



## Social Identities

Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture

ISSN: 1350-4630 (Print) 1363-0296 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csidi20>

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To cite this article: Spyros A. Sofos (1996) Inter-ethnic Violence and Gendered Constructions of Ethnicity in former Yugoslavia, *Social Identities*, 2:1, 73-92, DOI: [10.1080/13504639652394](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504639652394)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504639652394>



Published online: 25 Aug 2010.



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## **Inter-ethnic Violence and Gendered Constructions of Ethnicity in former Yugoslavia**

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*ABSTRACT: This article constitutes an attempt to put forward some suggestions towards constructing a framework of understanding the processes of social construction of sexuality and gender identity within the context of the ethnic conflict, and of nationalist/populist politics in former Yugoslavia. In particular, it focuses on the ways in which masculinist discourse is articulated to the politics of ethnicity in former Yugoslavia, by examining the definition and treatment of women as 'biological reproducers of the nation' through the discourses and policy proposals of moral majority nationalist and pro-life movements in Croatia and Slovenia, and of the nationalist movement and regime in Serbia, and the use of rape and sexual assault against women as 'weapons' in the ethnic conflict in Bosnia and other republics of former Yugoslavia.*

### **Introduction**

In an interview with BBC2's *Newsnight*, broadcast in March 1994, Ratko Mladč, military head of the army of the self-styled Serbian Republic of Bosnia (*Republika Srpska Bosne i Hercegovine*), offering his own interpretation of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, claimed that Bosnian Serbs were engaged in war in Bosnia because they had to protect '[their] women and children' and concluded by arguing that the Bosnian conflict was motivated by 'love and honour'. These statements are quite revealing as they epitomize the prevailing or 'hegemonic' perceptions among Serbs regarding the war. An analysis of General Mladić's words, or more generally of the Serbian (but also Croatian) nationalist discourse, indicates — as I hope to demonstrate — that according to those who wage it, the war tearing apart former Yugoslavia is regarded as an expression of love for the 'motherland', a war waged primarily by and between men, despite the fact that a substantial proportion of its victims are women and children. It is important, I think, to note General Mladić's eroticized version of nationalism and its explicitly gendered character, as it is more or less typical of nationalist/populist discourses in former Yugoslavia.

The aim of this article is to put forward some suggestions towards elaborating a framework for understanding the processes by which sexuality and gender identity are socially constructed within the context of the ethnic conflict and of nationalist/populist politics in former Yugoslavia. In particular, I will

consider the ways in which masculinist discourse is articulated to the politics of ethnicity in former Yugoslavia by focusing on:

1. the definition and treatment of women as 'biological reproducers of the nation' through the discourses and policy proposals of moral majority nationalist and pro-life movements in Croatia and Slovenia, and of the nationalist movement and regime in Serbia;
2. the use of rape and sexual assault against women as 'weapons' in the ethnic conflict in Bosnia and other republics of former Yugoslavia.

### **Nationalism, Populism and Ethnic Conflict as Gendered Phenomena; some Prolegomena**

The definition of nations as imagined communities is not new, especially since the work of Benedict Anderson has been extremely influential among students of nationalism (Anderson, 1983). Nevertheless I will briefly consider at this point in what ways nations — as well as other forms of community — are imagined. The use of terms like imagined or imagination in everyday conversation often implies an opposition between a sphere of 'reality' and a sphere of the 'not-real'. Anderson makes it very clear that imagining national communities is by no means creating something artificial. His analysis of the construction of national communities also indicates that 'imagining' is not an exclusively 'mental' activity. On the contrary, it is a lengthy process of forging links between social groups, of inventing community and suppressing differences, of establishing the context in which the members of the community under construction can develop common experiences, and interpret past experiences in similar ways.<sup>1</sup> It involves the organization of collective memory — and thus, of collective forgetting — and of the rituals and institutions that support such projects (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). In this sense, imagination is a creative process; nations are imagined but also real, concrete entities. Indeed, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) — and before them Foucault (1972), have suggested, any manifestation of the 'social' is the product of this process of imagination, or of discursive construction, to use their own terminology. I would thus suggest that imagination involves creating economies of truth, making sense of the raw material of social experience, in fact, creating this very social experience through discursive practices.

The use of the term populist in my description of nationalist movements in former Yugoslavia is intended to draw attention to the particular modality of identity formation that characterizes them. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere (Sofos, 1993, 1994), populism consists in the simplification of the political field into two opposing camps, or in the positing of an irreconcilable antagonistic relationship between 'the people' (or 'nation', or other community for that matter) and its 'other'. The positing of this binary political and social division not only simplifies the political field, but entails the maintenance of some sense of homogeneity within the ranks of the community in question as it unifies it on the basis of establishing a relation of equivalence among its constituent elements. Very often this antagonistic relationship is combined with a chain of antithetical signifiers which further deepen the binary division of the

political field as they also are organized into chains of equivalent elements. Thus, one pole of the political is posited as good, pure, moral and threatened, whereas its antagonistic pole is posited as bad, impure, immoral and threatening.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, moving to the issue of the gendering of ethnic conflict, it should be stressed that national communities have been imagined most often as communities of males, as brotherhoods or, to use Anderson's own words, as 'fraternities', characterized by a sense of 'deep, horizontal comradeship' (p. 7); nationalism therefore is gendered not only in the case of the former Yugoslavia. However, it is the intensity of the link between national identity and masculinism and the particular ways in which this is being asserted in the case of ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia that seems to be of particular interest.

