

THE USE OF GENDERED VICTIM IDENTITIES BEFORE AND DURING THE WAR IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Tamara Banjeglav
University of Ljubljana

Abstract

The article discusses the construction of the self-victimization identities of former Yugoslav nations, which were developed through certain discourses and representational practices of the media controlled by nationalistic political elites. The victim identities analysed were largely constructed in gendered terms. Thus, the article analyzes examples of media reporting which used gendered victimization practices, in an attempt to reveal how national identity can be constructed as victim identity and how gender can be used to achieve this. In order to do this, the article looks at examples of articles published in some of the most prominent printed media from countries involved in the war (Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) reporting about gender-based sexual violence. It discusses the way in which the media covered events happening before the outbreak of war, which had consequences for later developments as it introduced the idea that sexual violence could be used as ethnic violence and as an effective tool of war.

Keywords: gender, ethnicity, victim identity, media, former Yugoslavia

1. Introduction

Some elements of collective identities in the former Yugoslavia started to develop during the 1980s, before the war had even begun. This happened during the course of a process of constructing victim identities of former Yugoslav nations. These victim identities were to a large extent gendered and based on the (re)construction of the national 'self' in direct opposition to 'the Other', as well as developed through the creation of national

myths and 'Truths'. However, since the question of victimization of national identities before and during the war in former Yugoslavia cannot be addressed without paying special attention to the issue of gender¹ and to violence committed against women, this article focuses on gendered victimization of national identities and analyzes how it was interconnected with sexual violence, such as rape, which, for the most part, affected women and their role in the process of nation-building.

Thus, this article attempts to analyze examples of discourses which used such gendered victimization practices, in order to answer the question how national identity can be constructed as victim identity and how gender can be used in order to achieve this. I use discourse analysis that focuses on the idea that all meaning is contextual, relational and contingent. The main proposition of discourse analysis is that our access through reality is inevitably and always through language and that our discursive representations of reality contribute to the construction of our social and cultural realities. Discourse analysis claims that language is central to our knowledge of reality and that it is possible to know reality through linguistic construction only². The language does more than just describe, so that the meaning of words is dependant on their discursive context Or, as Thomas Diez put it, "discourses do not 'cause' but 'enable'"³.

1 Gender can be understood as socially constructed differences between groups categorized as of either 'male' or 'female' sex, but it is sometimes very difficult to tell which differences are biological and which are socially constructed. However, as Laura Sjober notes: "the dynamic construction of sex and gender is generally divisible into masculinities and femininities – stereotypes, behavioural norms and rules assigned to people based on their perceived membership in sex categories. Gender, then, is not static, but a contingent and changing social fact and process." Laura Sjober, "Agency, Militarized Femininity and Enemy Others: Observations from the War in Iraq", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 9, no. 1, (2007), 84.

2 Ole Weaver. "Discursive Approaches", in Antje Wiener and Thomas Diez: *European Integration Theory*, Oxford University Press (2005).

See also Teun A. Van Dijk. "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis". *Discourse & Society*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1993, 249-283.

3 Thomas Diez. "Speaking 'Europe': the Politics of Integration Discourse", in *Journal of European Public Policy* 6:4, Special Issue, 1999, 598-613.

This analysis includes the war and pre-war media reporting on rapes, since gendered construction of the enemy was most easily used when reporting about sexual violence, such as rape. This will be done by analyzing the reporting employed by some of the media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was done in order to create an atmosphere of fear and a feeling of threat for one's nation and to mobilize people for the war. The three countries are selected due to the most well-known cases of inter-ethnic rapes that happened there before the outbreak of war or during the conflicts. The examples of media discourses that I analyze have been chosen because they are representative of a certain reporting practices, because they are considered to be especially influential or because they comprise the most important arguments.

The article first discusses the use of discourses of victimization of different nations employed by government-controlled media from different Yugoslav republics. This kind of reporting, at the end of 1980s, resulted in a competition over which nation would be presented as a greater victim of other nations. It then moves to show how these victimization discourses were often gendered, since they were used to talk about sexual violence between members of different ethnic groups. Sexual violence was largely presented not as an assault on an individual victim, but the rape victim was shown as a symbol of suffering of its whole ethnic group. The article analyzes the reporting employed by some of the mainstream media of former Yugoslav republics when writing about inter-ethnic rapes and discusses how this contributed to later understanding of rape as a tool of war.

