ‘it will be all right in the end, there will be a trial. They are just being interrogated.’ The tension was electric.”¹⁷¹

Twan Huys, the Nova reporter, also realized what was going on after having reached Tuzla.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Partly due to the experiences on the spot, some uncertainty remained concerning the exact extent of the catastrophe: “At the time, I did not think that thousands of people were dead. Absolutely not – not that kind of figure. I only realized that later. And those figures might have been deliberately planted as a rumour. To be honest, we did not even know how many people had arrived in Tuzla. The people we spoke to moved straight on to people in the neighbourhood, family in Tuzla. They did not register with anyone. But what is so much worse, and this is something that only dawned on me later, is that the group of combatants who had managed to fight their way through to Tuzla from Srebrenica were actually prevented from registering. I came across them by accident when I was travelling behind a truck in which people were sitting with old rifles. ‘What’s going on here?’, I thought. Eventually we arrived at a small secret airfield. Just a landing strip, really. All these people assembled there and they were not allowed to report to the authorities or to contact their families. That is something that did surprise me at the time, more from the humanitarian point of view.” (Zimmermann, 28 April 2000).

“When I arrived in Tuzla, like all the other journalists, I interviewed the women (with the help of interpreters) who told stories about ‘rivers of blood’. At first we thought they must have been exaggerating, but then we realized, and that was confirmed by the stories told by the UNHCR, that few if any men between the ages of 12 and 65 had crossed the border alive. This became immediately apparent. Something had happened to them. Perhaps they had followed another route, or they may have been killed on the way. Or perhaps those stories were true – the stories told by the Muslim women who had crossed the border at Kladanj and who said that all the men had been executed. That is what we reported. On the way back from Tuzla to Split, I met Minister Pronk and he confirmed the stories. So you could no longer claim that it was all down to a bunch of hysterical women. By then, given the experience of Bosnia that I already had, I was certain that this was a very serious situation. I was sure that the Geneva Convention, the treaty that ensures correct treatment of prisoners of war, would not be observed here. That Mladic and his followers would kill prisoners immediately to be rid of them. Of course, I had not seen this for myself. I had only heard the stories. In the case of Srebrenica, first you heard reports of no men having crossed the border at Kladanj. There were women who made statements about what had happened to their menfolk. There were the UNHCR staff, level-headed, one of whom was actually Dutch. Early on, this Margriet Prins had told my cameraman, ‘Your story is in Tuzla. You will find the most dreadful stories to recount there.’ She knew what was going on. It was on her advice that we went to Tuzla when we did, although it is now almost incomprehensible that we didn’t realize what was happening sooner. I stayed with her for a couple of days, and so I heard confirmed what I already knew from my own observations. On the way back from Tuzla we stopped in Split, which is where we met Minister Pronk who also confirmed the stories. Then later at Camp Pleso we met people coming back from Bratunac. They told us that they had seen truly horrific sights.”¹⁷²

Once the press had left, but with the Nova camera still rolling, the released Dutch hostages were addressed by General Couzy. “Lads, we have decided that you can go home tomorrow. But there is one thing you must realize: when you land in the Netherlands the press will be there and they will want to talk to you about the things you have seen. I wish to make an urgent request. Keep your mouth shut! To say anything would place those who remain behind in danger”.¹⁷³ Huys recalls: “Afterwards, some men approached us of their own accord and said, ‘What we saw was really dreadful’. When I asked what they had seen, they replied, ‘dumper trucks full of bodies,’ and ‘bodies being taken from Bratunac to Zvornik’.”¹⁷⁴

Having consulted Couzy, Huys decided not to interview the soldiers on camera.¹⁷⁵ The next day, *Algemeen Dagblad* reporter Karel Bagijn heard similar stories from one of the freed soldiers in Zagreb.¹⁷⁶ On Monday 17 July, Minister Jan Pronk spoke to Huys about genocide and thousands of deaths.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Huys, 8 July 2000.

¹⁷³ *Nova*, 17 July 1995; the words are those of Huys, 8 July 2000.

¹⁷⁴ Huys, 8 July 2000.

¹⁷⁵ Huys: “I went to Couzy and said, ‘It all sounds very serious and I would like to do a report, but I heard from you that you do not wish anyone to speak to the press. What is the exact situation?’ He then gave a very plausible, reasonable explanation and said, ‘I understand that you would like to record a report but I nevertheless request you not to do so’.” (Huys, 8 July 2000).

¹⁷⁶ Karel Bagijn, ‘Eerste militairen vrij. “Vreselijk wat mensen elkaar kunnen aandoen”’ (‘First soldiers freed: “terrible what people can do to each other”’), *Algemeen Dagblad* 17 July 1995. On the front page, the newspaper carried a photograph of

Nova was among the first to receive official permission to talk to Dutchbat soldiers as they returned to the Netherlands. As a token of his appreciation for Huys's restraint, General Couzy offered Nova a videotape that had been made in Srebrenica and which showed actual executions. The editors of Nova immediately approached The Hague for permission to broadcast the tape.

