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“Woman” in the Service of National Identity

by Julie Mertus

INTRODUCTION

Close your eyes and imagine a woman from ex-Yugoslavia. What does she look like? Is she haggard, hollow-eyed, despondent, babushka-clad with baby in tow, lugging water, dodging bullets in the streets of Sarajevo, weeping uncontrollably over the death of her son/husband/father/child, consoled by a kindly old gentleman?

We all know what the women of ex-Yugoslavia look like because CNN tells us so.

Yet women hold prominent posts in nearly every nongovernmental organization in the ex-Yugoslavia — from peace organizations, to human rights groups, to pro-intervention groups. Although this phenomenon holds true around the world, the presence of women in ex-Yugoslavia is particularly pronounced. After all, so many of the men are fighting, dead, subsisting in concentration camps and/or drunk, dazed and confused.

Where are the pictures of the women of the ex-Yugoslavia as lawyers, doctors, academics, journalists, leaders? When in the ex-Yugoslavia, I run

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2. “Yugoslav” and “Yugoslavia” refer to the self-proclaimed Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the union of Serbia (including the provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo) and Montenegro. Although claiming successor status to the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has not been officially recognized as a successor state. Still, the current Yugoslavian state’s declaration that it wishes to be recognized as a successor state implies that it is willing to accede to international agreements to which the former Yugoslavia was a party. For a general statement on the duties of successor states, see RESTATEMENT OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES § 208 (1986).

3. A major exception is an article about women soldiers by Chuck Sudetic, In Sarajevo, War Also Means Battles of the Sexes, N.Y. TIMES, June 6, 1993, §1, at 12.
into women activists at every turn. Why can't journalists seem to find them?

Maybe journalists are just lazy; perhaps they simply regurgitate what the state feeds them. Maybe they try to write stories about women activists, but their editors instead plaster stories of women victims across their front pages to increase circulation. Headlines screaming "Rape/Death Camps" sell papers;\(^4\) headlines announcing "Women Organize for Themselves" are thought to turn readers away. Journalists soon learn the formula to creating a "good story:" exploit differences, ignore similarities, and sensationalize the plight of victims.

Regardless of the ultimate intentions of journalists and editors, their myopic focus on victims ultimately harms women.\(^5\) By excluding images of women as activists, the media conspires with other power brokers who seek to use real and imagined "Woman" to suit their own needs. In particular, journalists play into the hand of nationalists who eagerly use this mythical Woman to build and empower their own nation. In the context of the conflict in ex-Yugoslavia, this essay examines the use of women by nation builders and the crucial role of the media in the process.

I. A WORD ON TERMINOLOGY AND THE LIMITATIONS OF THIS DISCUSSION

Any discussion of nation building should recognize that there are many nations and no single privileged narrative of either "nation" or "nationalism."\(^6\) A discussion of the process of defining nation and nationalisms must be left to a longer text, but suffice it to say, "nationalism is neither inherently reactionary nor inherently progressive."\(^7\) Rather, like gender:

\(^4\) See, e.g., Ms., July/Aug. 1993 (announcing Catherine MacKinnon's story on "Rape/Death Camps" with a blaring headline encompassing the entire front cover, gasping "Exclusive," and using red lettering for the word "Death," designed apparently to look like blood).


N]ationality is a relational term whose identity derives from its inherence in a system of differences. In the same way that 'man' and 'woman' define themselves reciprocally (though never symmetrically), national identity is determined not on the basis of its own intrinsic properties but as a function of what it (presumably) is not.8

“Nationalism can only be analyzed concretely, on the basis of a specific historical, social and political situation.”9 Nevertheless, while recognizing that no essential attributes of nationalism exist across all cultures and over all time, general characteristics of nation building can be identified.

In a circular fashion, commentators frequently point to a composite of fundamental aspects of national identity which purportedly define the nation itself. The trick lies in determining which aspects of identity are fundamental. For Anthony Smith, a “nation is a named human population, sharing historical territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.”10 Ernest Gellner recognizes a somewhat different combination of aspects of identity which can combine to tie a community of people into a nation: language, religion, history, territory, cultural practices, values, historical myths and loyalties.11 On the other hand, Benedict Anderson steers clear of listing attributes of national identity, defining the nation instead as “an imagined political community” which is “inherently limited and sovereign.”12 To Anderson, “the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship” — in his words: a “fraternity.”13

Noticeably absent in these and other commonly proposed definitions of nation is the recognition that all of the proposed aspects of national identity are gendered14 — i.e., that there is a gender component to everything from
the creation and perpetuation of shared myths to the establishment of common boundaries, to Anderson’s imagined fraternity. Furthermore, wholly apart from lists of attributes, gender itself plays a crucial role in the defining of a nation. Women, for example, provide the blood-line that determines citizenship in many nations. In the national folklore of most nations women are the procreators, the symbol of the motherland, the political victims, and not the political actors.