2. The Politics of 'the Truth'

The media played an important role in a series of violent events which lead in the late 1980s and early 1990s to the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. The discourses used by the media contributed to the emerging crisis and, at the same time, indicated the formation of deep divisions among different ethnic

groups and helped establishing the legitimacy of newly-formed political elites.⁴ The influence that the media had on the conflicts that followed the disintegration of Yugoslavia mostly consisted of the creation of a certain general discursive framework within which a public debate took place and which limited other possible interpretations of the events and processes.

The 'media war', a term widely used in former Yugoslavia, resulted in the direct engagement by the media in defending political leaders and the politics of their own republics and attacking those in other republics which belonged to different nations. This was possible, in the first place, due to the closed and divided media space that existed at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s and to very low exchange of information among different republics. This, in turn, was due to censorship of other republics' media, which existed in the form of controlled broadcasting of TV stations from other republics or difficult access to print media from other parts of former Yugoslavia. The main media (such as best-selling dailies and national TV stations) were owned and controlled by nationalist governments and were 'servants to the regime', so that the messages sent out to the public reflected the governments' interpretations of events and their politics. As Dubravka Žarkov noted,

"already by [the] mid-1980s the involvement of the media in the growing nationalism in the former Yugoslavia had become apparent. Hostile communication between media of different republics became part and parcel of mutual accusations that engaged political leaders, prominent cultural figures and social scientists of the different Yugoslav republics."⁵

4 For a more detailed discussion on the role of the media in the disintegration of former Yugoslavia see Gordana Đerić, ed.: *Intima javnosti (The Intimacy of the Public)*, Fabrika knjiga, Beograd, 2008 and Nena Skopljanac Brunner et al. (eds), *Media & War (Centre for transition and civil society Zagreb; Agency Argument, Belgrade, 2000)*.

5 Dubravka Žarkov, "Pictures of the Wall of Love. Motherhood, Womanhood and Nationhood in Croatian Media", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 4, issue 3, (August 1997), 305.

However, it should also be mentioned that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, before the violence started in 1991, it was still possible to read different or completely opposite political perspectives in the mainstream media. It was also possible to find similar positions in newspapers from different republics across the former Yugoslavia. Later, during the war, alternative media belonging to opposition parties existed, but the problem was that this space for alternative writing was very limited and marginalized, thus accessible to a narrow reading public.

One of the most important strategies in war propaganda used by the media was reporting on 'our' victims. Discourses of victimization of certain nations started to be used in the media in the late 1980s during the period of Yugoslavia's disintegration and resulted in a competition among different ethnic groups over which one would be characterized as a greater victim. Members of each nation⁶ of the former Yugoslavia, before the outbreak of the war, started revealing their 'Truth' of being a victim of other nations. Through their control of the media, media, nationalist political elites started uncovering 'Truths' necessary for understanding the situation which they felt their national group was in and which was crucial for the construction of that nation's victim identity. Thus, it is necessary to examine these "more or less truths".⁷

Political elites from different ethnic groups used the power they had to change and influence the meaning of historical facts and to create different myths, producing, in this way, their own 'Truths'. In the former Yugoslavia, almost every one of its nations⁸ had felt

6 I understand the term 'nation' in accordance with Hurst Hannum's definition: "a self-identified group with certain shared characteristics, such as ethnicity, culture, religion or language, and a sense of political identity". Hurst Hannum, "International Law", *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism. Fundamental Themes*, Vol. 1 (Academic Press, San Diego, San Francisco, New York, Boston, London, Sydney, Tokyo, 2000).

7 Julie A. Mertus, *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War* (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1999), 2.

8 In Yugoslav political terminology, there were five nations (*narod*): Slovenes, Croats, Serbs and Montenegrins, Macedonians, and Muslims; several national groups (*narodnosti*), such as Albanians and

threatened by another national group and had been perceived as a threat to another group. Thus, the media in different republics started producing victimization narratives, which served to

“produce the feeling that one’s national group was threatened with extinction as the object of another’s aggression. In the process of maintaining a balance of power among national groups, every nation/republic had reason to believe that it had been unjustly treated in the Yugoslav state.”⁹ What should be stressed, however, is that these narratives of victimization “are all specifically and characteristically *national*, emphasizing the trials and sufferings of *the nation* and identifying those nations which should be held responsible for one’s own nation’s suffering.”¹⁰