On Friday 21 July, the main body of Dutchbat forces eventually reached the Croatian border at Lipovac. No one had expected journalists to be present at the border crossing from Serbia into Croatia, but there were some there nonetheless. Colonel Karremans told RTL4 journalist Jaap van Deurzen of his 'admiration' for General Mladic. Most reporters waited at Camp Pleso for the arrival of Dutchbat. Van Deurzen's colleague Lust was by this time on his way home, via Zagreb.¹⁷⁸

On the Saturday, it transpired that the promises made to Huys were not to be kept. The video had been burnt in Srebrenica 'for security reasons'. The planned interviews with Dutchbat soldiers were cancelled. According to Huys, General Couzy said that he had been willing but had been overruled by the Ministry of Defence in the Hague because of a special NOS broadcast scheduled for the next day (Sunday).

Huys: "What made us really angry was firstly that the promises were not to be kept, and secondly a very simple detail. We had no broadcast scheduled for the Sunday. Thirdly, well actually firstly, that footage of soldiers telling us what had happened to the Muslim men had to be dropped in favour of a grand celebratory broadcast on the Sunday. We considered it absolutely unacceptable that the Ministry was keeping things back and also planning a party to be broadcast live by NOS."¹⁷⁹

The editors in Hilversum were also disgruntled:

"When I came back with the story of what had happened, there was great dismay. The way things had gone with Couzy, the failure to keep promises, the organization of a broadcast which we, the editorial team, considered shameful. Objections were made to the NOS: you can't just allow yourselves to be used as an extension of the Ministry of Defence. They had allowed themselves to be misused – that was our view."¹⁸⁰

As a gesture of goodwill, General Couzy agreed to a live interview from Zagreb with the presenter of Nova, and also agreed to take part in a press conference at the gate of Camp Pleso – together with Karremans – about the events in Srebrenica.¹⁸¹ During that informal press conference and the press conferences held later on the Sunday, Couzy attempted to play down the extent of the disaster, while Karremans once more expressed his regard for Mladic. Huys noticed no outrage or even unease among

two of the released soldiers, and on page 5, another photograph of members of the same group of Dutchbat forces from Bratunac celebrating in Novi Sad. (Most of the battalion were still in Srebrenica at the time).

¹⁷⁷ *Nova*, 18 July 1995.

¹⁷⁸ Lust: "I must say that I came back from Tuzla rather shaken. Then I heard that a band was on its way. I did not think I could face that. I had my own conclusions about what had happened. I thought, I really don't need this!" (Lust, 19 July 2000).

¹⁷⁹ Huys, 8 July 2000. There was a major argument with Couzy and the defence spokesman Paul Hartman. In his rage, Huys threatened "I shall be arriving at Camp Pleso in a tank on Saturday and you will let me in because I want to talk to those Dutchbatters!"

¹⁸⁰ Huys 8 July 2000. Responsibility for the image that would be presented – that of Dutchbat troops celebrating while the bloodbath continued – was (according to Huys) entirely that of the Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister, who were stage-managing events.

¹⁸¹ The intention was that Couzy should be confronted (in the 22 July edition of *Nova*) with the statements made by the first group of Dutchbat forces to have returned to the Netherlands, but this was not possible due to technical difficulties. (Huys, 8 July 2000).

his colleagues. “The atmosphere was more one of, ‘Well, that’s an end to that, then. They have all returned safely’. That was the general feeling. There was a more or less bewildered response to questions with a critical slant such as those that Harald Doornbos and I asked.”¹⁸² The same atmosphere marked the press conference for the Dutch media held the following day. The international journalists posed much more critical questions during their press conference.¹⁸³

For journalists like Huys who would devote considerable attention to Srebrenica, the days following the fall served to build up considerable mistrust of the Dutch authorities, a mistrust that would only grow thereafter. Huys:

“I think that the events in Zagreb and the way we were treated helped to make us realize we were being shafted by the Ministry of Defence, to put it bluntly. Then there was the film and the list which both disappeared. From then on we took nothing at face value, we assumed that there was something seriously amiss. We never got over that feeling.”¹⁸⁴

This turning point is not just a change in the personal convictions and the attitudes of journalists, but it has manifested itself in at times radical changes in the manner in which responsibility and accountability were apportioned. In a rather laudatory, not to say sycophantic, report in *De Volkskrant* of 13 July 1995, Jan Hoedeman and Ewoud Nysingh describe how Minister Voorhoeve managed the situation from the bunker under the Ministry building in The Hague. “There is not a moment’s panic. He does not make a single mistake. Voorhoeve has proven himself to be the right man in the right place. The refrigerator had been cleared of all alcoholic beverages upon the departure of his predecessor Ter Beek. It now contains only muesli and yoghurt. The Minister is in excellent physical condition, thanks to his jogging and long walks.”¹⁸⁵ One month later, the same Nysingh describes Voorhoeve as “too resolute on Srebrenica, against the advice of others.” On 28 October: “he should not give the UN all the blame, since he himself succumbed to pressure from the military top brass” and by 9 December 1997, Nysingh awards Voorhoeve an extremely low grade of “three out of ten for his performance.”¹⁸⁶

Official information

A ‘classic information failure’, is how Ministry of Defence’s spokesman Olivier described it a few weeks later on *Nova*: “not telling people what you saw and what you went through. Only dropping tiny pieces of information here and there when the media had already unearthed them.”¹⁸⁷ Half-truths, incomplete information, disinformation, blunders, clumsiness, all resulting in enormous mutual suspicion: these were the features that marked the public information process concerning Srebrenica. Carolien Brugsma: “I could talk for hours about the things that were hushed up or brushed under the carpet. Formal requests for information were made under the Public Administration (Disclosure) Act, but apparently this does not apply to certain sections of the Ministry of Defence. They covered things up or they played for time. The law just didn’t matter to them.”¹⁸⁸ According to Westerman and Rijs (1997), the

¹⁸² Huys, 8 July 2000.