This essay examines the role that representations of women play in a particular kind of engendered nationalisms — engendered nationalisms imposed in haste and by force. It does not deal with engendered nationalisms as lived cultural identities, nor as identities that unfold gradually over time. And, to the extent that identities can be "chosen" by the Powerless (for example, as survival mechanisms), this essay does not address chosen identities, but those prescribed from above by the Powerful. In other words, this essay is concerned about "state nationalism," not so-called "nationalism from below."

15. For example, when Anthony Smith recognizes that the "myths and memories" of the "dominant ethnic" help create the "presumed boundaries" of the nation, he fails to note both that the process is a gendered one and that the myths may also contain a substantive gender component. Smith, supra note 10, at 14.


17. Some have also argued that nationalism is an "incurable phenomena," a "universal characteristic of social life." See Pešić, supra note 9, at 53; Michael Walzer, The New Tribalism, Dissent, Spring 1992, at 164.


19. Use of the term "choice" is always problematic when those in power manipulate the conditions under which decisions are made to such an extent that no range of choices is truly "free." However, use of the word "choice" is important as it recognizes when people are not only the subject but also the agent of their lives, thus granting them the dignity of rising out of the "victim" status.

For example, in constructing their path of resistance to virulent Serbian nationalism which feeds on oppression of all non-Serbs but particularly that of Albanians, the Albanians of Kosovo have cultivated a unique Kosovar Albanian identity which serves both as a mechanism for survival and a force that unites them against a greater power. This identity, which places a premium on "dignity," "solidarity," "self-education," the cultivation of safe "private spaces," and "self control," resembles yet is distinct from that of Albanians living elsewhere. At the same time, the identity of Kosovian Albanians differs from that of others who are oppressed elsewhere in the Balkans, such as the Muslims of Bosnia. Unlike the instant, deadly force used against Muslims in Bosnia, the suffocating tactics employed against the Kosovian Albanians have given them time to choose tools for resistance and to create a society rooted in a strategy for resisting oppression. See Julie Mertus & Vlatka Mihalic, Open Wounds: Human Rights Abuses in Kosovo (1994). (These observations come from a larger work in progress by the author.)

20. See Andjelka Milić, Women and Nationalism in the Former Yugoslavia, in Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union 109, 110 (Nanette Funk & Magda Mueller eds., 1993) [hereinafter Funk &
The women of Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Slovenia, Macedonia... Mars... could decide on their own components of national identity. They could call themselves whatever they want — the "nation of women," the "nation of Bosnian women," the "nation of Balkan women," the "nation of Yugoslav women" (defined in whatever terms they choose), etc. They can act consciously in defining themselves or, through their actions and reactions, they can unfold their list of attributes of national identity gradually, as a form of resistance. No matter what approach women take, they, like other disempowered groups, will not be seen by those in power to present a legitimate alternative national identity. For example, as Julie Mostov has noted,

A person of Serbian "descent" who rejects the national identity crafted by the leaders of the Serbian community and wishes to participate in politics as an individual or through a civic party or broad coalition, does not present an alternative Serbian or civic identity. She is merely a traitor to the nation, characterized in the media as a self-hater or collaborator with the enemy.21

Many people in the former Yugoslavia — men and women alike — have indeed rejected their government’s vision of their national identity.22 Some have held steadfast to a vision of a Yugoslavian national identity, others have put forth another alternative national identity (such as a multi-ethnic Bosnian, Croatian, or Serbian identity) and still others have rejected the notion of national identity altogether.23 Feminist and anti-war groups

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22. For a discussion of such groups in Croatia, see JULIE MERTUS & RACHAEL PINE, MEETING THE HEALTH NEEDS OF WOMEN SURVIVORS OF THE BALKAN CONFLICT (1993) (report available through The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, 120 Wall Street, New York, NY 10005). A short list of such groups in Serbia includes the following: Women in Black, the Belgrade Women’s Center, Arkadia (gay and lesbian group), SOS Rape Crisis Center for Women, SOS Rape Crisis Center for Girls, the Humanitarian Law Fund (independent human rights law group), Civic Forum, Belgrade Circle, the Belgrade Anti-War Center. (Source: authors’ own work with such organizations). See also Jill Benderly, *Bosnia: No Place to Hide — No Place to Run: The Balkanization of Women's Bodies*, *On the Issues*, Summer 1993, at 40, 42 (listing women’s groups active on the issue of rape in war); C. Carr, *Battle Scars: Feminism and Nationalism Clash in the Balkans*, *The Village Voice*, July 13, 1993, at 25 (discussing nationalist conflicts among women’s groups in the Balkans.)

23. Observation from author's contacts with women from throughout the former Yugoslavia.
in particular have made an effort “not to slip into [the] trap of historical inclusion” in nationalism.24 While not discounting these extremely important forms of rebellion and resistance, this essay focuses solely on the Powerful’s use of women in the building of national identity.

II. BUILDING NATIONAL IDENTITIES: GENERAL ELEMENTS

A primary task of nationalists is building the national identity. If a society were homogeneous — sharing a common language, culture, history and tradition — the task would be easy. But no society is perfectly homogeneous. Thus, a sorting process must occur to establish who is inside and who is outside the nation. This task of convincing people that they “naturally” lie inside or outside a nation becomes a particularly difficult one when discrete, homogeneous groupings are not easily identifiable — due to intermarriage and changing boundaries, for example.

