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## **Gendered Ethno-Nationalism and Sexual Violation During the Wars of Disintegration in Former Yugoslavia**

*“A divinely organized military conflict baptizes the nation in a male birthing ritual, which grants to white men the patrimony of land and history. The white nation emerges as the progeny of male history through the motor of military might. Nonetheless, at the centre of the imperial gospel stands the contradictory figure of the volksmoeder, the mother of the nation” (McClintock, 1995: 369)*

Childhood stories resonate in my memory, narrated by Bulgarian women, of women hiding Chetniks (Bulgarian revolutionary men in the Balkans) in their houses, baking breads in the middle of the night and equipping these men with provisions to defend the ‘mother nation’ from the Turkish Other; legends carry on through generations of young ‘brave’ women braiding their long hairs together with their friends and committing group suicide through jumping off steep Balkan mountain cliffs, as not to give into marriage or the sexual violation by Turkish men and thus to preserve their honour and that of the nation. These narratives, along with vast school years spent in memorizing revolutionary poems and reading revolutionary literature, have re-affirmed and established as commonsensical the notion that men are the protectors of women’s bodies and the ‘Mother nation’ from the invading Other; this establishes that women’s role is to reproduce the brave ‘sons of the nation’ and support them in battle (as the narrative up above demonstrates) to maintain the boundaries and sanctity of the nation. In addition, these legends re-affirm the notion that men were the sole agents of resistance to foreign rule, and that the violation and appropriation of women’s honour by the Other, is

the equivalent of polluting the 'purity' of the nation, transgressing its boundaries (embodied by women) and humiliating its men, regardless of the actual material suffering and the active resistance pursued by women. The act of instrumentalization of women's experiences, bodies and sexuality by the state/nation or ethnic group in order to reinforce and reproduce from one generation to the next an ethno-nationalist discourse, is an occurrence that has often been ignored by mainstream theorists on the study of nationalisms. Exhaustive scholarly contributions on theories of nationalism obscure the gendered nature of ethno-nationalism and tend to re-produce it. While considerable emphasis is placed on ethnicity and group animosities, it is often ignored how ethno-nationalist discourse successfully appropriates women's bodies, in order to re-affirm patriarchal norms through which to frame and reproduce meanings of ethnicity and gender, constitutive of nationhood.

Expanding on this established framework above and also acknowledging the diverse forms that nationalism takes, I will argue that ethno-nationalism is a contradictory phenomenon which constructs gendered notions of ethnicity and nationhood, specifically through the symbolic construction and material appropriation of women's bodies. This was expressed in the form of sexual violation against women in the context of the Yugoslav wars of disintegration in the 1990s, where it is commonly perceived that sexual violation in times of conflict constitutes the inevitable 'natural' outcome of war rather than the violation of women's bodies vested in unequal gender power relations and gendered symbolic constructions of the nation (Yuval-Davis & Anthias 1989; Yuval-Davis, 1993; Agathangelou 2000; Marokvasic 1997; Zarkov 1995). The purpose of this paper will be first, to deconstruct ethno-nationalism through revealing its dependence on

an Orientalist discourse and patriarchy to demonize the ethnic/national or female Other, as well as on the symbolic appropriation of women's bodies - as the boundary markers and cultural reproducers of the ethnic/national group - justifying the control of women's bodies and sexuality. Through revealing the gendered nature of ethno-nationalism and its dependence on women's bodies to identify the threat from the ethnic/national Other, it will be articulated that sexual violation in times of conflict according to ethno-nationalists does not constitute the equivalent of an act against women's integrity, but is perceived as a transgression of the ethnic boundary and an act of violation by the 'primitive' and 'irrational' Other. Second, these tendencies will be analyzed and related through examples from the wars of disintegration in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s with a focus on the connections between ethno-nationalist gendered symbolic constructions of the nation and their contradictory material implications expressed through the sexual violation of women's bodies. Following this, a critical exploration will be made of the various analyses on sexual violence during the wars in former Yugoslavia, all unintentionally justifying gendered violence. Third, the diverse experiences of men and women in times of war will be briefly acknowledged, where being a woman does not constitute the equivalent of passivity and victimhood (the raped woman or the refugee woman), but is a diverse form of being according to race, class and sexual orientation, where women either actively participate in reproducing the gendered nature of nationalism through participation in ethno-national warfare or their support for such, or rally across class and ethnic boundaries to form peace movements in opposition to ethno-nationalist conflict as was the case in the former Yugoslavia. The formation of such transnational solidarities as in the Yugoslavian case, aimed at de-constructing

representations of sexual violence, and eliminating ethno-nationalist appropriation of women's bodies for their purposes of forming national communities based on unequal gender power relations.

## **Nationalism, Gender, Ethnicity and Orientalism: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

Prior to focusing on the gendered nature of nationalism, it is important to introduce and define briefly some important conceptual and theoretical tools, such as ethnicity, nation, state, sexuality, gender and nationalism, and to critically challenge constructions of these categories as unitary, distinct and static. It is important to emphasize the constantly evolving and diverse nature of these categories and their intersectionality in the constitution of various forms of nationalism. The exploration of these conceptual and analytical tools is important in order to be able to grasp the gendered nature of ethno-nationalism, and emphasize how gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity intersect in various ways to construct the Other, through an ethno-nationalist discourse dependent on the Orientalization of the subject as in the case of Yugoslavia.

First, literature exploring the relationship between gender and nationalism, and the use of gender in the construction of nationalism and *visa versa* often falls into generalizations of what nationalism and gender are and view gender as a monolithic static category, which applies strictly femininity to women and masculinity to men, and classifies nationalism to be a negative phenomenon. For example, McClintock (1995) argues that “all nationalism are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous” (352). In

addition, when reference is being made to gender and nationalism in the context of war, and specifically to sexual violence, women are represented as being passive receiving victims from a particular nation/ethnic group, rather than as being active agents resisting violence and forming transnational peace movements. Nationalism and gender are complex categories cross-cutting race, class and sexuality, assuming various forms depending on the context of analysis.