¹⁸³ Huys had left Zagreb by then, angry and frustrated. On the plane, he met General Nicolai, Colonel Brantz and Colonel De Ruiter. They were also on their way home to avoid having to attend any festivities, Huys concluded. (Huys, 8 July 2000).

¹⁸⁴ Huys, 8 July 2000; also Brugsma, 2 February 2000.

¹⁸⁵ Jan Hoedeman and Ewoud Nysingh, ‘Voorhoeve bewijst zich als juiste man op juiste plaats’ (‘Voorhoeve shows himself to be the right man in the right place’), *De Volkskrant* 13 July 1995.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Voorhoeve stellig over Srebrenica tegen advies in’ (‘Voorhoeve resolute on Srebrenica contrary to advice’), *De Volkskrant* 12 August 1995; ‘Voorhoeve kan VN niet alle schuld geven’ (‘Voorhoeve cannot lay all blame on UN’), *De Volkskrant* 28 October 1995; ‘Een idealist redt het niet op Defensie’ (‘An idealist would not last long at Defence’), *De Volkskrant* 9 December 1997. All articles were written by Ewoud Nysingh.

¹⁸⁷ *Nova*, 4 August 1995; Huys, 8 July 2000.

¹⁸⁸ Brugsma, 2 February 2000.

Ministry of Defence spokesmen did all they could to shift the focus of the public debate onto to the role played by France, the UN and the USA.¹⁸⁹ “They certainly tried to stage manage matters, especially in the aftermath of the events,” recalls Brugsma, “I cannot remember how many times they tried to exert pressure by saying that our broadcasts would hurt the already traumatized Dutchbat forces. We weren’t doing it, they were.”¹⁹⁰

Not only lack of cooperation and attempts to dictate the content of news programmes, but also the (suspicion of) pressure on military officers such as Colonel Brantz and Captain Rutten as well as on the journalists involved served to reinforce the feeling that there was a lot being covered up.¹⁹¹ Brugsma: “I am 99.9 per cent certain that people were pressured into refusing to talk to us, people who actually wanted to talk to us.”¹⁹²

Much of the criticism was directed at Bert Kreemers¹⁹³, the Deputy Director of Information at the Ministry of Defence. “You knew that if you had any bad news, Bert would try to keep it out of the papers. By almost any means possible.”¹⁹⁴ Bart Rijs writes, “the spin doctors at the Ministry of Defence, with Bert Kreemers at the fore, trivialized or denied every revelation, leaked selective information to their favourites in the media, and boasted that they had nothing to fear from them – ‘they’re on our drip-feed’.”¹⁹⁵ Huys reports that, after he had threatened to enter Camp Pleso in a tank, Nova received a visit from Ministry spokesmen Van den Heuvel and Kreemers who suggested that Huys should be sacked.¹⁹⁶ If journalistic efforts were led away from investigating the exact facts surrounding the drama Srebrenica itself and into revealing the scandal of Srebrenica in the Netherlands, circumstances such as these may well have contributed to this development.¹⁹⁷

Competition

“There is a war going on between Netwerk, Nova and the Journaal,” Linda Polman says in her critical analysis of the television summer of 1998, “and that war was fought out over the backs of the Dutch

¹⁸⁹ See also Bart Rijs, ‘Journalist leek meer op Dutchbatter dan hij wil toegeven’ (‘Journalist was more of a Dutchbatter than he cared to admit’), *De Volkskrant*, 22 August 1998.

¹⁹⁰ Brugsma, 2 February 2000.

¹⁹¹ *Netwerk*, 24 January 1997.

¹⁹² Brugsma, 2 February 2000.

¹⁹³ Five years later, when Kreemers had revealed the context in which he was expected to work, journalists such as Ewoud Nysingh, Bart Nypels and Twan Huys took a somewhat more lenient view of his actions. They are now prepared to accept that he, like the responsible minister, was not always in possession of fully accurate information at crucial moments. Nypels: “Based mainly on documents, I can see that very little of the official information during the period after the fall was accurate. This means that information must have been deliberately withheld by some people, particularly the senior army staff. Even the official spokesman would then have little or nothing to report, of course.” (De Poel and Nypels, 28 October 1999).

¹⁹⁴ Nysingh, 14 September 2000; see also Frank Westerman, ‘srebrenica wel in de doofpot’ (‘srebrenica was to have been hushed up’), *De Journalist*, 13 November 1998.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Journalist leek meer op Dutchbatter dan hij wil toegeven’ (‘Journalist was more of a Dutchbatter than he cared to admit’), *De Volkskrant*, 22 August 1998.