By mid-1980s, many Serbs became convinced that they were the main victims in communist Yugoslavia. In their version of □the Truth, there were two reasons for this. First was the policy of nation-building, which was believed to exist within all nationalities except the Serbs and, according to nationalist elites, ignored the fact that the Serbs had sacrificed the most for the creation of Yugoslavia during the two World Wars. Second, this policy was felt to had been unfair because it led to the fragmentation of the Serbian territory, and it forced the Serbs into assimilation (in Croatia), subjected them to persecution (in Kosovo), and lead them to potential minority status (in Bosnia and Herzegovina). A Memorandum issued by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Art (SANU) in 1986, which later heavily influenced the growth and development of nationalist politics in Serbia, lists many other deep frustrations and resentment felt by some Serb intellectuals and shared by an increasing number of Serbs in the late 1980s. It “asserted that Serbia had suffered systematic discrimination

Hungarians, and a number of national minorities (nacionalne manjine), eg. the Roma, Italians, Romanians and others.

9 Vesna Pešić, “Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis”, *Peaceworks* No. 8, United States Institute of Peace (April 1996).

10 Sabrina P. Ramet, “The Dissolution of Yugoslavia: Competing Narratives of Resentment and Blame”, *Southeast Europe. Journal of Politics and Society* (01/2007), 26-69, author’s emphasis.

against its vital political and economic interests in Yugoslavia.”¹¹ Moreover, as Sabrina P. Ramet notes, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, some writers writing for *Književne novine*, a journal of an association of Yugoslav writers, “have compared the Serbian nation to the Jewish nation or to Job or even to the crucified Christ”.¹²

Although Kosovo was the predominant issue in the discourse on the danger threatening the Serbs, there was also the story of Croats and the genocide they committed against the Serbs in World War II. Anthony Oberschall discusses the consequences of such discourses:

“In my interview with a Serb refugee one can trace how the atrocities discourse switched on the crisis frame: ‘We were afraid because nationalists revived the memory of World War II atrocities...nationalist graffiti on walls awakened fears of past memories; it was a sign that minorities [Serbs in Croatia] would not be respected and safe.’¹³

What the nationalist political elites took advantage of was the ‘collective’ memory of victimization in the Independent State of Croatia¹⁴ during World War II. Thus, for example, in the 1990s, stories of traditional torture and victimization of the Serbian nation by Croats since World War II became a much exploited topic in the Serbian nationalist literature. Memories of the WWII period and of Ustashe were also recalled in the public speeches or football fan songs at stadiums.¹⁵ Moreover, the Kosovo myth was also (ab)used in the context of the Kosovo crisis of the 1980s and

11 Milica Bakic-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme “Balkans”: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 51, No. 1, (Spring, 1992), 6.

12 Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Dissolution of Yugoslavia*, 32.

13 Anthony Oberschall, “The Manipulation of Ethnicity: From Ethnic Cooperation to Violence and War in Yugoslavia”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (1 November 2000), 991.

14 Independent State of Croatia was a World War II Nazi puppet state, which existed between 1941 and 1945, and was governed by fascist Ustashe movement.

15 For an analysis of a number of these examples see Ivan Čolović, *Bordel ratnika: folklor, politika i rat*, Biblioteka XX vek, (Beograd, 1994).

it provided explanation of the historical experience of the Serbs' collective victimization and sacrifice for the homeland.¹⁶

Croatian historical narratives also contain elements of victimization and reveal yet another Truth. The first victims were considered to be those Croatian Catholics who lived in the areas which were populated by the Turks and who suffered violence that forced many to convert to Islam. It was thus believed that, in the 18th century, the Turks forcibly removed many Catholic Croats from Bosnia. In more recent history, Croatian national identity was claimed to have been denied to the Croatian people from 1918 to 1939, when the Croats became part of a kingdom in which they claimed to have been under the Serbian oppression. During the 1980s, complaints in Croatia centred on the alleged draining of Croatian money and revenues to support the bureaucracy centred in Serbia and to subsidize poorer regions, such as Bosnia and Kosovo. Moreover, as Franke Wilmer points out, "some Croats also complained that under Tito they were as a group more frequently and vigorously persecuted for expressions of national and cultural pride and more frequently arrested and punished for political crimes".¹⁷ Such national 'Truths' were needed for the creation of a victim-nation identity, and were later used to justify many crimes that would be committed later during the Yugoslav wars.¹⁸

16 The Kosovo myth dates back to 1389 and to the Battle of Kosovo, in which Serbs fought and lost against Ottoman Turks, symbolizing the loss of the medieval Serbian empire. It still remains the central event in all of Serbian history. The Battle of Kosovo also shapes a large part of Serbian national consciousness and culture. Kosovo was considered the cradle of Serbian medieval culture and the symbol of national history and mythology.