I will argue that the gendering of nationalist and populist discourses is instantiated through the imagination of the 'nation' as a primarily or exclusively male community, in which women are represented as symbols, boundaries or reproducers of the nation — and the nation's 'Other'. In the first case (that of women 'belonging' to the national community), women are subordinated through their inclusion within a structured male-dominated social order whereby femininity assumes mainly the form of motherhood. In the second case, (that of women 'belonging' to the others' national community) they are subordinated through, 1) their symbolic exclusion in their being represented as symbolic enemies of the 'popular/national' community, and, 2) their physical violation, or annihilation.

I should emphasize that this analysis is not intended to contribute to the creation of a neo-orientalist body of work that considers masculinism as the exclusive property of Balkan societies.<sup>3</sup> Social-historical research has demonstrated that national and ethnic identity, as well as conflict, is inextricably linked with particular interpretations of sexuality and with processes of formation of masculinity and femininity (Mosse, 1985; Parker *et al.* 1992; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). Rather, I seek to demonstrate how in a situation of crisis and rapid and violent change masculinism is manifested and articulated in relation to the nationalist/populist imaginary.

### **Nationalist/Populist Politics in Former Yugoslavia**

Since the late 1960s, a mixture of discontent with the economic situation and awakening nationalism gave rise to a chain of political protest throughout the Yugoslav Federation. Despite Tito's purge of the nationalist and liberal opposition, the 1974 constitution, instead of enabling the expression of the social diversity of Yugoslavia and its republics (including, but not limited to ethnic and religious diversity), reified republican and, by extension, ethnic and national identities. It rendered these identities the primary form of differentiation within Yugoslavia, by legally sanctioning and naturalizing them, at the expense of other social and political identities which remained suppressed or at least excluded from the universe of political debate. The process of fragmentation gathered pace as the political dynamics unleashed by the constitutional and party changes were complemented by the dramatic deterioration of the economic and social conditions during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. The international oil

crisis and the world recession of the 1970s, the increasing unemployment, falling living standards, high inflation, a restrictive monetary policy, combined with economic mismanagement and the failure of the principles of self-management seriously undermined the foundations of the 'social contract', triggered waves of discontent, and created an atmosphere of widespread disappointment. In addition, the increasing social dislocation in the south of the country gave rise to internal migration, mainly of Kosovo and Macedonian Albanians, to the Northern, more prosperous republics. In addition, partly for the same reasons and partly due to the political situation in Kosovo, local Serb and Montenegrin migration to Serbia and other republics intensified (Ramet, 1992, pp. 198–99). These developments increased the tensions within the republics and migration provided a unifying issue in public debate and a valuable mobilization resource (Sofos, forthcoming). Since at least the mid-1970s, inter-republican tensions and social issues were progressively perceived as problems created by the 'unnatural' breach of ethnic faultlines within the context of the Yugoslav Federation. This ethnicization of socioeconomic and political grievances eventually led to perceptions of irreconcilable antagonism between the 'ethnic' communities within the Federation. As a result of the 1974 constitution, virtually each republic and province, despite the multicultural and multiethnic composition of Yugoslavia's constituent units, increasingly provided a frame-work for the promotion of the national identity and attainment of sovereignty of a specific ethnic group, facilitating in this way the fragmentation of the already precarious Yugoslav public sphere. Yugoslavia's artificial and arbitrary internal borders were 'upgraded' to national or 'civilizational' faultlines (Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, 1992, pp. 3–6); and the federation began to disintegrate as a result of the 'ethnicization' or 'nationalization' of its republics and autonomous units together with the pursuit of essentially monoethnic policies within their boundaries. During the late 1980s, the demise of the state-socialist experiment in East/Central Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union undermined the last traces of legitimacy of the Yugoslav experiment and affected the strategies as well as the composition of the republic's elites in a variety of ways.

A central element of these changes resides in the binary-populist logic of the political and cultural discourse throughout Yugoslavia. Indeed, one could distinguish several antithetical pairs employed in political and cultural discourse in former Yugoslavia such as conquerors versus conquered, oppressors versus oppressed, heterochthones versus autochthones, immoral versus moral, impure versus pure and, significantly, masculine versus feminine and male versus female. As I will show in the course of this paper, the last two pairs of opposites, based on the existence of sexist, masculinist cultural elements, have been conspicuously present in popular as well as in official discourse. Thus, the category 'feminine' has been employed to include virtually everyone — men and women alike — not conforming to the accepted 'nationalized' versions of masculinity, or to the 'gendered' versions of national identity.

There are indications that the arguments put forward and the questions raised in the remainder of this paper apply to most of the Baltic nationalist movements that have emerged over the past decade. I nevertheless confine my arguments mainly to the cases of Serbian, Croatian and, to a lesser extent,

Slovenian nationalisms as these are articulated in the discourse and practice of groups and individuals ranging from the political elites of the recently independent republics, to members of the groups of militia irregulars in the war fronts of Croatia and Bosnia. The decision to focus on these particular nationalisms has been influenced by the accessibility of data and of existing research.

### **Moral Majorities and Reproductive Politics: the Nationalization of Female Sexuality**

It has been argued that in several East/Central European societies politics has been influenced by the emergence of post-socialist moral majority movements (Salecl, 1994; Tsagarousianou, 1995). The addition of the term 'post-socialist' to references to moral majority movements of East/Central European societies was prompted by the need to distinguish them from their western counterparts on the basis of two significant criteria:

- 1) the convergence of nationalism and moral concerns: although these movements share a strong pro-life commitment and resolve with their counterparts in the USA and the West, they nevertheless do so not merely due to their moral commitment to respect for 'the right to life of the unborn'; East/Central European moral majority movements elevate the nation and its right to claim and mobilize all its members, even those who have not yet been born;
- 2) the emphasis on the role of the state as a guarantor of the national well being through the regulation of sexuality and reproduction and the provision of financial and welfare incentives and disincentives to its 'citizens'.

In some of the republics of former Yugoslavia, 'moral majority movements' — alliances of conservative forces within the Church, nationalist and right-wing political and social forces — have had considerable influence in shaping the emerging post-communist political agenda.