¹⁹⁶ Huys, 8 July 2000. Huys himself was not present but according to Ed Ribbink, deputy editor of Nova, he recounts the gist of the message accurately. The comments were actually made in a private conversation between Kreemers and Ribbink. Later, a further conversation which also involved Van den Heuvel and editor Ad van Liempt took place, with a view to restoring the relationship which had been disrupted (Ribbink, 4 September 2001). The effect of such outside interventions is always the opposite of what is intended, suggests Huys. See also Eickhof (above) on the response to critical reports. However, Nysingh claims to have received no support from his editors in a similar case (after 1995). (Nysingh 14 September 2000).

¹⁹⁷ Kranenburg: “When you look at all those supposed or actual revelations, you see a number of separate incidents. There is no connecting line. I believe that with an issue such as Srebrenica, it’s all about somewhat larger patterns. Clearer lines. Yet all editions of *Nova* feature just one aspect, one incident. No focus on the overall picture, no taking account of the inevitable chaos. That is always the case with disasters. ‘Emergency services were chaotic’ – that is a standard journalistic response. It would be more of a news item if things hadn’t been chaotic” (Kranenburg 13 September 2000).

UN peacekeepers in Srebrenica.”¹⁹⁸ It has already been stated that the competition in terms of news coverage (and ‘scoops’) is relatively modest in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, with a dossier such as Srebrenica a lot of professional, and also personal, acclaim, could be earned.¹⁹⁹

Journalists are not known for hiding their light under a bushel. Modesty is not a journalistic virtue, and when journalists describe their own accomplishments this may result in rather gushing prose, as in *Het Parool*’s special 1998 supplement on ‘the summer of Nova’²⁰⁰ to which Polman refers. “Competitor Netwerk was left far behind, and even the newspapers couldn’t keep up” runs the subtitle to an article in which Nova’s chief Ad van Liempt says, “I feel sorry for the boys at Netwerk.” Executive editor Gerard Dielessen explains, “Nova is still pure journalism, while Netwerk is moving in the direction of entertainment. It’s all part of a trend. The dumbing-down of television. We shall not be taking part.” A year later, Fons de Poel, who had been executive editor of KRO’s contribution to Netwerk since 1993, explained in *Vrij Nederland* that Nova could not be regarded as the best, since that was clearly Netwerk and in particular the *Brandpunt* contributions. “For years, we at Netwerk have done our best to avoid being staid and boring, to make a programme with a certain degree of excitement. The emphasis is on the reporting itself. Nova is easy to make; it relies not on the reporters but on the presenters. I, on the other hand, try to arouse the viewer’s curiosity.”

The aftermath of Srebrenica was unmistakably an area in which one programme could attempt to outdo the other, or, to put it less optimistically, in which personal glory could be achieved by ‘scoring’ over others. In fact, the two programmes are not all that dissimilar in terms of journalism; and the margins are narrow. Healthy rivalry has traditionally been among the factors spurring the journalist along, but it is also clear that increased competition in television and radio have intensified the struggle for journalistic survival.

When judged according to the criteria which journalists apply to their own performance, Polman may have been right. The current affairs programmes fought their own war over Srebrenica. Carolien Brugsma, editor of Nova, also attributes part of the satisfaction derived from investigating the Srebrenica drama from the comparison with Netwerk: “Of course, it is blowing one’s own trumpet somewhat, but I think that Netwerk lost the battle of Srebrenica. In 1995, they were still ahead of us in terms of revelations, but they then went off in a different direction. They are often much better than we are at studying complete dossiers, but I believe that the Kemenade Commission was set up as a direct result of the five days of reporting on Nova. Then everyone sat up and took notice – the research journalists and the newspapers.” Referring to the week in November 1999 in which the UN published its report on Srebrenica, she adds: “They were furious at Netwerk. Nova knew exactly when the second report would appear, but Netwerk did not. That’s all to do with the fact that Twan Huys and I are persistent to the point of being obsessive. I phoned Kofi Annan’s office every day for weeks and said that if I did not find out the publication date I would be sacked. They gave us the date.”²⁰¹

At the same time, she attributes her own resolute language, and that of the other television makers, to the ‘inferiority complex’ of television news, always having to prove itself alongside the print media.

¹⁹⁸ Polman 1998, 1999a. For a profile of the television current affairs programmes, see Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2000.

¹⁹⁹ Even David Rohde, the *Christian Science Monitor* reporter who won the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for his investigation into Srebrenica, admits that, besides a ‘sense of moral justice’ and the ‘need to awaken the world to the horrors of Srebrenica’, there were also personal motives behind his quest for evidence of mass murder in Srebrenica. His decision to seek out such evidence entirely on his own was taken ‘to ensure that the new grave sites would be my exclusive story’ (Boucher 1998:4). See also Rohde 1997.

²⁰⁰ Paul van Liempt, ‘De zomer van Nova: Komkommertijd bestaat niet meer’ (‘The summer of *Nova*: the silly season is no more’), *Het Parool*, 26 August 1998.

²⁰¹ In late November 1999, following the publication of the UN report, Leslie Woodhead’s documentary *A cry from the grave* and the Mladic tapes were broadcast. KRO’s *Reporter* programme (under the editorship of Steven de Vogel) examined the political decision-making process which led to the deployment of Dutchbat. The KRO documentary was brought forward by a month ‘in connection with the publication of the UN report’ (according to a statement made by Margot Smit of *Reporter* on 28 November 1998).