17 Franke Wilmer, *The Social Construction of Man, the State, and War. Identity, Conflict, and Violence in the Former Yugoslavia* (Routledge, New York and London, 2002), 181.

18 For a detailed exploration of how and why Serbian and Croatian nationalist elites used a victim-centred propaganda to legitimate the creation of new states and the conflict that followed the break up of Yugoslavia see David Bruce MacDonald. *Balkan Holocausts. Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*. Manchester University Press, (Manchester and New York, 2002).

3. Gender Imagery and Victimization Discourses: (Inter-) Ethnic Rapes in Kosovo

In Serbia and Croatia, victim discourses used by the media were, to a large extent, gendered. The importance of the gender imagery during the wars in the former Yugoslavia lies in the media's continued manipulation of gender identities to create a feeling of threat and hate towards the other ethnic group. When analyzing the Croatian and Serbian press that was published during the 1991-1995 war, Dubravka Žarkov noticed that:

it was apparent that in the mid-1908s the media in [the] former Yugoslavia started covering stories that they had not covered before. The concern with which the media suddenly started addressing the so-called women's issues, especially issues regarding reproduction and sexual violence against women was striking. (...) References to childcare, maternity leave, abortion rights, legislation on rape, sexual morality, and so on, were now discussed (in political bodies as well as on the pages of the newspapers) in the light of population growth, traditional values, and historic dreams of, or historic injustices against, a particular ethnic group.¹⁹

The manipulation of women's bodies, symbolically marked as ethnic territories in national discourses, actually began in the media in the 1980s. One of the most controversial issues that the media wrote about was the case of Fadil Hoxha, one of the highest ranking Albanian politicians from Kosovo, who was reported by the media as saying that the problem of the rape of Serb women by Albanian men in Kosovo would be solved if more non-Albanian women worked as prostitutes. Serbian weekly *NIN* and daily *Politika*²⁰ followed for days protests by Serbian women

19 Dubravka Žarkov. *The Body of War. Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*, Duke University Press, (Durham and London, 2007), 3-4.

20 *NIN* is a Sunday newsmagazine published in Belgrade. *Politika* is the oldest daily in Serbia. During the Milošević regime, which owned the daily, *Politika* was one of the most powerful weapons of the populist war propaganda used in order to prepare the Serbian nation for war. Its reporting was full of hate speech and of constant glorification of Slobodan Milošević and his politics. For a detailed analysis of the reporting of *Politika* during the war in former Yugoslavia see Petar Luković: "Umetnost propagande: Analiza Politike 1988.-

in Kosovo and published photos of them holding banners which read "We want freedom!" and "Our mothers are not whores".

The way in which the press covered this story clearly revealed their intention to present the Serbian women not only as victims, but also as victims who stood as the very symbol of suffering and plight of the whole Serbian nation. The emphasis was, for this reason, put on the (Serbian) ethnic identity of these women and the issue was not discussed as an insult to women or as a reflection of a discriminatory thinking of a still deeply patriarchal society, but was discussed in the light of the Serbian nation's victimhood in Kosovo. Thus, for example, *Politika* quoted women saying that "women and children of Serbian and Montenegrin nationality have suffered real terror for years."²¹

Similarly, the Croatian media, such as the daily *Vjesnik* and weekly *Danas*²², developed stories about Serbian nationalism, Albanian separatism and the overall political situation in Kosovo, without really putting women's protests into the centre of attention. An article in *Danas* started with a story of three minors of Albanian nationality who tried to rape, in a school backyard, two girls – one of Serbian and another of the Roma nationality – thus stressing the nationality of victims and perpetrators and not the actual crime. The article goes on to mention the protests of Serbian and Montenegrin women in Kosovo, but continues with a lengthy discussion and analysis of the political situation in Kosovo, putting the rapes and women's protests in the background and stressing the overall national tensions in the province.²³

1991." (The Art of Propaganda: An Analysis of Politika 1988-1991) at <http://www.e-novine.com/feljton/27459-Priprema-odstrel.html>.

21 *Politika*, October 19, 1987.

