

Jan - Mar. 1997

Vol. 1 No. 2
ISSN 1391 - 2380

Nēthrā

A non - specialist journal for lively minds

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INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES COLOMBO

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Journal of the International Centre for Ethnic
Studies, Colombo

Nēthrā will appear quarterly. Subscription rates are listed in a folder that accompanies this issue. Readers who have earlier subscribed to *The Thatched Patio* will be credited with the residue of their subscription.

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Colombo

ISSN 1391 - 2380

All correspondence to:
International Centre for Ethnic Studies
2, Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka

Typeset by
Unique Graphics, 33, 2/3, Galle Road, Colombo 6

Printed by
Unie Arts (Pvt) Ltd. No. 48 B, Bloemendhal Road, Colombo 13

Nēthrā

'Successor to "*The Thatched Patio*"')

Quarterly Journal

Editor
Regi Sirlwardena



International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo

FROM THE EDITOR

The major contribution to this second number of *Nēthrā* comes from Stanley J. Tambiah, Professor of Anthropology at Harvard. His paper, which takes a searching, and often agonising, look at ethnic violence in what was once Yugoslavia, was originally presented at a conference at the University of Mainz, Germany in 1995. Though many fresh political developments have taken place since then in former Yugoslavia, the essence of Professor Tambiah's paper hasn't been outdated by the march of events, because his principal question — how is it that ethnic violence was often perpetrated, not by strangers against each other, but by neighbours who had lived side by side with and known each other for many years? — retains all its urgent and disturbing character. And in relation not only to former Yugoslavia but also to many other societies torn by fratricidal violence.

Rape is one of the several forms of obliterating the 'other' that are considered by Professor Tambiah, but it is the sole subject of Rosanna Favero-Karunaratna's paper. (She is a member of the Peruvian Bar, and is Representative in Asia of CLADEM, the Latin-American Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights.) Taking as her main principle the fact that women's rights are human rights, she examines the varied social contexts in which rape can take place and the different ways in which they violate the fundamental human rights of women.

*

A particularly lynx-eyed reader has raised with us the fact that both British and American spellings occurred in the pages of the first number of *Nēthrā*, and that, as he points out, even the same word (in different articles) was sometimes spelt in two different ways. We wish to explain that this wasn't accidental but in keeping with our conscious editorial practice. We consider that in a world where both American and British books and periodicals circulate in Sri Lanka, as in other parts of the English-speaking world, where computers often come equipped with spellcheck programs (rather than programmes) that are attuned to American spellings, where students, scholars and writers migrate from South Asia to the United States as often as to Britain, we

are confronted by an international culture in which the old lines of distinction have been blurred. In this situation, then, we don't wish to impose by editorial fiat either British or American norms of spelling on our contributors but will be guided instead by the choices made by each writer him/her/self. Is it *colour* or *color*, *defence* or *defense*, *sceptic* or *skeptic*? We answer such questions on the basis of the Sam Weller Principle: 'That depends on the taste and fancy of the speller, my Lord.'

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Obliterating the “Other” in Former Yugoslavia

Stanley J. Tambiah

The Diabolical Riddle

Georg Simmel has made this observation which I take to be my text for explication: “The degeneration of a difference in convictions into hatred and fight occurs only when there were essential similarities between the parties. The ‘respect for the enemy’ is usually absent where the hostility has arisen on the basis of previous solidarity. And where enough similarities continue to make confusions and blurred outlines possible, points of difference need an emphasis not justified by the issue but only by that danger of confusion.”

Many commentators on the so-called ethnic or ethnonationalist conflicts exploding in many parts of the globe - in Eastern Europe, Northern Ireland, the Middle East, Turkey, South Asia, Africa (most recently in Rwanda and Burundi), and in many other locations - have been deeply confused and shocked by two features.

One is the extreme brutality of the conflicts in which the attackers inflict extreme pain, mutilation, deprivation and degradation on their victims. The other is that the assailants and victims who frequently reverse roles and are engaged in exchanges of violence are not strangers to one another. They have been “neighbors” in the loose sense of having lived in the same towns, resided or intermixed side by side in contiguous districts and in neighboring towns, for long periods of time, and have had transactions of various kinds. As Simmel has perceptively said it is because of the sudden imposition of difference

on the basis of previous solidarity and co-existence, and it is because of the "blurred" nature of the social landscape that perhaps an overdetermined hatred and repudiation is unleashed in denial of "confusions" or lack of firm partitions between the antagonists. One might extend Simmel by saying that the greater the blurrings of and ambiguities between the socially constructed categories of difference, the greater the venom of the imposed boundaries, when conflict erupts, between the self and the other, "us" and "them". No international military code of humane treatment of "prisoners of war" deriving from "respect for the enemy" regulates the conduct of Serb and Bosnian Muslim, Armenian and Azerbaijani, Hindu and Muslim in Kashmir, Sinhalese soldier and Tamil insurgent in Sri Lanka.

Can we push this process of creating and repudiating the intolerable "other" in current ethnonationalist conflict any further? Can we say that it is because that component of "sameness" that the ethnic enemy shares with you, and because already your enemy is part of you, that you must forcibly expel him or her from yourself, objectify him or her as the *total other*? Accordingly, that component of 'difference' from you, whether it be allegedly 'religious' or 'linguistic', or 'racial' is so exaggerated and magnified that this stereotyped "other" must be degraded, dehumanized and compulsively *obliterated*?

I have previously referred to the sudden imposition of difference on the social space of previous coexistence. I have to offer some interpretation of the genesis and repulsion of this process. I shall try to provide this in the last section of this paper when I shall discuss the nationalizing and nation-making project, that leaders of ethno-nationalist movements espouse and champion, and how that project entails a problematic homogenising process inside one's own collectivity at the same time as it attributes an equally homogenising opposed identity to the "other" collectivity.

The former Yugoslavia is an apt site to visit to see the processes I have outlined. This extended quotation from Misha Glenny's *The Fall of Yugoslavia* suits our purpose¹:

"From the beginning of the conflict in Croatia, one question above most others has exercised minds inside and outside the country:

what causes this depth of hatred which has provoked atrocities and slaughter on such a wide scale over such a short period of time? In retrospect, it seems clear that the wars of the Second World War did not end with Tito. The conflict inside Yugoslavia between 1941-5 assumed such bloody proportions that, were it ever to revive, it was always likely to be merciless. Even for those like myself who have observed not merely the war itself but the dense web of political intrigue which led to it, the extent or nature of the violence is beyond any framework of moral comprehension. Obviously, the conflict has been caused by complex historical and political forces. But the hatred has a slightly different origin. To a large degree, the wars of the Yugoslav succession have been nationalist in character. They are not ethnic conflicts, as the media would often have it, as most of those doing the killing are of the same ethnos. Indeed what is striking about Bosnia-Herzegovina, in particular, is just how closely related are the Serbs, the Croats and the Moslems. Religion is the crucial factor dividing these people, although this is not a confessional conflict. For centuries these people have been asked to choose between competing empires and ideologies, which have invariably been defined by religion.