Given their multi-ethnic composition25 and history of changing borders, the quest for nationhood by communities of the former Yugoslavia “requires both an integrative process of ‘nation-building’ and an authenticating process establishing the ‘natural’ or ancient roots of the national community.”26

Where history exists already, national leaders exploit and manipulate its telling; where history doesn’t suffice, nation builders turn to myth and outright lies. As Yael Tamir has noted, there is a “compulsive tendency to ‘go back’ to the ancestral origins of new nations, clinging to even the faintest evidence of historical continuity and supporting blatantly false claims in order to ‘prove’ that the nation’s roots lie in the distant past . . .”27


25. Only Slovenia has a practically homogeneous population. Before the war, governmental statistics found that non-Croats accounted for 23% of the population in Croatia; non-Serbs 36% of the population in Serbia. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Muslims accounted for 43.7%, Serbs 31.3%, and Croats 17.3% of the population. Pešić, *supra* note 9, at 39 n.3.

26. Mostov, *supra* note 21, at 33. Mostov makes this observation with regard to Eastern Europe in general.

27. Yael Tamir, *The Right to National Self-Determination*, 58 SOC. RES., 565, 572 (Fall 1991, No. 3). *See also* Hedva Ben-Israel, *Nationalism in Historical Perspective*, 45 J. INT’L AFF. 391 (Winter 1992) (“Such concepts as the shame of assimilation, the glory of national sacrifice, the continuity of heroic lives and the everlasting value of ‘authentic’ cultural treasures are the stock-in-trade of nationalist vocabulary . . . the folklore is mined, the archives are raided and feelings are stirred — to build up the emotional ecstasy and ethnic cohesiveness . . .”).
In war time, national folklorism gains added importance. Ivan Čolović has observed that in sending their people off to war, leaders achieve "a collective symbolic integration" by the strategy of "war-propaganda mythologism" (myth-making). He explains:

This time, the trick is to present the war as something eternal, that is, to transfer the conflict from the sphere of politics, economics, and history to the otherworldly sphere of myth. For the Serbs, the war in Croatia is but another episode in the eternal battle against their mythical enemies.

Integral to the fantasy of forced national unity, in war or peace, is the process of essentializing difference:

In [the nation], differences are assimilated, destroyed, or assigned to ghettos, to enclaves demarcated by boundaries so sharp that they enable the nation to acknowledge the apparently singular and clearly fenced-off differences within itself, while simultaneously reaffirming the privileged homogeneity of the rest, as well as the difference between itself and what lies over its frontiers.

The underbelly of nationalisms imposed from above achieves identification by creating and crushing an "oppositional other" — an essentialized "Other" defined by its very difference to oneself.

It is through this process of creating an Other, Edward Said observes, that one comes to think of oneself as "not-foreign." When the line between the members of the nation and the Other is in fact a blurry one (such as when there are mixed marriages, desegregated communities, varied migration patterns, and common languages and traditions — as in Bosnia, for example), nation builders take extra pain to create threatening differences. In this case, the "Other" becomes "The Enemy."

While all leaders in the former Yugoslavia have employed this process, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević is a particularly brilliant

29. Id.
32. EDWARD W. SAID, ORIENTALISM 54 (1978).
33. Although less skillfully, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman responded with his own selective presentations of myth and history. Several commentators have remarked that Yugoslavia switched gears from communism to nationalism with remarkable speed. Andjelka Milić explains this phenomenon as follows:

Although unexpected, the switch to nationalism by former communist parties seems logical because the distance between the communist collectivist ideology, based on such concepts as "the working class," "the class interest," and "the class enemy," and the nationalist collective ideology, based on such concepts as
master at the game. In order to justify his power play in Yugoslavia, Milošević created an enemy large enough to turn neighbor against neighbor. Only an enemy that was powerful enough to endanger Serbian security and hegemony would justify the use of violence. Only an enemy that was dehumanized and "evil" would galvanize the Serbian people to take up arms in defense of themselves. Croats and Muslims were conveniently at hand. Painting all Croats as reincarnations of supporters of the Ustaša Nazi state, and Muslims as loyal descendants of the Ottoman Turks who subjugated Serbs for 500 years, Milošević manipulated history to justify the use of force in the name of protecting all Serbian people.

Milošević has also distorted history and perpetuated myths in order to justify use of force against the Albanians of Kosovo, the tension-filled southern province of Serbia. Milošević rose to power by exploiting anti-Albanian sentiment among Serbs, promising to protect Serbs living in Kosovo from "Albanian terrorists," and to regain control of what has long been seen as the cradle of Serbian civilization — the sacred land of Kosovo. True to his word, in 1990 Milošević introduced constitutional amendments that stripped Kosovo of its autonomous status and rendered it subservient to Belgrade. Now, with the world's attention diverted by the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbian authorities feel free to act with impunity in Kosovo, intensifying their campaign of forced displacement, harassment, arrest, and torture of Kosovian Albanians. See MERTUS & MIHALIC, supra note 19; see also HELSINKI WATCH, HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN KOSOVO (October 1992).

