

# **Redefining the Public-Private Boundary: Nationalism and Women's Activism in Former Yugoslavia**

Ana Devic, University of California, San Diego

In a socialist nation, men and women are equal, but women are different.

The task of this article is to discuss the ways in which nationalism was practiced by the political elite in the former socialist Yugoslavia since the 1970s, and the ways in which this process coincided with the stages of women's activism in Yugoslavia during the same period. The decentralization of authority within the Communist party and between regions of Yugoslavia had a profound impact on the trajectories of social life, including women's initiatives.

I would like to start with an apparent paradox. It seems, ironically, that ethno-nationalist ideology and Western feminist studies, namely, some aspects of the post-modernist approach, often regarded as 'enemies', share a similar focus on the politics of collective identity and the blurring of the boundaries between the public and private spheres of life. Both ideologies, it seems, assume a direct relationship between the two spheres, a relationship in which private sphere exhibits an unmediated influence on the sphere of public-political life. Collective identities of women, ethnic identities in particular, are assumed to be unmediated by civic structures. In addition, and especially in the context of the post-socialist change of the role of women in the public sphere, they both exhibit a tendency to speak on behalf of women, as a group of victims, without allowing any 'local knowledge' to become part of legitimate political or academic discourse. This neglect of women's self-evaluation of their roles results, as many of us witnessed in the past several years in some serious misunderstandings between Western and 'local' East Central-European feminist researchers and activists on the issue of "what the post-socialist women want" from the democratization processes, and how they should react to the roles assigned to them by ethno-nationalist ideology. I will return to the problems of Western feminist analyses in the closing sections of the article.

## **The Stages of Women's Activism in Former Yugoslavia**

The case of the former Yugoslavia appears to be unique in several aspects. Feminist initiatives in Yugoslavia started emerging since the late 1970s; the Communist party did not seem to put any efforts in suppressing them. Another aspect of Yugoslavia's uniqueness is that, despite the apparent vitality of the alternative scene in Yugoslavia, the country disintegrated in the most violent way, generating, so it seems, only one form of collective identity -- the ethno-national one. A closer look at the most recent women's initiatives in the successor states of former Yugoslavia reveals some new developments that seem to fit quite poorly in the mentioned post-modernist scheme of the construction and influence of collective identity.

In this article I will argue that the post-WW2 Yugoslavia lived through two stages of official nationalism (in the sense of the term suggested by Benedict Anderson): republican, that lasted between the early 1970s and mid- 1980s, and ethnic official nationalism, that lasts until today. These stages of official ideology correspond with the three stages of women's activism: 1) 'Modernist' stage of the socialist Yugoslavia, sharing the dominant socialist ideology's perspective on the priority of public sphere over the private, 'traditional' one; 2) 'Reactive' stage of women's anti-war protests where the perspectives on the divide between public and private oppose each other: ethno-nationalist ideology insists on the private roles of women being an essential part of an ethno-national collective being', while women's activists act in defense of the relative safety of the socialist (and all-Yugoslav) private sphere; and the 3) Stage of 'New Activism', where women's initiatives in all former republics of Yugoslavia start, as I will argue, rebuilding the public sphere based on the skills and communicative patterns of everyday life, and thus, altering the roles assigned to them by ethno-nationalist ideology.

I will further argue that the research on the stages of women's initiatives in relation to the stages of official 'nationalism complicates the 'correspondence' between the nationalist ideology and feminist post-modern approaches to collective identity, by departing from their common essentializing tendencies. Studies of collective and individual identities practiced in the stage of new women's activism in the former Yugoslavia may point to the dangerous overlap between post-modernist and ethno-nationalist approaches to the motives and goals of post-socialist women's mobilization. This thesis is schematized in the following Table 2.

I would also need to emphasize here that my definition of the 'private' sphere does not include simply everything that does not belong to the realm of the State, including the market. I prefer the definition of the 'private' used by Gregorz Ekiert, where it is described as a sphere of 'domestic' life, marked with 'familial' and 'emotional' networks of solidarity.