On occasions, great earthquakes have erupted along this powerful historical fault line. It is then that the Bosnians have been enlisted in the service of this or that great power. The Bosnian Serbs, Croats and Moslems have been adorned with many different cultural uniforms over the centuries by which they identify one another as the enemy when conflict breaks out. Despite this, underneath the dress they can see themselves reflected - it is this awful recognition that these primitive beasts on the other side of the barricade are their brothers which has led to the violence assuming such ghastly proportions in Bosnia. The only way that fighters can deal with this realization is to exterminate the opposite community. How else does one explain the tradition of facial mutilation in this region? How else can we account for the high incidence of women and children being killed in cold blood? The Orthodox, the Catholics or the Moslems can only claim victory when the heretics have been wiped out or expelled from their homes. Ceasefires brokered by the United Nations may come and go in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the fighters on all three sides will almost certainly ignore them. The Serbs will continue until they control 65

¹ Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, Penguin Books, pp. 168-169.

percent of Bosnian territory; Croat guns will not rest until western Hercegovina and Posavina have been integrated into Croatia; and despite the best attempts by the Serbs to exterminate them and the Croats to disenfranchise them politically, the Moslems will mount a guerrilla campaign against which the struggles in Northern Ireland and the Basque country will pale into insignificance. Historically, the only way to keep these people apart once the fighting begins has been for an outside power to intervene and offer its protection to all citizens, in particular, from imperial urges of Croatia and Serbia. History will judge whether the international community is able to rise to the mighty challenge posed by war in Bosnia-Hercegovina."

Neighbors Turn Assailants in Croatia

The following examples dramatically illustrate how persons of different ethnic nationality who have lived in accommodation and amity speedily turn against one another, when carried by the tidal wave of ethnonationalist conflict.

The New York Times, dated July 31, 1991, contained this article in which certain Croat villagers of Struga, a rural community about 60 miles from Zagreb, the Croatian capital, are reported as describing "how their Serb neighbors rounded up dozens of their kinsmen four days ago [in late July 1991] and used them as human shields for a methodical march of death and destruction."

"One of the victims of this violence, a Miss Melita Blazevec, 20 years old, described how the attack began in the morning with an onslaught of mortar rounds, followed by "the Serbs ... moving through the neighboring hamlet of Zamlaca, collecting hostages.

Miss Blazevec, who has a black eye and shattered teeth, said she was hiding in her home at the outskirts of Struga when the Serbs kicked down the door. Outside, she saw the flatbed truck with the machine gun bolted to its floor. Her 24-year-old brother, Zdravko, had long since left the house to join in the firefight."

"Almost all of them were schoolmates, the people with whom I used to meet for drinks,' she said of the Serbs. 'I told them, 'You are garbage.'

'They asked me, 'Where is your brother?' I said 'I don't know.' And they started to beat me.'"

"One started to beat me with his pistol on my face,' she continued. 'When he broke three teeth - he was standing on my left side - I directly blew my teeth out. He said, 'Why are you spitting at me?'"²

"The skirmish in Struga was part of a broad offensive on Friday and Saturday that saw Serbian rebels push the Croats from a number of villages south of Zagreb. Struga, home to about 200 people, is on the edge of a predominantly Serbian area that has declared its independence from Croatia and calls itself Krajina."

According to Miss Blazevec the hostages were to make "a human wall", behind which the Serb assailants placed themselves, and the procession moved forward, the hostages being prodded by knives and gun butts, toward the Croatian police who were trying to maintain authority in a region of Croatia where Serbs outnumber Croats: "The police defenders were reportedly paralysed by the sight of their families held hostage and did not return fire."

"Another informant, Maria Kizevic, who gave her age as over 60, said she knew nearly all of the assailants from her years of work at the local school. Mrs. Kizevic said she was terrified by the initial artillery barrage, and gave up counting the sounds of exploding mortar rounds after reaching 257 in one hour."

It is noteworthy that not only had the assailants and victims, Serbs and Croats, lived together and knew one another, but also that the witnesses commented on the suddenness of the ethnic divide and violence that had engulfed them:

"The villagers seemed bewildered by the speed with which hatred has overwhelmed all other feelings between local Serbs and Croats. Several said Predrag Orlovic, a Serb who has openly boasted of cutting Croatian policemen's throats, only last year shared a combine with his Croatian neighbors to bring in the harvest."

² *The New York Times*, July 31, 1991: "A Day of Terror and Death on a Serb-Croat Divide" by Stephen Engelberg. All quotations are taken from this report.

Serbs and Croats: From Coexistence to Enmity and Annihilation

Glenny provides us with a vivid reporting of how the narod, the ordinary people of a region called Krajina, where the town of Knin is located, became fatally fractured in ethnonationalist terms. Although Krajina was officially within Croatia, yet the majority of the local population were Serbs, and in Knin itself the Croats were definitely a minority.

Before May 1991, according to Glenny, the local Croats and Serbs "lived in contentment in this and other regions." They would not have dreamed at that time that it might be possible "that Croat soldiers would massacre innocent Serbs, while Serb fighters would mutilate innocent Croats." This is how Glenny narrates what had befallen Knin in the space of one year since he had visited it in 1990.

"When I first arrived in Knin, although the narod was being prepared for the forthcoming events, this had not yet affected the everyday friendships of Serbs and Croats. Later on during the war, I witnessed how the tightest and oldest personal bonds were slashed into ribbons by the blades of hate and prejudice. But it was a gun-carrying, Ustasha-hating Serb who put me in touch with his old Croat friends in Knin when I first travelled there. 'Most of the Croats in Knin are fine people,' he explained. 'They're not like those dreadful Ustashas in Split.' I developed a friendship with the Croat family whose fate is now a mystery to me. Even by 1990, it had become clear to me that in Croatia one's nationality was not important. The only fact of significance for individuals in Croatia was whether they were members of the local minority or not. In Knin, the Croats were definitely a minority. Although the fabric of their life was still intact, my Croat family did explain how their thirty-year-old son had been warned to stay away from public places and, indeed, to consider leaving Knin lest the Martićevci, as the Krajina Militia was labelled, should try and mobilize him.

