

# Nationalist Narratives and

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*L'auteure s'insurge contre la réduction systématique par les États et les féministes du viol comme un acte génocide commis par "l'Autre," le barbare; en outre, elle considère que la violence sexuelle est toujours un crime contre les femmes en tant que "personnes," et en temps de guerre, un crime contre les communautés.*

## *Cyprus Roars*

I am Cyprus and I am in deep pain  
My womb is in shambles  
My head and shoulders ache  
all my body cells, one by one, are injured  
Male doctors unceasingly excavate my pain  
I cannot speak of my dead sisters/their beatings  
all the rapes, my anguish  
I cannot speak of my colonizers  
and all my struggles for justice  
At times, I can hardly remember  
all the stories I had to tell  
When I was an active witness to myself  
to a world of abject poverty  
and all the sexual violence  
When my memories overflow/wanting me to tell  
I am Cyprus/and I can be silent no longer!

—A. M. Agathangelou

This poem maps a defiance that does not disavow the nation, but rather expresses a suppressed Cypriot nationalist discourse. In another part of the world, in Yugoslavia, the NATO bombing campaign is over. Troops are marching back into the shambles of what has been a sore spot in Europe, a socialized economy. Armed to the teeth during the Cold War, the Yugoslavs, through the ideology of international militarism and patriarchy, used the masculinist discourse of nationalist and ethnic identity and politics to mobilize enough forces to reverse the conditions of domination and put themselves on "top." However, this reassertion

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of ethno-nationalism is reconstituted through violence against the "other." The resurgence of sexism and racism works to affirm and essentialize the "defining" characteristics of cultural groups, while simultaneously supporting the systematic application of force and genocide against "others." It is imperative that feminist theorists rethink the concept of nationalism and its affirmative inscriptive possibilities. Under what conditions are nationalism and feminism recuperated by the state for the reconstitution of global power? How does sexism articulate with nationalism?

Classic writings on nationalism by Gellner, Smith, Hroch, and Anderson silence the gendered dimension of nationalism and the maleness of the nation. This lack of focus conceals the discriminations, inequalities, and violence committed upon women's bodies, marginalized working-class people, and people of colour. I address the political implications of these classic theorizations and explanations of nationalism and gender relations. Following postcolonial and feminist critiques, I posit that the imagined community is not the ideal, seamless, and monolithic community of comradeship but rather a community whose constitution and emergence depends on sexual violence against women.

In this article, I develop my analysis with a focus on the rapes of women during ethnic conflict and war within Cyprus in 1974 and Yugoslavia in 1991. I argue that when sexual violence (rape) is subsumed under understandings of nationalism, a sustained reading of the traumas sanctioned by the sexual symbolism and reality of conflict is not possible. I posit that liberal and radical feminist theories, when they are dealing with the reality of rape under the conditions of war and ethnic conflict, fail to challenge the terms of nationalist discourse, which invokes genocide and rape in order to legitimize its constitution. Their focus on women experiencing violence as representatives of a particular ethno-nationalism, does not allow us to see women as historical agents or as individuals on their own terms. This feminist approach conceives, at least implicitly, that patriarchy is parallel to the power of the state. In this case, the suffering of the women of the Third World "is measured by the value of the suffering of the nation" (Morokvasic 81). Women are conceived as the property of men and "good victims" of nationalism and ethnic violence "as long as their nation can be demonstrated to be a good victim" (Morokvasic 81). I conclude by suggesting that a (re) formulation of Anderson's understanding of nationalism's development and the feminist understanding of violence

# (Dis) Appearing Women

## *State-Sanctioned Sexual Violence*

against women will make visible suppressed inequalities and struggles concealed by discursive nationalism's solidarities, and violences against women of the Third World.