Huys: “Let us just say that, immediately after the events in Zagreb which took place during the summer months, there was no competition for Nova, except from the *Journal* news programme. The other current affairs programmes were not being broadcast – of course that would have played a role. The journalistic quality will be that much better if you are on top of the subject and can devote an entire programme to it, rather than just one minute and ten seconds. We wanted to cover everything that happened since 1995. We very soon took the lead in the first days after the return of Dutchbat, with Karremans’ statements roundly refuted shortly thereafter. Nova was the first to broadcast the Minister of Defence’s own account, on the Monday following the press conference I think. That can be looked up easily enough. If I am not mistaken he distanced himself from Karremans’ comments on three or four occasions, saying ‘this should not have been said by that man’. And each time, we thought ‘it should not have been said, but you are entirely responsible, Minister’. This gave rise to the question of how something like this could have happened in the first place. Why were these statements made? Who wrote these words? Were they Karremans’ own words and why is the minister now saying something else? Eventually, there was a never-ending string of things that went wrong. The disappearing film, the disappearing list of names of the Muslim men. These were brought up every time in Nova. At one stage, the Minister had to come to the studio on innumerable occasions to make another statement about who was responsible. No wonder we soon came to be incredulous. It was a marvellous story from the journalistic point of view and one in which we were always ahead. Naturally, that led to the feeling that we were doing extremely well. That we should continue what we were doing. But after a while, the dust settled and there was a period of calm. Then in August there was an edition featuring the Petrovic tape and a report made in collaboration with NRC Handelsblad. That resulted in considerable publicity, not only within Nova and NRC Handelsblad, as the story was soon taken up by others. We quickly got the idea that we were decisive in a journalistic sense for the reporting about Srebrenica.”²⁰²

The Srebrenica dossier

Most journalists who played a significant part in providing information about the war in the former Yugoslavia and about Srebrenica were driven by a combination of motives. The nature of ‘the dossier’ was not the least among these. Although the majority would probably deny any allegiance to a ‘journalism of attachment’, many demonstrated particular concern and engagement with the events in Yugoslavia – the *cri de coeur* by Bleich, Etty, Michielsen and Nysingh in 1991 was one of the first demonstrations of this involvement.²⁰³ Brugsma:

“We were considerably more involved in this dossier than in any other subject. Something like this comes along only once in a lifetime, such a combination of journalistic passion, interest... How could eight thousand people be slaughtered under our very eyes? That is dreadful enough in itself, but it has happened on a number of occasions in history. However, this was also an appeal to one’s sense

²⁰² Huys, 8 July 2000.

²⁰³ When Brugsma and Huys came to express their feelings about the Srebrenica dossier, each recalled the words of Dutch soldier Monique Bergman who described what she had seen as ‘scenes from *Schindler’s List*’ (Brugsma, 2 February 2000; Huys, 8 July 2000).

of democracy. The main reason that *Nova* devoted so much time to this dossier is a matter of choice, since so many people involved in the programme believe this to be one of the most important dossiers, if not *the* most important dossier, of the past ten to fifteen years.”²⁰⁴

‘srebrenica’ seems to have stimulated discussion about the desirability of in-depth investigative journalism as a counterbalance to such tendencies as the increased pace of news production, leaving less time for reflection, and the news itself becoming more superficial. However, for a news organization to employ investigative research journalists on a permanent basis remains problematic, not only because of the costs involved. Investigative reporters are, by definition, set aside from the day-to-day work of the organization. In the view of those colleagues who are involved in the frantic world of up-to-the-minute news and current affairs production, this position can only be justified by results. The pressure to produce is postponed, but it exists nonetheless. Some lack of success will be taken into account, it is all part of the game, but in practice there will be limits to what a news organization can endure.

Furthermore, the investigative reporter himself or herself may succumb to the temptation of trying to become the next Bernstein or Woodward. According to Paul van Liempt (Het Parool, 26 August 1998), the investigative journalist fulfils a lifelong dream if he achieves the desired results: “Digging out the news, sniffing around in files and court papers, the rush of adrenaline if sleaze is unearthed. Illicit meetings in car parks are interspersed with conversations in dark bars – the only places where anonymous sources can go unobserved. Twan Huys, responsible for the Srebrenica broadcasts, has seen it all. “For the investigative reporter, there is also the risk of becoming totally obsessed with the topic being investigated. Nothing will distract him from his purpose, nothing which contradicts the impressions already formed will be accepted as possible.”²⁰⁵

Another problem may arise when investigative journalists or research teams enter the fields of established specialisms within the news organization. When NRC Handelsblad assigned Frank Westerman to the Srebrenica story, this seems to have given rise to some conflict between him and the political reporter allied to the Ministry of Defence in The Hague.²⁰⁶

Shortly after the events in Zagreb, *Nova* decided that Srebrenica should become a target area. Ad van Liempt recalls, “Srebrenica was a very sensitive matter throughout Dutch society. Although there was a degree of ‘Yugoslavia fatigue’ among the viewing public, we considered it extremely important to continue our coverage.”²⁰⁷ Srebrenica was not accorded this status in all quarters. At the NRC Handelsblad, Frank Westerman was allowed to carry on his investigative work, but other newspapers such as *De Volkskrant* assigned low priority to the topic. Various editorial staff, including

²⁰⁴ Brugsma, 2 February 2000. At first, Hendrina Praamsma and Twan Huys worked on the Srebrenica case. Later on Twan Huys and Carolien Brugsma (Brugsma, 16 July 2001).