Gender and nationalism mutually intersect, along with sexuality, ethnicity and class, to shape power relations of advantage or disadvantage, depending on the particular context in which these categories intersect (Okazawa-Rey, 2002:376). Nationalism is a contested concept and it continues to reappear in different forms; it has been analyzed as a plural “chameleon-like phenomenon, capable of assuming a variety of ideological forms” (Ozkirimli, 2000:61), “diverse”, “fluid” and “protean” (Cockburn, 2000:613). Meanings of nationhood and ethnicity situated in such a fluid context may also vary in importance and meaning. Nationalism cannot be defined separately, without understanding what nation, state and ethnicity are, which are not separate categories but mutually intersect in the constitution of nationalism, and account for its diverse expression.

Nationalism emerges with the idea of a nation, where the latter can take ‘objective’ or ‘subjective’ forms, either through an emphasis on language, territory or religion, or subjective categories such as will, sentiment, imagination or belonging (Smith, 2001:12). Nationhood can take on simultaneously ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ meanings towards its constitution. The nation is “a felt and lived human community...occupying homeland, and having common myths and shared history, a

common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members” (Ibid:13). The nation is neither a state characterized as “an agency possessing the monopoly of legitimate violence” (Gellner, 1983:3), with autonomous institutions and legal power over a certain territory, nor an ethnic community defined as but not limited to people with “lack of public culture” sharing common beliefs, language, history and customs, and sometimes but not always territory, and as in the Yugoslav case, attempting to link a glorious historical past and myths of historical origin and territorial existence, as well as to a glorious present and future for the continued existence of the ethnic group, with aims for nation-state formation. Often, a nation or an ethnic group has a will for autonomy, possesses national identity and desire for self-determination (Smith, 2001:13-20). This is when nationalism emerges in various forms, through which groups aim to realize materially an abstract national consciousness.

The creation of a feeling of identifying with the nation – national sentiment or consciousness- is necessary in order to have the emergence of nationalism as a unifying ideological movement. Nationalism is “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation” (Smith, 2001:10); it is a “political principle”, aiming to achieve unity between the political and the national (Gellner, 1983:1); and it is an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983:15) of people coming together to create and share a unique communal experience. Nationalism may include civic, cultural or ethnic identifications, which mutually intersect and cross-cut with sexuality, class or race to construct various meanings and attachments to the nation. Recognizing the diverse nature of nationalism and the inclusive or exclusive relations that

it may imply when it intersects with class, gender and race, the focus here will be on the gendered nature of ethnic nationalism and its intersection with ethnicity, gender and sexuality in the context of the wars of disintegration in the former Yugoslavia.

Sexuality, expressed in diverse forms and constantly evolving, is defined as “a range of practices and concerns, norms and values that are deemed sexual: a matter that undergoes historical shifts but drags with it at every stage an interrelation of the social and biological. It includes direct aspects of the sexual-heterosexual and homosexual intercourse, desire, promiscuity, masturbation and rape – and issues like fertility which are not so much about ‘what people do to each other’, as the consequence” (Pryke,1998:532). Sexuality plays an important role in the construction of gender. Gender is produced and reproduced through daily acts of repetition or what Judith Butler refers to as “performativity”, which comes to constitute the “materiality of bodies” and acts to “materialize the body’s sex, to materialize sexual difference” ( Butler, 1999:236). Gender has been often defined as a separate category from the body, and the focus has been on the mind, the social construction of feminine and masculine roles to explain subjectivity. Thus a Cartesian dualism of the mind/body has been created and sustained, making a sharp distinction between the biological and the social as being two distinct analytical categories, where the focus has been more so on the social and how men and women become masculine or feminine subjects rather than on their subjection through the construction and appropriation of their bodies and material experience (Shildrick & Price, 1999:1-3). As exemplified above through Butler’s work, gendering and subjection occurs also through one’s body, its performances and the meanings attached to it, where masculinity or femininity are not definite categories, where the latter two can be applied

either to men or women interchangeably (Mayer, 2000:4; Squires, 1999:62-64). We cannot understand the process of gendering of the nation as a system of meanings and symbols without also acknowledging the role of the material, the various bodily experiences of women in the context of the nation, through which they come to constitute and sustain the boundary of the nation and are used to reproduce ethno-national constructs and subjectivity. Thus, the material and the discursive are intertwined, where discourse is “an amalgam of material practices and forms of knowledge linked together in a non-contingent relation”, utilized to (re) produce particular norms through bodies (McNay, 1994:108). Therefore, gender is “a material effect of the way in which power takes hold of the body and an ideological effect of the way power ‘conditions’ the mind” (Squires, 1999:64). In sum, the female body matters, and power works itself through the body, to reaffirm particular discourse i.e. ethno-nationalism.

Ethno-nationalism depends on the construction of a gendered perception of the nation, through the symbolic (feminine representations of the nation) and material (experience of sexual violation; constraints on reproduction; control of sexuality and bodily discipline and experience through war) appropriation of women’s bodies and the control of their sexuality, while also relying in the context of the Balkans on a construction of the ethnic Other through an Orientalist discourse. It should be noted that the symbolic and material appropriation of women’s bodies intersect, where the symbolic serves as the justification for the bodily oppression and sexual violation of women, and in turn women’s bodies serve as the constructive elements towards building a symbolic meaning of the nation - as for instance as motherly, nurturing and seductive with its beauty, which deserves dying for- within the context of particular gender power relations.