In Slovenia, for example, the discourse of the nationalist and Catholic Right was reflected in the public debate which culminated in the 1991 draft of the constitution. In 1991, representatives of the DEMOS coalition argued that women should not have the right to abort 'future defenders of the nation', while in the 1991 draft motherhood was posited as the essence of women's identity (Antić, 1991). In other words, women were represented as 'reproducers' of the national community, whose only useful and desired contribution to their society would be to bolster the nation's demographic regeneration which, according to official definitions of the situation, was threatened by a declining birth rate. In the context of a continuous moral panic throughout the 1980s and early 1990s regarding the threat of extinction of the national community because of the presence on Slovenian territory of 'migrants' from other former Yugoslav republics and due to the geographical and demographic position of 'a small Slovenia' in the midst of potentially hostile larger nation-states (Sofos, forthcoming), the 1991 draft constitution subordinated women to the imperative of the reproduction and preservation of a (male dominated) national community.

Admittedly, the opposition to the 1991 draft constitution was by no means negligible: the final text of the 1992 Slovenian constitution is substantially different from the 1991 draft, and does not include the latter's controversial sections which link female identity exclusively with motherhood. However, the significance of the propositions included in the draft cannot be underestimated, especially as they are combined with the recognition under the 1992 constitution of the sanctity of life (Article 52) and the provision that statutes will determine the reproductive rights of women. They already provide some constitutional legitimacy to the discourse of the Slovenian 'moral majority' which effectively seeks to introduce a new right — that of the nation (i.e., of the Slovenian ethnic community and its political expression) to survive at the expense of individual or social rights. In fact, it could be argued that by not referring explicitly to women's reproductive rights the constitutional legislator leaves the door ajar for a future 'moral majority'-based political coalition to introduce restrictive legislation.

Similarly, in Croatia, one of the issues that occupied a prominent position in the political debate shortly before independence and in the post-communist period was that of women's right to abortion. In this republic, however, the 'moral majority' influence has been much more significant than in the case of its northern neighbour. Unlike Slovenia, the opposition to the convergent pro-life and nationalist forces has been considerably weaker, and these forces virtually achieved a consensus across the (limited) political spectrum regarding the necessity of restricting abortion 'for the sake of the nation'. Bolstered by the national unity climate that the military conflict generated with the Yugoslav People's Army, and later with the Croatian Serb resurgence and violent confrontation the nationalist right, including Franjo Tudjman's HDZ, promoted its vision for an independent, nationalist and 'morally healthy' Croatia. Central in this vision were the notions of family, sanctity of life, and motherhood. The Catholic Church supported this movement by organizing public rituals such as special benedictions of large families held in churches in 1990, by directly intervening in the debate on the issue of abortion and by highlighting the responsibility of the Sabor (the Croatian parliament) 'to God, to history, and to the nation' (Iveković, 1995, pp. 400–1) to forbid abortion. In 1992 the government established the 'Ministry for the Restoration of the Croatian Republic' which included a 'Department for Demographic Restoration' whose stated purpose was to combat anti-life mentality and to reinforce the role of the Croatian family in the Republic. President Tudjman has gone to great lengths to demonize women who choose not to accept their prescribed roles, by claiming that 'female exhibitionists' — women who opted for pursuing their careers — constitute a major danger to the future of Croatia. This fusion of masculinism, nationalism, and catholic conservatism was also demonstrated just before the republic's independence, when the slogan 'the foetus is a Croat too!' could be seen on posters and graffiti throughout Croatia.

In Serbia, the nationalist movement, to which the Orthodox Church has been allied, did not focus so strongly on the issue of abortion, partly due to the tradition of more discrete involvement in the private realm by the Orthodox Church. However, the public debate on the threat of the 'Albanization' of the

formerly autonomous province of Kosovo and the demographic decline of the Serbian and Montenegrin nations that eventually culminated in the introduction of a complex legal framework of reproduction regulation provided ample evidence of the definition of women as reproducers of the nation. In its Draft Law on Serbia's Population Policy, the Socialist Party government effectively proposed that women from different ethnic communities be treated differentially. The proposed legislation envisaged the revision of existing rights and the introduction of new restrictive measures and sanctions. More precisely, Albanian families would be penalized and abortion would be indirectly forced upon Albanian women, under the pretext of a demographic policy that favoured three-child families and penalized larger families, and hence ethnic groups with a higher birth rate like the Kosovar Albanians (Milić, 1993; Ivećovic, 1995). On the other hand, in accordance with the draft law, childless couples would be penalized by having to pay added taxes to make up for their lack of contribution to the nation's demographic effort.

The discourses and policy proposals of the moral majority nationalist and pro-life movements in Croatia and Slovenia, and of the nationalist movement and regime in Serbia, illustrate the definition and treatment of women as mere 'instruments' for the achievement of the national good, as 'biological reproducers of the nation'.

### **'Masculinity' and Serbian Populism: the Anti-bureaucratic Revolution**

The emergence of Serbian nationalism was promoted by mobilizing elements of popular and folk culture (including historically conditioned fears and anxieties). These cultural commitments, fears, and anxieties were articulated in terms of the official discourse promoted by sections of the state bureaucracy and the party. Having realized the potential of nationalism, party leaders supported a policy of change in the party and the state apparatus that would allow the fusion of the nationalist movements of Serbia and Montenegro and the old institutional actors of the Republic (mainly the Serbian League of Communists). We can trace the intensification of this process in 1987 when one of the best known members of this faction, Slobodan Milošević, then a relatively young dynamic leader, emerged and occupied the foreground of Serbian and Yugoslav politics. Milošević placed himself at the centre of the emerging nationalist movement after his 1987 visit to Kosovo Polje, where he pledged to protect the members of the Serbian and Montenegrin minority of the province from 'persecution by the Albanian majority'. By adopting a nationalist rhetoric, allying himself with the Serbian Orthodox church, reinforcing the moral panic regarding the 'Albanization' of Kosovo, and mobilizing aspects of folk and popular culture (Sofos, forthcoming) Milošević was able to capture the party leadership. His success, in other words, was enabled by manipulating various elements of popular concern such as the ever-widening Serbian perception that Yugoslavia was undermining 'Serbian rights', the emotional ties of Serbs with Kosovo, and the widespread popular dismay with the inflexible administrative-bureaucratic system of their republic as well as the Federation as a whole.