My research method combines several lines of data collection and analyses: first, the political and historical sociology of the disintegration of Yugoslavia; second, the use of women's issues in the dominant ideologies of Yugoslavia and ex-Yugoslav states; third, the statistics on women's participation in the labor force and political stratum; fourth, the history of women's groups in Yugoslavia between the late 1970s and late 1980s; and, most importantly, my semi-participant observation of the work of some fifteen women's and anti-war groups, mostly those from Serbia and Croatia, and a few from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Macedonia since 1991. This article is a smaller, condensed part of this research.

Let me now explain in more detail what I mean by the stages of Yugoslav 'official' nationalism and their correspondence with stages of women's activism since the late 1970s. Although few sociologists and political scientists today would argue that Yugoslavia's violent collapse was caused by some 'ancient' ethnic hostilities and national loyalties, there is enough evidence to conclude that nations are still being defined as 'real', fixed cultural and political entities by various proponents of the modernization and world-system theories. Instead of analyzing the Yugoslav 'nation', and its constituent 'nationalities' is a set of institutions and their ways of building social constituencies, these post-primordialists borrow the definition of the nation from the practice of the states that disseminate nationalism as their dominant ideology. Whose "false consciousness" is, then, nationalism? Of the 'bourgeois', or of the researcher trying to de-construct it?

Post-primordialist narratives of nationalism also tend to suggest that the line between the public and private sphere in the age of nationalism is virtually non-existent, meaning that the power of nationalist sentiments subsumes all aspects of group and individual identity. The case of women's activism in Yugoslavia can be used as a de-mystifying window to the landscape of private and public lives of some living constituencies of nationalism.

My approach takes nationalism as a group-making process. In the case of former socialist Yugoslavia, the motion of national 'groupness', or collective, has moved through two stages -- republican, and ethno-nationalist --, that accompanied the failing agendas of the

Yugoslav League of Communists to solve economic and political crises since the early 1960s. After its break-up with Stalin in 1948, the Yugoslav League of Communists attempted to introduce the system of workers' councils in industrial enterprises. The 1965 economic reform planned to institutionalize the autonomy of industrial enterprises, as well as cultural and educational institutions, and reduce the power of federal planning agencies. On the ideological level, this agenda meant the dismantling of the Soviet model, denounced for its detachment from the 'working people'. Between 1965 and the promulgation of the new federal Constitution in 1974, proposals for the regional autonomy of industrial complexes, as well as cultural institutions came from the liberal-minded Party cadres in all Yugoslav republics. However, what took place in practice, instead of the actual decentralization of decision-making, was a vertical devolution of political power: it was transferred to, multiplied, and 'rounded off within the six republics and two provinces. Instead of the monopoly of one federal League of Communists, eight Party establishments were now endowed with the power to control economic and cultural policies within their regions. Since the transfer of political power from the federation to the republics turned out to be the only substantive result of the "self-management decentralization" reform, it would be difficult to argue that the new system actually allowed for a greater expression of (objectively increasing) social and economic grievances. In fact, the new Constitution expunged the "interests of the working people" even from its text, replacing it with the idea of the republican and provincial citizenship. Thus, group interests of each individual citizen in Yugoslavia were formulated as the interests of his/her republic and province, according to both (!) territorial and nationality criteria. (Sekelj, 1993: 4-18).

Since the mid- 1970s, when the growing army of the unemployed and semi-employed started threatening the legitimacy of the League of Communists, party oligarchies began to define the deepening economic crisis in terms of the problem of inadequate responses of particular regional (one or another republics' or provinces') bureaucracies to the pressures of modernization. Since each republics' titular nationalities were identified with certain territories, the deepening economic crises could be officially interpreted as a problem of a certain 'national territory'. Since the attempts for solving the deepening economic crises were replaced with the efforts to create full autonomy of administrative-territorial units, six republics and two provinces soon became autarkic, --more than autonomous. (Sekelj, 1993:97-101; 227-226). The ensuing rivalry between the republic's Party leaderships, and its ideological expression – multiple