It was through these Croats that I uncovered a network of Serbs in Knin who believed that Babić was driving them to a senseless war. These were relatively sophisticated Serbs from Knin who protested in particular against Babić's methods in organizing the referendum and

the *straža*. They described how the followers of Babić and Martić would knock on the door of recalcitrant Serb males at all hours to demand why they had failed to volunteer for duty on the *straža*. They painted a convincing picture of the general fear which Babić had created to guarantee his order. They also explained how Babić's most faithful people came not from Knin itself but from the surrounding villages. Although I was convinced by these men's story, I am similarly convinced that Babić could have survived in Knin without resorting to such crude totalitarian methods, as support for him in the town was substantial.

I visited Knin once after the war had begun. The house of my Croat friends had been taken over by Serb refugees from somewhere on the Dalmatian coast who had prominently replaced the Croat names with their own written in Cyrillic, and although I succeeded in briefly meeting one of the Serb dissidents of eighteen months earlier, his commitment was now one of unquestioning and genuine loyalty to Babić. It was as though the while town had suffered the fate of the American mid-west town featured in Don Segal's film, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: some alien virus had consumed their minds and individual consciences. Mercifully, this virus had not been so effective in the Krajina areas to the north of Knin where opposition to Babić began to grow. But in Knin nobody had a bad word to say about Babić any more and they were all being sincere. I hope I will be able to meet my Croat friends from Knin again some day. More than this, I hope they are still alive."³

The Career of Babić, A Serb Leader

Who is this Babić who was the undisputed war leader in Knin and who with the local Serbs would lead his people to one of the Balkan's most elusive grails - Serbian unity?

It was in Knin, some forty miles from Split, that Glenny met Ifilan Babić, the President of Knin's Town Council and the *enfant terrible* of Krajina politics. When he, having negotiated two barricades, finally reached Babić's headquarters in a farmhouse in the village of

³ Ibid., pp., 19-21.

Strmica he and his guide were "surrounded by several people bearing ostentatious weapons ... I saw a massive machine gun with a circular magazine which was toted by Babić's personal bodyguard. "During Glenn's discussion with them on "how these simple Serb peasants [were] traumatized by unscrupulous politicians wishing to realise their politics of nationalist fantasy, a confused tale of real and perceived discrimination emerged."

At this particular time, this particular part of Croatia, especially Knin and Krajina, was safe country for the rural Serbs, but mostly from hearsay they "were absolutely convinced that following the victory of Franjo Tudjman and his Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) in April 1990, Croats began to install the infrastructure of a fascist state in Croatia ... the revival of Croat national sentiment in any form was *ipso facto* interpreted by them as the return of fascism."⁴

Babić was a dentist, a first generation professional, who had joined the Croatian Communist Party; and after the collapse of communist power he joined the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), which was formed during the early months of 1990. Partly because of his organizational skills as the President of Knin's Town Council, Babić soon became the second most influential politician to Krajina. Soon afterwards, Babić travelled to Belgrade and his programme of action received the express approval of Milosevic. "The result was the transformation of Krajina's ragtag shotgun resistance movement into an extremely well-armed and highly motivated militia quite capable of bloodying the nose of Tudjman's nascent army..."⁵

Babić had realized "that Knin, the SDS and fears of the rural Serbs in Croatia could be mixed together, and spiked with a potent spirit of violence to make up a recipe for his political success." And he dared in time to think of territorial autonomy and to advocate for the Serbs of Krajina a policy of secession from Croatia. A self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina duly followed.

The Rape of Women on the Nationalist Battleground

Let us now turn to another matter that integrally affects the process of creating divides in the context of ethno-nationalist warfare. We are faced with the devastating issue of how the female body has become a public battleground for the pursuit of nationalist objectives which encourage rape, murder, genocide, and dehumanization. Despite the alleged deep animosities between the so-called separatist "nationalists" of former Yugoslavia, and the much touted romanticized notions of exclusive homelands inhabited by racially pure sons of the soil, the ironic countervailing fact is the "occurrence of numerous mixed marriages, and mixings and borrowings of tradition between one another, in the Eastern European milieu. 'Even in the most homogeneous republic, Slovenia, only 73 percent of the children listed on the 1981 census issued from 'ethnically pure' Slovenian marriages, while in the most bitterly contested areas of Croatia (e.g., Eastern Slavonija) as many as 35 percent of the 1981 children were from mixed Serb Croat marriages.'"⁶

Despite these every day practices that result in large proportions of intermarriage, there is another sociological principle at work, which especially in the context of demanding and affixing an unambiguous identity in these troubled times, works to impose a divide between "us" and the hostile "other". This is the strong male-macho-oriented patriarchal patrilineal principle that fixes the identity of children of mixed marriage. In the context of ethnic cleansing, children of mixed marriage seem to be forced to take the father's patrilineal identity, and are coerced together with their parents to flee or stay, to become displaced refugees or remain rightful residents, according to the fortunes of war. The entrenched tradition of patrilineage-affirming feuding and waging vendettas strengthens the use of women merely as pawns in the politics of identity, and merely as possessors of a procreative sexuality appropriated by the nationalist imperative.

Let us now visit the theatre of war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a site of brutal violence and of organized abuse of women.

⁴ Glenn, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

⁵ Ibid. p., 17.

⁶ These figures are given in Robert M. Hayden's *Constitutional Nationalism in Yugoslavia. 1990-91*, a paper read at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, Nov. 23, 1991, Chicago.

The New York Times, dated Wednesday October 20, 1993, carried this item under the caption "Rape was a Weapon of Serbs, UN Says."⁷

"United Nations war crimes commission has found evidence that rape has been used by the Serbs as a weapon of terror in the war in Bosnia.

But the commission says that the number of provable cases of rape may be substantially lower than the 20,000 estimated earlier this year by a committee of the European Community.

The European group in January said that Muslim women were raped by Serbian soldiers as part of their campaign of 'ethnic cleansing' in the Bosnia and Herzegovina civil war.

The commission has collected reports of about 3,000 rape cases in its data base at the International Human Rights Law Institute at DePaul University, Chicago. But the four-member commission has been able to identify only about 800 victims by name.

But on the basis of an examination of the first 330 victims for whom it has names the commission says it is inclined to believe that rape has been used by the Serbs as a weapon of war in their campaign to drive Muslims from their homes and seize their land.

The commission said that although Serbian, Croatian and Muslim soldiers and the police have all committed rape, the largest number of victims were Muslims and the largest number of perpetrators were Serbs.

The commission points out, in a report, that most of these cases occurred between May and December last year and in regions where Serbian forces were systematically driving out the Muslims.

It also says that accusations against members of the same military and police units suggests 'command responsibility by commission or omission,' meaning the soldiers were either encouraged to commit rape by their officers or not punished for doing so.

'The United Nations War Crimes Commission is rightly taking a restrictive view because it is a legal body preparing charges to present to a court of law,' said Ralph Kinnear, a British official. 'But we felt we had to give our ministers some idea of the probable scale of the crime that had been committed.'