Upon capturing power, Milošević launched the anti-bureaucratic revolution, a campaign intended to 'cleanse' the party and state apparatus of 'inefficient



bureaucrats' and to facilitate the take-over of republic and Federation institutions. In the name of the anti-bureaucratic revolution and of the restoration of Serbian rights and pride, Milošević passed legislation which allowed the change of the Serbian constitution (which he presented as dysfunctional and therefore an obstacle to the anti-bureaucratic restructuring of the state), the effective abolition of the autonomous status of the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, and the purge of civil servants, industry managers, journalists and university staff who were allegedly obstacles to his reforms. In the province of Kosovo, these purges acquired an ethnic dimension as the Albanian majority population was forced out of significant positions, and Albanian cultural institutions (universities, schools, media) were forced to close or starved of funds.

The official justification for the launching of the anti-bureaucratic revolution was that the bureaucracy had impeded the development of the Serbian territories and had contributed to the 'selling-out' of Serbian national interest. The Milošević regime cultivated a populist discourse according to which Serbian society was deeply and irreconcilably divided into two opposing camps: that of 'the people', hardworking and honest, preserving the culture of the national community, and that of the 'ruling bureaucracy' which had betrayed the people's hopes and was represented as alien, corrupt and indifferent to the fate of Serbia, and thus as not belonging to the people.

An important discursive strategy employed in the positing of this antagonistic relationship between the people and the corrupt bureaucracy drew upon a masculinist definition of the people. According to official and popular representations of the opponents — actual or potential — to the Milošević regime the 'bureaucrat' or 'old regime official' was effeminate, and 'unmanly', in contrast to the ideal representatives of the working people, who were regarded as real — masculine — men (Salecl, 1994, p. 23). This association of Serbian identity with 'manliness' and of 'enemies' of the Serbian nation with lack of masculine traits had in the past been a feature of popular Serbian stereotypes of Croats. It has become, more recently, prevalent especially in the discourse and rituals of the extremist wings of the Serbian nationalist movement: Vojslav Seselj, leader of the SRS (Serbian Radical Party), has often praised the strength and decisiveness of 'the Serbian masculine arm' in the struggle against the enemies of Serbia both inside and outside the country. In this context, the 'national' or the 'popular' community was defined on the basis of the particular versions of masculinity prevalent in Serbian folk and popular culture and those excluded from it were effectively deemed to lack the attributes of real men. The association of manliness with the Serbian nation was a significant feature of the bureaucratic revolution of the late 1980s and had important effects not only at the level of representation and identity formation, but also at the level of the legal and political system. It partly contributed to delegitimizing factions of the political elite opposed to the rise of Slobodan Milošević and to the development of extra-institutional forms of political legitimation and mobilization.<sup>4</sup>

### **Ethnic Conflict and the 'Reterritorialization' of Rape**

This reliance of the regime on masculinist perceptions of the national community, however, has been clearer in the former's identification of Kosovo Albanians as the primary, ethnic, enemy of the Serbian nation. Serbs consider Kosovo (or Kosova, as it is called by its Albanian majority inhabitants) to have been the spiritual cradle of Serbian Christendom, the centre of the medieval Serbian Empire that was eventually destroyed by the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. The modern Serbian nation-building project was premised on the promotion of a collective memory associated with the sanctity of Kosovo, and the significance of the Serbian sacrifice there. A collective memory of the battle survived in the local oral tradition and folk songs, while the Serbian Orthodox church invested the defeat and death of Prince Lazar with a mystical dimension. Such is the power of the history and mythology of Kosovo that the head of the Association of Serb Writers, Matija Beckovic, stated that Kosovo would be Serbian even if not a single Serb lived there. In 1986, members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, in their *Memorandum*, presented the situation in Kosovo as equivalent to a national defeat. Although in modern-day Kosovo the Albanian population outnumbers Serbs and Montenegrins nine to one, the province still occupies a central position among the markers and symbols of Serbian identity. As in the case of the anti-bureaucratic revolution, in Serbian nationalist discourse the relationship between Albanians and Serbs has been posited as one of irreconcilable antagonism because the Albanians were represented as stealing Serbian land, and were perceived to be threatening the culture of the Serbian nation (see for example Petrović and Blagojević, 1988).

In this climate of antagonism between Serbs and Albanians, the nationalist movement and the Serbian mass media exploited cases of rapes attributed to nationalist motives in Kosovo and orchestrated a moral panic.<sup>5</sup> In fact, rape has constituted one, albeit the most potent element of a wider moral panic regarding the 'Albanization' of Kosovo. This panic climaxed in 1987, when Milošević, while visiting Kosovo, met local Serbs and Montenegrins who accused the Albanian majority of intimidation and violence against persons and property and requested his support. These allegations became a permanent or recurrent theme of news reports from the province and triggered reaction from political, religious and cultural leaders as well as from the public. But one of the most decisive moments in the development of the moral panic came when cases and rumours of rape of Serbian women by Albanians were taken up and exploited by the media. As early as in 1981 Serbian clergy accused Albanian Kosovars of having raped Serbian nuns (Ramet, 1995, p. 111) while in the mid-1980s allegations of rape of Serbian women by Albanian males increased considerably (Milić, 1993, pp. 114–15). Although the local Serbian and Montenegrin-dominated police had been reluctant to initiate investigations in rape cases in the past, during the mid-1980s, and under pressure from the Serb nationalists in the province, they became increasingly interested in instances of alleged rape or sexual assault of Serbian or Montenegrin women by Albanians. Rape acquired therefore a dimension of ethnic antagonism. It was argued by nationalists and the local authorities that these rapes constituted premeditated attacks against Kosovo Serbs and, by extension, the Serbian nation.