### Nationalism and women

As reflected in the poem "Cyprus Roars,"

nationalism is rarely the nationalism of [all people in] the nation. On the contrary, "nationalism ... represents the site where [different] positions [and interests] negotiate and contest with each other.... The state comes to be in charge of the nation, and through the control of education creates the requisite interchangeability of individuals. (Duara 152)

The development of nationalism through the nation-state and its democratic advance is predicated on the "gendering of political capacities, on the social qualification and limitation of citizenship, and on the exploitative domination of some peoples over others" (Eley and Grigor Suny) both in the domestic and international arenas. Of course, this gendering of the nation-state has roots in colonial relations, something that we cannot ignore when we seek an understanding of how power is consolidated internationally through the practices of peoples in the First and Third World contexts (Stoler; Wildenthal). In order to understand how nation-states of the Third World consolidate their power internationally, I focus on how nationalism in two Third World<sup>2</sup> states, Cyprus and Yugoslavia, became predicated on men's rape of women.

Cyprus won its independence from the British in 1960. The elites of the Greek and Turkish ethnic communities worked together towards consolidating their power in Cyprus. However, three years later, this national project of progress, democracy, and development did not resemble the form it had taken in Europe. Producing a common "national fantasy" was impossible because the nationalisms of both communities had originated elsewhere and their goals, values, interests, and agents conflicted due to historical political relations. Thus, within Cyprus, two "national fantasies" or cultures,<sup>3</sup> the Greek and the Turkish, attempted to become local "through images, narratives, monuments, and sites that circulate through personal/collective consciousness" (Berlant qtd. in Eley and Grigor Suny). In 1974, when the Greek *junta* invaded, the military of Cyprus (re)organized socio-political and

economic power on the island by trying to kill president Makarios and imprisoning and threatening the lives of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriot men who belonged to parties on the left (communists and socialists). Claiming its role as guarantor for the Turkish Cypriot minority, Turkey militarily intervened to protect the Turkish minority from the Greek *junta*. Turkey established a firm military presence and remains on the island even today. During the months of July and August of 1974 Turkish soldiers raped Greek women in churches, at their homes in front of relatives, and in several villages before other soldiers.<sup>4</sup> These rapes did not have the same substantive currency as other issues in the discourse of the state in 1974. The marginalization of this issue is evident in that while no agencies or support groups were created to address acts of sexual violence, a plethora of agencies were developed to redress the loss of property and homes of thousands of refugees, and support networks were created for women who lost their sons during the war.

When I interviewed women in 1993 and 1995, they spoke primarily about refugees and mothers, missing sons and husbands. These topics are part of a nationalist discourse used to reinforce a supposed social homogeneity among Greek Cypriots and the wives of missing persons. This dominant discourse fails to address—indeed actively displaces—another aspect of the development and stabilization of Greek Cypriot ethno-nationalism: its own narrative of rape and violence both within the boundaries of Greek Cypriot nationalism and outside them by targeting Turkish Cypriot women.<sup>5</sup> The Greek Cypriot women I interviewed during 1993 and 1995 in Cyprus did not volunteer any information about sexual violence against Greek or Turkish Cypriot women during the 1974 war. When I broached the topic, they expressed concern that discussing such violence might endanger themselves or those who had been attacked. A 50-year-old Greek Cypriot working-class woman who originally came from a mixed village said:

*That's the past. What's the point of bringing it up? We were all, both women and men, incarcerated in two rooms in our village. The*

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Women are conceived as the property of men and "good victims" of nationalism and ethnic violence "as long as their nation can be demonstrated to be a good victim."

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women were put in one room and the men in another. One night several Turks and Turkish Cypriots showed up and grabbed four women. Some of the mothers were pulling their daughters not to go screaming and shouting to the soldiers. The soldiers, pointing guns at the daughters, angrily told the mothers angrily to let them go... You know what happened after that. You know (pointing to a woman who is sitting two doors away from her house), she is married now with children but she still carries the "weight." Do you understand what I mean? (Interviews 1993: 5)

This Greek Cypriot woman chooses to disrupt the articulation of the dominant masculinist discourse which focuses mostly on the nation, inscribed in the passivity of female images, as expressions of the suffering of the country. She tells us that sexual violence against women is prevalent during ethno-national conflicts, as well as struggles against such violences. In this particular case, women did not passively accept their lot. On the contrary, they were historical agents with their own suffering, anger, and power who resisted the militarism and violence of Turkish men against their daughters.