republican nationalisms –were further exacerbated in the late 1970s, when another shift took place in the international terms of trade. In response to the shifting terms of trade the federal government's austerity measures attempted to make the country's exports more competitive on the international market, favoring the producers of manufactured exports in Slovenia, developed regions in Croatia, and some producers in Serbia. Agricultural exports from Bosnia, Macedonia and Serbia, the beneficiaries of numerous subsidies and foreign loans in the previous period, were no longer favored. As a response to the pressures for reunification of the Yugoslav autarkic markets and financial systems, pressures coming from the International Monetary Fund advisors, the Yugoslav political oligarchies developed two competing strategies: 1) 'Federalist' strategy sought to reunite the Yugoslav market and allow for the free flow of capital and labor across the republics' boundaries; 2) 'Anti-federalist' strategy, instead, demanded protection of the most profitable industrial producers, located in the northwestern regions of the country (Woodward, 1995: 58-63; 82-88). It is within this context of the pressures from the IMF, on the one hand, and the competing strategies of economic reform, on the other, that we must understand the role of the republican official nationalisms, practiced by the Yugoslav republics' elites. It is within this same context that the debates between the Slovenian and Serbian Leagues of Communists about the proposals for new constitutional amendments took place between 1987 and 1988. The coming to power of Slobodan Milosevic in 1987 and his quick moves to abolish the constitutional autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina, could be, then, regarded as a 'federalist' response to the shifting terms of international trade, but also as an attempt to reunite the disintegrated market and polity in Serbia. On the other hand, it was also an assertion of the monopoly of the Serbian League of Communists over the territory of the entire republic, the process that was taking place in all republics since the 1974 Constitution.

The conflict between the Serbian and Slovenian Party leaderships about the content and goals of the republics' constitutional amendments in 1989 is significant because it presents a departure from the stage of official elite republican nationalisms. For the first time since WW2, the language of ethnic chauvinism, elaborated as the themes of ethno-national exploitation of one region by another, entered the pages of the daily press and other mass media in Yugoslavia. The stage of populist (and popular) ethnic nationalism, as a sentiment to be assimilated by all citizens in a, needless to mention, multi-ethnic state, was orchestrated from above, as the last stage of the all-Yugoslav ideology, and its Nemesis at the same time. The fact that the federation's political

and economic institutions, as well as their media and cultural institutions, were thoroughly divided by republics and provinces since the early 1970s, provided an ideal structure for the dissemination and assimilation of ethno-national group sentiments. To summarize: the Yugoslav territorial and ethnic nationalisms, defined as ideologies of the rivaling republics' Leagues of Communists, and then, as sources of group identification in the late-socialist Yugoslavia, developed as the result of the long-time autarkization of the country's political, economic, and cultural institutions, -- not the other way around. Ethnic mobilization of the 'masses' had its roots in a successful orchestration of legitimate social and economic discontents, not in some grassroots 'liberal' or grassroots 'aggressive' nationalist ideas, surviving since the nineteenth century or earlier. Prior to the first multi-party elections in 1990, and arguably, not even after the elections, the 'masses' (urban and rural, and in all regions of the former Yugoslavia) had few means to imagine themselves as individual political subjects (with economic, communal, ethnic, or any other interests). The 1990 polls show that, despite the several- years-long orchestration of ethno-national hostilities, only a small percentage of the population expected their country to break-up (Oberschall, 1996).

What was, then, happening with private lives of the 'ordinary' Yugoslavs, what was the distance between them and the rivaling elites? Numerous studies document the rise of alternative civic initiatives in the republics of former Yugoslavia since the late 1970s. Unfortunately, some former experts on the cultural and political ethos of these alternative initiatives have succumbed to the pressure to explain the success of ethno-nationalist mobilization, and have argued that nationalism simply had proven to be the most powerful source of group identity, rather than trying to understand how the nationalist elites utilized some of the cultural repertoire of numerous alternative initiatives. First of all, it is important to say that alternative initiatives in the former Yugoslavia were never oppositional movements, to the extent that it could be said of the Solidarity movement in Poland or Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. Since the late 1960s, the criticism of the Yugoslav political system by 'critical' intellectuals was firmly embedded in the discourse of a return to the true essence of socialist self-management (Sekelj, 1993: 149-152). The same could be said of the political attitudes of the early feminist groups, comprised of professional women from the fields of social sciences, literature, and journalism. One should not forget that Yugoslavia in the 1970s was the only socialist one-party state that had open borders and relatively free access to foreign periodicals