Slavenka Draculić, who spoke to refugees in a camp at Resnik (near Zagreb), comprised of mostly Muslims from Bosifia-Hercegovina, confirms what we have said so far about 'the role that mass rape plays in the Serbian program of ethnic cleansing. As Susan Brownmiller and other feminists have pointed out, women have been raped in every war: as retaliation, to damage another man's 'property', to send a message to the enemy. Rape is an instrument of war, a very efficient weapon for demoralization and humiliation. In World War II, Russian and Jewish women were raped by Nazis, and Soviet soldiers raped German women by the hundreds of thousands. Chinese women were raped by the Japanese, Vietnamese by Americans. What seems to be unprecedented about the rapes of Muslim women in Bosnia (and, to a lesser extent, the Croat women too) is that there is clear political purpose behind the practice. The rapes in Bosnia are not only a standard tactic of war, they are an organized and systematic attempt to cleanse, (to move, resettle, exile) the Muslim population from certain territories. Serbs want to conquer in order to establish a Greater Serbia. The eyewitness accounts and reports state that women are raped everywhere and at all times, and victims are of all ages, from six to eighty. They are also deliberately impregnated in great numbers, held captive and released only after abortion becomes impossible. This is so they will "give birth to little Chetniks," the women are told. While Muslim men are killed fighting or exterminated in about one hundred concentration camps, women are raped and impregnated and expelled from their country. Thus not only is their cultural and religious integrity destroyed but the reproductive potential of the whole nation is threatened. Of course, Croats and Muslims have raped Serbian women in Bosnia too, but the Serbs are the aggressors, bent on taking over two-thirds of the territory. This does not justify Croat and Muslim offenses, but they are in a defensive war and do not practice systematic and organized rape."⁸

One commentator reports the voices of raped women and the issues posed by the suddenness of the violence that struck them as follows:

⁸ Slavenka Draculić, "Women Hide Behind a Wall of Silence" in Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz (eds) *Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War*. Stony Creek, Connecticut: The Pamphleteer's Press, 1993, p. 119.

⁷ The reporter was Paul Lewis. A few sentences have been deleted.

"How can there be such barbarity today, in the heart of Europe, in a civilized country, among neighbors and friends? This is a question that hangs over every conversation in Bosnia. 'How was it before the war?' I asked everyone I met, hoping for an explanation.

'Before the war it was super,' a thirty-five-year-old Serbian woman, a refugee from Vares, told me without hesitation. 'My neighbors were Muslims, Croats. We celebrated all the holidays together. A few months before the war broke out, people started separating. It was after Bosnia's independence was recognised. Our neighbors avoided us. They were blaming the Serbs for the war in Croatia.'

'Yesterday we were friends said a Muslim, a young man of twenty-four, describing how his wife was raped before his eyes by a Serb whom he knew. 'I shake when I think of it. I can't believe it happened... We knew these people; we knew them all. Overnight we became enemies. I don't know why.'⁹

'Fatima, a forty-year-old Muslim nurse, knew some of the men who had abused her when she was imprisoned in an abandoned high school in Doboj, Bosnia, for almost a month beginning last May. One of them was J., a Serbian doctor who was the first to rape her, after he called out her name from a list. 'Now you know how strong we are,' he told her afterward, 'and you will remember it forever. Where is your Izetbegovic now?'

'He was a doctor,' Fatima said. 'I would have expected him to be different from the others ... *I knew him for ten years*. We were in the same hospital circle. I saw him every day in the restaurant for hospital personnel. We talked, were acquaintances, I never sensed any hostility. He was a golden guy, refined, polite.'¹⁰ [emphasis added]

"Ljubica, a thirty-seven-year-old Serbian woman with a pretty freckled face and short dark hair, is one of seven rape victims who have been testifying in Belgrade on behalf of the Serbian government's War Crimes Commission. After her village, near Odzak in Bosnia, came under Croatian shelling on April 18, she moved from one village to another, trying to escape the war. 'The Croats came for me at 12:30

AM on June 5,' she told me. 'They broke down the door of the house and picked me out, made me walk some twenty meters away and said 'now you're going to tell us where the Chetniks are.' There were fifteen of them, *I knew them all- they were neighbors*. 'They call themselves the Fire Horses brigade.'¹⁰ [emphasis added]

Fatima's testimony that her abuser was a doctor whom she knew for ten years vividly reminds us that such ethnic violence cannot all too easily and temptingly be attributed wholesale to the criminal elements, urban lumpen proletariat, rustic louts smelling of the pigs they rear, or the mentally deformed. The doctor knew exactly what he was doing: whatever the (pathologically) erotic pleasure of rape, the inescapable truth about rape as one of the instruments of ethnic cleansing is that this form of ethnic violence is perpetrated by males upon the bodies of women, bodies which in turn signify so much. Rape as macho behaviour is a primary form of male violence practised in the service of political domination; in attacking and impregnating the women, the women are degraded, despoiled, violated and in the context of 'patriarchal' values of purity and pollution as the special sensitivities and burdens of women, rape is also an attack on the family, on the reproduction of the family, and on male pride in patriliney. As Laber puts it, any explanation of these forms of rape in terms of being "the expression of pent-up sexual desire and thus apolitical in nature, a 'private crime'... fails to recognize rape for what is, a brutal show of power and aggression not only towards women but also against vanquished men."¹¹ To this we may add, that reports that Serbian men who raped Muslim women and kept them in captivity for several weeks until the foetus is formed and thereby ensuring the birth of children of Serb fathers is the latest twist in the employment of patrilineal male dominant kinship systems in the service of nationalism.¹²

¹⁰ Laber, *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² It has also been reported that Serbian forces have held Bosnian women in brothel-like conditions, impregnated them through serial rape, and not released them until their pregnancy was too advanced for abortion. In other cases, pregnant victims themselves were unable to get abortions because of the unavailability of the necessary services.

⁹ Jeri Laber, "Bosnia: Questions About Rape" *The New York Review of Books*, March 25, 1993, pp. 3-6.