The state addressed the issue of rapes against Greek women only in passing. It insinuated that there were rapes, especially rapes against the Greek Cypriot group (to which Greek Cypriot women belong), but did so without naming the specific men who committed the atrocities, the reasons behind such violences, and the specific women who experienced such violences. In the 1990s, after the incidents of rape in Yugoslavia, the Greek Cypriot state systematically and adamantly centralized the issue of rape as a form of "ethnic cleansing." Rapes are framed within the pre-existing nationalist discourse which presumes a colonizing "other," that is, Turkey, responsible for the "application of [extermination ... policy and methods [against] Greek Cypriots as an ethnic and religious group" (The World of Cyprus).<sup>6</sup>

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The state, to consolidate its power, searches for ways through which the international community can hear its concerns and mobilize its support, whether through aid or other political means. Thus, the state invokes arguments similar to those circulated by the other ethnic groups in the international media and institutions in order to mobilize the support of the international community. When the Greek Cypriot state argues that Turkey is intending to exterminate the Greek Cypriots through its policy of "wholesale and repeated rapes," it is appealing to the line of argument about sexual violence in

Yugoslavia. The state seizes upon these international events, defocusing its attention from domestic sexual repression, and orchestrates anxieties about the sexual violence of the enemy in 1974. These events are strategically magnified in times of socio-political stress. Retroactively, the state attempts to recapture the past not to redress the injustices of sexual violation, but to remind the international community that Turkey, the former brutal invader, is still the implacable enemy of Greek Cypriots, and, especially, of women. For example, several recent pronouncements by the state of Cyprus centralize the discourse of rape against women under the category of "ethnic cleansing":

The atrocities of the Turkish army included wholesale and repeated rapes of women of all ages, systematic torture, savage and humiliating treatment of hundreds of people, including children, women and pensioners during their detention by the Turkish forces, as well as looting and robbery on an extensive scale, by Turkish troops and Turkish Cypriots. (The World of Cyprus)

These retroactive attempts to recapture the past include deliberate efforts to simultaneously recover and forget the 1974 war rapes of Greek women, precisely because they underscore, however indirectly, the "impotence" of Greek Cypriot men within a patriarchal context. Broadcasting this ethno-national discourse beyond its borders, the Greek Cypriot state moves to tell the global community about the violations by the Turkish Cypriots or Turks (from the mainland). This strategic, discursive move by the state to remember sexual violences against women is a metonym for ethno-national power. In this fashion, ethno-nationalist discourses subordinate gender and ethnicity to an idealized masculinized ethno-national group. Like social scientists such as Anderson, the state shows signs of "progressive intentions." It raises the issue of rapes during national wars but only to demonstrate its "good" victim status internationally. As with Anderson's approach to nationalism, the Greek Cypriot state fails to acknowledge that women are an object of domination in the constitution of any ethno-nationalism, and that the elite powers of postcolonial states objectify them. The Greek Cypriot ignores that the individual testimonies of rapes are not mere fodder for testimonies for or against national history. In fact, women who are interested in being raised to the witness stand to testify are doing so to stop such atrocious experiences before, during, and after war.

Ethno-nationalism's contact with other international institutions opens the space for a possible renegotiation of gender relations, creating the possibility of changing the assumptions that have informed the development of the nation state: that Greek Cypriot men are the protectors and Greek Cypriot women are inviolable. However, the

Greek Cypriot state's demands at the European Convention on Human Rights, that the international community reprimand the barbarous Turks who raped Greek women—even when it challenges sexual violence and seems to create some degree of fluidity in transforming gender relations—harks back to an ethno-nationalist culture destroyed or violated by foreign invasion and rape. The recovery of the violation of Greek Cypriot ethno-nationalism reinforces the powerful imagery involved in merging the idea of national community with that of the mother. This automatically triggers the response that one should ultimately be prepared to come to the defense and be the protector of women as a decisive criterion of men's masculinity (Parker *et al.*). This strategy to regulate gender relations at a discursive level is a strategy that nationalism presumes necessary at this historical moment to (re)legitimate its power and consolidate itself as a "geographically and culturally fixed unit [the Greek Cypriot nation-state]" (Yang 129).