²⁰⁵ Brugsma: “Of course, there were times when Twan Huys and I suffered from a sort of tunnel vision, but we did not broadcast anything that wasn’t subject to the usual editorial control. Everything was always well-founded from the journalistic viewpoint.” (Brugsma, 2 February 2000)

²⁰⁶ Kranenburg: “A political editor has a certain territory. Then someone else comes along and encroaches upon that territory. That was very much the case in the wake of Srebrenica. Frank Westerman came from *De Volkskrant*. He produced a lot of material. The first man in The Hague was Willibrord Nieuwenhuis, covering defence matters, who said: ‘This is not news’. You see it elsewhere as well. Leader-writer Roel Janssen was even more reluctant. You can see that in the editorials he wrote, after the revelations. There were not many editorials in total. But on the one hand that ‘smoking gun’ piece from the reporter, and on the other hand the same newspaper asking: ‘What is so new?’ One consideration is professional honour. He reveals it all, and I cannot. On the other hand, wasn’t it blown out of proportion a bit? Hadn’t all this been in the news before? He brought a lot of news to light, but other things had been more or less common knowledge for some time.” (Kranenburg, 13 September 2000).

²⁰⁷ Paul van Liempt, *De zomer van Nova*, (“The summer of *Nova*”), *Het Parool* 26 August 1998.

Ewoud Nysingh and Hella Rottenberg in The Hague and foreign editor Bart Rijs – continued to concern themselves with Srebrenica, but there was little coordination or continuity.²⁰⁸

In general, it is easier to fit investigative journalism into the working practices of current affairs programmes and weekly magazines than into those of a typical news programme. Netwerk undertakes some investigative reporting, while the entire format of Reporter is based upon this type of journalism. The task a medium has set for itself, the size and character of its audience or target group and the size of the organization itself will play a role. NOS Journaal does conduct investigative activities. RTL Nieuws does not. At RTL, reporter Willem Lust might have been able to lay claim to the topic of Srebrenica, but felt no desire to do so. Nor was there any pressure from his editors in this regard:

“The editors did not assign anyone specifically to this topic. *RTL Nieuws* is not known for its investigative culture. It provides a daily news bulletin, seven days a week. That is the priority. Those bulletins take up so much time and energy that it would be difficult to keep up investigative activity for any length of time. That has never been our strength. I have always assumed that it could not be done anyway. I was perhaps wrong in that, since *NOS Journaal* manages very well. I had always believed that the investigative department of a smaller news organization couldn’t possibly work well, that things would always go wrong. That there would always be such pressure to produce results that things would be broadcast before the full facts were known.”²⁰⁹

In retrospect, it may seem as if the media turned their spotlight on Srebrenica immediately and simultaneously. This was not the case. It was some time before the Dutch media began to devote any close or critical attention to the Srebrenica dossier. Some foreign journalists (such as Gutman and Rohde) did so some time before the Dutch. Even then, it was not the media in general, or all journalists, but just a small number who took up the cause. Shortly after the fall itself there was general interest, but the excitement waned considerably once ‘our boys’ had returned home. The safe homecoming was itself subject to much coverage, encouraged by the authorities. This apparently excessive attention to the fortunes of the ‘home side’ is not unusual in itself.

Othon Zimmermann mentions that Srebrenica received attention for a relatively long time in the *Algemeen Dagblad*, but qualifies this immediately by asking “what is long? A lot was revealed in the first months and then every July the whole thing is regurgitated time and time again.”²¹⁰ According to Bart Rijs, it was only after the initial revelations that other media decided to make good their earlier inactivity. “They scurried round looking for Dutchbat troops willing to tell tales, whereupon one trivial revelation would be followed by the next. Some journalists did a professional job, but most of them were lazy, poorly informed and cowed by authority.”²¹¹

The behaviour of the media after Srebrenica followed an established pattern seen after most major disasters, first devoting all attention to the actual events, then providing a tentative explanation of those events and then finally seeking to determine who was responsible (COT, 1997: 41–42).

²⁰⁸ Theo Klein, ‘srebrenica ook journalistieke les’ (‘srebrenica also a lesson in journalism’), <http://www.volkskrant.nl/achtergronden/extra/355022294.htm>; Bart Rijs, ‘Journalist leek meer op Dutchbatter dan hij wil toegeven’ (‘Journalist was more of a Dutchbatter than he cared to admit’), *De Volkskrant*, 22 August 1998. Nysingh claimed that he had to provide *De Volkskrant*’s coverage practically single-handed (Nysingh, 14 September 2000).

²⁰⁹ Lust, 19 July 2000.

²¹⁰ “Whereupon I do all I can to persuade the editors to keep these items out of the newspaper. Documenting that all this was already known in August or September 1995. Everything -absolutely everything – has been published before. Every year, *Nova*, VPRO and even the *NOS Journaal* reinstate this as major news. That annoys me. It means that you have been unearthing information and writing reports for nothing.” (Zimmermann, 28 April 2000).