and programs of international academic exchange. In this atmosphere, feminism developed as a critical discipline among the non-Party-affiliated professional women in the form of discussing the trends in Western feminism, but also as a critique of the inequality between sexes in the socialist Yugoslavia. The critique of the socialist forms of patriarchy, developed by the feminist groups in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana, was at first received with suspicion by the party-sponsored Socialist Conference for Women's Activities, but soon found its way not only to academic workshops funded by the Yugoslav official academic associations, but also to the popular weekly and academic press (Pacic, 1989: 91-97). The permissive authoritarianism of the Yugoslav Party was cautious in suppressing such alternative initiatives, especially since they did not question the legitimacy of "self-management democracy". The reputation of Yugoslavia as a state different from all others, especially from its 'oppressive' East European neighbors, seemed to play some role in the Yugoslav Communist elites' decision to leave the new feminist initiatives alone. After all, the Yugoslav legacy of the anti-fascist struggle during WW2 had always contained an emphasis on the inclusion of women of all classes and nationalities in the building of the socialist state. To what extent the Yugoslav elites were ideologically permissive (or unstable) can be shown by the slogan of one of the first feminist discussion forums in Belgrade in the late 1970s: "Proletarians of all countries, who is washing your socks" -- a slogan that passed without a comment on the part of the official ideologues, but was applauded in the popular weekly cultural and political magazines.

Although these early feminist groups worked in close cooperation with each other, the staging of an all-Yugoslav feminist movement was not easy, due to the fact that financing academic and cultural exchange across the republics' and provinces' borders was more and more difficult since the early 1970s. Most feminist conferences were sponsored by the so-called Unions of the Socialist Youth that allowed feminist forums to use their facilities and charge some of their travel and other expenses to the local (Serbian, Croatian or Slovenian) Socialist Youth. At the same time, Croatian feminists organized a "Woman and Society" section within the official sociological association of Croatia, which enabled them to apply for research and travel funds: feminist studies thus became sponsored by official academic bodies. Between the late 1970s and late 1980s, research was conducted on the diminishing access of women to high political posts, on the discrepancy between the high academic achievements of women and their invisibility in the top echelons of academic establishments, and on the patterns of occupational

segregation, typical of all socialist states at the time. (Jancar, 1985; Slapsak, 1996). Women were concentrated in low-skilled administrative jobs, or, as university graduates, as teachers in kindergartens, elementary and high schools. New job areas that became stereotyped as 'female' were soon acquiring low status and resulted in lower pay and benefits.

What is interesting about the first stage of women's activism is that it focused on the poor representation of women in the high-paid and high-status jobs more than on the studies of everyday lives of 'ordinary' women. This tendency was observed by some feminists in Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade already in the 1980s: they claimed that feminism became an elitist trend, while the field was in need of empirical studies and direct communication with those sixty per cent of women who were presented in the official statistics as dependents or semi-employed persons.