Milosevic and other nationalists, both in Serbia and elsewhere in the region, have used real and imagined images of Woman in three steps of nation building: constructing, tearing down, and consolidating national identities. And, to a large extent, through their images and stories, local"nation," "the national interest," and "the national enemy" is much shorter than the distance between communism and democracy.

Milić, supra note 20, at 110. I'll note that I'm not in complete agreement with Milić on this characterization, but a full discussion is left to a later day.

34. I take as my premise that at the onset of the most recent Balkanian conflict the struggle for power was paramount: the exploitation of ethnic hatred subsidiary, the fuel, the aftereffect, but not in and of itself the cause of the conflict. While there is considerable disagreement on this issue, many commentators with a knowledge of relevant history support this thesis. See, e.g., BRANKA MAGAŠ, THE DESTRUCTION OF YUGOSLAVIA: TRACKING THE BREAK-UP 1980-92 159-238 (1993).

35. True to his word, in 1990 Milošević introduced constitutional amendments that stripped Kosovo of its autonomous status and rendered it subservient to Belgrade. Now, with the world's attention diverted by the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbian authorities feel free to act with impunity in Kosovo, intensifying their campaign of forced displacement, harassment, arrest, and torture of Kosovian Albanians. See MERTUS & MIHALIC, supra note 19; see also HELSINKI WATCH, HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN KOSOVO (October 1992).

36. A report of the CSCE Human Rights Rapporteur Mission to Yugoslavia noted in 1992:

The increase in nationalism has also led to a war in the media in particular in Serbia and Croatia. Facts are distorted, data falsified and sometimes atrocities invented in order to contribute to the atmosphere of mutual hatred. Neither the Government of Serbia nor that of Croatia seem to do anything to stop this incitement to ethnic hatred. This kind of nationalistic propaganda has also a
and international journalists have perpetuated this instrumental use of women. The following sections provide examples of each step of the use of women in nation-building, all in the context of ex-Yugoslavia.

III. THE USE OF WOMEN IN SERVICE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Essentialist views of "Woman" have been particularly useful in creating and perpetuating the oppositional imagination of the nation, both in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere. Nationalists use the fantasy of the essentialized Woman — either "Our Woman" or "Enemy Woman" — in a particular, engendered manner. As Zillah Eisenstein has observed:

Woman is not constructed as 'foreigner' in the same way as the status of other 'others' are. Her otherness is constructed differently. Women construct the very meaning of 'otherness' while never being identified as 'the' other. They represent the unnamed, the absence, in order to name the 'other' others.

Nationalists name women, but not for what they are and, thus, "[t]he nationalizing of identity makes woman visible while ascribing invisibility to her." In the context of ex-Yugoslavia, the state-controlled media pumps out carefully drafted images of women that render real women's problems and interests invisible. Slavenka Drakulić notes that in the Croatian media:

negative effect on individual freedom. Anybody who does not agree with the national majority is disciplined by his colleagues and his superiors; any attempt toward moderation is looked at with suspicion.


37. These observations on the use of women to build national identity apply generally across cultures and continents and throughout time. For an expanded discussion of the use of women to build nations in other contexts, see generally FLOYA ANTHAS & NIRA YUVAL-DAVIS, WOMAN, NATION, STATE (1989); McClintock, supra note 14, at 105; KUMARI JAYAWARDENA, FEMINISM AND NATIONALISM IN THE THIRD WORLD (1986).

38. See RENATA SALECL, THE SPOILS OF FREEDOM: PSYCHOANALYSIS AND FEMINISM AFTER THE FALL OF SOCIALISM (1994); Renata Salecl, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and Anti-Feminism in Eastern Europe, 57 NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE 51 (Fall 1992) (writing on a fantasy structure that supports ethnic hatred and propels nationalism).


40. Id.
Women are praised in the media as mothers, but there are no articles or discussions about the facts that they form the largest percentage of the unemployed, that they are underpaid, and that they are in a very difficult position if they are single mothers. Women's problems, such as the feminization of poverty, are not "interesting" to the new government. Belgrade feminist Daša Duhaček similarly observes that the media in Serbia leapt at the chance to cover the 1990 demonstrations purportedly organized by a group called "Women's Movement for Yugoslavia." This group boasted pictures of Milošević as a defender of peace under the slogan "Yugoslavia, peace, and bread." But when demonstrations were organized against the war by Women in Black and other groups, the media spouted critical articles at first and then quickly lost interest.

Since women belong to all nations but at no time define a single nation, they "are inside/outside nations in a very particular way." Women hold a unique position in engendered nationalist discourse, a place which is never wholly on either the inside or outside of the nation. Straddling the border, Woman becomes the border. As explained below, nationalists readily use the real and imagined Woman in constructing the border between self and "other," in tearing down the other's identity, and in consolidating and perpetrating the boundaries of national identity.