²¹¹ Bart Rijs, ‘Journalist leek meer op Dutchbatter dan hij wil toegeven’ (‘Journalist was more of a Dutchbatter than he cared to admit’), *De Volkskrant*, 22 August 1998.

Epilogue

The end of the Dutch presence in the Srebrenica enclave was represented by a television image which was perhaps every bit as forceful as the reports and pictures of Omarska which had pricked everyone's conscience in the summer of 1992 and which had acted as a catalyst for discussions concerning military intervention. For many people, the photograph of Lieutenant Colonel Karremans and Bosnian-Serb general Mladic drinking a toast to each other encapsulated the futility of the international community's efforts, and those of the Netherlands in particular.²¹² Here was another image with clear references to the Second World War, and to the preferred framework within which the conflict had been defined by the Dutch (and others) as a question of 'good guys' and 'bad guys'. However, here the Dutch were not unequivocally in the role of the good guys, but were playing Daladier and Chamberlain (comparison made by French president Chirac, in a slightly different setting), or were cast as the engine-drivers of the trains to Westerbork (Herman Wigbold).²¹³

Media and politics seem to have aided each other in creating a rather stereotypical, simplified picture of the conflict, and, as a consequence, also of what the international community, the Netherlands in particular, could do to bring it to an end and solve it. In the Dutch political climate, so they say, it is easier to score with a solution which takes the moral high ground than might be the case elsewhere. And media and public opinion in the Netherlands are more susceptible to the temptation offered by such solutions. There was a widely shared belief among the media and journalists, particularly after the summer of 1992, that the conflict in Yugoslavia could only be resolved by means of military intervention. Dutch politics needed no convincing of that, though *De Volkskrant* and the *Netwerk* programmes *Brandpunt* and *Hier en Nu* put the pro-intervention argument forward clearly. That the Netherlands should play a prominent role in military action was seen as even more self-evident, and the politicians needed even less persuasion on this point. It should be noted that the image presented by the media in this regard was somewhat more balanced than this schematic outline suggests (see Scholten, Ruigrok and Heerma, 2001a).

Many journalists are aware of the shortcomings apparent during this period: too much moralizing, too few facts, too much opinion, too little analysis, too much emotion.²¹⁴ The trauma of Srebrenica is also a trauma of the Dutch journalist, even though it failed to lead to any marked degree of open and critical self examination. Bart Rijs (who, by the way, did produce a critical analysis of his own performance and of Dutch journalism in general) wrote: "After having urged the government to intervene in Bosnia for years, the media then went on to vent their wrath on Dutchbat."²¹⁵ The contrast between the standpoints before and after Srebrenica is sometimes extremely marked²¹⁶ and it is therefore tempting to describe the Dutch media's approach to Srebrenica as a reaction – or over-reaction – to the feeling that they or society as a whole had failed to respond adequately in the period preceding the drama. There is probably some truth to this assessment.

Writing about a review *De Volkskrant* produced of its coverage of Yugoslavia, Theo Klein, then head of the news department and now *De Volkskrant*'s complaints ombudsman, remarks: "The drama of Srebrenica was not adequately placed in the complex international (UN) framework in which it had developed. The analyses and editorial comments did make such a link, but in uncovering and reconstructing events we leaned too heavily on Dutch informants." (Klein 2000). In other words, *De Volkskrant* did not do enough factual research of its own and the newspaper also relied too heavily on

²¹² See Alain Franco, 'Quand les "casques bleus" néerlandais trinquaient avec les Serbes à Srebrenica...', *Le Monde*, 2 September 1995.

²¹³ 'VN lieten zich manoeuvreren in rol van collaborateur' ('UN allowed itself to be manoeuvred into role of collaborator'), *De Volkskrant* 17 July 1995.

²¹⁴ Aside from all shortcomings in the organization of the news production process.

²¹⁵ 'Journalist leek meer op Dutchbatter dan hij wil toegeven', *De Volkskrant* 22 August, 1998.

²¹⁶ Apart from the brief euphoria surrounding the safe homecoming of the Dutchbat battalion.

opinions. This diagnosis does not apply to all the main Dutch media to the same degree. *De Volkskrant* has always been more opinion-based than, say, the *NRC Handelsblad*. Nevertheless, several of our respondents come to similar conclusions, the newspaper journalists more often than their television counterparts.

The shortcomings identified by Klein for the period following Srebrenica are also significant in the period preceding the deployment of Dutchbat forces. All possible standpoints – for and against intervention, for and against safe havens, for and against deployment of the Airmobile Brigade – could be found in the media at that time. However, for most Dutch politicians, the majority of the general population and many journalists, there could be no doubt about where the moral duty lay.

Media coverage, whether factual reports or editorial opinion, have only limited direct influence on political decision-making. Journalists are aware of this. The ways in which politicians, or authorities in general, react to media publicity are no proof of any real influence in the sense of effectuating change with regard to a policy that has already been defined. If there are no great differences of opinion among the political elite, the overall effect will be slight. The feverish activity that can sometimes be seen is more in the nature of crisis management: by showing that one has listened and taken note, some of the pressure from media and public opinion can be relieved. In this respect, television is no different from the print media. Even events in Yugoslavia with a very marked and immediate media impact – such as the discovery of the prison camps in the summer of 1992 – serve to confirm this general pattern. The public outcry is immediate, but the subsequent call for effective military intervention will not yet be heard.