What the first feminists seemed to be less sensitive about at the time were the reasons behind the growing interest of the political elites in constructing the image of the Yugoslav woman. In the late 1980s, when Fadil Hoxha, a representative from Kosovo in the Federal Presidency of Yugoslavia, allegedly suggested that the Yugoslav women of Christian background should be allowed to work as prostitutes in Kosovo because Muslim Albanian women could not do that, Yugoslav intellectual feminists at first failed to analyze this event as a construction of the collective identities of both Albanian and Serb and Montenegrin women in Kosovo. With a typical contempt for everything taking place in the realm of high politics, they regarded both the alleged comment of Fadil Hoxha and the following construction of his 'anti-Yugoslav ethno-nationalism' by the Serbian media as symptoms of 'male chauvinism'. The event was, in reality, much more complicated. When the Serb demonstrators in Kosovo started carrying some slogans such as "Serb mothers are not whores", demanding Fadil Hoxha's resignation, the feminist circles defined it as demonstrations of poor 'traditional women', worried about their rural (meaning ethnic) values of 'honor'. What the intellectual feminism of the 1980s failed to observe is the peculiar relationship between the rivalries of the republics 'Party leaderships, rising unemployment, and declining social benefits on the one hand, and the rise of the pro-natalist discourse and the celebration of the role of women as carriers of family and national stability on the other. Nation, as I mentioned before, was being increasingly defined as ethnic entity.

The same elements of the pro-natalist discourse can be found in all other East-Central European states at (the time, which shows that ethno-nationalization of official politics, occurring in Yugoslavia at the time, was not the sole reason for the socialist regimes' interest in women. The crumbling of the welfare state, taking place in all late-socialist states, was accompanied by the concern for moral and cultural 'well-being' of both women and children, that, supposedly, needed to be protected from the harmful effects of public life. In reality, on the other hand, public life did contain some unpleasant changes: unemployment and the deterioration of child care facilities. The way in which the pro-natalist regimes of the 1980s addressed the 'well-being' of women-- an ambiguous view of women as being 'burdened' with their work outside home, and at the same time, as the beneficiaries of socialist policies -- extended to the post-socialist period. In fact, the post-1989 restructuring of the welfare system, employment policies, and the regrouping of the new political elites, provided new incentives for the pro-natalist and paternalistic discourse (Gal, 1994; Verdery, 1994).

It comes as no surprise that the intellectual feminists in Yugoslavia observed the victory of the mono-ethnic nationalist parties in the collapsing federation in a similar fashion that other non-empowered constituencies reacted to it: with revolt, disbelief and consternation (Slapsak, 1993 and 1996). Unlike the dissident circles in the rest of East-Central European states, the alternative networks in Yugoslavia had not perceived themselves as opponents of the regime. It could be argued that many of the anti-ethnonationalist feminists thought that the Communist Party converted to nationalism (as a destructive ideology) only in the few years preceding the 'collapse of Communism'.

The all-Yugoslav intellectual feminist networks could not survive the Yugoslav federation. The next stage of women's initiatives, developing between 1991 and 1992, was, in fact, the period of anti-war initiatives in all ex-Yugoslav republics (I call it the reactive stage). Individuals demonstrating against the war in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Slovenia, were mostly women: among them, old-time Yugoslav feminists were gradually getting outnumbered by students, mothers of soldiers, and refugee women. The motivation to participate in the anti-war demonstrations, under the pressure of the increasing hostility of the post-Yugoslav nationalist regimes toward any anti-war sentiments, obviously required more courage than the earlier feminist mobilization. Since the majority of anti-war demonstrators did not belong to the strata of women with a developed 'feminist consciousness', constructed in the professional milieu of

the early feminists, we should seek a more sensitive explanation of the reasons behind the entry of these 'new women' in the public arena.

Anti-war protests in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia reached its apogee in 1991, and faded away during the escalation of the war in Bosnia. However, between 1992 and 1995 new groups of women emerged, absorbing the members of the anti-war protests and drawing new participants, particularly from refugee women, women who had lost their jobs (or were on what is called in ex-Yugoslavia 'unpaid vacations'), and students. The third stage of New women's Activism was characterized not only by an elaborated work among the refugees, but also by organizing shelters for the victims of war rape, domestic violence, and providing legal aid to draft-dodgers. Although it may seem that many of these activities are 'typically feminine' and should be welcomed by the nationalist-conservative regimes, I would suggest that the motivation of these women to work in various humanitarian relief groups is, in fact, a subversion of the paternalistic nationalist ideology. First, it is true that the nationalistic regimes attempted to use the 1991/1992 revolt of the mothers of soldiers for its own purposes. The examples of the Croatian Rampart of Love, the Serbian Mothers Against the War, and most obviously, the use of the mass rape by Serb soldiers against the Bosnian Muslim women in the Bosnian government's pleas for international military intervention, are the instances of overt instrumentalization. Moreover, the identification of women with the "wounded bodies of the nation" was appropriated even by some prominent Western feminists and 'critical intellectuals', such as Catherine MacKinnon and Alain Finkelkraut.