Even when the "protector" state is (re) opening the discourse of sexual violence that occurred during the 1974 war, it does so in ways that re-deploy patriarchal norms: the state remembers the acts of sexual violence during the war against women as symbolic violence toward the Greek Cypriot culture, a violence enacted by displacing the real violences against women. In other words, the state charges the Turks with doing violence to Greek Cypriot womanhood and reminds the international community of the brutalities of the enemy. Instead of facilitating an understanding of violence or overcoming it, in part, by acknowledging its own acts of violence, this strategy works to perpetuate it by simplifying both women and the nation. While the core of nationalism relies on discourses of sexual violence as a way of contesting the enemy, this nationalist discourse, by focusing on sexual violence as merely a national concern, blurs the contestation and only serves to consolidate patriarchal power-relations over women. Thus, the state would do well to consider how its silencing of the rapes as violence against women first and foremost, enacts a different kind of violence against women: it reminds women of the violence against them, but it does not redirect resources to combating, and denouncing rape first as a crime against women at all times, and then as a gendered political strategy in war. The state's strategy of demonizing the "other" as the barbarian rapist prevents women from perceiving themselves as individuals, who, first and foremost, become the targets of violence when the state wants to consolidate its masculinist power. Thus, women both in Greek and Turkish communities who were raped cannot possibly see themselves able to cut across state, national, or communal identities and create domestic and transnational solidarities.

Events in Yugoslavia further demonstrate how nationalism's progress and advancement is founded primarily on the sexual assault of women. It should be

noted here that gender relations cross-cut other social and political relations and gender identities are constitutive of other identities (class and sexuality, for example). Sexual violence is not only against the state, nation, or ethnic group (Morokvasic), but also a crime against men against women. The abstract conception of an imagined horizontal fraternal comradeship, although useful in helping us understand how communities are organized, is contingent upon structures of inequality and practices of violence. Anderson's imagined community sustains its meaningfulness and its legitimacy within a context of exploitation and oppression.

The disastrous effects of the war in Yugoslavia in 1991 resulted from both internal and external contradictions of the international world order. The ethnic conflict, despite claims that it is an inter-ethnic conflict based on historical and traditional antagonisms, emerged out of contradictions among several elites who wanted to consolidate their power after the death of Tito, under whose rule nationalism was extensively suppressed (Coulson).<sup>7</sup> Throughout the early 1990s, nationalism was gaining credence in Slovenia and Croatia. The contradictions of the socialist system encouraged and validated what Anderson calls the process of becoming national: the systematic recovery, and forgetting, of aspects of the past. In addition, the degenerative socio-economic conditions in Yugoslavia, especially after the 1973 oil crisis, instigated the "reclaiming and reconstituting of earlier histories and further activated in defensive response to Serbian nationalism which they also fed" (Coulson 99). By the early 1990s, when communist parties all over Eastern Europe were being pushed out of power, the first multi-party elections in Yugoslavia (1990) led to the creation of a looser confederal structure of relationships among the republics. Serbia saw this confederal idea as marking the end of Yugoslavia and therefore did not accept it. In June 1991, Slovenia and Croatia declared themselves independent sovereign states. When the Yugoslav National Army moved into Slovenia to "secure the borders" of the federation, it was rebuffed. In early 1993, Yugoslavian soil became the stage for a many-sided war, spiraling out of control by attempting to construct "new democracies." These new political systems were based on exclusion, discrimination, and violence against the "others," members of different ethnic groups and those who refused to identify themselves in national terms. For example, when feminists in Belgrade raised the issue of rape and violence against women as first and foremost crimes against women, and then as crimes of one nationality

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**This nationalist discourse, by focusing on sexual violence as merely a national concern, only serves to consolidate patriarchal power relations over women.**

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Erika Simon Gottlieb, "Recollections: Sisters," oil on board, 16 x 20", 1964.

against another, these "others" were vehemently accused of being traitors to the nation. Feminists from Zagreb who spoke out against rape as a "war crime against women have been viciously accused of raping Croatia" (Coulson 100).