Nevertheless, such events are not without consequences. Omarska provided one of the direct impulses for the Yugoslavia Tribunal, and did more than any other event help to define the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. That definition was not the same as the official UN position, which did not distinguish between ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’. The trickle-down effect of such a definition – of a way of understanding and interpreting which gradually becomes more generally accepted and self-evident – is far greater than the short-term effect of media campaigns or media events.²¹⁷

The trap into which a journalist may fall is that opinions which are not in line with such an established view are given less opportunity to be heard, and events which do not match the overall pattern are likely to be ignored. Nevertheless people, journalists in particular, should be even more aware of their biases in such a situation and more self-critical of their preconceived ideas. This applies even more if the standpoints have been validated as politically or morally correct. The risk is greatest for those journalists who choose to take sides, no matter how honourable their reasons. The accuracy of the general definition (or their definition) of a situation is not particularly important; what matters is that any conviction, once established, will affect one’s ability for critical reflection.

The developments in the media and in the production of news in recent decades have not been conducive to critical reflection or self-criticism. The greater part of the news production process is largely based on routine and displays little similarity to the idealized picture of the investigative journalist at work. Various respondents in the current study have felt deeply involved in the events in Yugoslavia, because they believed the conflict to be one in which important human values were at stake. They often had the idea that they had to fight indifference and apathy on the part of the public, politicians and even their own colleagues. The evaluation produced by Rijs (1998) and the responses of various interviewees use terms such as ‘complacency’ and ‘provincialism’ to describe the performance of Dutch journalists in connection with Yugoslavia and Srebrenica.

The Dutch media in general, and the broadcasters in particular, may be more reliant on reporting by outside news providers than is either necessary or desirable. Even the ‘quality’ newspapers, which in terms of circulation, size of staff and budget could easily compete with broadsheets in larger countries, fail to take full advantage of their position, as Peter Michielsen points out.²¹⁸ The editorial

²¹⁷ See the discussion accompanying the analysis of media coverage in 1993 in Scholten, Ruigrok & Heerma 2001a.

²¹⁸ Michielsen 14 September 1999.

teams of the television current affairs programmes may be too small and their resources too limited to allow a permanent presence in an area such as Yugoslavia, but it is nevertheless surprising that greater cooperation and collaboration were not achieved, particularly in view of the historical and moral significance that was attached to events in the Balkans.

Another problem is the lack of continuity. There is little opportunity to develop expertise if a field is constantly being covered by different people. In the case of the reporting on Yugoslavia and the UN action there, this problem was exacerbated by a lack of expertise among the editorial staff. It also proved difficult to coordinate knowledge internally, with the various desks sometimes working at cross purposes. After Srebrenica, the situation may well have improved, at least in some ways. The traumatic experience persuaded the media that more concentrated and ongoing efforts were required if such an event was to be reported and analysed adequately. While some changes were made, the Srebrenica dossier was nevertheless passed from person to person within many media. This occasionally resulted in 'old news' being presented as 'new news', as the media do have a tendency to be swayed by the issues of the day. The increasing cooperation between public broadcasting's current affairs programmes is in itself a good thing, but was not a direct result of Srebrenica. Rather, it was brought about by broadcasting policy considerations, leading to increased 'profiling' of the various channels.

Our research material does not allow us to make a balanced judgement of media and journalistic performance after Srebrenica, apart from one based on experiences and qualifications given by some of our interviewees. Nevertheless, it is apparent that there was a somewhat one-sided fixation on incidents and on the 'scandal' element of Srebrenica, which was helped along by an inadequate publicity policy on the part of the government. In other words, the government actually contributed to a situation in which media attention focused more on its own performance and that of the Dutch forces than the Srebrenica issue itself would have justified.

There is a stark contrast between the ever increasing tempo at which news is gathered and processed in the media and the slow speed at which a government still collects and processes information. This is not entirely unrelated to Minister Jozias van Aartsen's complaint about media pressure. In crisis situations, there is likely to be an even greater clash of interests, needs and opportunities between the media and the government. The media want immediate answers to their questions, while the government feels the need for extensive consultation and careful consideration. The avoidance strategies often adopted by the government – delaying tactics, the removal of sensitive information or inclusion of vast amounts of irrelevant information (COT 1997:131) – are not always the result of unwillingness to provide information. However, many of our respondents have experienced too much of this in the wake of Srebrenica to keep faith in the goodwill of the government, and the Ministry of Defence in particular.

As far as official communication is concerned, the problem goes beyond poor crisis management. Even under normal circumstances it would have been difficult enough to speak for a department so markedly fragmented as the Ministry of Defence seems to have been at this time. Moreover, it is not a department known for its tradition of openness. Another factor could be a style of communication (or of communicators) in which good relations with the media, or at least with some journalists, are to some extent maintained by favours (cf. Rijs 1998), and in which the main purpose of providing information at all is to 'market' policy or to protect the responsible authorities. Official spokespersons, whose increased significance and involvement is not looked on favourably anyway by most journalists, then become 'spin doctors'. The logical consequence is a greater degree of cynicism. However, even without the unfortunate approach to communication taken by the government and journalists being put off the scent, the Srebrenica dossier would still not have been closed.

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