

'Ethnic cleansing' acquires force of law

By R. Jeffrey Smith=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina -- Several times a month, Borislav and Dusanka Birg walk past their apartment in this city and sadly shake their heads. Having fled on the eve of war in 1992 with just one piece of luggage between them, they have been trying to reclaim their home for more than two years.

Of Croat and Serb descent in a city that is now 87 percent Muslim, the Birgs have run into a mass of red tape and not-so-subtle discrimination from local authorities. Their application to reclaim their home was refused, their appeal was ignored, and when they tried to occupy their apartment anyway, soldiers briefly choked Dusanka Birg and then ejected the couple.

The compact two-bedroom unit is the only vacant one of 12 in a refurbished building. Its dark windows and decrepit interior, foreign officials here say, are a symbol of the Bosnian government's failure to implement repeated pledges to foster the rebirth of a multi-ethnic society. As one U.N. official who has been pressing for action asserted, the city is tough on Dusanka "because she is a Serb. ... Its goal is to keep them from coming back."

An examination of the Birg case and many similar ones suggests that, by wide consent, ethnic-cleansing in this country continues -- except that it is now accomplished by legal means instead of armed conflict. After the war ended in 1995, the two newly established political entities in Bosnia -- the Serb Republic and the Muslim-Croat federation -- each enacted laws and regulations meant to freeze communal concentrations and obstruct the return of minority refugees to their prewar homes.

The effort has been largely successful. Less than 9 percent of the 400,000 refugees who have returned to their homes since 1995 are minorities in their immediate communities. As a result, postwar migration patterns have mostly reinforced the war's impact, complicating the West's aim of turning back the clock to prewar integration.

Foreign frustration with these obstacles has reached a boiling point. At

the urging of the Clinton administration and with the support of the international community's High Representative in Bosnia, a one-day conference will be convened here Tuesday to spotlight the failure of the Bosnian government to allow -- much less promote -- minority resettlement.

The conferees will set a series of short deadlines for the government to adopt new laws, resolve dozens of housing disputes and permit thousands of minority refugees to return to Sarajevo. To ensure the message is heard, U.S. and European diplomats at the conference also plan to threaten a cutoff of tens of millions of dollars in aid to Sarajevo if the deadlines are not met.

The goal is make a showplace of the capital city, whose prewar population was roughly 50 percent Muslim, 27 percent Serb and 7 percent Croat. "Sarajevo is what it's all about. ... If you get that right, you get a multiplier effect," said Andy Bearpark, a British diplomat who serves as deputy high representative for reconstruction and return. "This conference is meant to raise the political temperature."

The principal obstacle to allowing minority refugees to return is a 1995 Bosnian law that gave former residents two weeks to reclaim their homes after the Dec. 22 cease-fire that year, a tight deadline at a time when factional hostility was still high. If they did not meet it, their property was declared abandoned and given to someone else. Because the law was never publicized outside the country, hundreds of thousands of minority refugees are now without legal recourse.

The Bosnian parliament also has voted to deny refugees the right to return to thousands of apartments owned by the Yugoslav Army before the war by nullifying contracts for the sale of those apartments to their prewar inhabitants. The Bosnian army has declared many of the apartments abandoned and transferred them to favored war veterans.

U.N. aid workers here can tick off dozens of cases of Serbs or Croats who have been abused by arbitrary regulations, such as that of one man whose documents were not accepted because they were in the Cyrillic lettering commonly used by Serbs.

Many were barred because they appeared on the wrong day to pick up keys; others were told officially that their homes were uninhabitable, even though they were occupied by Muslims.

"People are asked to run after documents and papers for which there is no basis in the law," said Pandurevic Mladen, vice president of the local Serb Civic Council. "When we find out and make pressure, they back off but always make up something else."

The Bosnian government "has basically closed the (Sarajevo) canton through its property laws ... and been dancing around on this one" to avoid amending those laws, said U.S. special envoy on Bosnia Robert Gelbard, who conceived the conference. "They want to make Sarajevo a haven" for Muslims.

Government officials here acknowledge making mistakes, but say that U.N. and U.S. officials have exaggerated them. "There is quite a bit of tension ... about this conference because of the stupid statements by the Office of the High Representative," said Mirza Hajric, an adviser to Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic. He said housing disputes have arisen from government inefficiency and because there are simply not enough apartments for all those who want to live in Sarajevo.