22 *Vjesnik* is a Croatian daily newspaper published in Zagreb. In 1990, after Croatia declared its independence, it came under the control of the ruling party HDZ. It was seen as taking a pro-government editorial stance. *Danas* was a weekly political magazine published in Zagreb. It stopped being published during the Tudman regime in 1992, due to its critical-analytical writing.

23 *Danas*, October 27, 1987, 7-10.

The media campaign which started with the story about Fadil Hoxha's statement continued with reporting on the systematic ethnic rapes of Serbian women perpetrated by Albanian men and the Albanian demographic war against the Serbian nation in Kosovo caused by a very high Albanian birth rate. The high fertility rate among the Albanians in Kosovo was the reason why the media started making allusions to uncontrollable and abnormal Albanian sexuality which would, in the end, lead to a higher percentage of ethnic Albanians in the population of Kosovo and their majority in the province which had long been seen (by Serb nationalists) as the centuries-old 'heart of Serbia'. Because of a higher Albanian birth-rate and higher Serb emigration, the Serbian population in Kosovo dropped from 23 percent in 1971 to 10 percent in 1989²⁴. Such a high birth-rate was characterized by the Belgrade-based weekly *NIN* as

"deviant and unnatural, achieved at the expense of women who were kept secluded and subordinate, required to bear children until exhausted, even forced into polygamous marriages or subjected to incest carried out for nationalist motives"²⁵.

The alleged rapes were explained as an attempt by Albanians to terrorize the Serbs and make them move out of Kosovo. The emphasis was again put on the ethnic identity of victims and perpetrators of these rapes, while facts and figures were, respectively, neglected and exaggerated. However, research that was later conducted showed that rapes in Kosovo largely did not cross ethnic lines²⁶. As Vesna Pešić discovered, "my research on rapes in Kosovo indicates that as of 1987, there was not a single 'interethnic' rape (i.e., a Serbian woman raped by an Albanian), although such cases were constantly mentioned in the press. Under enormous public pressure regarding the rape of 'Serbian women', new criminal proceedings were introduced if the rape

24 Oberschall, *The Manipulation of Ethnicity*.

25 *NIN*, 9 October 1988, 14.

26 See Vesna Kesić, "Muslim Women, Croatian Women, Serbian Women, Albanian Women", *Eurozine*, (May 9, 2003).

involved individuals of 'different nationalities'. In addition, the rate of such sexual assaults in Kosovo was the lowest compared to other Yugoslav republics, and the greatest number of rapes in Kosovo occurred within the same ethnic groups."²⁷ Thus, rape as sexual violence against women was not considered problematic unless it was inter-ethnic and emphasis was again put on the ethnic component of these crimes, making all other rapes (happening between members of the same ethnic group) invisible and not worth of attention.

Meanwhile, allegations of inter-ethnic rape created fear and contributed to an atmosphere for future violence. As a result of this atmosphere, the Serbian Criminal Law was amended in 1986 to include the category of 'ethnic rape' and introduced heavier sentences for crimes of rape committed against a person of different ethnic group. In this way, criminal zone of deviant sexual behaviour was extended from individual victim to a whole group, concerning a feeling of threat to a whole nation or ethnic group.²⁸

One of the first examples of inter-ethnic rapes is the well-known case of a Serbian man, Đorđe Martinović, who reported to had been raped by two Albanian men. However, he later took his allegations back and his case was never clarified. Moreover, as early as 1981, Serbian clergy accused Albanian Kosovars of having raped Serbian nuns, while in the mid-1980s allegations of the rape of Serbian women by Albanian men increased considerably²⁹. Rape and sexual assault became, in the 1980s, a highly-discussed political issue in a wider debate over the Serbs' status in Kosovo.

The Kosovo case was an example of ethnic conflicts which had been invented and promoted through media propaganda. Sofos

27 Pešić, *Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis*, 35.

28 See, for example, Darius M Rejali. "After Feminist Analysis of Bosnian Violence", *Peace Review*, Volume 8, Issue 3 September 1996, 365-371.

29 Spyros A. Sofos, "Inter-Ethnic Violence and Gendered Constructions of Ethnicity in Former Yugoslavia", *Social Identities*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1996).

argues that "this effective tool became the principal mechanism for intensifying ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia. In essence, the media dramatically staged reality for millions of Serbs and turned whatever potential existed in Serbia for ethnic hatred into a self-fulfilling prophesy."³⁰ Through nationalistic propaganda, the threat to the Serbian nation was presented as the threat to Serbian women from Albanian assaults. Discussions of rape were used to portray the victimization of the Serbian nation as a whole and to legitimise Serbian nationalism.

