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Book Review

Laurel E. Fletcher
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***Blood and Vengeance: One Family's Story of the War in Bosnia*, by Chuck Sudetic (W.W. Norton & Company 1998), 393 pp.**

The suffering of the victims of the war in Bosnia is fading from public view. In 1995 the Dayton Peace Agreement¹ brought an end to the fighting in Bosnia and to news images of residents of Sarajevo lifting bloody bodies into make-shift ambulances in the wake of another Bosnian Serb mortar attack. Now, the accounts of victims receive only sporadic press attention, largely through reporting on UN-sponsored war crimes trials at The Hague. In light of this, former *New York Times* correspondent Chuck Sudetic's book is a timely contribution to the growing body of literature on the Bosnian war. Sudetic gives us a more holistic account of the war—one that integrates political developments into the real-life wartime stories of the author's own relatives. The result is a moving and intimate perspective on the causes and impact of the conflict from the perspective of the victims.

While Sudetic has covered Bosnia for the *Times*, his ties to the region predate his posting. His wife's sister, a Serb and Belgrade native, married a Bosnian Muslim named Hamed Celik. Hamed Celik's family lived in a small village of Serbs and Muslims in eastern Bosnia, called Kupusovici, at the outbreak of the war in 1992. Hamed's family is the fulcrum of the book.

Sudetic traces the history of the Mus-

lim Celik family from their arrival in the village at the turn of twentieth century to the fall of the Bosnian town of Srebrenica in 1995—at the time a UN-declared "safe area"—where the family had sought refuge. Through the Celik family, the author depicts the evolution of rural life in Bosnia through World War I and World War II—during which time Muslims and Serbs committed atrocities against each other.

Sudetic's snapshot of life in Yugoslavia after the war forcefully contradicts the myth that ancient ethnic hatreds between Muslims and Serbs led inevitably to war. In fact, the Celik family and the other Muslims in the area lived peaceably with their Serb neighbors during Tito's rule. Violence erupted in the area in 1991, as a result of a plan by the Bosnian Serbs (backed politically and militarily by the President of Serbia, Slobodon Milosevic) to carve out of Bosnia an area "cleansed" of Muslims, which would then merge with the neighboring republic of Serbia to form a "Greater Serbia." As the war advances, Sudetic traces in vivid detail the family's experience of the "ethnic cleansing" of their village, the deprivations of their life as *torbari* (impoverished refugees) in besieged Muslim enclaves in eastern Bosnia, and their final days in Srebrenica.

Sudetic's method of storytelling is deliberate. He rejects the journalistic framework of a *Times* correspondent that "focuses mainly on institutions and political leaders and their duties and decisions while leaving the common folk to exemplify trends."² Instead,

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1. Dayton Agreement on Implementing the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, signed 10 Nov. 1995, U.N. Doc. A/50/810-S/1995/1021, Annex, reprinted in 35 I.L.M. 170.
 2. CHUCK SUDETIC, BLOOD AND VENGEANCE: OUR FAMILY'S STORY OF THE WAR IN BOSNIA, at xxxii (1998).

Sudetic inverts the structure, making the experiences of the Celiks the prism through which the reader sees and understands the effects of the decisions of political leaders. For example, in the final chapter, Sudetic provides the details of the capture and "cleansing" of Srebrenica, an operation that is carefully planned by the Bosnian Serb leadership. In fact, the commander of the Bosnia Serb army, General Ratko Mladić, personally oversaw the mass execution of thousands of captured Bosnian Muslim men, whose shot bodies were bulldozed into unmarked graves. The reader is drawn into the maelstrom and is invited to walk the "trail of death"—the route that thousands of Muslim men have attempted to take out of Srebrenica in order to escape capture—perched on the shoulder of Paja Celik, Hamed's brother. From this intimate vantage point, the reader witnesses the chaos and death that ensues when the Serbs bomb the column of men. The author's detailed account of the capture of Srebrenica is simultaneously riveting and revolting. The reader cannot escape the unbridled brutality of the Serb attack nor deny the chilling passivity of UN and Western leaders, who received clear signs that the assault was imminent. Sudetic succeeds in brokering a special link between the observer and the observed, in part because Sudetic does not romanticize or glorify the plight of the Bosnian Muslims.