The different ethno-nationalisms within Yugoslavia dominate, humiliate, and attempt to destroy "the other" through women. Rape becomes a weapon of war and a tool of political repression (*The Human Rights Watch Global Report on Women's Human Rights* 1). Women's bodies have been always used by male conquerors as the spoils of war, trophies which prove that the masculine unified nation has been victorious over the enemy. When the first rapes occurred in Yugoslavia, independent feminists from Zagreb raised the issue internationally, but their presentations did not gain prominence because international institutions viewed them as lacking a "clear national approach."<sup>8</sup> However, when the warring parties recognized the propaganda value of women's suffering and violation, rape stories spread all over the world.<sup>9</sup> As Allen cites:

Rape has been used since the beginning of the conflict on a large scale, as a means of implementing the strategy of ethnic cleansing and to increase inter-ethnic hatred....The victims are said to be mainly Muslim but also Serb and Croat women.... Attempts made to locate specific places where women were allegedly detained and raped have proved unsuccessful to date. Information was often too imprecise. (69)<sup>10</sup>

When ethno-nationalisms wield rape as an instrument of humiliation and violation within both domestic and international spaces, rape is presented as a crime against ethno-nationalism and not as a crime against women nor as a gendered political strategy. Thus, facts about the

rapes and the after-effects on women's lives are deemed unimportant in comparison to how these crimes against women can be used to capture attention within the international community as an ethno-national crime against another ethno-nationalism. The text below shows how the documentation of rape can be used to determine which ethno-nationalism is worse:

The rape of thousands of women had been documented. The Serbs even had camps for the sole purpose of detaining women. Serbs had taken 150 Muslim women away from the town of Brcko in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Allen 66)

In such texts and others presented at the United Nations, we see a resituation of rape to consolidate the power of a particular ethno-nationalism. Rape as the bodily violation of women is utterly silenced because their sexual violence is not the real issue. After all, sexual violence against women happens all the time! Here is the "real issue" in war:

They [the raped women] did not want in any way to let rape overshadow the real problem which is the extermination and execution of thousands and thousands of men and women. (Jacobs qtd. in Jones 119)

This quotation suggests that women participate in their own oppression by setting aside their traumatic experiences, while their ethno-nationalism wages a war of public relations over "the other" by referring the international community to the crimes of the other ethnic groups, and also participate in the imagined community of the nation by foregrounding the real problem. This reframing of rape, which points to the violent crimes of another ethno-nationalism, places rape within ethno-national and religious boundaries while eclipsing the violations of women's bodies both then and now.

It is not a coincidence that few women want to discuss the atrocious experience of rape, and if they do decide to speak, they choose to remain anonymous (Nikolic-Ristanovic *et al*; Agathangelou). Sexual violence is condemned by various ethno-nationalisms as a way of defining the violator of the collective or nation.

Thus, while women's identities are necessary ingredients for the development of any ethno-nationalism and its own boundaries, sexual violence against women becomes the weapon to attack men of other ethno-national groups during times of war. In this way, ethno-nationalisms can continue to silence women as individuals, individuals who do not want their ethno-nationalism's power to be predicated on sexual violence within the boundaries of

their own nationalism or against women of other ethno-nationalisms. Women as individuals with their own ambitions and visions about community are eclipsed by ethno-nationalism's means and ends. Women's status as righteous victims is contingent upon the global community's perception of the nation as a righteous victim.

Out of their lost lives they are being raised into the witness stand, to testify for—or against—national history. But as witness, a person is only visible and audible in the witness stand, his individual testimony is being collected into a general one, his identity, his being is dissolved into collective identities. After the testimony [she] is invisible again or becomes captive of [her] own statement, turns into a monument of ideological fixations of the political and intellectual elites with ideological claim to leadership. (Greverus 281)

In the end, rapes are consistently reduced by ethno-nationalisms to crimes against the larger community and nation-state via a systematic process of de-emphasizing sexual violence against individual women. Clearly, gender and sexual relations are constitutive of elements of other sociopolitical identities, and, thus, sexual violence against women during war cannot be reduced solely to violence of men against women. Neither though is it solely a violence against the community or the nation-state. Sexual violence against women originates in the symbolic construction of the female body as the body of the community (Wobbe qtd. in Seifert 1996: 40). Once that construction circulates as a central currency within national contexts,

the rape of women of a community, culture, or nation can be regarded—and is so regarded—as a symbolic rape of the body of that community. (Seifert 1996: 39)<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, rape, ethno-nationalism argues, endangers the existence and homogeneity of the state, the nation, and the community and humiliates its men. Therefore, rape is always

resituate[d] to question social and national power and agency, not just bodily [and almost always female] violation. (Layoun 73)