"The problem is that 30 percent of the housing was destroyed and 15,000 foreigners (are) living here" to administer aid programs, Hajric said. He conceded, however, that the squeeze resulted in part from the fact that multiple dwelling units have come under the control of owners who had just one unit before the war. "Here is where (Western critics) are right. ... Someone tries to get something, a flat for his cousin, three flats for himself," Hajric said. "The government is trying to get a grip on this issue."

Borislav Birg said he finds it frustrating to be a "refugee in my own city" and to be barred by police from making any repairs to his apartment. He said that while he and his wife were refugees in Switzerland the apartment was stripped of its doors, windows and toilet fixtures. "Something has to be done," he said. "I cannot live on the street anymore," depending on the help of relatives.

Syria: The Hollywood of the Mideast?

By John Lancaster=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

DAMASCUS, Syria -- From Lebanon to the Persian Gulf, television viewers are tuning in to "The Mirror," the Arab world's answer to "Saturday Night Live."

Irreverent in the extreme, the hour-long comedy show takes gleeful aim at uncaring bureaucrats, autocratic rulers and other distinguishing features of Arab politics and society. One recent episode, "The Tribal Conference," parodied a summit meeting of Arab leaders, depicting them as self-important buffoons whose search for "Arab unity" ends in squabbles over soccer matches and a riot of hurled paper and insults.

Another depicts the Kafkaesque struggles of "Essam" -- a young Syrian woman named after a boy -- to avoid the draft by persuading government bureaucrats that she is, in fact, a female.

In a region where governments traditionally show little tolerance for dissent, such pungent political satire is as rare as it is popular. What makes "The Mirror" even more remarkable, however, is that it originates in Syria.

Despite its well-deserved reputation for political repression, Syria has emerged as a leading producer of Arab television entertainment, much of it surprisingly bold in its treatment of sensitive themes. Besides "The Mirror," Syrian-made programs now airing around the Middle East include a lavish adaptation of Shakespeare's "King Lear" and historical dramas such as "The Silk Market," a hugely popular serial that casts a critical eye on the brief, unhappy union between

Syria and Egypt from 1958 to 1961.

With a dozen or more private production firms, a recently inaugurated government-owned satellite channel and a strong tradition of dramatic arts, Syria is poised to challenge Egypt as "the Hollywood of the Middle East," television producers and actors here say.

"We have new ideas and new subjects," said Hatim Ali, 35, who produces "The Mirror" for a private company here. "The Egyptians are repeating themselves."

Much of what Syrian television offers is heavily flavored with propaganda, such as the 1996 hit "Brothers of Sand," an ambitious, privately produced war epic whose depictions of Turkish atrocities against Arab soldiers during World War I -- including a graphic impalement scene -- sparked formal diplomatic protests from Ankara.

The limits of free expression are clear. It would be unthinkable for "The Mirror," or any other program, to poke fun at a specific Arab ruler, least of all Hafez Assad, the former military pilot who has ruled this country of 15 million since seizing power in 1970. "As long as you attack bureaucracy and generic baddies, you can get away with it," a Western diplomat said.

That appears to be the strategy of Ali, the producer of "The Mirror." He recently finished work on a dramatic series that blends two works by Shakespeare -- "Macbeth" and "Richard III" -- to make a statement about "the authority and power of the state, and the rise of dictatorship," he said.

But according to diplomats and Syrian television officials, Assad has

promoted the growth and export of Syrian television entertainment as a means of boosting his claim to leadership of the Arab world -- a status Syrian officials say he has earned in light of his resolute defiance of Israel.

"Syria's essential position makes it important to be admired all over the Arab world," said Adel Yazigi, the director of state television. "Syria stayed firm and consistent and straight. That's why people like to see what is coming out of Syria."

With that in mind, Yazigi said, the government in 1988 sought to boost the output of Syria's entertainment industry by encouraging private production, easing import restrictions on cameras and other television gear and expanding the margins of free expression. Syria's satellite station, which broadcasts locally produced fare throughout the Arab world, went on the air three years ago; the government will soon begin work on a new studio complex in the ancient city of Aleppo.

Syrian writers and producers still must submit their projects to Yazigi's office for prior review. Asked whether his office practices censorship, he replied, "There are no restrictions. There is encouragement."