While Sudetic clearly focuses on how the Serbs ruthlessly orchestrated and implemented their design to cleanse a large swath of Bosnia of its Muslim inhabitants, he also adds complexity to the tale by exposing the cynicism that infected all parties involved in the conflict. For example, Sudetic provides two notable instances of the Bosnian govern-

ment's manipulation of its own Muslim citizens to gain military and political advantage. In the first instance, the Bosnian government exploits the Celik family and other refugees in its attempt to save the remaining pockets of Muslim-occupied territory in eastern Bosnia. In making no attempt to impose discipline, Muslim leaders instead found a use for the terror their own refugees could spread. When Bosnian forces attacked surrounding Serb villages, the impoverished Muslim *torbari* fanned out, killing Serb civilians and wounded soldiers and pillaging whatever food and supplies they could find.

In the second instance, Sudetic exposes the cynical staging of the images of the civilian casualties of Serb sniper fire in Sarajevo, which were transmitted to international audiences. Many of the pictures, which became symbols of the defenseless Bosnian Muslims, were taken in front of the Holiday Inn, where most foreign news correspondents and photographers stayed. As the cameras clicked, Serb snipers would shoot pedestrians as they crossed the wide boulevard in front of the hotel. However, what was not widely publicized, according to Sudetic, was the fact that the bloody intersection was more like a theater set than a tragic reality of the war because the Bosnian government refused to protect the thoroughfare from attack as it had done at other crossroads, despite pleas from the UN commanders. It turns out that the Bosnian government, apparently, was willing to sacrifice some civilians in order to keep images of the siege conveniently in front of the foreign press.

Bear no mistake, however, that Sudetic makes clear that whatever the Bosnian government's moral shortcomings were, they paled in comparison to

the United Nations' disastrous peace-keeping policy. The author seems to relish giving the reader behind-the-scenes accounts of how the United Nations actively undermined efforts to stop Serb aggression. For example, in April 1993, Paja Celik was working at the Srebrenica hospital when Serb mortar fire hit a local schoolyard where boys were playing soccer, shattering their bodies as well as a cease-fire. Instead of denouncing the Serb attack, UN officials initially told journalists that the Muslims had fired first and that the Serbs had merely fired in retaliation. While the story was later retracted, it had the effect, according to Sudetic, of laying blame for the breakdown of the cease-fire on the Bosnian government. It serves as one more example of how UN officials tried to absolve themselves of their failure to protect the thousands of Muslim civilians crowded into Srebrenica. The impact of the United Nations' political decision is brought home vividly by the harrowing scene of Paja helping a former neighbor search for her son among the bodies of the school bombing victims; the young man's face was so disfigured by the blast that the only way they were able to identify him was by a mole on his back.

Although written for a general audience, this book is of particular interest to the human rights community. For those concerned with survivors of the Bosnian conflict, the story of the Celik family puts the wartime experiences of rural Bosnians into a fuller context. For observers of Balkan foreign policy issues, the book serves as an important reminder of the human consequences of

political decisions. Sudetic's masterful recounting of the experiences of victims to explain the root political causes and human effects of Bosnian war results in a superb and memorable narrative for scholars and activists alike.

Laurel Fletcher
Lecturer and Staff Attorney,
International Human Rights Law Clinic,
Boalt Hall Law School,
University of California at Berkeley

***Reclaiming Social Rights: International and Comparative Perspectives*, by Paul Hunt (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company, Ltd. 1996), 209 pp.**

In *Reclaiming Social Rights: International and Comparative Perspectives*, Paul Hunt, formerly a Visiting Fellow with the Harvard Human Rights Program, now at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, grapples with the historical and political marginalization of social rights, and offers visionary but practical plans for reclaiming them. By "social rights," Hunt means the rights set out in Articles 11–14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),¹ including an adequate standard of living, food, shelter, health, and education. Hunt seeks a broad audience, focusing on the human rights community, which, as he correctly points

1. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *adopted* 16 Dec. 1966, G.A. Res. 2200 (XXI), U.N. GAOR, 21st Sess., Supp. No. 16, arts. 11–14, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3 (*entered into force* 3 Jan. 1976).