A. "WOMAN" USED TO CONSTRUCT A NATIONAL IDENTITY

"Our Woman" serves a three-fold role in constructing the borders of national identity. First, Woman is seen as the bearer of future members of the nation and, second, as the caretaker of the "Family," Woman is viewed as integral to reproducing the ideological constructs of the nation by transmitting its culture to new generations.

42. Duhaček, supra note 24, at 134.
43. Observation based on reading the press in Belgrade and on interviews with women groups in Belgrade in 1993 and 1994.
44. Eisenstein, supra note 39, at 5. Eisenstein observes that women "are never spoken of like 'the' Jew, or 'the' Black, or 'the' Roma, or 'the' foreigner." Id. I agree that while the image of "the" woman appears in nationalist discourse, it is in the context of a particular type of woman, i.e., a woman divided, further classified by ethnicity or nation. It is no accident, I suggest, that the fantasy of a "Woman's nation" has never taken hold. As Eisenstein acknowledges, "[t]here is a politics to 'seeing' especially when erasure and invisibility define one's presence." Id.
45. In Julie Kristeva's terms, women are "boundary subjects." JULIE KRISTEVA, NATIONS WITHOUT NATIONALISM 35 (1993).
46. This observation is taken directly from Anthias & Yuval-Davis, Introduction to WOMAN, NATION, STATE, supra note 37, at 7.
The emerging struggle over reproductive freedom in Croatia serves as a good illustration of the role of women in both regards.\(^{47}\) Reproductive freedom had been taken for granted in the former Yugoslavia.\(^{48}\) Now, however, as the newly emerging nations struggle to replenish themselves during wartime, a vocal and growing contingent of pro-life groups have emerged, particularly in Croatia, branding women who forgo their childbearing and childraising roles as "unpatriotic" or even "dangerous."\(^{49}\) The ruling Croatian party, HDZ, continually uses the concept of "fruitful virgin-mother" in public speeches addressing women as a group.\(^{50}\) The new constitutions of Slovenia and Croatia contain vague provisions that could be interpreted to deny women's right to abortion in order to protect a competing right to "life."\(^{51}\) In a similar vein, politicians in Zagreb have pushed a spate of "pro-family" legislative proposals that include, among other provisions, a formula for calculating pensions that accounts for time spent raising children.\(^{52}\)

Belgrade nationalists also exploit the vision of woman as mother and caretaker. Propaganda about large Albanian families, exploiting real and imagined fears about a Kosovo overpopulated by Albanians, has been used to encourage the "right women" — the Serbs — to have children and to dissuade the "wrong women" — the Albanians — to refrain from having children.\(^{53}\) Serbian lawmakers have fashioned drafts of laws on "population policy," "social care for children," and "labor relations" in a manner that encourages Serbian, not Albanian, women to stay at home and have children. Among their many provisions, the laws grant maternity leave based on an exponential formula, so that women are rewarded once they have a third child.\(^{54}\)

47. Note that this and other examples throughout the text are only one illustration. Many additional illustrations exist which are not mentioned here.
49. Observations drawn from attending hearings of pro-life groups in Zagreb in March-April, 1994.
50. Drakulić, supra note 41, at 123.
51. Article 21 of the Croatian Constitution states that "Every human being has the right to life." (Constitution on file with author.) For a discussion of the drafting process and the particular provisions problematic for women, see Drakulić, supra note 41, at 124.
52. Interestingly, some feminists and "anti-choice" activists have found themselves united in their opposition to such proposals — the feminists because the provisions may coerce women to stay at home with children, and the "anti-choice" activists because the proposals do not offer sufficient inducements for childrearing.
53. Milić, supra note 20, at 112-113. Some commentators have claimed that Serbs used "forced sterilization" programs and "population control" against the Kosovian Albanians. See, e.g., Bosnia: No Place to Hide - No Place to Run, supra note 22, at 41 ("Serbian lawmakers sought to enforce population control on Albanian women in Kosovo"). In my own research in Kosovo, I have not documented incidents of forced sterilization.
54. Milić, supra note 20, at 113.
A third role for women is that of a symbolic and emotional catalyst for the nation. As Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis have remarked, Woman serves as a “focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction, and transformation of ethnic/national categories.”55 Our Woman thus becomes the symbol of the nation, variably as: Mother, Protector, Warrior, Victim, Martyr, and Matriarch. “Unable to produce its own history in response to its [lack of] inner sense of identity, nationalist ideology sets up Woman as victim and goddess simultaneously.”56

Media accounts in the Balkans create a national romance with the plight of Woman, and these images of Woman are at times further perpetuated by government officials for their own political advantage. “When [journalists] find a woman who went through all the horrors [particularly of rape in war], they would like them to tell their stories in full, preferably with all of the details,” explains Jadranka, an Omarska concentration camp survivor now working on collecting evidence of war crimes.57 Nusreta, another volunteer (also a refugee herself) working with refugee women from Bosnia, remembers:

While I was working for Camp Resnik, journalists and TV crews kept coming and asking, “Are there any raped women here?” You know, we cannot divide women into those who were raped and those who were not, as if they are exhibits on a display . . . This is what hurts me. Women are stamped as raped women as if they don’t have any other characteristics, as if this is the only element of their identity.58

55. ANTHIAS & YUVAL-DAVIS, supra note 37, at 7. Women may also affirmatively contribute to the construction of national identity by defending the nation and participating in its political, economic and social struggles. Id.
56. R. Radhakrishnan, Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity, in NATIONALISMS AND SEXUALITIES, supra note 7, at 85.
57. Transcript of interview with Jadranka, Omarska concentration camp survivor (July 1993)(transcript on file with author). Jadranka also explained how journalists’ actions are affecting the women survivors:

These people [journalists] are leaving a mark on the witnesses. When a witness has to deal with two or three of such journalists, who are only after the sensations, the witness sees that his/her story is only for the sake of the public and that he/she is only the object of the story. . . . [The] witness [then] disappears] and that is a tragic loss.

Id.
The sensational photographs of rows of “rape victims” — without any mention of women survivors like Jadranka and Nusreta — in *Time* and *Newsweek* are only one example of this phenomenon.\(^59\)

In exploiting alarm over the security of Serbs in Kosovo, Milošević and his followers turned to a popular image of woman as victim and warrior — that of an armed Serbian woman carrying a baby. The message was loud and clear: as a good patriot/martyr/victim/mother, the Serbian woman was defending her family and country against the evil of the Other — the Kosovo Albanian. Belgrade feminist Andjelka Milić explained:

> [The photograph] brought together and symbolized all of the salient aspects of national identity and what threatened it: the nation’s sense of jeopardy was clearly depicted by the mother and child defending themselves, by her readiness to defend her identity by means of arms but also to persevere as perhaps the last member of the nation. This photograph helped galvanize Serbian public opinion around the threat to the Serbian minority in Kosovo and to create resolve to settle this situation in favor of the Serbian minority by force if need be.\(^60\)

In a like manner, the media in Croatia had a field day with the image of Croatian mothers against the war. At the beginning of the war against Croatia in 1991, these women — some of whom later called their group “Chain of Love” or “Wall of Love” (Bedem Ljubavi) — marched to demand that their sons be released from the Yugoslavian army that was attacking Vukovar and other Croatian towns.\(^61\) While these women aimed at first to be “anti-war,” many of them later actually enrolled their sons in the Croatian army. In addition, although this group began as an independent organization, it soon developed close ties to the Croatian government.\(^62\) In the words of Jill Benderly, an American feminist who has worked with women’s groups in ex-Yugoslavia for a dozen years, “‘Wall of Love’... was little more than a cheering squad on behalf of Croatian president Franjo Tudjman.”\(^63\) The media’s readiness in propagating the image of “mothers against war” only aided nationalists’ instrumental use of women in this regard.

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B. "WOMAN" USED TO TEAR DOWN AN "OTHER'S" NATIONAL IDENTITY

As noted above, as part of the nation building process, the nation creates a "fantasy of an enemy, an alien who has insinuated himself into our society and constantly threatens us with habits, discourse, and rituals which are not 'our kind.'" 64 With regard to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, enemies abound. 65 Croats and Muslims invoke the image of the Četnik, the Serbian force that during the Second World War fought against the occupying Axis powers and called for the restoration of the Serbian monarchy and the creation of a "Greater Serbia;" the Četniks also fought against the pro-Nazi Ustaša forces of Croatia and Tito's communist Partisans and committed atrocities against Muslims and Croats, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina. 66 On the other hand, some Serbian military and paramilitary forces refer to Croats as "Ustaše," the Croatian fascists backed by both the Nazi and Italian fascist governments during World War II, and Muslims as "Turks," associating Muslims with the Ottoman rulers who reigned over most of Serbia from 1371 to 1871. The state-controlled (or, at least, state-manipulated) media, in turn, continually draws and exploits these images of the enemy. 67

Intertwined in this process, the image of "Enemy Woman" provides a particularly potent brew for nation-builders. Enemy Woman's real and imagined body becomes a tool by which the nation can "project [its] own desires and deficiencies on an [O]ther." 68 In this vein, the nation will kill, rape, and forcibly impregnate the Other's Woman as a method of humiliating the Other, and as a means of conquering their souls. The Enemy Woman becomes ugly and dirty, violated by rape and sin, while the nation's own Woman is venerated, clean and noble.

Wartime rapes have been committed by all sides in the Balkan conflict, and research indicates that Bosnian Serb troops have employed rape of Muslim women as an element of its publicly announced plan of "ethnic cleansing," terrorizing and forcibly moving or otherwise extinguishing

65. For a list of some of the specific heroes and their adversaries in the ex-Yugoslav conflict, see Colović, supra note 28, at 115, 117.
66. The Yugoslavian army and some Serbian paramilitary groups vehemently reject the label "Četnik," claiming that they are merely defenders of their people and their land and that they are not extremists. Others, such as paramilitary units, commonly refer to themselves as Četniks.
67. For an excellent discussion of the propaganda machine in Belgrade, see Luković, supra note 5, at 74.
68. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Nationalisms and Sexualities in the Age of Wilde, in NATIONALISMS AND SEXUALITIES, supra note 7, at 238.
Muslim populations from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Through these attacks on Muslim women, Bosnian Serb soldiers seek to destroy the very soul of the real and imagined Muslim nation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. As Zillah Eisenstein has observed, “[r]ape violates ‘others’ and establishes [greater] Serbia at the same time.”