A central narrative of Serbian nationalism, that of the nation-under-threat, was supported therefore by the redefinition of rape as a weapon used in the ethnic conflict between Albanians and Serbs. In media and political discourse, accordingly, rape victims were redefined as Serbs at the expense of their individual and collective identities as women. They were often referred to or visually represented as Serbian mothers or wives, and so prescribed roles of actual or potential reproducers of the nation, as instrumental to the preservation of the patriline. Public interest was directed not towards the individual cases of rape but towards the 'rape of the nation by Albanians' (Milić, 1993, pp. 115–16; Salecl, 1994). Thus, against the background of the political antagonism in Kosovo, in the popular imaginary women became symbols and property of the national community, markers of national identity. Their violation was re-territorialized<sup>6</sup> by becoming primarily an act of ethnic violence instead of an expression of gender power relations. By contrast, Albanians assumed the role of the rapists of Serbian women, hence of Serbian culture and national identity. It is interesting to note that in most media accounts of alleged rapes, the Albanian rapists were represented as impotent (Saleci, 1994, p. 23), unable to succeed in violating Serbian women. Here, impotence could be understood as symbolically emasculating the alleged Albanian perpetrators, therefore undermining their masculinity and possibly their claim to nationhood.

Whereas the rape of Serbian and Montenegrin women by Albanian men in Kosovo was perceived and represented by Serb nationalists as a form of ethnic aggression, the 'meaning' of rape and sexual assault in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been more complex. The reasons are numerous. In Kosovo the distinction between its Slavic and Albanian populations has been apparent, not only in terms of religion, but also in terms of linguistic difference and an historically conditioned hatred and fear of Albanian conspiracy against Serbia. In addition, as the victims belonged to the Serbian and the alleged perpetrators to the Albanian community, rape could be seen as an act of aggression against the Serbian nation. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the complexity of ethnic divisions between the Bosnian Muslims and other speakers of Serbo-Croatia gave rise to more complex and ambiguous interpretations of rape among Serb and Croat nationalists. Moreover, despite the fact that rape in war-time is not uncommon, the practice of systematic rape that has been taking place in Bosnia-Herzegovina needed some kind of 'legitimation' among those who perpetrated it.

There is no doubt that in Bosnia-Herzegovina, just as in every war, rape and violation of women constitute an expression and reaffirmation of male dominance over women. However, such interpretations<sup>7</sup> do not take into account the processes of deterritorialization/reterritorialization of rape in the context of ethnic violence. Indeed, there are indications that the practice of rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina is often associated by its perpetrators with a need to assert their dominance over their female victims, or to attain mere gratification (Vulliamy, 1994, p. 200; Gutman, 1993). But there are also indications that such practice has been closely linked with the intention to humiliate or terrorize, and thus to facilitate the process of 'ethnic cleansing'. It has reflected on several occasions, then, a will of the perpetrators to 'colonize' their victims (Vulliamy 1994, p. 199). What is certain is that rape has very often acquired an ethnic

dimension in a conflict in which the logic of ethnic division has subsumed most discourses and practices.<sup>8</sup>

My concern in the rest of this paper is to suggest some ways of critically analysing the systematic rape and violation of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina by reading them in terms of the nationalist mythologies projected by each of the sides involved in the conflict. In particular, I am concerned to map the national genealogies these mythologies express, and to specify the place Bosnian Muslims occupy within them.

### **Biology, Culture and Gender in the Genealogies of South Slav Societies**

Like most nationalist narratives, South Slav genealogies are premised on a volatile mixture of notions of biological and cultural continuity of the various South-Slav nations. Serb and Croat nationalists in particular have consistently competed in their attempts to project their respective nations to remote historical periods in which alleged precursors of the contemporary nation-states of Serbia and Croatia dominated the region. This desperate search in history for a justification for the pursuit of a Greater Serbia or a Greater Croatia has invariably involved claims on Bosnia-Herzegovina and its inhabitants. Indeed, the turbulent history of the regions of former Yugoslavia, characterized by a succession of conquest wars, successive migratory flows, national liberation wars and relatively recently established nation-states, has been conducive to such attempts. All this has contributed to the formulation of nationalist narratives in which reclaiming the past and restoring historical justice (including reclaiming Bosnia and, possibly, the Bosnian Muslims) occupied a significant position.