The issue of rape in Kosovo and the sense of victimization were some of the strongest tools used to mobilize mass support for Serbian nationalist politics. The Đorđe Martinović incident even came to be called "Jasenovac for one man"³¹ in the Serbian press, alluding to the suffering of the Serbs during World War II, when a large number of people of Serbian nationality died at Jasenovac, the largest concentration camp in the Independent State of Croatia.

Although rape was only one of the crimes the Albanians were accused of having used against the Serbs in Kosovo, Wendy Bracewell argues it was the one which resulted in the most intense reactions:

The depiction of rape in Kosovo implied that sexual violence in Kosovo had a radically different character from that elsewhere in the country: that rape was an age-old weapon of Albanian nationalism; that it was an everyday occurrence; that no Serb, regardless of age, sex, or status, was safe from sexual assault; that Albanian judiciary protected rapists, a policy that was either ignored or condoned by republican federal authorities; and that all Albanian men were potential or actual rapists.³²

30 Ibid., 17.

31 Duga, June 10, 1985, quoted after Mertus, Kosovo, 98-101.

32 Wendy Bracewell, "Rape in Kosovo: Masculinity and Serbian Nationalism", Nations and Nationalism 6 (No. 4, 2000), 563-590.

Furthermore, Bracewell argues that rape in Kosovo was presented as an 'act of genocide' and 'an attack on the Serbian nation' and was used to raise the Serbian paranoia and to manipulate the public opinion³³. However, the issue of 'genocidal rape' would gain a lot of public attention during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, when stories of mass rapes of *Bosnian Muslim* women by *Serbian* military and paramilitary forces went on the front pages of the Western media in 1992 and 1993. Although rapes happening in Kosovo were presented as 'an attack on the Serbian nation', in later developments of Yugoslav wars, rapes were connected to *Serbian* campaigns of ethnic cleansing, which aimed at making certain territories ethnically 'pure' and homogenous, by forcing members of certain ethno-national groups into leaving these territories.

The Đorđe Martinović case was presented as an assault on Serbian masculinity and reified the nationalist stereotypes about Serbs and Albanians. The way in which Martinović was attacked was used in order to promote the long-standing stereotype about Muslims' deviant sexuality while the whole case became a metaphor for the victim position of the entire Serb nation in Kosovo. The Serb nation was portrayed as a victim violated by Albanian autonomy, while Martinović himself became a martyr. The image of Đorđe Martinović was repeatedly used whenever the nationalist elite needed to remind the public of the oppression of the Serbs in Kosovo and of their victimization. Thus, as Julie Mertus remarked, a number of new articles on the Martinović case were published again in 1989, as "journalists reminded the public that Martinović was still waiting for justice."³⁴

However, when it came to sexual violence against women, Serbian nationalist interpretations of such violence did not concentrate on the victim identity of the women, but rather presented it as, again, an attack on the Serbian masculinity and

33 Again, similar debates on the 'nationalist' aspects of mass rapes will occur among Croatian, Serbian and, to a much lesser extent, Bosnian feminists during the debates on mass rapes during the war in Bosnia.

34 Mertus, Kosovo, 111.

masculine pride. The victim of rape was not an individual woman but a woman of a certain nationality. Rape victims were redefined as Serbs at the expense of their individual and collective identities as women. They were often referred to as Serbian mothers or wives.³⁵ Public interest was directed not towards the individual cases of rape but towards the 'rape of the nation' and femininity was subordinated to nationality.

Dejan Ilić argued that in situations such as the rape of Đorđe Martinović in Kosovo, it was desirable to publicly show that an individual victim of rape was a man and not a woman. This happened because legitimization for going into war was needed. What became important was the very fact that the victim was a man and not a woman, because, in such a case, the suffering and humiliation of a nation, both physical and emotional, were presented as being all the more terrible and greater.³⁶

In discourses about rapes in Kosovo men and women became identified in terms of their nationality, which helped to create deep ethnic divisions among people. Their identities were constructed in terms of their differences, so that members of a different nationality were seen as 'the Other'. Throughout the former Yugoslavia, opportunistic political elites created an atmosphere in which it was possible to produce feelings of fear of and danger from 'the Other'.