Images of the Enemy Woman are perpetuated despite women’s actual experiences, not because of them. For example, Bosnian Serb troops target Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina for rape because Muslim women are supposed to be especially “virtuous” and revered by their communities and, thus, their rapes are particularly harmful to the enemy. In addition, according to what some soldiers have told women while raping them, part of the purpose of the rapes is to add Serbian sperm and, in this manner, to render them impure. In reality, however, many of the women raped are of mixed marriages or mixed parentage and, thus, not even capable of being “pure” and “virtuous.”

At the same time, according to many activists and government workers in Croatia, the government-controlled Croatian media widely publicized rapes of Muslim women while, at the same time, de-emphasizing rapes of Croatian women. One explanation could be that Croatia wanted to maintain its image of its own Woman as “pure” and “clean.” Yet, it was fine to portray Muslim Woman as violated — these images served well to


70. Eisenstein, supra note 39, at 4 (citing Drakulić, supra note 69; Laber, supra note 69; Pitter & Stiglmayer, supra note 69; Riding, supra note 69; and Lewis, supra note 69).

71. See WATCH REPORT, VOL. II, supra note 69, at 21-23. According to K.S., for example, Serbian soldiers raped her and threatened her life while specifically identifying her as a Bosnian Muslim. Id. at 173, 175 n.227. Another woman, B., testifies that Serbian soldiers specifically stated their intent to impregnate women while raping them. Id. at 215, 218, 219.

72. See Pitter & Stiglmayer, supra note 69. In this sense, women’s virtue is constructed in order to be defended. Cf. Donna Guy, “White Slavery,” Citizenship and Nationality in Argentina, in NATIONALISMS AND SEXUALITIES, supra note 7, at 202. See also Christine Obbo, Sexuality and Economic Domination in Uganda, in ANTHIASS & YUVAL-DAVIS, supra note 37, at 85. “Human societies always portray their women as more virtuous than women of other groups and therefore in need of protection. Never mind that each society also coerces women to be ‘good women’ through imposing a number of sanctions against ‘bad women.’” Id.

73. This observation is drawn from my field work in Croatia in February, 1993. See MERTUS & PINE, supra note 22.
draw attention to the perpetrator: the Enemy Serb. The impact on Muslim women really did not matter; after all, the image of Muslim Woman was a constructed fantasy “Other” to begin with, as the so-called Muslim women of Bosnia identified themselves as “Muslim” in only a vague, cultural way before the war.

C. “WOMAN” USED TO CRUSH INSUBORDINATION TO THE NATIONAL IDENTITY

“Nations are forever haunted by their definitional others,”74 however the Other is constructed. Nations need both to exploit and administer difference in order to perpetuate the myth of homogeneity and punish those who violate this myth.75 Nationalists seem well aware that “because women are used as a site to construct borders they also provide a possible site for the subversion of nationalist aggressions.”76 The nation can consolidate its identity by projecting beyond its borders the sexual practices and gender roles it deems abhorrent, while simultaneously penalizing those who reject their assigned gender roles.77

Any conduct, male or female, which challenges prescribed gender roles may be viewed as antithetical to the interests of the state and suppressed through legal and social sanctions. While homosocial male conduct is tolerated by many nationalisms (particularly those envisioning a fraternal horizontal community),78 the nation draws a line at same-sex sexual conduct. In the name of safeguarding and distinguishing “proper” fraternal brotherhood from “improper” male-to-male sexual acts, a nervous nation often employs penal sanctions.79

In the discourse of nationalist war propaganda, battle is presented as the “manifestation of masculinity.” Ivan Čolović observes:

The war is not for weaklings, gays, cowards or crybabies, but for real, big, tough men, who exude virility and a distinct smell. . . . A report on Belgrade Television

74. PARKER, supra note 7, at 5.
75. See, e.g., GEORGE MOSSE, NATIONALISM AND SEXUALITY: MIDDLE CLASS MORALITY AND SEXUAL NORMS IN MODERN EUROPE 9 (1985) (bourgeois sexuality used to advance the political goals of the nation state).
76. Eisenstein, supra note 39, at 6. Perhaps for this reason, nationalists have harassed the Belgrade anti-war group “Women in Black” with increasing frequency. (Observation from author’s trip to Serbia in April 1994 and conversations with members of Women in Black.)
77. PARKER, supra note 7, at 10.
78. MOSSE, supra note 75, at 67 (“nationalism had a special affinity for male society and together with the concept of respectability legitimized the domination of men over women.”); see also ANDERSON, supra note 12, at 16.
79. See, e.g., Lee Edelman, Tearooms and Sympathy, or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet, in NATIONALISMS AND SEXUALITIES, supra note 7, at 263.
recently showed a story about a group of soldiers preparing
to cross a minefield. The officer encouraged them by
saying: "Whoever is man enough, let him join us!" 80