Layoun raises an important point: how do Third World states (re) situate and remember rape to question the "other's" national power? Again, the notion that rape originates in the political construction of the female body as the symbol of the community and nation does not sufficiently explain the act of rape. Although the ethno-national aspect of rape is prevalent, for example, in the case of Turkish men raping Greek women, and the

violence and violation of Greek bodies being converted into the power of the Turkish regime, the fact remains that women are raped by men in many contexts, which means that the "incontestable reality of [violated and raped] female bodies is translated into male power" (Seifert 1996: 41) because women are also defined as the property of men.

Some women are not interested in indirectly achieving power through the sexual violence perpetrated against other ethno-nationalisms' women because they know that sooner or later it may be their turn. Thus, the simultaneous deployment of sexual violence is designed to consolidate power of particular ethno-nationalisms and political agendas, to consolidate gender relations both within the boundaries of a particular ethno-nationalism and in relation to others, and to prevent possible transnational solidarities. This is a form of socio-sexual regulation both in the community as much as against an "Other."

### **Feminist analyses of sexual violence in war**

Feminist and postcolonial theorists challenge Benedict Anderson's "imagined community." His conceptualization, they argue, relies heavily on abstracting the subjects within historical and material socio-economic relations as symbols and tropes. Such rhetorical and metaphorical uses of nationalism as they intersect with sexuality (especially sexual violence) turn away from concrete social contexts and specific historical realities of war and violence where women are treated as "reified property of the masculine nation" (Yang 130). Additionally, such conceptualizations falsely imply that we know all there is to know about these realities and that the production of nation-state power follows a similar trajectory everywhere. As long as nationalism and its "products" are understood as merely structural universal narratives, material contradictory experiences are precluded and thus sustained readings of the trauma of sexual violence cannot take place.

At the same time, most of the feminist studies of sexual violence against women, especially in the case of Yugoslavia, argue that rape is a weapon of war and a genocide against humanity. In fora such as the United Nations, feminists have presented rape as a crime against a nation. Such explanations are steeped in a nationalist discourse which assumes that its agents are all equal "free" historical subjects despite material realities to the contrary. MacKinnon argues: "What is happening here is first a genocide, in which ethnicity is a tool for political hegemony: the war is an instrument of the genocide; the rapes are an instrument of the war" (MacKinnon 1994: 187). *The Human Rights Watch Global Report* similarly argues that the "mass rape of women has also been used as a tool of 'ethnic cleansing,' meant to terrorize, torture and demean women and their families and compel them

to flee the area" (8). Seifert states that rapes are,

part of the "rules" of war ... rapes in wartime aim at destroying the opponent's culture ... the background to rape orgies is a culturally rooted contempt for women that is lived out in times of crisis. (1994: 58, 62, 65)

Despite efforts by Mackinnon (1994, 1998), Seifert (1994, 1996), Brownmiller, and Stiglmeier to suggest that rapes are about genocide, misogyny, and cultural destruction, they all participate in producing a liberal understanding of domination, the elimination of which depends on legally proving that the rapes are a form of genocide. However, a legal proof linking war-time rapes with genocide has yet to be achieved. As long as rape is understood and explained as a human violation or political violence against the nation-state, which is equated with the male subject position or the international community alone without linking it to material conditions, then sexual violence is relegated to a *cas de jurisprudence* rather than as a means of (re) distributing power and resources among men (and some women). When feminists Mackinnon (1994, 1998), Stiglmeier, Brownmiller, and Seifert (1994) argue that rape is a weapon of war used by ethno-nationalisms to consolidate their power, these ideas are echoed by states as a means of serving their own ends (i.e., stabilizing their power in the global context).<sup>12</sup> Women cannot exist as sovereign beings in their communities as long as the sexual violence against women of particular ethnic groups is not understood as a strategy in the international community where women are subsumed by the needs and sufferings of the nation-state and reduced to property and objects.