Despite all these attempts of the nationalist regimes to create their versions of women's issues as public (belonging to the realm of state intervention) and private (as the site of sacred loyalties to family, husbands, and children) at once, the activities of women's groups between 1992 and 1995 show a much greater propensity for autonomous ideas and self-perceptions than presented by the ruling parties and the media. In fact, many groups that I studied combine their humanitarian relief work with writing petitions against their governments' anti-women's policies in the sphere of employment and social services, while some, like Women in Black in Belgrade and Rijeka, continue to stage anti-war protests, condemning the warring ethno-nationalist regimes. Even in the war-torn Bosnia, women's groups insistence on their urban, cosmopolitan identity alters the images of submissive, frightened, in short, 'traditional' women celebrated by the Bosnian government. Another feature that makes the work of these groups different from the

image of women's private sphere, assigned by the nationalist governments, is their dedication to work with and for other women. Those working in the numerous shelters and counseling centers for battered women and children not only confront some enraged husbands who come to their doors, but also conduct and publish studies of the detrimental effects of nationalism and war psychology on the aggressive behavior of men. Women's' grassroots refugee relief groups, in contrast to state-run refugee agencies, try to promote economic self-reliance among women, by organizing special training and work programs, and by selling books, drawings, sweaters and accessories produced by refugee women.

The overwhelming majority of women working in these groups express their dissatisfaction with both the realm of partisan politics and with the attitudes toward war and ethnic nationalism held by their male family members, neighbors, and work mates. While many women tend to essentialize the differences between women and men with regard to their attitudes toward war and nationalism, this essentialization serves as an important impulse for criticizing the policies of nationalist governments, and for making the activities of these groups more attractive to many women who may feel suspicious or awkward about 'Western' feminist insistence on individual career goals and competitive behavior.

### **The Problems of the Observers**

Before I start synthesizing my findings about the impact of the official ideology and policies of the Yugoslav regime and its successors upon women's groups, I would like to suggest paying closer attention to the conceptual and methodological problems found in some influential Western feminist literature on the East-European transition. I suggest to return to this topic, mentioned in the opening paragraphs, because I wish to problematize further the problem of the lack of field studies of the boundary between the public and private spheres in the East-European transition.

The examples of the misunderstandings and 'clicheing' of East European women and feminists are numerous. The debate about who the East-European women are culminated in the writings about the mass rape of the Bosnian women by the Bosnian Serb soldiers in 1992-1993. A prominent American feminist Catherine MacKinnon argues that the Bosnian Muslim and Croatian women could be identified with the fate of their new nation-states, borrowing the

metaphors from the local politicians' pleas for international military intervention. In the same piece, MacKinnon suggests that the pursuit of mass rape as part of the ideology of (male) Serbs comes should not be surprising since the production of pornography in the former Yugoslavia was run by the Serbs (!) (MacKinnon, in *Mass Rape*, 1994). Perhaps more disturbing than the ignorance and rage that inform her article, and more striking than her identification of women's suffering with the 'pain' experienced by their nation-states, is MacKinnon's disinterestedness in the real lives, past and present, of women who survived the war rape. As the Serbian-Slovenian feminist anthropologist Svetlana Slapsak points out, the patterns of women's solidarity networks, formed by their past private lives (in the rural and suburban Bosnia), translated and changed in the refugee context, seldom attract the curiosity of foreign observers, even those motivated by the most humanist-feminist causes, as in the case of MacKinnon's involvement (Slapsak, 1996). The relationship between the rise of ethno-nationalism in East-Central Europe and the marginalization of women and women's groups is one important testing ground for concepts and methodologies applicable to the post-Communist women and their activism. The problems found in the volume on the mass rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina resurface in another form in Sabrina Ramet's work on alternative movements in Eastern Europe. Although Ramet spent many years studying women's groups in the region, she explains their marginalization in the former Yugoslavia in a 'commonsensical' fashion: patriarchal nationalism was revived in Serbia since the advent to power of Slobodan Milosevic; this event then unleashed conservative ideologies in other ex-Yugoslav republics, sweeping away women's and other alternative movements (Ramet, 1995: see chapters on Yugoslavia). It follows from this scheme that the post-socialist anti-women's backlash is a reaction to the 'socialist-modernist' policies on women. This simplistic explanation of the backlash implies that conducting field work on some fledgling post-Communist forms of women's activism is not a priority task as long as nationalism is the dominant ideology. After all, they (the post-1989 women's groups) may be just 'residues' of the nostalgia for the public space of women during socialism.