These elements of South Slav nationalist discourse have been central in rituals of national regeneration throughout the republics of former Yugoslavia, but they were present especially in Serbia during the 1980s. After 1987, the Serbian regime sanctioned and the Serbian-Orthodox Church organized two sets of 'national' rituals: mass baptisms of Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo Polje, and the 'procession' of the alleged remnants of Prince Lazar through Serb-populated villages and monasteries from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to Kosovo Polje (1988–89) where they were eventually reinterred after a funeral ceremony. The return of the 'heroic' prince to the place where the Serbs had been defeated by the Turks and where Lazar lost his life was represented as the completion of a full circle, as a 'new beginning'. Both rituals constituted a symbolic confirmation of the will of the Serb nation to restore and reclaim its 'dignity' and 'rights' that, according to Serbian nationalists, had been undermined by successive conquerors of the area and former Yugoslavia. The mass baptisms of Serbs in Kosovo as well as the return of Prince Lazar's relics to Kosovo in fact constituted meaning-creating or, more precisely, nation-instituting rituals. The former were effectively pilgrimages whereas the latter had an effect somewhat similar to those that Turner associates with pilgrimage (1974; also Anderson, 1983, p. 56). Unlike pilgrimages, however, in this case it was not travelling to, or coexistence at, a given sacred or administrative centre that constituted the main meaning-creating experience. It was the route of the procession that demarcated the 'territories of the Serbian nation' and brought together Serbs from Serbia proper and those areas within different republics and

provinces of former Yugoslavia. An important aspect of both types of ritual is their emphasis on 'cultural regeneration'. However, the centrality of Prince Lazar's remains (bones) in the latter ritual affirms the cultural/spiritual as well as physical/biological endurance of the national community, for, in the Christian-Orthodox tradition, relics of saintly figures — and Prince Lazar is considered to be such a figure — have spiritual value. This coexistence of the material and the spiritual, of biological and cultural continuity, has been common in Serbian nationalist discourse.

The link between biology and culture, with greater emphasis on the former, has also been present in family genealogies. Recently, a member of the former Yugoslavian and Serbian Karadzeordzevic dynasty, Prince Tomislav, emphasized the resemblance between his grandson and King Petar of Yugoslavia, pointing out the persistence of (presumably Serbian as well as royal) genes throughout the generations despite the (ethnically) mixed marriages in the royal family. Radovan Karadzic, the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, also stressed the importance of biological continuity and the patriline by pointing to facial characteristics shared by himself, his son, and his alleged ancestor Vuk Karadzic (1787–1864), an eminent Serbian intellectual, language reformer and national ideologist.<sup>9</sup> In both cases, biological continuity among the male members of the family is stressed in order to reinforce arguments of cultural continuity — belonging to the Serbian nation (interestingly linked to the patriline) — and to legitimize the political ambitions of contemporary political personalities.

Just as in family genealogies, the notions of cultural and biological continuity have been central in definitions of national communities and have played a significant role in the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bosnia-Herzegovina is a region of former Yugoslavia where the three majority ethnic groups (Muslims, Serbs, Croats) had coexisted in relative harmony for long periods. However, the relative stability of the region and the tradition of coexistence of different national and denominational communities have been dependent, at least partly, upon the existence of outside 'stabilizing' factors. The Ottoman and Habsburg empires and, in the twentieth century, the two Yugoslav states managed to an extent to sustain and encourage a tradition of tolerance (Schoup, 1995). Whenever these external stabilizing forces waned, however, national rivalries emerged, encouraged by the nationalists among the two major national groups of the region, the Serbs and the Croats. As mentioned in the previous pages, both national cultures have nurtured myths of national loss to justify their respective nationalistic claims over Bosnia. According to extremist but not unpopular variants of Croatian nationalism, Bosnia-Herzegovina is Croatian territory and its Muslim community is essentially Croat, its adherence to Islam and its particular culture being merely the legacy of Ottoman occupation of the region.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, according to their Serbian counterparts, Bosnian (and Sandzak) Muslims are merely Serbs who chose to convert to Islam during the Ottoman era.<sup>11</sup> However, Croatian and Serbian nationalisms are premised also on an apparently contradictory definition of Bosnian Muslims as alien, both culturally and biologically. They are regarded as (and in Serbian popular discourse often called) Turks, that is, alien, conquerors of the Croatian or Serbian homeland.

It should be emphasized at this point that the apparent mutual incompatibility of these contradictory definitions is often neutralized in practice, or suppressed through their inclusion in a chain of equivalent elements in nationalist discourse. In the case of Serbian nationalism upon which I primarily focus here, 'being an islamized Serb' and 'being a Turk' are equivalent definitions in terms of their irreconcilable opposition to the Serbian nation.<sup>12</sup> This, I believe, is very important. It provides a double 'justification' for the ferocity of Serb nationalists against Bosnian Muslims. The latter are seen first as external enemies, totally foreign to the national 'body' and, therefore, conquerors or usurpers of what is 'rightfully' Serbian territory and, second, as traitors who committed the ultimate treason for they chose not to suffer like their Orthodox brethren by renouncing their Serbian culture and converting to Islam. Among the multiple antagonistic relations upon which contemporary Serbian nationalist discourse is premised, this contradictory representation of Muslims occupies a significant position. One of the *raison d'être* of Serbian nationalism is the 'rectification of historical injustice'. This injustice is perceived in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina as either the presence of foreigners (Turks) on Serbian soil, or the commission of treason by members of the Serb nation (islamized Serbs), or both. These definitions and their associated attitudes were reflected in the contemporary versions of Serbian 'folk epic' songs devised by soldiers of the irregular Serb militias or of the 'regular' Bosnian Serb army, often with the encouragement of their leadership.<sup>13</sup> The stated objective of the war in these songs is clearly cultural conquest — baptism — of the Bosnian Muslims, thus indicating an implicit recognition of the 'essentially' Serbian nature of Bosnian Muslims or, at least, of the possibility of their becoming part of Serbdom. It should be stressed that, according to these folk singers, this conquest is often seen as a conquest of women. One verse from an epic song perfectly exemplified this: 'Turkish daughter our monks will soon baptize you'.

According to the 'folk-song', war is not merely an exclusively male business. Indeed, whereas it is implied that 'Turkish' men are to die in battle, the 'Turkish' nation will be eradicated through the conversion of Turkish daughters. Women here are not merely civilian victims of the war, accidental casualties of hostilities as they are usually represented, but also direct victims, enemies whose soul at least is to be captured or reclaimed.