We shall deal with the experiences of rape and their effects on female victims shortly. Here the main point of focus is that in the context of ethnic politics valorized in this way the fact that many rapists were known persons who, shifting from the mores of everyday practice and etiquette, assumed and unleashed violence under the thrall of a felt collective demonizing and everyday taboo-lifting imperative sheds some light, however murky, on their behaviour. This particular trail may lead us to the political and territorial ambitions of leaders such as Milosevic of the Serbs, Tudjman of the Croats, Karadzic of the Bosnian Serbs, and their ethno-nationalist followers who have broadcast manipulative propaganda, rumours and invented 'evidence', mobilized the masses for action, and sown both collective fears and generated collective rage that have demonized the enemy, and justified their domination, displacement, degradation and elimination. "They aim to terrorize, and the methods follow a formula that has been repeated in a number of different regions of the former Yugoslavia: cold-blooded killings of men, women, and children; bodies dumped in hastily bulldozed communal graves; apartments, homes, and villages looted and burned; forced deportations; torture and abuse of detainees; rape."¹³

The Silence of Women

Draculić has reported how "reporters, feminist activists, UN officials, European Community delegates, Human Rights Watch, Helsinki Watch and Amnesty International envoys", all of them usually run "into a wall of silence" when they try to get the raped women to talk of what happened to them.

"The matter is more complicated than outsiders realize. That their cases might provide evidence against war criminals is not the main concern of these women. They barely survived the terror of the war; many have lost family members or have had husbands and sons who are still fighting there - or are held in concentration camps or have disappeared and it's not known if they are alive or dead. If the women talk, they could jeopardize the men's lives. Besides, once they are

safely out of Bosnia, they want to forget what happened to them as quickly as possible. The third, and perhaps most important, reason is that they want to hide it. Even though each woman is one among the many victims of a mass rape, what happened to them is in the domain of unspeakable things, the ultimate humiliation and shame. The invisible scars are never going to heal, but it is better if they can hide their hurt and shame from others, even relatives and neighbors ... Under normal conditions only one out of ten rape victims reports the crime. Why would women who are raped in wartime be more forthcoming? Most of the victims are Muslims from strongly patriarchal communities; they simply do not want to revive the pain they went through. I asked one if the women talk about it amongst themselves. No, she said, they prefer to face it all alone."¹⁴

Thus what happens is that women who at all costs do not want to talk in the presence of men form a 'secret, silent, frightened underground network who might know one another's misery but prefer to hide it. A thirty-year-old woman raped by four Serbian boys, allegedly 'normal' boys from the nearby Serbian village, confessed "After all these months I cannot get rid of a feeling of carrying some kind of visible stamp, of being dirty, physically dirty and guilty ... Under no condition would I return to live in the same village with Serbs as before ... In fact, I would not even live in the same state as them."¹⁵

Purging the Unwanted Experience

Melissa Caldwell, reports¹⁶ these words of a girl of 16 years of age, Enisa, who was raped by some Serb Chetniks:

"It seemed as if I were in a state of non-existence, simultaneously dead and alive, on the thin line between consciousness and madness."

Caldwell then reminds us that Elaine Scarry has argued that the intense pain of torture is the moment at which the victim's "world, self,

¹³ Ibid., p.3.

¹⁴ Draculić, op. Cit., p. 113.

¹⁵ Draculić, ibid., p. 119.

¹⁶ Melissa Caldwell *The Struggle to Appropriate Women's Bodies: The Case of the Former Yugoslavia*. Unpublished paper. I thank Melissa for allowing me to quote her essay.

and voice are lost", the moment when they are also appropriated and manipulated by those of the torturer."¹⁷

It would be unrealistic to think that one can represent or report on the felt experiences of all or even the vast majority of raped women - the information is not simply available or easy to elicit -but one pattern of reported experiences illuminates how the raped women must of necessity transform that experience into the alien "other" that can thereby be detached and eliminated from their own selves. These women in order to reassume their lives must reconvert the intrusive rape into an extruded other. These passages taken from Caldwell illustrate this point:¹⁸

"One journalist who interviewed numerous rape victims reported that 'women who have been raped will tell you that it often takes a long time to feel whole again.'¹⁹ Several young women whose testimonies were collected by a relief worker found it difficult to recall the actual event of rape, and described it in a very detached manner, calling to mind again Scarry's definition of the goal of torture: to 'destroy language, the power of verbal objectification'²⁰ Mirsada, a 17-year-old woman serial - raped in a Chetnik camp recounted her experience in this way:

'They raped us every night ... There were nights when more than 20 of them came. They did all kinds of things to us. I don't want to remember ... I want to forget everything. I cannot live with these memories. I will go insane.'²¹

In another account, 15-year-old Azra reported:

'They [the Chetniks] ordered us to walk in a circle. Then it started. They all approached one girl and started on her. This took place on a rock in the yard ... I fell. Then the worst happened.' [Ibid: 13]

¹⁷ Elaine Scarry. 1985. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 35, 54.

¹⁸ Caldwell, op. cit.

¹⁹ Quindlen, Anna. 1993. "Gynocide", *The New York Times*, March 10, 1993, p. A19.

²⁰ Scarry op. cit., p. 54.

²¹ Ms. "Despatches from Bosnia and Hercegovina: Young Survivors Testify to Systematic Rape." Zoran Minderovic (transl.). 1993, 3 (4), pp. 12-13.

In yet another chilling testimony, 16-year-old Enisa described her rape:

'He ordered me to undress. I took off my clothes, feeling that I was falling apart. The feeling seemed under my skin. I was dying, my entire being was murdered. I closed my eyes. I cried, twisted my body convulsively, bled. I had been a virgin.' [Ibid: 13]

These accounts, then, support the imagery of a fragmented body and self, and suggest that rape victims are able to reappropriate their identities and bodies only by first rejecting them. By making that part of themselves disappear, as the rejected other, so they can create themselves anew. Other images of purging appear in the accounts of women impregnated by Serb soldiers. One young woman referred to the child in her womb only as a foreign object, as 'that thing' or 'that curse'.²² Another young woman, who had already signed papers giving up her Serb-fathered child for adoption, told a journalist, 'I don't feel anything towards this child ... My feelings towards this child are like my feelings toward this wall. This child I do not want'.²³ By freeing themselves of these burdens, women such as these two can move towards reclaiming their bodies."

The Nation-State Making Projects of Tudjman and Milosevic

Babić, whom we projected on our screen earlier, was himself only a provincial leader who mobdized the local Serbs living in a corner of Croatia. His own mobilization of parochial rural Serbs for armed action against the hated Croatian 'Ustashas' was a process that has to be situated within the larger imperial projects of two men, mirror images of each other, determined to bring into being two separate republics - Croatia and Serbia - by making one the quintessential enemy of the other. These two men are Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic to whose Fascist designs in the name of the *narod*, and to whose 'romantic nationalism' exuding the poison gas of 'racism' and 'ethnic cleansing', we now turn.

²² Horvath Daniela. 199. "The Children of the Rapes: Young Victims of Ethnic Cleansing," *World Press Review* 43 (6), pp. 11-12.

²³ Eggerston, Laura. 1993. "Children of Rape: The War Produces a New Generation of Victims," *MacLean's*, 106 (21), p. 22.