Ethno-nationalism primarily focuses on the construction of the 'purity' and boundary of the ethnic group or as Ignatieff (1993) notes it is about "blood and belonging" (3). Ethnic 'purity' can only be acquired through birth and women embody and reproduce this 'purity'. In turn the threat of contamination of this 'purity' by the ethnic/national Other, serves to justify violence and oppression directed against women and the Other. Thus, the locus of expression of patriarchal power is in and through the female body. The control of women's bodies and their potential for violation by the ethnic Other become prerequisites for assertions of power and maintenance of the ethnic boundary (Zarkov, 1995: 113). The formation of a community based on an emphasis on the boundary of the ethnic group and its 'purity', creates forms of inequalities within this supposedly equal horizontal unity, through the various use of gendered symbolic forms, expectations within in terms of the 'appropriate' roles men and women should play, as well as the emphasis on the bodily protection or potential for violation of 'our' women from/by the Other is all done in order to sustain the boundary of the nation/ ethnic group and bring about its reproductive continuity. In this endeavor the construction of symbols with historical meanings behind them, which are also gendered, are essential for the binding of the ethnic community/nation and justification of boundaries. National symbols "serve to express, represent and reinforce the boundary definition of the nation and to unite the members inside through a common imagery and shared memories, myths and values" (Smith, 2001:8).

The appropriation of such symbolic categories as natural, through an ethno-nationalist and Orientalist lens, and the perceived notion of an inevitable historical threat from the Other, serve to gender and race the nation and reproduce various oppressive

bodily experiences. Orientalism, is the process of identifying the non-European, un-Enlightened Other. The Orient according to Edward Said (1979) is not only a geographical location adjacent to Europe, but it is “the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” and “it is based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and the Occident” (pp.1-2). Orientalism is not only a territorial power relationship between the East and the West , but it is also a discourse vested in the exchange of material power relationships, constituted of the ‘power political’, the ‘power intellectual’, the ‘power cultural’ and ‘power moral’ (Ibid:3-12). Orientalism is a discourse aiming to identify the Other in relation to an ‘enlightened’ subject, where the latter justifies its power superior by controlling and demonizing the Other’s culture, morals, political standing and so on.

In the context of the Balkans, Orientalism could be applied on two levels: first it is a relationship between the West (constitutive of superior socio-political, economic and cultural powers, and civic values) and the East –Balkans ( ethnically divisive, culturally and economically backward societies, constitutive of un-enlightened subjects clinging to ethnic/tribal belongings, which are often protected and asserted through violence); second, this relationship is transferred internally to the Balkans, where the Orientalized begin to Orientalize the ethnic/national Other ,and the process of ‘othering’ is based on culture, values, religion (Orthodox values and culture vs. Byzantine or Islamic values) , and so on. Ethno-nationalism depends on an Orientalist discourse to construct the ethnic Other through the revival of national tragedies and historic threats, which serve to justify the control and violation of women’s bodies in relation to this threat from the Other in

terms of the reproductive continuity of the ethnic group, culture, identity and sexual norms (Zarkov, 1995: 106-109). As Morokvasic (1997) argues, “[d]ominating, humiliating, conquering and destroying the Other is done via women” (p.79). The female body becomes the locus for targeting the Other, as well as is the means for demographically outnumbering the Other, thus suggesting the necessity for its control and appropriation by men. Zarkov (1995) notes that female ‘Oriental’ sexuality, especially in times of war, is constructed as dangerous to ‘Occidental’ men, and male ‘Oriental’ sexuality also constitutes a danger to ‘Occidental’ women. This use of gender and sexuality by ethno-nationalists through an Orientalist discourse, re-affirms the existence of threat from the ethnic and territorial ‘pollution’ by the Other, and justifies the notion that ‘our’ women have to be protected from ‘their’ men, and yet at the same time ‘our’ women constitute a seductive danger to the Other men. Therefore, this suggests that women’s sexuality needs to be controlled and their reproductive capacities have to be contained within the boundaries of the ethnic/national community (113). Sexual inclusion/protection/ control of men’s or women’s bodies or their exclusion and violation are determined in relation to the threat that the ethnic/national Other may pose in terms of sexual morals or continuity of the ‘ethnic purity’ of the targeted group.

In sum, ethnicity, sexuality and gender are appropriated through an ethno-nationalist and Orientalist discourse to construct sexed and raced perceptions of a national community. The nation is gendered through the symbolic appropriation of women’s bodies in relation to men, which in practice works to ‘de-sex’ the body, desensitize “us” in relation to “them” and is expressed in contradictory terms through sexual violence against women (and sometimes against men).

## **Gendering the Nation and ‘De-Sexing’ the Body: Ethno-Nationalist Contradictions and Sexual Violence in the Case of the Wars of Disintegration in Yugoslavia**

The sexual violation of women in times of conflict is perceived as the ‘natural’ outcome of ethnic warfare, rather than the consequence of the mobilization of gendered ethno-nationalist representations of the nation. Ethno-nationalists perceive the nation to be a timeless “natural set of bonds”, binding the community together (Mostov, 2000:89). Ethno-nationalists represent history as one of ethnic hatred and emphasize the violence against their ethnic group and glorify the resistance to the Other. Since history is that of ethnic hatred, and the only way of existing is holding on to ethnicity, thus ‘ethnic purity’ becomes the norm and criteria for membership in the group (Zarkov, 1995:108-110). Since, women are constructed by ethno-nationalist leaders as being the reproducers, maintainers and carriers of the ‘purity’ of the group, the violation of their bodies comes to constitute a crime against an ethnic group, a whole nation, or represents the violation of the family’s honour. Women’s bodily violation becomes significant only when it is understood as a crime against an ethnic group or the nation. This common occurrence has to do with the symbolic representation of the nation through women by ethno-nationalist discourse, which constructs a gendered understanding of nationhood. Women are represented as the vehicles rather than the agents in efforts towards nation-building. As Agathangelou (2000) acknowledges sexual violence against women, especially in times of conflict, “originates in the symbolic construction of the female body as the body of the community” (p.6). In ethno-nationalist discourse, the woman is embodying the nation,

the nation is described as familial and domestic space (the “Mother land”, “mothers of the nation”, “the family of nations”); women’s domesticity is emphasized through the representation of her functions within the nation as being: to maintain the boundaries of the nation through reproduction of sameness by stressing the difference from the Other, as cultural transmitters and maintainers of the group’s identity as well as participant in national, economic, military and political struggles (McClintock, 1995 :357; Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989:8-10; Wilson and Frederiksen, 1995:2-4).