4. Gender and Ethnicity as Collective Identities: (Mass) Rapes in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Although there is no evidence that rapes in Kosovo served as a pre-text for the mass rapes and rape camps that followed later during the war in Bosnia, and to a lesser extent in Croatia, events in Kosovo put sexual violence as ethnic violence on the political

35 See, for example, Politika, October, 1987.

36 See Dejan Ilić, *Kruna od trnja* (Crown of Thorns), (March 1, 2009), available at <http://www.pescanik.net/content/view/2767/128/>

agenda and introduced the idea that sexual violence could be used as effective tools of politics.³⁷

During the war in former Yugoslavia rape, rather than a sexual crime, became an element of national conflict. The phenomenon was manipulated again for achieving political goals when the story of mass rapes in Bosnia made a breakthrough on the front pages of the world media. The stories of mass rapes of Bosnian Muslim women by Serbian military and paramilitary forces went on the front pages of the Western media in 1992 and 1993, which reported on the opening of rape camps throughout the country. These rapes were connected to campaigns of ethnic cleansing, the aim of which was to make certain territories ethnically homogenous. Moreover, the numbers of rape victims in the war in Bosnia were also used and manipulated by political elites to win over the international public opinion and in order to provoke an intervention from international actors that would change the course of the war.

Thus, for example, Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina Institute for the Study of Crimes against Humanness and International Law from Sarajevo (a state-owned public research institution) issued a report entitled *Aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina as a Crime against Peace, War Crime and Crime against Humanness and International Law*, which reads:

A special form of the crime of genocide, never seen up to now in the history of mankind, is a systematic raping of Muslim women of all ages, six-year old female children as well as old women.(...) The data collected up to now points to the fact that 25,000 to 30,000 Muslim women of all ages have been the victims of such a loathsome crime. The data are not completed yet, because the matter is extremely intimate and delicate. All foreign observers (for example Roy

37 Silva Mežnarić, a Croatian sociologist who has conducted a study on the discourse of rape in Serbian-Albanian conflict in Kosovo, argued that the Serbian media's rape campaign against Kosovo Albanians as perpetrators escalated into rape policy via ethnic cleansing and has been a prelude to the actual rapes by Serbian soldiers in Bosnia. See Silva Mežnarić. "The Rapists' Progress: Ethnicity, Gender and Violence", *Revija za sociologiju* 24 (3-4), Zagreb, 1993, 119-129.

Gutman from *Newsday*) estimate that these rapings were not the result of a certain instinct, but one of the aims of the war and a part of its tactics.³⁸

The Bosnian government institutions readily adopted the kind of foreign reporting on mass rapes in Bosnia which portrayed the crimes as being perpetrated on a large scale and following a systematic pattern in order to argue that genocide was being committed against the Bosnian nation.³⁹ Most debates which emerged from these reports concentrated on the precise number of women who had been raped, and on the insistence that the nature of the rapes had been systematic and that they had been committed because of the victims' ethnicity. The estimation of numbers of rape victims was used (and misused) for political purposes, but the United Nations Commission of Experts condemned such manipulations in its *Final Report* on rape and sexual assault, saying that:

examples of this type of allegation are: 20,000 have been raped. These allegations are so general that they provide no useful information for analysis. This particular allegation comes from the European Community Delegation, headed by Dame Anne Warburton, and including Madame Simone Veil among others. This mission investigated only Muslim allegations of rape and sexual assault. The investigators spoke of few direct witnesses or victims, but concluded that the most reasoned estimate of the number of the Bosnian Muslim victims of rape was 20,000. The investigators gave no reasons for their arrival at this figure and offered no evidence for this accuracy.⁴⁰

38 Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina Institute for the Study of Crimes against Humanness and International Law, Sarajevo (1993) *Aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina as a Crime against Peace, War Crime and Crime against Humanness and International Law*, April 25, HU OSA 304-0-3, Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia (IHRLI), Numbered Commission Document Files ("Bates File"), container No. 9.

39 Roy Gutman, an American journalist, asserted that "the Serb conquerors of Bosnia have raped Muslim women, not as a by-product of the war but as a principal tactic of the war". Roy Gutman "Rape by Order. Bosian Women Terrorized by Serbs", *New York Newsday*, Sunday, August 23, 1992, 39.