A Belgrade actor, Boro Todorovic, posed this despairing question which comes alive in the context of the dismantling of the Yugoslav communist regime, and the alleged substitution for it of the much touted political and economic 'democratization' and 'marketization'.

"To what end, and in whose name, I ask myself.. this senseless nationalist imperative, which enforces membership in a nation to which you are driven and in which you are instructed by those who until yesterday were champions of the League of Communists, fighters for brotherhood and unity, secretaries of various committees from the commune to the Central Committee?"²⁴ It is well known that the component groups of the former Yugoslavia have a long history of differences and rivalries as well as intermixtures and minglings.

Slovenia and Croatia were originally part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Serbia part of the Ottoman Empire. Yugoslavia had in 1990 six republics and two autonomous provinces. An ethnically diverse country of some twenty four million people, the main ethnic groups are Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Muslim Slavs, Albanians and Greeks (in Macedonia). Croats and Slovenes are Roman Catholic; they also in large measure collaborated with the German Nazi regime during the second world war. The Serbs are affiliated with the Eastern Orthodox Church, and sided with the Communists in the War, and afterwards came to dominate the communist government that was established. The Croats and Serbs speak a common language but use different scripts - the Roman and Cyrillic, respectively. The memories both groups have of the second world war are very bitter indeed, and with the break of Yugoslavia today the Serbs and Croats are aggressively following their aggrandizing policies in the name of ethno-nationalism, opposing each other and also participating in the dismemberment of Bosnia.

There are many divisive allegiances and interests that plague the different ethnic peoples and the multiple republics of Yugoslavia. What I want to highlight here is that while Yugoslavia's ethnic groups have their geographical concentrations in different republics, (Slovenes in Slovenia, Croats in Croatia, Serbs in Serbia), sizeable numbers are also dispersed outside these boundaries and constitute significant

minorities elsewhere. The largest ethnic group, the Serbs, who dominated the federal government and are concentrated in Serbia, have, however some 50,000 of their people located in Slovenia and a much larger number, 2,000,000, living in Croatia, most of them in its southeast. (The mix of ethnic nationalities in the republics and provinces other than Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia is greater.)

It is on this kind of historically complex, demographically intermixed and culturally divisive as well as intersecting landscape that nationalist ideologues such as Tudjman and Milosevic and others have decided to carve out and impose their ethno-nationalist states with their separate territories and majoritarian domination.

I need not rehearse here the recent parliamentary elections in the republics, and the declaration of independence by Slovenia and Croatia, which have repudiated communism, the resistance put up by pro-communist Serbia, which controls the national army, to these secessions, and the Serbian invasion of Croatia allegedly to secure the interests of fellow Serbs in danger there and on whose behalf Serbia demanded special guarantees. Now consider what is at stake in Kosovo province in Yugoslavia, ridden with tensions between Serbs and Albanians. Serbia has also annexed this province, where Albardans outnumber Serbs by more than 10: 1. And most recently, the republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina has exploded in violence as it pursues its independence in the face of resistance offered by Serb-led army garrisons. Bosnia and Herzegovina have the deadly mix, in a total population of 4.3 million, of Muslim Slavs, who make up 44% of the population, Roman Catholic Croats, who make up 18%, with the remainder, Eastern Orthodox Serbs, constituting 31%. UN peacekeeping troops have already intervened to defuse the side in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but so far with little success. Serbian troops, both local and governmental are now engaged in attacking Sarajevo and driving out or decimating the Muslim Slavs. There are also signs that old enmities are breaking out in Macedonia.

In the concluding part of this essay I propose to discuss the ideological ingredients and suppositions of the ethno-nationalist projects of Tudjman and Milosevic and the techniques they have employed to implant separatist identities and the policies they have devised to separate out and obliterate the ethnic 'others' while striving to enforce a Croatian or Serbian political hegemony.

²⁴ Quoted by Misha Glenny, op. cit., in Preface.

I have already stated elsewhere²⁵ that the ethno-nationalist proclamations of Tudjman and Milosevic remind us of the 'racial' rhetoric of the Third Reich, which again was a dangerous distortion and perversion of Johann Gottfried Herder's romantic philosophy of the "Volksgeist".

Now the remarkable feature of Herder's conception of Volksgeist, or of 'ethnonationalism' in my jargon, was that while being deeply infused with historical, cultural, linguistic collective memories and consciousness, it was not *political* in orientation, and was totally opposed to the aggressive nationalism of the nation-state. Herder denounced every form of centralization of political power and the coercion and violence that went with it. "Nature" creates "nations", not "states," and the basis of the state is conquest.

Herder's vision of a people fused into some kind of organic whole by historical memory, language and literature and cultural productions was, as we have underscored before, not a conception of a political nationalism coupled to a territorial bounded state but of pluralistic 'cultures' of 'organic' collectivities following their own historical development.

But it took only a certain twist for this notion of a distinctive people to be transformed in the hands of National Socialism and its Fascist Nazi propagandists to a demonic philosophy of Aryan racial superiority and to discrimination against allegedly dangerous and sinister minorities living among majority populations and their expulsion from the fatherland or their extermination in death camps. The politicization of ethno-nationalism and the imposition of an ethno-nationalist state representing an intolerant majority on a pluralistic terrain spawns violence and warfare. Though Hitler and his associates were the arch-exponents of this pathological philosophy of racial superiority and special destiny, leading eventually to imperial expansion and subordination of 'inferior' peoples, some of these same attitudes and conceptions of ethno-nationalism have been operative among

many of the ethnic nationalities of Eastern Europe and the former USSR, and have today broken out in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Rumania (which are in the process of fragmenting) and in many of the previous Soviet republics among which the Armenian-Azerbaijani hostilities are the most vicious.

Consider now the philosophy of political ethno-nationalism propounded by Franjo Tudjman, who is currently President of Croatia. In a text published in English in 1981 under the title *Nationalism and Contemporary Europe*,²⁶ Tudjman binds the *narod* (ethnic nation) explicitly to the *state*; the ethnic nation is imaged as a collective individual defined by shared physical substance, a far cry from the theory of individualism that is the cornerstone of the West European nation-state. This collective ethnonationalism entails the view that all persons share in one homogenized ethnic identity. The rights of political self-determination are vested in the collectivity, and it is this collective entitlement that constitutes national sovereignty. The positing of a "total national sovereignty" of this kind is the high road to nation-state chauvinism.