In ethno-nationalist discourse, women are symbolically represented as embodying the nation through their ability to reproduce the ‘sons of the nation’, and as such they are equated with the landscape of the nation, both analogous with their reproductive and nurturing roles. As Mohanram Radhika (1999) argues, “the woman’s body functions to experience the landscape and the nation as nurturing, comforting and familiar” (83). The woman’s body/landscape represents the link of men to the nation. Men are perceived to be the protectors of women and the nation’s boundaries, and yet they are also to find comfort in the land’s feminine nurturing qualities and familiarity, away from the threat of the Other and their often sexualized aggressive tendencies. The woman/nation becomes the place of men’s comfort, the place to be loved, fought for and protected, as well as controlled and subordinated. The woman has no place in this discourse, but yet she is to provide this place and embody it (Ibid: 83-84). Men’s way of being is through the nation/woman, through the possession of the phallus. The phallus signifies power and authority and is the source of language, culture and subjectivity. Based on Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytic theory analyzed by Radhika (1999), a useful analogy could be made between the nation and the phallus. If power is exercised through the phallus and

the phallus signifies power, women could only acquire power through the phallus, by becoming or embodying the phallus, by being its object of desire and site of penetration. Similarly, women matter in ethno-nationalist discourse as long as they uphold the nation; women embody the nation – they are the source of desire for “their” men and the threatening Other, as well as they are the reproducers and maintainers of the boundaries of the nation or the phallic power. Thus, ethno-nationalist discourse constructs the existence of the woman only in reference to the phallus/nation (Ibid: 84-86). Her existence and sexual violation, matter as long as they are tied into the experience of the ethnic community, and as long they serve to uphold the nation/phallus.

Women, significant for upholding the nation, become central targets by ethno-nationalist leaders as in the case of the states in former Yugoslavia, in propagations towards their ‘natural role’ and duty to give birth to the ‘sons of the nation’, in efforts to preserve the ‘purity’ of the group. Women, according to ethno-nationalism exist in reference to the nation/ethnic group only as the reproducers and maintainers of ethnic ‘purity’ and culture, and through these roles they constitute the markers of the ethnic boundary. The female body becomes the locus for assertion of male power, through the control of its sexuality for the purposes of cultural continuity and increase in the number of the ethnic group, and becomes the point of contestation between ethnic/ national groups. The female body becomes the battle ground of men and constitutes the demarcating point between two rival ethnic communities. Ethno-nationalist leaders exploit notions of the historic threat from the Other in order to control the female body, and justify this through the use feminine metaphors (“the birth of the group”, the defense of the mother land or the motherland that mourns her sons) to reinforce threats to the

nation, and in so doing designate particular contradictory and de-sexed bodily experiences for men and women within the ethnic or national community (Kaufman & Williams, 2004:418-419; Zarkov, 1995:113).

In the case of the wars of disintegration in the former Yugoslavia, ethno-nationalist leaders mobilized such highly sexualized and gendered imagery of the nation, yet in contradictory ways, which as Mostov (2000) argues, led to the construction of de-eroticized images of “chaste and faithful wives, patriotic mothers and pure wholesome heroes”, thus constructing women’s existence through and for the nation, and men’s purpose as the ‘protectors’ of the boundaries of the nation/woman (90). The nation in ethno-nationalist discourse is over-sensualized through feminine representations and is described as “adored and adorned, made strong and bountiful or raped and defiled, its limbs torn apart, its womb invaded. Feminine spaces are caressed and nurtured or occupied and trampled by masculine actors” (Ibid: 90-91). Feminine spaces are vulnerable and open to invasion by the Other, they are seductive and in requirement for protection by heroes. The eroticized image of the nation, being the extension of the familial and domestic, is to be guarded by soldiers and national leaders, and the women’s bodies are to be ‘protected’ and controlled by sons, fathers and husbands from the threat of the ethnic/national Other (Ibid:91). In the context of conflict, women’s bodies are being ‘de-sexed’ and they are to guard their chastity and give themselves to the heroes upon their arrival. Women’s purpose and bodily existence is justified only when they adopt the image of brave mothers, bearers of future soldiers, sacrificing their sons and husbands for the nation and tending to the wounds of warriors. Women are represented also as victims of rape, widows, refugees, mothers and daughters all reasons to avenge

the nation and erase this national tragedy. For example, in the initial stages of the wars of disintegration in Yugoslavia, the media spread images for the purposes of demonizing the Other through a gendered representation, of a young woman strapped with a gun carrying a child and marching through a field with two other children, as well as that of a nun carrying a weapon – a representation that appeared as a consequence of a story told of Albanian men raping Serbian nuns in monasteries. These ‘de-sexed’ female bodies signified their willingness to fight for the preservation of their identity, which was an integral and constitutive part of the higher ‘sacred’ collective identity, pledging to protect family, nation and church (Morokvasic, 1997:75).