Many groups in the Balkans portray enemies of their nation as "soft" or
"feminine," — faggots, incapable of leading, desirous only of being led.
In Montenegro, for example, graffiti decries enemy politicians as pederasts
or sodomites. 81 Similarly, angered by Belgrade peace activists rallying in
support of the citizens of Sarajevo, one Serbian writer, Momo Kapor stated:

Those small, insignificant parties in Belgrade will always find as
many lesbians, homosexuals, philatelists, whatever you want, 
members of doberman dog owners clubs, mountain climbers, or
writers, who will support them in anything. 82

In this case, Vojin Dimitrijević notes, "lesbians and homosexuals, who are
anathema to patriarchal societies and who nationalists say never existed in
the good old days [along with] other groups are also identified with
perverse habits introduced into primeval society from the "West": stamp
collecting, owning 'useless' dogs as pets, and mountain climbing." 83

In general, all nonreproductively-oriented sexualities are excluded from
the discourse of the nation. It is no accident that oppression of gay men
and lesbians in Serbia has intensified since the war began. Serbia has long
maintained "pink lists," lists of suspected gay men (lesbians are invisible),
and have detained and harassed gay men for the slightest provocation. In
February 1993, for example, police took Z.R., a 36-year-old gay man into
custody, purportedly for "listening to Ustaša music" (Croatian music) and
"spreading false information" (he was a regular guest on a radio show).
Once at the police station, however, they questioned him about the
Belgrade gay and lesbian organization, Arkadia. Z.R. testified:

[T]he two policemen who arrested me were most interested in the
list of members of Arkadia, which I refused to give them. . . .
Since I insisted that the list didn't exist, they started hitting me.
All three of them beat me, but not continuously. They were
kicking me in the legs, and with fists on the body. This lasted for
about an hour . . . . 84

80. Čolović, supra note 28, at 118.
81. Observation drawn from my own trip to Montenegro (Sept. 1993).
82. Vojin Dimitrijević, Xenophobia as a Menace to Human Rights in Former Socialist
Countries, in YUGOSLAVIA: COLLAPSE, WAR, CRIMES, supra note 5, at 65, 70 (citing
VREME, May 11, 1992, at 51).
83. Id.
84. Testimony compiled by Helsinki Watch in Abuses Continue in the Former
Yugoslavia: Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Hercegovina, NEWS FROM HELSINKI WATCH
Z.R. was arrested again on trumped-up charges less than a month later.85 Z.R. attributes the attacks against him and other gays in Serbia directly to intensified nationalist feelings and distrust of "others."86

Vesna Pešić observes how nation builders in ex-Yugoslavia have deliberately rebuilt and promoted patriarchal social structures:

Rather than creating a civil society and a democratic state, patriarchal social structures were restored, particularly in the rural and mountainous parts of the country where the armed conflicts acquired the most intense and brutal form. . . . These patriarchal structures provided the conditions not only for genocide, but also for the destruction of towns and cities. . . .87

As observed earlier, labor and child care legislation88 in various parts of ex-Yugoslavia conflates woman's proper role in society with her proper role in Family, the imagined mini-nation designed to advance a political agenda.89

Because the image of nation is so deeply rooted in patriarchal symbols and structures, a woman who challenges her prescribed gender role in the Family is not a Woman at all, but a traitor to the nation. Conversely, those who wish to slander women already judged to be traitors artfully accuse them of being lesbians — The Joan of Arc Syndrome.90 Women writers in the Balkans who have spoken out against their governments' policies have been accused of being lesbians, communists, CIA agents, and a host of other evils.91 The status of traitor becomes intricately linked to the real and imagined status of lesbian.

The nation's threat of exclusion and other legal and extra-legal sanctions can force women to choose between their identity as women and their identities as members of the nation, and compel male members of society who do not fit prescribed gender roles to choose between their identities and that of the nation. In the Balkans, such men and women who are seen as threats to some national identity have been attacked by the
government and opposition groups alike. By failing to recognize these attacks for what they are, the media has in turn only perpetuated them.

IV. CONCLUSION

As long as they exist, nations will continue to attempt to harness Woman in service of their national identities. By recognizing this trend, however, we will begin to strip it of its potency. The media can counterbalance nations’ misuse of Woman by challenging state-promulgated, mythical images of Woman with accurate, countervailing images of women as activists. Yes, the war in the Balkans has created a large number of women victims, all of whom deserve redress. However, these women stand to gain nothing from further exploitation. Rather, all women — victims, activists, activist victims — would benefit if we recognized the full breadth of their lived realities and allowed all women to voice their differing struggles.

92. In Croatia, for example, pro-Croatian women groups have lesbian-baited other women’s groups who do not take a nationalistic line. (This observation is from my own experiences speaking with several women’s groups in February, 1993.)