Tudjman's own words are unambiguous about *narod* as the amalgam of collective homogeneity and sovereignty. He writes:

"Nations ... grow up in a natural manner ... as a result of the development of all those material and spiritual forces which in a given area shape the national being of individual nations on the basis of blood, linguistic and cultural kinship."²⁷

Again Tudjman writes:

"Every nation, no matter what its size or character, has the natural and historic right to its sovereignty and its place in the human community, just as the individual has in society ... only a free and sovereign nation, like a fully developed and free human being, can give its full contribution to the world."²⁸

²⁵ Stanley J. Tambiah, *The Nation State in Crisis and the Rise of Ethno-Nationalism*. The Punitham Tiruchelvam Memorial Lecture, August 1992. Distributed by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

²⁶ Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1981.

²⁷ Tudjman (1981), p. 10. I am indebted to Robert M. Hayden's *Constitutional Nationalism in Yugoslavia, 1990-91*, a paper read at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, Nov. 23, 1991, Chicago, for these quotes.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

Tudjman's views are not unique or peculiarly Croatian. Tudjman's major opponent, President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, also rallies his people in the name of an inflammatory ethnic nationalism. Milosevic, and his Serbian associates, in their latest assault on the Muslim Slavs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (who comprise 42 per cent of the population), have begun to preach the deadly policy of 'ethnic-cleansing' - that is the slaughter and driving out of Muslims so that in the end there will be only Serbs in areas that were once mixed. The Serb strategy is aimed first at forcing Muslims out of mixed towns, and then isolating the remaining pockets of Muslims. As of July 31, 1992, some 700,000 people had been driven out of Bosnia since the war began earlier that year. The horrors perpetrated in Bosnia in the name of ethnic cleansing should twinge the consciences of other ethnonationalist groups in other countries who in the name of a fictive racial purity or of being equally fictive sons of the soil or of an invented exclusive homeland drive from their midst neighbors of a different ethnic identity. What is ironic and myopic about these assertions of ethnic homogenization and cleansing as fact and as a nationalist goal is the occurrence of numerous mixed marriages, and mixings and borrowings of tradition between one another, in the Eastern European milieu.

Tudjman's "greatest obsession was the creation of a state which would be identified with the Croatian people". In Tudjman's eyes this state-making required the display of Croatian nationalist iconography - especially the hanging of the red and white chequered shield, the *Sabovnica*, the core of Croatian heraldry, from every building, it meant demoting the Serbs from their status within Croatia as a majority Yugoslav nation - as in Tito's time - to that of a minority nation within Croatia; and "it entailed pronouncing literary Croat as the only language of administration in Croatia and dismissing the Serb's Cyrillic script as well. The move was as senseless as it was provocative. According to moderate Knin Serbs I met in 1990, only about 5 per cent of the local Serbs used Cyrillic script, the rest not only spoke the Croatian variant, they used the Latin script. Eighteen months later, on my return, I witnessed the extraordinary spectacle of a Knin Serb attempting to write the address of his relations in Belgrade

in Cyrillic ...²⁹ Tudjman later compounded the issue by decreeing that biscriptual signs in Latin and Cyrillic be replaced with Latin ones alone.

Under the complicated calculations and policies of the Tito regime, the Serbs in Croatia, especially in the cities, occupied a disproportionately high number of posts in the state administration; and in the Croat state and the party bureaucracy Serb officials had been dominant. President Tudjman decided to 'rectify' matters by requiring nationality as a criterion for employment, and this resulted in a number of Serbs being declared redundant in the administration of Croatia. "When the militant dogs of the HDZ were unleashed and allowed to organize purges of the state administration, Serbs throughout Croatia were shaken by the spectre of persecution. When the HDZ government attempted to start redressing the imbalance in the police forces where Serbs dominated, the spectre of persecution was able to invoke their worst nightmare: the return of Ustasas, the Croat fascists."

"With every provocative decision taken by Zagreb, the people of Knin were driven faster towards the heart of darkness, the leadership of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and Prince Milosevic."³⁰

The Serbian thrust towards its own form of nationalism paralleled that of the Croatian. "The great motor behind Serbian nationalist politics is the search for unity. The most powerful form of Serbian iconography is the symmetrical cross adorned with four Cs (the Cyrillic letter S), the two left-hand ones being printed as mirror images. This is an acronym for the phrase '*Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava*' (Only Unity Can Save the Serb). Serbian society is in fact driven by provincial rivalry and suspicion, and the assumption of Serbs that a state which encompasses all of them as one nation can overcome all major social and economic evils is an illusion. This was Misha Glenny's reading of the Serbian situation in 1992.

We have already reviewed the perpetration of rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina as a strategy of warfare and as part of the policy of ethnic cleansing and even genocide. These are entailments of an extreme cultivation and imposition of a collective phobia of 'species' and

²⁹ Misha Glenny, *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

'racial homogeneity'. As Michel Foucault would put it, the systematic infliction of rape on women, of displacement and expulsion of people, of genocide and killing the enemy, of changing the blood of the 'other', these are all focused on "the two poles of biopower", on the one hand the conception of a 'species body' and a 'biopolitics of the population', and on the other the conception of the individual body as a machine which produces various "utilities", the "anatomic politics of the human body." "Sex as a political issue", Foucault said, "was at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life. On the one hand, it was applied to the disciplines of the body ... on the other hand, it was applied to the regulation of populations."³¹ Foucault chillingly concluded, "If genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, this is not because of a recent return to the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population."³²

Milosevic and Tudjman as the generals of Serbian and Croatian nationalisms as collective "species" projects for ensuring the future are willing in the present time to shed the blood of their youth. The mothers who have given birth to these same youth are always the unflinching questioners of this sacrifice at the altar of the fatherland and the expositors of the symbolics of blood and the honor of war. Melissa Caldwell provides a vivid account of the confrontation between the Mother's Movement (Women's Uprising) and the generals:

"In July 1991, several hundred Serbian mothers of federal army draftees broke into the parliament building in Belgrade and interrupted the session of parliament, demanding the return of their sons from the war. Protesting 'the war and the abuse of their reproductive labor by the state, the army, and the party'³³, the mothers pushed through the

building shouting such slogans as "Generals are killers" and "We don't want our sons to die for generals," and accusing the generals of using their children for "cannon fodder".³⁴ In support, a Croatian mothers' movement marched on Zagreb, only to be met by President Franjo Tudjman, who told them, "I'm very proud that you demand your sons' return from the federal army ... but I am proud that you are giving them to Croatia's national guard to protect our homeland."³⁵ These women, then, are attempting to remove from the authorities their control over sex as "a thing to be ... managed, inserted into system of utility, regulated for the greater good of all."³⁶

We have seen how the romantic and politically intoxicating transmutation of the *narod* into an ethnonationabst state has inevitably spawned in a ruptured Yugoslavia and elsewhere in Europe, the horror of recently liberated 'minorities', having become 'majorities' in their newly carved states, in turn discriminating against, inferiorizing, expelling, and killing their own 'minorities'.