On the other hand, in contrast to these eroticized images of the nation and women’s asexual bodily existence within the nation, men’s bodies, like women’s, are also being ‘de-sexed’. Where as women’s ‘proper’ roles are designated solely to motherhood and the protection and transfer of national culture and identity, the men warrior and guardian is constructed as an asexual being, committed solely to his duty on the battlefield. The warrior is depicted as “fearless, with maiden soul, son of the Mother land”, “dead in battle”. His manliness and sexuality is expressed through the battlefield, while at the same time abstaining from sexual activity. The “warrior with a maiden soul” is an expression particularly relevant to the typical Montenegrin or Balkan hero, who is shy but yet strong and courageous, and refrains from sexual conduct or contact with any women. The sexual behaviour of the warrior is repressed and all their energy is mobilized towards the battle with the enemy, where the latter is portrayed as a sexual aggressor, invading the woman’s/national body (Morokvasic, 1997: 91-93). Thus, sexual aggression

and violence are not part of this idealized national framework, but such constitutes a threat only on the part of the Other.

The ethno-nationalist dependence on the Orientalized notion of threat – the threat of cultural and racial ‘contamination’ by the ‘primitive’ ethnic Other - as for instance of the sexual aggression by the Serbian or Albanian ‘rapist’ against the integrity of ‘our’ women and the Bosnian or Serbian nation, coupled with the construction of idealized images of the nation with its nurturing mothers and heroes with “ maiden souls”, opens up the space for justifying the appropriation and control of women’s bodies and choice within the ethnic/national community. Religious, social and ethno-cultural norms become the means of control and appropriation of women’s bodies, as women are perceived as being vulnerable from seduction by the Other and they may endanger the ‘ethnic/national purity’ if their bodies are not controlled and contained within the community/nation. A special emphasis is placed on women’s reproductive roles and their ‘duty’ to bear children for the nation, which can be illustrated through the speeches of nationalist leaders during the wars of disintegration in Yugoslavia as well as the passing of several controversial bills banning abortion or aiming the taxation of childless couples (Morokvasic, 1997:68-69;76). For example, Croatia’s leader Franco Tadjman outright blamed the difficult situation of the country on “women, pornography and abortion”, and claimed that women who had abortions were “mortal enemies of the nation”. In addition, the Serbian patriarch Pavle argued that the low birthrates in Serbia were the result of “women’s selfishness”. Ethno-nationalist leaders framed women’s duty as being the reproduction of sameness or ethnic ‘purity’, which was meant to ‘save’ the ethnic group from extinction. Having more children was also seen as a source for the military, whose

role was to defend the nation and the Church. According to a Serbian and Montenegrin saying, the ideal family has three sons – “one for the Church (God), one for the army (state) and one for the parents (progeny)” (Kaufman & Williams, 2004: 424-425). The spread and absorption of this propaganda was facilitated due to the deteriorating state of the economy, political instabilities and military conflict, which all played a role in most but not all, women’s retreat to the public sphere (Morokvasic,1997:75). Thus, nationalist leaders’ propaganda to a certain extent made its way through and aimed at constraining women to the private sphere, whose only participation in the public realm was to be through the provision of sons for the nation, in order to outnumber the Other. Women’s ‘seductiveness’ to the Other had to be contained and controlled within the ethnic/national group for the purposes of reproducing sameness and military power to defend the group/nation.

Furthermore, women’s bodies were not only controlled by ethno-nationalists in terms of reproduction for the purpose of outnumbering the ethnic Other, but their existence was also restricted to the ethnic/national group. For example, during the wars in Yugoslavia, nationalist leaders such as Milosevic and Tudjman, spread propaganda condemning mixed marriages and argued that whoever was not from the dominant ethnic group, he/she constituted a threat to the political stability of the nation and a drain on the national economy. Thus anyone who was married into another ethnic/national group was considered to be a traitor (Kaufman & Williams, 2004: 424). Kaufman & Williams (2004) present an analysis on the fate and struggles of women who were already in mixed marriages and the difficulties they had to face during the wars of disintegration in Yugoslavia. However, it should also be noted that by marrying into another community,

women exercised agency and saw themselves as playing a larger societal role than just being the symbols or reproducers of the ethnic/national community. Where as prior to the war women's marriage into another group was accepted by the communities involved, during the war these women faced isolation from their own and in-law communities, or experienced violence from their husbands. As the group Women in Black Against War noted, soldiers in mixed marriages, returning home from war, raped their wives to express their hate against the Other (pp.427-428). There were also women, who fled with their children and stayed with relatives, but their choice was not made easier by the nationalists and their access to economic resources was limited due to their decision to marry into the 'rival' ethnic group, as the following observation illustrates:

*“Serbian authorities and local Serbs working with international and aid organizations viewed these women as ‘belonging’ to their husbands’ in Bosnia and thus refused to consider their requests for protection and assistance independently. If their husbands were not ethnically Serb, the women were especially mistrusted and denied benefits. If their husbands were Serbs, the women were still assumed to be willing to return to Serbian-controlled parts of Bosnia” (Mertus, 2000:22).*

Women's economic security and existence was determined by the ethno-nationalists based on their national/ethnic belonging. Women were acknowledged only as long as they contributed to the reproduction of sameness. However if they 'deviated' and married into the Other's ethnic/national group, then they instantaneously became the ethnic and female Other, a target for economic and sexual violence.

In sum, ethnic/national belonging is gendered. Women embody the nation/ethnic group; their bodily being is de-sexed, and their existence is acknowledged by ethno-nationalist leaders only as long as they contribute to the reproduction of ethnicity/nationality and the ethno-cultural continuity of the group. Thus, ethno-

nationalist discourse recognizes women's role and existence only through the nation or ethnic group. On the other hand, ethno-nationalists believe that women's seductiveness represents a threat to the 'purity of the nation/ethnic group' from 'contamination' by the 'primitive, savage-like' Other. The supremacy of one ethnic/national group is established through an emphasis on the feminized 'purity' of the nation/ethnic group, the proper conduct of its women and the brave character of its men/warriors with 'maiden souls'. Ethno-nationalist discourse constructs contradictory notions of gendered and sexualized perceptions of the nation, while de-sexing the body, and places an importance on women as symbols of the nation, while simultaneously attempting to control their reproductive roles, sexuality, and bodily existence. These contradictions between the use of sexual imagery to describe the nation, while 'de-sexing' the body and the symbolic importance of women for the nation while simultaneously contributing to their suffering and political marginalization, were necessary to uphold and assert male power, and were played out through the sexual violation of women and the exploitation of such violations for demonizing the Other.