With satellite television, however, government control is ebbing. Although technically illegal, satellite dishes are widely used in Syria, giving viewers access to a variety of Arab-language programs carried by Middle Eastern satellite stations such as the Saudi-owned Orbit network. As a result, the government has eased restrictions on content to keep Syrian television competitive with foreign rivals, producers say.

Authorities Seek Man for Questioning in Clinic Bombing

By Stephanie Saul=(c) 1998, Newsday

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. -- Federal authorities were searching a remote mountainous section of North Carolina on Friday for a man wanted for questioning in the abortion clinic bombing that killed a moonlighting police officer and seriously wounded a nurse here Thursday.

The FBI issued a national bulletin for Eric Robert Rudolph, seeking him as a possible material witness, and not a suspect, authorities said. He was identified only as a 31-year-old white man and the registered owner of a gray 1989 Nissan pickup seen leaving the bomb site shortly after the blast.

Rudolph's last known address was on a mountain road in Cherokee County, N.C. County Sheriff Jack Thompson said the FBI was looking for him Friday.

Authorities said Rudolph was not known to be a member of any right-wing group headquartered in the Smoky Mountain county.

"He might not even come back here if he is living here," Thompson said. "Our regular patrols have been look-

ing for the vehicle and we've not seen the vehicle. If we run into that person, naturally, we'd arrest him and hold him." Thompson said he had received a call Friday morning from the FBI's office in Charlotte notifying them that agents would be in the area.

Rudolph's telephone had been disconnected. Authorities in Asheville, N.C., where Rudolph may have lived at one time, had also been alerted.

U.S. Attorney Doug Jones emphasized that Rudolph was being sought under a "material witness" warrant issued Friday in federal court here. "No one should jump to any conclusions about the fact that we are looking to question Mr. Rudolph," Jones said at a news conference here Friday.

The Birmingham News reported Friday that a man wearing a wig was seen running from the New Woman All Women Health Care Clinic, then driving away in the Nissan pickup.

The National Association of Abortion Providers warned its members to be on the lookout for the truck, and abortion clinics throughout the nation's southeastern region heightened security.

As the manhunt began, federal,

state and local agents were continuing to comb through debris in a one-block area of Birmingham's Southside neighborhood. The area remained blocked off to vehicles and pedestrians Friday.

The ATF's lead agent here, Jim Cavanaugh, said authorities would be able to reconstruct the bomb. But he would not confirm any connection between the Birmingham bomb and the explosion at the Atlanta Olympic games in 1996 and two other bombings in the Atlanta area last year.

According to Cavanaugh, there is evidence that the three Atlanta explosions were the work of the same person. A joint ATF-FBI task force is investigating the Atlanta bombings.

Cavanaugh confirmed that, like the Atlanta bombs, the bomb was loaded with nails, which became deadly projectiles in the explosion, killing off-duty police officer Robert Sanderson.

The registered nurse and clinic counselor who was injured in the blast, Emily Lyons, 41, was improving Friday following nine hours of surgery on Thursday. She suffered extensive injuries to her legs, abdomen and face, including the loss of an eye.

Clinton Job Approval Soars to Presidency's Apex in Poll

By David Lauter=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON -- President Clinton's job approval has soared to the highest level of his presidency as strong public support for his policies and a distaste for his accusers appear to be outweighing doubts about his personal conduct, according to a new nationwide Los Angeles Times poll.

Asked how Clinton is handling his job as president, 68 percent of those polled say they approve and only 29 percent disapprove. That rating is up about 10 percentage points from the level found by a Times poll last week-end, a few days after allegations first became public that Clinton had carried on an affair with a former White House staff member, Monica Lewinsky, and had urged her to lie about it.

Even last week, Clinton's job approval rating had suffered only slightly from the scandal allegations. Clinton's high poll ratings have confounded his political adversaries and surprised many analysts, who believed he would suffer badly in public esteem because of the allegations.

The fact that his approval has risen, instead, appears to be attributable to several factors:

--Clinton clearly received a boost from his State of the Union speech, which was heavily watched and overwhelmingly well-received.

--The public appears to be making a sharp distinction between his private behavior and his ability to conduct official business.

--When asked about his private behavior, the public views Clinton far more charitably than do his critics.

--And, finally, the public has a low opinion of Clinton's main accusers, particularly Independent Counsel Kenneth W. Starr.

