

The Media and the Demonization of the Serbs

By [Marjaleena Repo](#)

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

In-depth Report: [THE BALKANS](#)

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To: CBC Radio Sunday Edition

Dear Michael Enright and staff,

Your last Sunday's programme on Slobodan Milosevic's death revealed a biased and propagandist approach to the whole tragedy of the systematic dismantling of Yugoslavia, You blame one man and one man alone, and label him "The Butcher of Balkans", "a tyrant", "a mass murderer", and throw in the suggestion that he "murdered millions," all this in the brief introduction to the interview of your equally biased interviewee, Mr. William Schabas. You make no attempt to offer proof; yours is a guilt-by-accusation approach.

Six years after the bombing of illegal, immoral and unjust US instigated and NATO conducted war on Yugoslavia you should have had plenty of time for second thoughts, particularly as the evidence is out there, easy to locate, that both Mr. Milosevic and the Serbs have been and continue to be falsely accused.

Back in '99 I wrote a piece, "The Media and the demonization of Serbs," which I urge you to read with fresh and open eyes. (See below.)

Michael Parenti's article of 2003, "The demonization of Slobodan Milosevic," adds more to the contrary evidence of Milosevic's and Serbs' "guilt" that you and your programme so completely ignore. (See below.)

To bring the point home about the absurdity of the claims against Milosevic, I am sending Swiftian piece by Jan Oberg from Sweden, "The real story: How Milosevic was more evil than you ever knew," which I hope will tickle your funny bone, and waken your (dormant) sense of honesty and truth in broadcasting. (See below.)

I will end with the hope, which is fast fading, that the CBC in general and your programme in particular, would pull away from the NATO/US dominant perspective on all matters regarding international affairs, and start speaking truth to power, at last. Canadians have the right to expect more from our public broadcasting!

After William Schabas' morally and intellectually lazy justification of the victor's courts such as the one that has provided "judicial lynching" (in Edward L. Greenspan's words) to Slobodan Milosevic, I would hope that you would soon do an in-depth interview with Professor Michael Mandel from York University's Osgoode Hall, whose book, How America Gets Away with Murder: Illegal Wars, Collateral Damage and Crimes Against Humanity, tells all, from the perspective of international law.

(You can find a review of it by Edward Herman at <http://zmagsite.zmag.org/JulAug2004/herman0804.html>)

Sincerely

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THE MEDIA AND THE DEMONIZATION OF THE SERBS

by Marjaleena Repo
Tuesday, March 30, 1999

The Yugoslavian government has just expelled some journalists from NATO countries from its territory. This is deplored by the media as “censorship,” but in some of us it has created a strange sense of relief: perhaps now there will be a ceasefire in the 10-year disinformation campaign about the Yugoslavian conflict in general and the Serbs in particular. Or at least the “journalists” (few actually deserve the name) have to declare that what they are talking about is unverified rumour and hearsay since they are nowhere near the scene. Up to this point they have been able to create the false impression that they have witnessed the events they report on.

The Western media’s relentless demonization of the Serbs of Yugoslavia has, however, produced a very predictable (and no doubt, wished-for) result: a truly genocidal assault on the Serbian people by Western military might, Canada to its eternal shame participating, breaking every relevant international covenant and treaty.

The pack-journalism over the last ten years has also succeeded in hoodwinking many Canadians into thinking that what is at stake is the good-riddance of a Serbian Hitler who has attempted a “final solution” of sorts on assorted ethnic groups in Yugoslavia. A lot of well-intentioned people are cheering the bombing of yet another pariah nation into the Stone Age. With the accumulated effects of media rumour-mongering and willful disinformation, who can blame these folks for their barely controlled blood thirst? After all, because Hitler wasn’t stopped in time, millions perished in concentration camps, goes the heart-felt argument.

Yet the labelling of Yugoslavia’s Serb leaders as Hitlers — and the Serbs themselves as brutal, subhuman monsters — is a familiar trick from recent history. It has been perpetuated by the various hired hands, PR firms, who have worked overtime for the various ethnic groups pushing for secession which would utterly destroy the once well-functioning, multi-ethnic Yugoslavian federation and replace it with small nation-states which ethnically cleansed themselves (Croatia, for instance, expelled between 500,000 and a million Serbs from its territory.) The media has merely carried the message of these “hidden hands” of the Balkan conflict.

The world was shocked to find out that a PR firm, Hill and Knowlton, had manufactured the “incubator babies” incident in Kuwait which precipitated the Gulf War: Iraqi soldiers ripping Kuwaiti babies out of incubators in a genocidal fashion. Phony eyewitnesses to this atrocity

tearfully testified in front of U.S. politicians and the media, adding to public support for the subsequent bombing of Iraq and contributing hugely to the demonization of the Iraqis, leaders and citizens alike. Even Amnesty International was taken in by the falsehood, which was later exposed as such, but only after the military damage was done.

Yet the shock of being duped soon wore off and gullibility returned. In no time another American PR firm, Ruder Finn, working for the Croatian and Bosnian separatists, publicly bragged that it had been able to turn world opinion against the Serbs. In April 1993 on French television, James Harff, the director of Ruder Finn, described his proudest public relations effort as having “managed to put Jewish opinion on our [Croatian and Bosnian] side.” This was a “sensitive matter,” he added, as “the Croatian and Bosnian past was marked by real and cruel anti-semitism. Tens of thousands of Jews perished in Croatian camps... Our challenge was to reverse this attitude and we succeeded masterfully. At the beginning of July 1992, New York Newsday came out with the article on Serb camps. We jumped at the opportunity immediately. We outwitted three big Jewish organizations.... That was a tremendous coup. When the Jewish organizations entered the game on the side of the [Muslim] Bosnians we could promptly equate the Serbs with the Nazis in the public mind. Nobody understood what was happening in Yugoslavia.... By a single move, we were able to present a simple story of good guys and bad guys which would hereafter play itself. We won by targeting the Jewish audience. Almost immediately there was a clear change of language in the press, with the use of words with high emotional content such as ethnic cleansing, concentration camps, etc, which evoke images of Nazi Germany and the gas chambers of Auschwitz. ”

The PR firm was piling hoax upon hoax. The famous story of Serb concentration camps was built on a photo of a gaunt man surrounded by others, staring at the viewer from behind barbed wire; surely an image to chill one to the bones. It took years before a German journalist Thomas Deichman, in an article titled “The picture that fooled the world,” described how the famous photo was staged by its takers, British journalists, who were photographing the inhabitants from inside barbed wire which was protecting agricultural products and machinery from theft in a refugee and transit camp; the men stood outside of it; and at no time was there a barbed-wire fence surrounding the camp. But by that time the image had done its deed, terminally slamming the Serbs as genocidal mass murderers.

There are countless other stories, all deliberately maligning the Serbs to further the ends of military intervention. These stories and photos of “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing” (a la Hitler) in a civil war, in which Serbs are guilty as sin and others are their innocent victims, are repeated ad nauseam by western reporters without the slightest evidence, and have provided the ground for the public’s (hopefully only temporary) acceptance of the illegal and brutal war against the sovereign nation of Yugoslavia. They continue after NATO’s bombing began, unabated, with new absurdities such as the suggestion that the Serbs are really bombing themselves. Perhaps in the war crimes court there will soon be a place for journalists and PR firms who with their inflammatory reporting and fraudulent actions cause wars to begin.

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