The appropriation of the female body by ethno-nationalism is not only symbolic, but also political, where sexual violence is the product of unequal gender power relations regardless of war or peace time, and becomes a tool for political repression. During a political conflict or an 'ethnic war' – where the wars in Yugoslavia can not be defined as ethnic due to the existence of one ethnic group split into separate constructed ethno-religious categories - the female body is physically present and is dealt with in "bodily and mortal terms". Sexual violence becomes the material extension of the gendered symbolic constructions of the nation through relationships of power, and the consequence

of the practical contradictions that this symbolism entails (Zarkov, 1995: 106-108; 113-114). When the woman is equated with and subdued by the nation/ethnic community, and an emphasis is placed on her embodiment of the 'purity' of the ethnic group, then the sexual violation of women becomes not only a way for asserting men's superiority over a woman, but the pre-requisite for transgressing the territorial boundary of the Other, threatening with extinction the Other and demoralizing and humiliating the Other's men (Kaufman & Williams, 2004:425). Sexual violation through an ethno-nationalist lens becomes "...a natural element of male power to define the boundaries of its own 'ethnic group' by defining the women of the 'Other' through rape, and thus defining the female body as the ethnic female body" (Zarkov, 1995:113). Thus sexual violence is not only a tool for political repression, but also serves to assert unequal gender power relations, through reinforcing particular gender and national identities.

This intersection of ethnicity and gender and the reinforcement of ethnicity through the female body can be illustrated with the example of the systematic rape by Serbian paramilitaries of Bosnian and Croat women in 'rape camps', where women were incarcerated, continuously raped, impregnated and forced to carry and give birth to these babies while in captivity. Rape in this case served as an ethno-marker and a source for transgression of ethnic boundaries, and the violation of family/community's honour. Since there are many cultural and linguistic similarities between for example Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia and there were no visible ethno-cultural and linguistic demarcations, rape became the tool to assert the difference from the constructed ethnic Other (Rejali, 1998:31). The women that were held in these 'rape camps' were told that they will be considered Serb along with the children that they gave birth to. Radhika Coomaraswamy

(1999), the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, shows this occurrence through the testimony of a female survivor:

*“They just came and raped us and later they told us, ‘...Come on now, if you could have Ustasha babies, then you can have a Chetnik baby too?’”(p.10)*

Ethnicity/nationality was seen as being passed on through the father, and women were the carriers of this ethnicity/nationality. In this context, women matter only as the reproducers of the group, and their violation signifies not only the ‘contamination of the purity of the Other’ and a source of outnumbering the Other, but also serves as a humiliating strategy against the Other for appropriating his property – the woman, as well as a justification for violence against women. These women were considered trophies of war, and their experiences were appropriated by the ethno-nationalists to demonize and declare victory over the Other, while simultaneously justifying the sexual violence against women (Morokvasic, 1997: 68; 80). Ethnic hatred becomes a way through which men (and some women) justify violence against women, and when hatred against the Other becomes part of state ideology and penetrates all spheres of life, it is expressed through the violation of the female Other. These women who struggled through the incarcerations and survived, consequently some of them were shunned by their communities, were abandoned by their husbands and were left to bear the burden of their experiences and feelings of guilt for supposedly violating their families’ honour. Others chose not to reveal their incidence of sexual violation and opted for silence, while very few spoke and received a level of support and retribution. These women’s experiences, strength and suffering were not acknowledged, and were hijacked by the media; they were also appropriated by the ethno-nationalists in order to assert their innocence and

portray themselves as the 'good victims' to the international community. For example, when Zagreb feminists in the beginning of the conflict expressed public concern over the first incidents of sexual violence and attempted to receive national and international attention on the issue, they were silenced and told that they did not have a "clear national approach". However, when the Croatian nationalists began to assert their position through the manipulation of the rapes for their own political ends and creation of an image of a 'good victim', this is when the media acknowledged internationally the occurrences of the rapes. Thus, the sexual violations were exploited for the purposes of assertion of nationhood, through demonizing the evil that the Others have done to 'our' nation in order to obtain international sympathy and support (Morokvasic, 1997: 80). Women's bodily violations were concealed, and the rapes committed were viewed as any ordinary act of violence against women that occurs all the time (Agathangelou, 2000:5).

In sum, the ethno-nationalist symbolic appropriation of women's bodies as a means of reproducing unequal gender power relations, as exemplified through the Yugoslav case, becomes a tool for political repression, reinforcement of gender and national identities and assertion of power over the female and ethnic/national Other, through the use of sexual violence. In turn, the images of violated women, under threat, serve to homogenize the nation and reinforce its boundaries, while simultaneously ignoring their bodily experiences or appropriating them for the benefit of the national community and justification of a 'good victim' status internationally.

While sexual violence against women was in progress during the wars in Yugoslavia, the media began to report on these occurrences, with a special focus on the rape of Bosnian women by Serbian forces. Such media attention to sexual violence along

with its interpretation by the international community reinforced the following perspectives of the events: first, sexual violence was represented as being a first-time unique occurrence to this war, and specifically a notion circulated among realists that these atrocities were a 'normal part of Balkan warfare' and a national concern; a second perspective asserted that the rapes were an 'exceptional part of Serbian warfare', and constituted a strategic weapon to eliminate and humiliate the Bosnian nation; and third, the rapes were an expression of 'Balkan patriarchy' and constituted a threat to all women, regardless of their national identification (Hansen, 2001:56-57).