In stark contrast to the nationalization of sexual violence evidenced in Cyprus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Croatia, in which virtuous Greek Cypriot, Bosnian, and Croatian women are victims of a hypersexualized Turkish and Serbian "animalism," feminists do not suggest that the sexual violence is inter-ethnic. In the Greek Cypriot case, the exception is Layoun, whose analysis of the Greek Cypriot text *Paralogismos* addresses this question extensively. Clearly Western feminists differ with the state's articulation of ethno-nationalism's victimization of women, but the feminist assertion that rape is genocide fails to address other violations of women's bodies in Third World contexts, especially where unstable nation-states depend on every strategy to legitimate their existence and sustain their political and economic power. Thus, it behooves us to re-examine the idea of sexual violence as genocide, especially when nation-states appropriate this notion to: (1) invoke support from the international community; (2) consolidate their unstable power and legitimate their existence within the international context and always at the expense of women; (3) (re) integrate the idea that women are the "blood and soil" of the

nation-state and the way community's constitution is made possible through the national female body; and (4) manage and control women's bodies by clearly associating the wealth and power of other ethno-nationalisms with violence against women (the objects of gender relations) as a moment of proving one's sexual power.

Feminists can respond to this (re) appropriation by insisting that it is crucial to make conceptual distinctions between women as individuals and women of the nation, and inter-ethno-national relations and intra-ethno-national relations. As long as states benefit economically and politically from erasing these conceptual distinctions they will continue to emphasize that women's primary roles are biological regenerators and the property of the masculine nation rather than political actors in social life and policy making (Milic). Conflating women with the nation, and sexual violence with genocide, obscures the point that the nation is not equal to women and that women of the nation are not valued the same way that men are valued. Both of these positions are informed by a liberal ideology which presumes "absolute" equal formal rights for all humans and that each loss of life counts the same way within the boundaries of any ethno-nationalism internationally. Both state and feminist constructions of sexual violence as genocide mobilize particular constructions of Third World womanhood in the service of a First World ethno-national logic. Such a logic is used by Third World ethno-nationalisms to measure their own power and legitimacy in the global context. It is a great irony that both ethno-national and feminist discourses simultaneously deploy and erase women in the Third World. In sum, when feminists (mostly Western feminists) call for explanations that emphasize that sexual violence is a war crime, they themselves inadvertently participate in abstracting women, in having the luxury of not asking who these women are, to what end (international and domestic) are these women raped during ethno-national wars, in what historical context, and with what present politics are they themselves able to raise rape as genocide, in what institutions, and what are the politics of such institutions. Regarding the civil liberties tradition in the United States, Matsuda argues:

somewhere tonight, ... a woman will pay the price of patriarchy. There is nothing natural, necessary, or inevitable about this. Freedom may cost, but the cost paid out in women's bodies is one we pay too unevenly to call it liberty. Let women [and workers, and third world people's] share power.... Until then, too often, the powerful will impoverish their own lives and the lives of others, calling it liberty. (144)

I want to follow the call of Matsuda and argue that liberal and radical feminists need to understand that "legally recognizing the nature of the crime," that is, to establish the rape of women in war as part of a crime

against humanity sets up an inevitable coupling of aggressive eradication of mass rapes with a loss or genocide of ethnic groups. However, this perspective seems to be arguing that “rape could be condemned only from a nationalist perspective” (Morokvasic 80) and, thus, silence that Third World countries and Third World women are raped because of structural enforcements of sexual and other socio-economic relations.

### **Conclusion: a reframing and (re) envisioning of community**

As long as solidarity exists between women’s or other groups across the borders, transnationally, it will be a reminder of other possibilities, even if these are obscured, erased or reinterpreted in nationalist discourses (Zarkov).

