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### **the Body of War: media, ethnicity, and gender in the break-up of Yugoslavia**

Dubravka Žarkov; Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, USA and London, UK, 2007, 286pp., ISBN: 978-0-8223-3955-7, £52.00 (hbk), ISBN: 978-08223-3966-3, £12.99 (pbk)

*The Body of War: media, ethnicity, and gender in the break-up of Yugoslavia* is the crowning achievement of Dubravka Žarkov's year-long research in media, gender and ethnicity during ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Those who have read the articles Žarkov has published over the last ten years in various academic journals and as book chapters may be familiar with her key ideas about the interconnection between gender and ethnicity, and the role of media narratives in the creation and/or recreation of gender and ethnic identities. However, all fragments of her analyses are now put together so that the book offers comprehensive analyses based on rich empirical material from Croatian and Serbian press. Especially interesting are the images of the press coverage. Moreover, apart from recognizing the important role feminists played in attracting public attention to war violence against women and the development of legal remedies, the special value that distinguishes Žarkov's book from similar works is her critical and provocative analysis of the contribution of feminists themselves to the media production of ethnicities.

Dubravka Žarkov uses an interesting yet unusual approach to the analysis of gender and ethnicity: she argues that ethnicity is produced through the representational practices of the media war as much as through the violent practices of the ethnic war. Thus, she does not define the ethnic war as a war between ethnic groups, but rather she perceives both the media war and the ethnic war as wars that produce ethnic groups. The consequence of these two wars is that ethnicity became 'the only mode of being, to obliterate and obscure everything that could cast a shadow on its omnipotence' (p. 3). To put it more simply, everything was seen and judged through an ethnic lens, with notions of femininity and masculinity and norms of sexuality becoming essential ingredients of the media production of ethnicity.

Žarkov suggests that both acts of violence and acts of representation have a role in producing meanings as 'the struggle to control these meanings was as fierce as the struggle to control territories' (p. 7). Starting from there, Dubravka Žarkov gives the same epistemological status to the meanings produced through violent practices and the meanings produced through

representational practices. Moreover, she argues that 'the meanings given to the words and pictures are derived from the same gendered, sexualized, and ethicized practices from which the violent acts receive inspiration, justification, and/or sanction' (p. 7). As a consequence, Žarkov's analyses of gender and ethnicity production in the former Yugoslavia include both ethnic war practices and media narratives.

The book has an introduction and three parts. Each part deals with one symbolic body: the maternal, the victimized and the armed bodies and their representation in media. Each part ends with a discussion of the controversies that each of these topics raises in feminism.

The first part deals with two case studies of media representation of public actions of women who defined themselves as mothers. Žarkov analyses articles, illustrations, cartoons and photographs published in the main Croatian and Serbian weeklies and dailies and searches for meanings of gender, sexuality and ethnicity vested in the imaginary of the maternal body.

The second part deals with the victimized body, where Žarkov analyses the construction of symbolic collective victims in the Serbian and Croatian press. This is perhaps the part where her analysis is most brilliant, provocative and productive in its possible implications for new conceptualizations about violence against women.

In this part, Žarkov argues that both ethnicity and the creation of a raped-women identity (by media but also by feminist analyses), contributed to the inclusion of some women (e.g. Moslems) into or exclusion of others (e.g. Serbs) from the category of victims, and conversely the inclusion of some men (e.g. Serbs) into or exclusion of others (e.g. Moslems) from the category of the perpetrator. Apart from the victimized female body, Žarkov also includes the victimized male body. She problematizes the excessive presence of victimized female bodies in both media and feminist analyses and the invisibility of male victimized bodies, and examines the influence of such representational practices in the reproduction of traditional gender roles. Over-representation of women as victims in feminist analyses and activism, and the narrative that sees them only and always as the victims, deny women both subjectivity and agency, locking them in the passive role of the victim while denying men their vulnerability. 'The fatal linkage', Žarkov suggests, 'between femininity, sexual violence, and victimization appears in many places, even in those where raped women exercise agency', the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia being one of these places (p. 177). Here, Žarkov searches for an analytical framework that would allow for a different conceptualization of violence (in both war- and peacetime) in relation to both (various) femininities and masculinities, victimhoods and agency.

The third part deals with the armed body, where the representation of women warriors is analysed. This is an important contribution to the almost non-existent academic literature on this topic in relation to the former Yugoslavia. In this part again, the role of media in the creation of ethnicity through the images of women warriors is followed by reflection on the absence of feminist interest in these women. Again, the connection between agency, victimization and gender identity is explored.

The book concludes with the final chapter titled 'Troubles with Arms'. However, a real conclusion that would synthesize key ideas from all three parts of the book is missing, which leaves the reader feeling as if s/he is missing the larger picture. Moreover, the analysis of the contribution of feminist theory and practice to the creation of ethnicity and gender identities would be more powerful if it showed more clearly differences in feminist approaches and if it offered better visibility for the efforts of those feminists, especially in the former Yugoslavia, who struggled not to contribute to the production of ethnicity and victimhoods, but to make women's voices heard and their agency recovered and visible. By making these feminist efforts invisible, Žarkov herself seems to fall into the same inclusion/exclusion trap that she criticizes, and misses a unique opportunity to promote the inclusive approach – one she argues for in the final sentence of her book: 'For this to happen each of us, feminists, must see – and ask others to point out to us – not only who and what is privileged in the production of violence, but also who and what is privileged in our own analyses of it'.

Žarkov's book may be a good point of departure for a much needed evaluation of the effects of feminist theory and activism on the lives of women both in war- and peacetime. In particular, reliance on legal remedies in cases of sexual violence needs to be combined with procedures that take better care of the interests of women. The book is highly recommended to those interested not only in gender studies and issues of violence against women, but also to criminologists, victimologists, as well as scholars and activists in conflict, media and peace studies.

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