First, sexual violence is wrongfully perceived to be the 'natural' consequence of warfare, or as a practice of 'ethnic pollution' directed against the Other, reiterating ethno-national constructions of ethnic 'purity' embodied by women, while also unintentionally justifying the act and ignoring the gendered nature of the crime. The inability by the international community, international law and national figures and legislators to recognize sexual violence as a gendered act against a woman, rather than as an exceptional strategy of war or genocide, is rooted into complex misrepresentations of rape through realist and some liberal and radical feminist perspectives, which obscure and unconsciously justify these atrocities. Sexual violence against women in the context of war (and also in the absence of traditional understandings of warfare) is not a new phenomenon. Such violations were carried out against women during the English occupation of Scotland in 1800, during the German occupation of Belgium and France in 1914, and during WWII were carried out by Russian soldiers against German women and by Japanese soldiers against Korean and Chinese women. In the case of Japan, there was reluctance to prosecute the perpetrators due to the insistence that if all military men were

to undergo trial, they would also be guilty of murder and robbery along with the rapes (Kelly: 2000 47). This cynical attitude towards sexual violence carried on to the wars in Yugoslavia. Realists portrayed the violations against women in the former Yugoslavia as being of national security/domestic concern (where such did not constitute a threat to the West) and maintained that the violations were a 'natural' part of warfare, and were understood to be especially so when regarded as an inevitable part of a volatile Balkan region, locked into centuries old animosities and aggression. Thus, the notion was that the sexual violence that was carried out was strictly a domestic/private concern, a product of the historic continuity of 'Balkan brutality', somewhere far in the East, away from the 'enlightened' and 'civilized' West. Through an Orientalist prism, rape would constitute a concern only if it occurred in the West, but since such 'barbaric' practices were not attributed to this region, then sexual violence constituted a 'natural' part of Balkan warfare and reinforced the Orientalist notion of the difference between the West and the East – the Orient and the Occident (Hansen, 2001:61). Therefore, realists did not only assert that sexual violence was a natural part of warfare and obscured the gendered nature of the crime, but this perspective also suggests that since the violence was perpetrated by Balkan men on Balkan women, there is no room for Western intervention and concern of the security of others (Ibid:62).

This Orientalist discourse was transferred on a national level, where the perpetrators of violence - regarded as being solely Serbs – were perceived to be the dangerous 'barbaric' ethnic Other, who violated an innocent nation – Bosnia. Sexual violence was portrayed as an act of humiliation from one ethnic/national group against another, rather than as a crime against women (and in some instances men). Sexual

violence was perceived to be an 'exceptional act of Serbian warfare' and as being an inevitable part of the Serbian 'ethnic cleansing' and genocide campaign. Despite the occurrence of rape cross-nationally, an emphasis was placed on the 'barbaric' nature of the crimes committed by Serbs against Bosnians (Ibid: 63). This perspective was portrayed in the media in efforts to raise awareness for intervention by the international community. Sexual violence was seen only as a means of intimidation of the Bosnians by the Serbs, and the nature of the conflict was simplified to one of "the goodies against the baddies". The sexual violations of women were not regarded as crimes against women and a gendered political strategy of intimidation, but as an act of one ethnic/national group in effort to intimidate the Other. Women's bodies were nationally/ethnically defined, and their violation only mattered as long as it was perceived as a crime against a nation/ethnic group (Morokvasic, 1997:80-81). This re-affirms the ethno-nationalist perception of defining women's identity and bodily existence only through the nation/ethnic group. Through such a representation, women's bodily violation becomes significant only if their nation is portrayed to be the victim in the conflict. In the instance of Serbia, many atrocities that were committed against Serbian women were obscured, as Serbia was portrayed to be the bad party in the conflict. The purpose of such misrepresentations of sexual violence is to demonize the Other, the rapist belonging to a particular national/ethnic group, and to destroy any transnational solidarities among women, who refused to identify with the ethno-nationalists' cause and regarded sexual violence as a gendered strategy of intimidation and a crime against women regardless of ethnic/national belonging( Ibid:80).

Sexual violence in former Yugoslavia was also attributed to “Balkan patriarchy”. Where as this perspective insisted on the separation of nationality/ethnicity from sexual violence and promoters argued for the representation of rape as an act of men against women, it essentialized sexual violence in such a way that portrayed women solely as the receiving victims, rather than as active agents of resistance to these atrocities. Sexual violence according to this perspective is the result of the policies of a patriarchal ethno-nationalist leadership against all women, regardless of the latter’s national and religious belonging and position within the battle zones. Rather rape being an exceptional part of Serbian warfare, ‘Balkan patriarchy’ perceived that it is a crime of men, derived from a particular militarized identity, against women as a whole. Although this view accomplishes to reveal that sexual violence is not an act by one ethnic group against another, but involves women and is clearly a crime against women, it fails to distinguish the diversity among men or women, and their differential involvement or lack thereof in the wars (Hansen, 2001:65-66).

Totalizing what constitutes a man or a woman, fails to acknowledge women’s direct or indirect participation in ethno-national warfare, where women either take up arms (and are represented as exceptional modern day Amazons) as was in the case with the formation of some Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian all women paramilitary groups; provide food for soldiers and tend to their wounds; older women’s installment of patriarchal or other social values in younger women; or men’s desertion from the war and the military altogether ( Handrahan,2004:438;Kaufman & Williams, 2004:426). Thus this perspective unintentionally reproduces the “Rape as normal warfare” and “exceptional Serbian warfare” perspectives, through its use of the term Balkan suggesting that sexual

violence is a 'normal' occurrence due to 'eternal historical hatreds' in the region, or viewing it solely as a crime of men against women – part of an unchanging and unchallenged 'Balkan patriarchy, thus reproducing a reformulation of the dualistic relationship of Serbs vs. Bosnians, and a static and unchanging and unchallenged patriarchy (Hansen, 2001:66-67).