A new comprehensive understanding of the past and present identities of East-European women means, first of all, a research on their institutional and cultural contexts. Only such in-depth analysis may legitimize the suggestions about "what to fight for and against". Some relevant criticism of the Western 'modernist' and 'post-modernist' (identity politics- colored) views of East-European feminism has been already articulated by the local sociologists and

anthropologists. Jirina Smejkalova-Strickland, a Czech feminist researcher, calls for a study of the 'socialist female and male subject', suggesting that the 'modern dominant male' started emerging in the post-Communist Europe only recently: ordering a battle against him in the same way that it has been done in the West may confuse and revolt many women and men. Maja Povrzanovic, a Croatian anthropologist, shows that Western NGOs in Croatia, and feminist groups in particular, have been classifying local women's groups into the categories of 'civic' activists (Western-like) who are eligible for foreign support, and 'nationalist conservatives' (those who are not critical of the Croatian regime) (Povrzanovic, 1995). In a remarkably similar fashion, Western feminist discourses on East-Central European women and ethno-nationalist rhetoric of the local politicians that the former seem to abhor, essentialize the identities of local women, depriving them from the voice of their own. The problem might be overcome by more field studies: this paper is a sign in that direction. By offering multi-layered definitions of who the East-Central European women were in their private and public lives before 1999/1990, i.e. by finding out how they were defined officially and in other, less visible, contexts, we may start understanding not only what the local women want, but also what kind of feminism might become successful in their midst. Limiting oneself to the studies of local feminists' discourses may shed too little light on the context of the disintegrating public sphere in East-Central Europe (employment structures, welfare and social service facilities, health care) and the ways in which women's private sphere (inherited from socialism) copes with the change and thus changes itself. This comprehensive approach may also help answer the question of why and how some women become tokens of nationalist ideologies or even their spokespersons.

### **Synthesizing Remarks**

In order to historicize and theorize the findings of my research in a more schematic way, I suggest to look again at Table 1, where the relationship between the stages of official nationalism of the Yugoslav regime and its successors, and the activities and ideas of women's groups is presented. This scheme also illustrates my attempts to de-ideologize the fluid boundary between the public and private spheres, and rescue it from the stiff definitions found in both nationalist ideologies and some feminist approaches.

The permissive authoritarianism of the Yugoslav League of Communists in the late 1970s, lasting until the mid-1980s, lead allowed for the emergence of a Yugoslav brand of intellectual feminism, focusing on the place of women in the public arena and the detrimental impact of patriarchy that was discovered to have persisted in socialism. At the same time, the early feminists did not dispute the distinction between the private and public sphere of women's lives, sharing the orthodox Marxist (developmentalist) contempt for women's role of the 'sentimental' care provider. Little effort was put at the time in trying to understand the tension between the role of women as 'socialist workers' and guardians of family 'safe havens'. Only recently some feminist writers from East-Central Europe pointed to the conflictual role of women during both socialism and post-socialism, neglected not only by the socialist and nationalist regimes, but by many ex-dissident intellectuals (Slapsak, 1996; Gal, 1994). During socialism, the sphere of private was regarded as a safe arena of anti-regime gatherings by both male and female dissidents. The celebration of women as guardians of that safe 'oppositional' space incidentally, at one point, started corresponding with the nationalist regimes' depiction of women as 'natural' links between the family and (ethnic) nation (seen as a 'big family').