However, throughout the war, there has been no evidence of Serbs proselytizing, or of Muslims willing to be baptized. Clearly, conversion had never been an option in the conflict; rather, it was a threat or invitation that was never intended to materialize. However, if the soul cannot be conquered, the body certainly can be. The interchangeability of the notions of ethnicity and race, of culture and biology in the popular imagination, seems to be an important dimension of the Serbian (and more generally South Slav) nationalist/populist imaginary. In the 'battleground', therefore, Muslims, having served as a legitimizing factor in Serbian claims of land by being recognized as 'islamized' Serbs, are confronted as Turks, as aliens, and therefore as foreign bodies of foreign blood. This representation of the Muslim as alien is irreconcilable with the solution of conversion, as it is not souls that Serbian nationalism is intending to control. It is a nationalism of the blood, and as such it is primarily premised

on the (re)construction of a community of blood ties. Serbian moral regeneration presupposes the existence of such a community.

It is at this point, I believe, that the use of rape in the conflict in former Yugoslavia can be partly understood. There is no doubt that rape and sexual violation of women during armed conflict is not an uncommon phenomenon, and it is by no means an exclusive characteristic of the Bosnian conflict. Anecdotal and fragmented testimonies and evidence indicate that rape and sexual violation have been linked to and legitimized on some occasions by nationalist 'mythologies' and despite considerably diverse estimates, it is clear that rape and sexual assault have been widespread practices in the war. It is also quite possible that the stigma associated with rape and the fear of social rejection has contributed to under-reporting such incidents. The attitude of some leaders of the communities affected by the armed conflict in Bosnia is indicative of the social pressures and additional victimization of the women subjected to sexual assault and rape during the war. It is not unrepresentative. Dr Izet Aganović, president of the Red Crescent in Croatia (and this attitude is by no means exclusive to the Muslim side), commenting on requests from North African men to marry Bosnian rape victims, characterized these men as 'forgiving' (*The Guardian*, 2 August 1993, p. 10).

As mentioned in the previous pages, apart from the association of the practice of rape with the perpetrators' felt need to assert their dominance over their female victims, or to attain mere gratification, rape also has been linked closely to two aims: to the intent to humiliate or terrorize, and thus to facilitate, the process of 'ethnic cleansing'; and to the desire of the perpetrators to 'colonize' the enemy nation by impregnating 'his women'. Indeed, Serbian perpetrators of rape have been reported to have told their victims to 'go and deliver fighting Serbs' (Vulliamy, 1994, p. 199). There is evidence also of the existence of detention sites run by all sides in the conflict (the UN has identified a Serbian site in Dobož, a Croatian one in Dretelj/Capljina and a Muslim one in Celebici/Konjic). In each case, the perpetrators of rape and sexual assault have stated that their aim was to impregnate the women detained, and impregnated women have been detained until it was too late for a termination of the pregnancy (UN Committee of Experts Report, Annex IX, pp. 9–10). In the first case, the 'objective' of 'producing Serbs' is expressly stated, while for Croats and Muslims it is at least implied, although it is possible that a subsidiary objective might be the disruption of kinship ties among members of the enemy nation. It is quite clear, however, that, as in the Serbian family genealogies examined in the previous pages, the nation is identified by perpetrators of rape with the patriline. By being asked to 'deliver fighting Serbs', Muslim women are reduced to mere vessels, instruments for the reproduction of the nation-as-patriline, as their offspring is not only going to be a 'Serb' (in the biological sense) but also 'a fighting Serb' (in a way, Serb in the cultural sense). It follows quite clearly that according to the perpetrators of rape — and possibly in the nationalist imaginary of South-Slav societies, the nation is reproduced through its male members. Even the biological/genetic contribution of women is not recognized as significant.

This objectification and marginalization of women have been demonstrated by anthropological research on the pastoralist cultures of the rural and mountainous areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia from which most of the Serb, Croat, and Muslim irregulars and the majority of their leadership originate. These are the areas of the Balkans in which the current conflict is centred. In his study of gender among the pastoral populations of the Balkans, Denitch, indicating the marginalization of women in kinship groups and in the cultural life of the community, suggested that

the formal structures in all these societies are based exclusively upon relations among male kinsmen. The only enduring social units are formed through the male descent line, and women are exchanged among these units to procreate future generations of males, leaving no enduring marks of their own existence in terms of the formal structure. Such systems can be diagrammed neatly without any women at all: women serve merely as links between fathers and sons and between male in-laws. (1974, p. 246)

It is obvious, therefore, that in accordance with Balkan pastoralist cultures women are not significant components of the nation. Indeed, the decisive element of the nation is male stock.<sup>14</sup> Thus rape, perceived as an act of 'fertilization' of women, is considered an acceptable way of rectifying historical injustice, the loss of contested lands, and the sacrifices of each of the warring ethnic communities. Land and history, therefore, can be and are conquered over women's bodies. In addition, forcing the women to give birth to children conceived under these conditions constitutes a means of contaminating the enemy nation in a number of ways: biologically and culturally, as the children would be deemed to be alien to the national community, and psychologically, as they might contribute to the disruption of the relations between family members. To return to Denitch once more, in Balkan pastoral societies

[o]nly as the mother of sons does a wife secure a place in the group, bound to it through a blood tie. The most essential function of women is, obviously, to serve as bearers of sons for the patriline. The fate of barren women is indicative, as they remain isolated within the group, unable to forge blood ties with it. (p. 251)

In the contemporary conflict, forcibly impregnated women are in a sense claimed by the ethnic community of their rapists; their ties with their own community are disrupted as the ethnic community is often seen as an extension of the kinship group.