40 The United Nations Commission of Experts (1994) *Final Report*. Annex IX – Rape and Sexual Assault, May 27, HU OSA 304-0-1, Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the

Manipulations of the rapes always identified the ethnic/national membership of the rapist and the foetus as the key matter of concern, and not the raped women themselves nor the actual crime. When they did come into discussions, women were viewed more as members of their nations than anything else. Thus, for example, during the war in Croatia and Bosnia, Croatian daily *Vjesnik* wrote that

(...) the structure of rapes equally affects the raped woman and the raped country. I would not allow for discussions about raped Croat and Muslim woman without talking of raped Croatia and Bosnia⁴¹.

The view that the rape of women is designed to destroy the nation to which those women 'belong' reflects the horrible objectification of women, which denies their individuality and their subjectivity.

What is more, some nationalist leaders and press viewed the children born as a consequence of these rapes as a 'lesser evil' than those which would be born out of mixed marriages, since they would be raised by two Muslim parents. In mixed marriages, on the other hand, and particularly in those in which the wife was a Muslim, there was a threat that children would not be brought up as Muslims, since "every marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim means a loss of her and her children for Islam and Muslims"⁴². Thus, a text in weekly *Ljiljan*⁴³ stated that:

Even though these rapes are difficult, unbearable and unforgivable, from the standpoint of Islam they are easier

Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia (IHRLI), Final Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), 27 May 1994, Container no. 6.

41 *Vjesnik*, January 13, 1993, 15.

42 Mustafa Mujki Spahić, "Gore od silovanja: Zlo mješovitih brakova (Worse than Rape: The Evil of Mixed Marriages)", *Ljiljan*, (August 10, 1994), 22.

43 *Ljiljan* was, during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a pro-SDA (Bosniac nationalist party) weekly.

and less painful than mixed marriages, the children and family relationships that result from them.⁴⁴

In her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt wrote that the aim of the totalitarian regime was to negate the individual characteristics of people and pressure the entire plurality of human beings into becoming *one*, reducing them to 'superfluous' human beings who would lose all common sense⁴⁵. She said that destruction of the plurality and individuality of human beings usually happened in the concentration camps. There, people would lose all their distinct characteristics, while, at the same time, losing their gender and other identities⁴⁶. However, although they would lose their individual identities, they would acquire a new, collective one, since they would become part of a larger ethnic collective. They would no more exist as individuals but only as members of their ethnicity. Only by turning men and women into bearers of ethnic symbols inscribed on their own bodies was it possible to annihilate people as ethnic and gendered bodies.

In the nationalist rhetoric analyzed in this article, the fusing of gender and ethnicity worked as a homogenizing practice. In the war in former Yugoslavia, individual women's bodies became both metaphoric and physical representations of the social and political body of the nation. Killing or damaging that body symbolically killed or damaged the woman's family and ethnic group, since an ethnic group is, according to Benedict Anderson, constructed as a "family writ large".⁴⁷ Rape, thus, became meaningful when a woman's body was understood as the body of the whole nation, whose purity and fertility are degraded by degrading its symbol, that is, the woman.

44 Mustafa Mujki Spahić, "Gore od silovanja: Zlo mješovitih brakova (Worse than Rape: The Evil of Mixed Marriages)", Ljiljan, (August 10, 1994), 22.

45 See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego New York London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1976).

46 Ibid., Part three: Totalitarianism, Chapter 13: Ideology and Terror.

47 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: London, 1983).

6. Conclusion

Before the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia, the media used certain discourses and representational practices in order to create nation-victim identities. These victim identities were based on the (re)construction of the national 'self' in direct opposition to 'the Other' and were developed through the creation of national myths and 'Truths', as well as through the belief in the creative power of violence. The victimization discourses, which dominated the public sphere before the war, were also gendered in the sense that they introduced a dichotomy between a feminized victim and a masculinised perpetrator.

Since the process of nation-building necessarily includes gendered roles for males and females of the nation, in order to build and strengthen national identity, gendered images of nationalism were by no means unique to the former Yugoslavia.⁴⁸ What was unique was the way in which historical facts and collective memory of the people were manipulated in public media discourses in order to present one nation as a (gendered) victim of other nations of the former Yugoslavia.

The gendered construction of the enemy was most easily used when reporting about sexual violence such as rape. Victims of rape were not, in the media representations, assaulted as individuals but as members of their ethnic group, since rape was presented as one of the strategies of ethnic cleansing and as an attempt to annihilate 'the Other'. By presenting rape as 'collective' or group violence and by turning men and women merely into members of their national groups, it was possible to create a nationalistic belief that the collective body of a nation is more important than suffering bodies of individuals.

48

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