The sexual violation of women is rooted in gendered relations of power and socio-economic and political inequalities. Sexual violence against women and in some instances against men, in the disintegrating warring states of former Yugoslavia was not only the consequence of ethno-national gendered symbolic constructions of nation/ethnicity, but was also a gendered political strategy for intimidating the ethnic and female Other . Rape did not constitute a 'natural' or inevitable crime of war perpetrated by one ethnic group against another, which representation obscures the bodily experience of women situated in diverse socio-economic and political contexts. Rape takes place not only through ethno-nationalist wars and constructions, but is also instigated against the global South and women from underdeveloped countries through the "structural enforcements of sexual and other socio-economic relations" (Agathangelou, 2000:8). Therefore, rape does not only constitute the bodily violation of women, but is also a means of asserting and reproducing relationships of power. Sexual violence is perpetrated against women in order to "consolidate power of particular ethno-nationalisms and political agendas, to consolidate gender relations both within the boundaries of a particular ethno-nationalism and in relation to others, and to prevent possible transnational solidarities" (Agathangelou, 2000:6). Thus, sexual violence against women has several dimensions: vested in material conditions, it constitutes a bodily

violation against women; it is the means of distribution of power and resources among men (sometimes women); mobilized during ethno-nationalist wars, serves as the means of breaking feminist solidarities and transnational communities along national/ethnic lines, and aims to create national communities based on unequal gender power relations.

In spite of these ethno-nationalist aims deployed through the appropriation of women's bodies and the deployment of sexual violence as a means of gendered political tactic of intimidation for assertion of power and division of transnational feminist solidarities, efforts were made by diverse Yugoslav feminist organizations to join hands across constructed borders regardless of minor ideological differences and national identifications, in order to protest ethno-national subjugation and violation of women's bodies. Despite of aims by ethno-nationalists for victimization and attempts for breaking the will of women through sexual violence, and efforts for mobilizing women in support of and as carriers of ethno-nationalist struggles, there were many women across nationalities in former Yugoslavia who realized and withdrew from these subjectivities. Cynthia Cockburn (2000) illustrates these transnational women's efforts for peace and individual identity formation separated from ethnic affiliations, through a study of two women's organizations in Northern Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The wars in former Yugoslavia were geared towards subjugating women's identities for the purposes of forming ethnic/national identities. The women from the Medica Women's Association in Zenica, Bosnia – a medical and psychosocial organization dealing with the needs of women raped and traumatized by war-time violence – coming from not only Bosnian but also from other ethno-national backgrounds, refused to identify with projects of ethnic separation, crossed borders to talk to various national and religious leaders in protest of

the violence that was taking place, and as a result took control of their own identities, and refused to be identified with the ethno-nationalists' cause ( Cockburn, 2000: 611-612).

Throughout the war, Medica received the support from other (what ethno-nationalists would define as the enemy) women's groups in Zagreb and Belgrade and continuously maintained e-mail and telephone contacts. Shortly after the war, despite ethno-nationalist intimidation, while enjoying the support of women's groups from Belgrade and Zagreb, the women from Medica, crossed the Inter-Entity Border Line in order to establish a link and meet up with a women's organization in Duga, located in Banja Luka, the Bosnian Serb capital (Ibid: 613). It should be noted that while these women's organizations were successful in challenging ethno-nationalist constructions and violence, others such as the Mother's Peace initiative were infiltrated with the ethno-nationalist identification of women as mothers and reproducers of the nations' progeny, and despite of their peace efforts, were easily divided by the ethno-nationalists along national lines (Kaufman &Williams, 2004:426). Thus, while Yugoslavia was in the process of disintegration as of internal contestations for power by ethno-nationalist leaders and various external pressures, simultaneously, a 'Yugoslavia-wide' feminist network was in the process of formation and challenging the war and its underlying ideology. While there were women who were sexually violated and intimidated by the nationalists during the war, this process did not stop the formation of transnational feminist solidarities. This shows that women and their experiences or affiliations are diverse, where not all women could be framed as "victims" or reproducers of their own oppression, but should also be regarded as agents in their own right, seeking to form transnational networks in opposition to ethno-national male-defined identities and war,

and formulate individual and complementary non-aggressive national identifications, facilitating transnational solidarities. Therefore, regardless of the violence and ethno-nationalist intimidation, these women's organizations did not give up and struggled through these obstacles to form transnational feminist networks.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to de-construct the gendered nature of ethno-nationalism, which relies on the appropriation of women's bodies for the purposes of symbolic constructions of the nation, which in practice serve to reproduce unequal gender power relations and subjugate women's bodies and identities to that of the nation/ethnic community. It has been shown, how the contradictions that these ethno-nationalist constructions entail, through a dependence on an Orientalist discourse demonizing the ethnic/national Other, encourage and justify the sexual violation of women's bodies in times of conflict. This occurrence has been illustrated by drawing examples from the Yugoslav wars of disintegration, with a focus on sexual violation in times of conflict as well as its various interpretations. It has been established that the sexual violation of women in times of war does not constitute the equivalent of a crime against an ethnic/national group, nor is it strictly an act of men against women or of one ethnic/national group against another, but also constitutes a gendered political strategy of intimidation, within a particular socio-economic and political context, aiming to demonize the ethnic as well as female Other, to break transnational feminist networks and (re) produce unequal power relations. In the context of former Yugoslavia, it has been

shown that regardless of the perpetrated sexual violence against women (and some men), women's organizations were successful in mobilizing their efforts cross-nationally and challenging ethno-nationalist oppressions and subjugations, through the formation of individual, independent women's identities.

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