"Clinton, in his State of the Union speech, appears to have done the right thing by not discussing the charges against him," said Times Poll Director Susan Pinkus. "He appeared presidential and portrayed himself to the American people as in control and governing as normal."

Americans remain sharply divided about whether they believe Clinton's denials that he had an affair, the poll shows. And the poll indicates that his standing could erode substantially if evidence ever proves that Clinton lied or urged others to lie. If serious wrongdoing were proven, majorities say they could support Clinton's impeachment or resignation.

But respondents clearly do not want

that to happen. By 56 percent-39 percent, those polled said that "if the allegations prove true, I do not want Clinton's affair with Lewinsky or his efforts to deny it to force him out of office."

In comparison with last week's survey, Clinton has gained substantial ground among younger Americans and political independents. In the current survey, those between the ages of 18 and 29 give him positive job ratings by a margin of 77 percent-21 percent, compared with 52 percent-44 percent a week ago. Independents give him a positive job approval, 70 percent-27 percent, compared with 56 percent-38 percent last week.

The poll also indicates some overall improvement in Clinton's ratings among men. In past surveys, including last week's, women had tended to give Clinton a somewhat higher rating than men -- the much noted "gender gap." In the current survey, Clinton's ratings are up among both men and women, with no statistically significant gender gap.

Those polled say, by a margin of 53 percent-38 percent, that the country is on the right track and, by 86 percent-12 percent, that the economy is doing well. And the poll clearly indicates that Americans give Clinton credit for those good times.

Asked if the country is better off or worse because of Clinton's tenure in office, over half said the country had benefited, while only one in ten said the country was worse off; and almost four in ten said Clinton had not made a difference one way or the other.

Even among Republicans and conservatives, the percentage saying the country is better off because of Clinton outweighs the percentage who say the country has suffered.

The public clearly makes a sharp distinction between the private and the public spheres.

Asked if it is possible for Clinton to "behave unethically in his personal life while still maintaining integrity in his presidential responsibilities," those surveyed said yes by a margin of 59 percent-35 percent.

By 54 percent-38 percent those polled said Clinton has the "honesty and integrity to be president" -- a level that is about average for his presidency. By 61 percent-38 percent they view him as credible.

Byrum Cartwright, a 54-year-old dentist from Fargo, N.Dak., one of those surveyed, was typical of those who said they draw a distinction between private and public conduct.

"He probably is a guy who doesn't

handle his sexual ethics the way we would like," Cartwright said.

But Cartwright described himself as "offended" by the way Clinton's personal weaknesses are being used in "political feuds."

"It's really irrelevant. It's between him and his wife," Cartwright said. "If you want to have an ethically perfect person" in office, he added, "you're kidding yourself."

Similarly, Lisa Burke, a 24-year-old self-described liberal Democrat from Columbus, Ga., said she is skeptical of Clinton's denials, but puts his performance on the job ahead of his private behavior.

"If he did it, that's his business," she said. "As long as he does his job for the American people, that's what I'm concerned about."

Indeed, 45 percent of those who voted for Clinton in both 1992 and 1996 said they thought he had had affairs even before the current allegations, compared with 28 percent who did not think so and 27 percent who said they were not sure.

Clinton's personal favorability rating -- 57 percent favorable, 36 percent unfavorable -- is lower than his job approval but is still quite healthy -- 9 percentage points more positive than last week and about the same level as when he was reelected.

His wife's favorability has moved sharply higher. By better than 2-1, those surveyed view Hillary Rodham Clinton favorably -- the most positive rating she has ever received in a Times poll.

The shift in Mrs. Clinton's favorability seems in large part to come from moderate Republicans and Republican women. A majority of moderate Republicans now view her favorably, and Republican women, both moderates and conservatives, now divide evenly -- 45 percent favorable, 46 percent unfavorable.

Clinton's chief accusers fare much worse.

Only 32 percent of those polled say they approve of the way Independent Counsel Kenneth W. Starr is handling his job, while 37 percent disapprove and 31 percent are not sure.

By 58 percent-32 percent, those polled say the allegations against Clinton "have more to do with partisan politics (than) getting to the truth" -- a view that is even shared by 44 percent of Republicans.

By 51 percent-43 percent those surveyed say they agree with Mrs. Clinton that the allegations are "part of a continuing right-wing conspiracy."