Needless to say, these points constitute merely cursory elements of a tentative exploration of the link between nationalist/populist mythologies and practices and the use of rape in the conflicts of former Yugoslavia. They can offer only partial explanation of how the practice of rape might acquire specific meanings within the universe of nationalist discourse and they are not intended to play down the aspects of rape and sexual assault related to the assertion of male dominance and power over women.<sup>15</sup> I argue, however, that we should focus on the specific articulation of gender and ethnicity in the imaginary of



those involved in the conflict in former Yugoslavia in order to achieve a better understanding of its dynamics.

### **In Lieu of a Conclusion**

The common argument regarding the situation in former Yugoslavia is that the national recognition and sovereignty emphasized by most of the protagonists in the conflict led to the recognition of what we can call 'national' rights and their prioritization over citizenship rights. Nevertheless, the consequences of the conflict have been far more important. The conflict has reduced women to virtual non-existence, and subjected them to humiliation and physical and mental violation.

The significance of fertility, of the capacity to bear children, is obvious, in folk culture, in social policy-related debates, and in some of the discourses and practices of the combatants in former Yugoslavia; I have pointed out throughout this paper that the main way women can be incorporated into the national community is through their prescribed role as its actual or potential reproducers. The predominant representation of women during the ethnic conflict has been as biological reproducer of the nation. Women's biological role of motherhood has been central in the state national projects, and their violation has often been perpetrated in the name of reproducing the national community.

It is important to remember that what is demonstrated in the Yugoslav conflict is not merely the failure of citizenship but the reinforcement of the conclusion that violent forms of masculinist and populist prejudice have been present in the daily relationships between men and women in one of the 'most progressive of state-socialist societies'.

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### **Notes**

1. In his analysis of the making of the English working class — although one could argue that the object of study is the emergence of the 'English people' — E. P. Thompson (1963) focuses on these processes.
2. This is clear in the context of the ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia: this absolute binary division operates in everyday political life (see Sofos forthcoming) as well as in the practice of *ethnic cleansing* (with all the connotations of 'purification' with which this term is invested).
3. Indeed, western feminists have initiated a debate regarding the victimization of women in the Bosnian conflict, a central theme of which is the exploration of how exotic the forms of masculinist violence used in Bosnia really are. See Bennett, 1993.
4. Forms of extra-institutional politics included the emergence of 'street democracy' (*ulicna demokracija*) in Serbian and Montenegrin politics and the 'Meetings of Truth' organized all over Yugoslavia by Serbs to 'enlighten'

fellow Yugoslavs regarding the positions of Serbia and its leadership. These constituted 'extra-institutional' rituals through which the regime claimed legitimacy, and on the basis of which the identity and unity of the nationalist-populist movement was forged. In this way also a 'plebiscitary' form of legitimation was established, parallel to that associated with the representative institutions of the socialist and post-socialist period, and it reinforced the 'charismatic' authority of Milošević. The 'direct', 'plain' and 'popular' language used in these events very often reflected the predominant masculinist themes outlined above. For a more extensive discussion, see Sofos (forthcoming).

5. For more on the notion of 'moral panic', see Cohen (1974).
6. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose seeing deterritorialization as a movement or 'line of flight'. At the level of signification, they argue, 'the signifying regime certainly attains a high level of D[eterritorialization]; but because it simultaneously sets up a whole system of reterritorializations on the signified, and on the signifier itself, it blocks the line of flight' (p. 508). I would argue that in the case of rape the 'line of flight' is not blocked entirely, allowing for a limited reterritorialization that amounts effectively to a substantial redefinition of rape outlined in this section of the article.
7. Prominent western feminists virtually dismissed the ethnic dimensions of rape in the conflict in former Yugoslavia. For a representative sample of the relevant debate, see Bennett (1993).
8. Instances of this process are present in most former Yugoslav republics and provinces. In addition to the 'ethnicization' of rape in the cases of Kosovo and Serbia outlined above, in Croatia, following media reports of systematic rape in Bosnia, the rape of Croatian women was represented as the rape of Croatia itself.
9. Both claims of continuity were made in Paul Pawlikowski's *Serbian Epics*, a BBC2 *Bookmark* programme.
10. This argument is maintained even today by prominent mainstream Croat politicians such as the current president of the Republic, Franjo Tuđman. Tuđman has repeatedly expressed his vision of 'restoring the sovereignty of Croatia within its historical borders'. By this he implies the Greater Croatia of the Independent State of Croatia established by the German occupation forces during the Second World War which encompassed most of Bosnia-Herzegovina. On this assumption Bosnian Muslims are considered to be Croats of 'Muslim faith'.
11. In *The Mountain of Wrath*, a classic text in Serbian nationalist literature, Bishop Petar Njegoš calls for the punishment of the Bosnian 'converts to Islam'.
12. On the notion of equivalence, see Laclau and Mouffe (1985, pp. 127–34).

13. The Bosnian Serb leadership even resorted to audio- and video-recording and disseminating these 'folk-songs' among its troops. For aspects of masculinism in these songs, see Luković (1992).
14. A similar conclusion is reached by the anthropologist Delaney in her study of gender in Turkish rural society (1991). Delaney effectively argues that, in the Turkish village community cosmology, it is the 'seed' of the male members of the community that determines and guarantees its continuity. The influence the Ottoman empire has had in the Balkans, and the existence of Turkish minorities in the territory of former Yugoslavia, provide some tentative indications that Delaney's remark is somewhat relevant to my argument. I am indebted to Dr Peter Loizos for pointing out Delaney's work to me.
15. I would indeed argue that the analysis of rape in the context of the conflict in former Yugoslavia should also take into account a number of additional factors, such as gender power relations and the interrelations between regular soldiers and irregular fighters in the battlefield. I cannot elaborate on these dynamics in the limited space of this paper; for an examination of these factors, see Sofos, 'Populism, Solidarity and Masculinity: Constructions of Identity in Ethnic Conflict', unpublished paper.

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