My own overflowing memories spoke to the silences, and urged me to address them here. This paper has approached the production of nationalism as a gendered, “imagined,” or cultural phenomenon in the sense that it is temporal, mutable, and socially produced by interpolating between structures and agency, the given and the negotiated reality. The social or national agent is a product of culture and produces culture, but always under particular socio-economic conditions. Following the theoretical debates of Anderson, feminists, and postcolonial theorists, I examined closely in two contexts ethno-nationalist contestations over economic and political resources. The historical social location of “woman” as the marker of otherness makes it possible for Third World ethno-nationalisms to articulate her with ethnicity and regional hierarchy through a linear historical narrative. Delimiting the scope of my claims as a means of conclusion, I am putting forward that once we distinguish between women as women and women as figures and tropes within structures of inequality, the issue of community (national, international, global) can be reframed. Any community interested in egalitarianism and democracy must address the problems of women’s freedom and their access to resources. This can be accomplished by addressing intra-ethno-national violence in addition to inter-ethno-national violence. Exploring this question again reveals a different configuration of “us” and “them,” demonstrating how different ethno-national communities are internally fractured along gender and class lines.

Our reading of the violence within two Third World nation-states facilitates the exploration of alternative constructions of communities where women are agents who use their own “primary resources” and access the nation’s resources without fearing violence. Such alternative communities would allow women to articulate a different identity, one that makes room for Greek and Turkish Cypriot women, and Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian women, to work together to create transnational solidarities for transforming the “imagined national”

communities. Thus, feminists can choose to be politically conscious and avoid creating and imagining “communities” “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each” (Anderson 16). Feminists are encouraged to critique visions of “communities” which have historically (re) produced structural inequalities along the lines of sex, race, and class.

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This poem was inspired by Maighread Medbh’s poem about Ireland, entitled “Easter 1991” published in *Feminist Review*, “Nationalisms and National Identities,” No. 44, Summer 1993.

<sup>2</sup>Both Cyprus and Yugoslavia were members of the nonaligned movement.

<sup>3</sup>Other communities and groups exist in Cyprus but are not discussed here for the sake of brevity.

<sup>4</sup>Some of this information comes from interviews I conducted in Cyprus during the years 1993 and 1995 with several women from four villages. All women wanted to remain anonymous because they feared ostracization for revealing such information to the Greek community.

<sup>5</sup>Greek Cypriots raped and killed Turkish Cypriot women during the Kofinou affair in 1963 and 1964.

<sup>6</sup>For a similar argument about the “ethnic cleansing” of Bosnians and Croatians see Mackinnon (1998: 46).

<sup>7</sup>I refer the reader to Woodward for an excellent analysis which sheds light on the multifaceted global and local dynamics leading to the war.

<sup>8</sup>See, for example, <http://www.suc.org/politics/rape/nanag/index.html>

<sup>9</sup>The North American News Analysis Group traces “The Evolution of the Rapes Story” and argues that the first rapes reported to the United Nations (report s/24991) were not rapes of Muslim or Croatian women but rapes of Serbian women by Muslim and Croatian soldiers in Sarajevo. This report was not released till January 5, 1993. According to the North American News Analysis



Group's report, the way the international community engages the "rape story" silences that "rape, systematic or not, is being perpetrated by all sides on victims on all sides, Serb, Muslim and Croat." (see also, <http://www.suc.org/politics/rape/nanag/index.html> and <http://www.suc.org/politics/rape/raskovic/index.html>)

<sup>10</sup>This report is the fourth one prepared by the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who visited Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro-Serbia, and Slovenia on several occasions. The report of the UN Commission's team details "allegations of rape in the territory of former Yugoslavia" (qtd. in Allen 69).

<sup>11</sup>Wobbe argues that the construction of the feminine calls for a "vulnerability to assault," a major element absent from the construction of masculinity (qtd. in Seifert 1996: 40).

<sup>12</sup>Scarry links the power of the state with the level of sexual violence, positing that as the power of an ethno-nationalism or state increases, the incidence of rape decreases.

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## LYN LIFSHIN

### Haiti

when my mother  
was raped it  
was bad but  
when she saw  
the soldiers  
pull my pants  
down, rape me  
in front of her,  
slice my cheeks,  
she went white  
and fell back  
wards. I bent  
over her said  
I was ok but  
she never opened  
her eyes again

*Lyn Lifshin's poetry appears earlier in this volume.*

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