The nationalization of women's issues that paralleled the crumbling of social services and employment opportunities for women, and their 'sublimation' in the pro-natalist rhetoric, were taking place in all East Central European states during the 1980s. (I should mention here that in most socialist states pro-natalist rhetoric, as a concern for the dropping birth rate, in fact, appeared already in the 1970s: however, at that time it was within the context of the regime's concerns for the diminishing pool of labor force.) During the 1980s, the feminists in Yugoslavia focused primarily on the diminishing presence of women in the public arena. This focus did not provide them with a sufficiently broad vision that would help them understand the potential of the emerging ethno-nationalist homogenization to usurp all areas and institutions that seemed to have secured some autonomy during socialism: family, schools, neighborhood networks, etc.

During the second stage of women's initiatives, in the anti-war phase, women rebelled against ethno-nationalism as a morally repugnant ideology destroying the fabric of everyday life, and as concerned mothers, sisters, lovers, and wives of the soldiers of the new armies. Although they were at times manipulated by the nationalist leaders and the media, this manipulation ceased to exist as soon as the regimes sensed that most women's groups were not comfortable with their image of the 'national mothers'. During this second stage the dominant ideology insisted on the

unity of public and private sphere, justified by the needs to sacrifice private interests to the goals of the war and liberation. Participants of the anti-war groups, on the other hand, presented a different picture of both public and private lives. Although they drew their motivation to participate in the anti-war protests from their role of the guardians of the 'family peace', and as if they would be able to communicate it to the public sphere, they obviously crossed the boundary between the sphere that was 'theirs' according to the dominant discourse, and the space that belonged to men -- the sphere of political visibility.

The subversion of the boundaries assigned by the nationalist narratives became even more obvious during the third stage, the one that is still at work. It is perhaps interesting to mention that the third ('humanitarian') stage is marked by a growing financial support of foreign philanthropic and women's organizations. In Serbia, for example, it was not possible to receive foreign aid between 1992 and 1996 for any other purpose except for humanitarian relief due to the international economic sanctions. During the third stage women in all ex-Yugoslav states have engaged in the activities that are even more discomfiting from the point of view of the nationalist ideology. Not only they have often helped refugee women of all nationalities, not only they have tried to make women financially independent, but they have, in addition, engaged in some unspeakable crimes: the organization of workshops that feature women from all ex-Yugoslav 'warring nations'. In the last four years, the Belgrade-based Women in Black have organized annual workshops and anti-war protests in Novi Sad, whose participants include not only women from Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia, but also from all confederate units of Bosnia. Ironically, some Western feminist writers few years ago claimed that women of the 'opposing sides' of the Yugoslav war cannot be expected to sit side by side (Helke Sander, in *The Mass Rape*, 1994).

In the third stage of women's activism, the boundaries between the private and public experiences are blurred, again in a different fashion. Women are expunged from the public-political arena more than ever, but they also develop a new critical sense of the meaning of their marginalization. They draw their sense of subjectivity from the skills and habits of their 'double shift', a subjectivity inherited from socialism, but they do not live it within their family space alone. They react to the encroachment of war ideologies and the rules of economic restructuring on the spheres where some autonomy existed before, and redefine their public and private roles.

The apparent lack of obstacles to the proliferation of women's alternative and genuinely non-ethnonationalistic activities seems to be due to the inherently unstable ideologies of the post-Yugoslav states. What kind of future could we predict for women's initiatives in this region? The fading of ethno-nationalist-nationalist ideology could lead to the 'demobilization' of women's activism and their further marginalization from the sphere of career jobs and political posts. The 'normalization' of the war-stricken states could also lead to the gradual movement of women's initiatives towards the sphere of political decision-making. We may expect that women's activism would contribute, and, in fact, has already contributed to the new forms of separation and connection between the public and private sphere, this time built from bottom to top, from scratch.

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