It is also clear, however, that the drive for the imagined and desired 'homogeneous' Serb nation or Croat nation, and subsequently the Bosnian-Muslim nation, is difficult to consummate and doomed to be contentious and fractious because of multiple internal contests and differences and cross-cutting interests. And this situation may also engender a process that Girard has elaborated in *Violence and the Sacred*:³⁷ the internal divisiveness and conflicts within a group or collectivity may drive its members to seek out a scapegoat and "sacrificially" kill it to gain its own uncertain unity, and make of this cleansing a sacred act of generative unanimity and duty. I have previously suggested that the targeted and victimized enemy next door usually shares much content and texture with the aggressor's own make up, and therefore the expulsion or annihilation of that enemy may be a substitution for the enemy one harbours within oneself, and that

³¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. New York: Vintage Books, pp. 134-149. In the focus on the species body, "the body [is] imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes" propagation, births and morality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity...", p. 134.

³² Ibid., p. 137.

³³ *Connexions*, 1993. "Mothers for Peace: Former Yugoslavia" by Stanislava Stasa Zajovic, 42, p. 16.

³⁴ Draculić, Slavenka. 1991. "Yugoslavia: Cracks in the Wall of Love" in *Ms.* 2 (3) pp. 12-13.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁶ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. P. 24.

³⁷ René Girard. *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Paperbacks, 1979.

this may account for the overdetermined brutality and the guiltless obliteration of the "other". Thus, culturally plural societies may shatter into antagonistic political fragments, when nationalities seek to become autonomous states.

But there is the power and play of another cluster of technologies to consider in determining outcomes. This is the enormously selective use of the media, the radio and television, audio and videocassettes (and now no doubt the computer and e-mail) to bombard the public with potent and mischievous propaganda, sinister rumours and character assassinations. The Tudjmans, the Milosevics, the Bihacs and the Karadjics, and their lieutenants and cadres are skillful and relentless users of both the media to intensify emotions and the guns to terrorize and cause physical damage. The information and communication revolution of our time, and the reach of its surveillance, has its parallel in the world-wide free market trade and accessibility of the most sophisticated weapons of death.

Regarding the power of the manipulated media, Milos Vasia, a founding editor of the independent weekly newspaper *VREME* has said:

"It's an artificial war, really, produced by television. All it took was a few years of fierce, reckless, chauvinist, intolerant, expansionist, war-mongering propaganda to create enough hate to start the fighting among people who had lived together peacefully for forty-five years. I acknowledge that noses were broken in bar-rooms over the years, but nobody was killed. You must imagine a United States with every little TV station everywhere taking exactly the same editorial line - a line dictated by David Duke. You, too would have a war in five years.³⁸

But once again there are twists to our narrative; twists, reversals and dialectics that complicate the simpler Girardian story line. If war-mongering propaganda employs rumours that demonize the enemy, it might be the case - as I have discovered in my investigation of similar ethnic conflicts in South Asia - that it is usually the locally dominant aggressors who hatch and circulate stereotyped rumours that demonize their victims, and at the same time these rumours invest the beleaguered victims with exaggerated powers and fiendish plans to attack the

attackers and to annihilate them. Thus these rumours which are compounded of a spiralling intertwining of rage against the enemy as well as fear of his retaliation, and which provoke a relentless redoubled attack of the enemy in turn, might be seen as another manifestation of that process we have tracked before - the negative propensities of the enemy within who is also displaced as the enemy without. These dialectical processes sustain a runaway inflation of violence.

The following passages graphically illustrate the conversion of the victim into the aggressor and crediting him with extremist designs. Misha Glenny is here quoting an account by another journalist, Andrej Gustinic of Reuters, who managed to enter the town of Foca which the Serbs overtook as they tightened the noose around Sarajevo's neck:

"Gangs of gun-toting Serbs rule Foca, turning the once quiet Bosnian town into a nightmare landscape of shattered streets and burning houses. The motley assortment of fierce-looking bearded men carry Kalashnikovs and bandoliers or have handguns tucked into their belts. Some are members of paramilitary groups from Serbia, self-proclaimed crusaders against Islam and defenders of the Serbian nation, others are wild-eyed local men, hostile towards strangers and happy to have driven out their Moslem neighbors.

"The Moslems, who made up half the town's population of 10,000 people, have fled or are in jail. Many of their houses have been destroyed or are in flames. The Serbs say the Moslems began it. A feverish distrust of all that is not Serbian and a conviction that they have narrowly escaped genocide at the hand of Islamic fundamentalists has gripped Foca's Serbs.

"Do you see that field?' asks a Serbian woman, pointing to a sloping meadow by the Drina river. 'The jihad (Moslem Holy War) was supposed to begin there. Foca was going to be the new Mecca. There were lists of Serbs who were marked for death,' the woman says, repeating a belief held by townspeople and gunmen. 'My two sons were down on the list to be slaughtered like pigs. I was listed under rape.' None of them have seen the lists but this does not prevent anyone from believing in them unquestioningly."³⁹

³⁸ *New Yorker*, March 15, 1993.

³⁹ Misha Glenny, op. cit., pp. 166-167

Coda

In a provocative essay with even more provocative title "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,"⁴⁰ Charles Tilly asserts:

"Protection rackets represent organized crime at its smoothest, then war making and state making — quintessential protection rackets with the advantage of legitimacy — qualify as our largest examples of organized crime. Without branding all generals and statesmen as murderers or thieves, I want to urge the value of that analogy. At least for the European experience of the past few centuries, a portrait of war makers and state makers as coercive and self-seeking entrepreneurs bears a far greater resemblance to the facts than do its chief alternatives: the idea of a social contract, the idea of an open market in which operators of armies and states offer services to willing consumers, the idea of a society whose shared norms and expectations call forth a certain kind of government."⁴¹

Tilly illustrates the analogy of war making with organized crime from a few hundred years of European experience from the sixteenth century onwards. He argues that "coercive exploitation played a large part in the creation of European states", and that if the definition of a racketeer is "someone who creates a threat and then charges for its reduction", then "government's provision of protection, by this standard, qualifies as racketeering". Governments stand out from other protection organizations by their "tendency to monopolize the concentrated means of violence."⁴² Tilly enumerates four different activities as those which the agents of states characteristically carry on under the general activity of organized violence:

"1. War making: Eliminating or neutralizing their own rivals outside the territories in which they have clear and continuous priority as wielders of force

2. State making: Eliminating or neutralizing their rivals inside those territories
3. Protection: Eliminating or neutralizing the enemies of their clients
4. Extraction: Acquiring the means of carrying out the first three activities - war making, state making and protection."⁴³

It is clear that these same strategies and processes are evident in the Eastern Europe of the last decade of the twentieth century. It would seem that both Tudjman in his drive to create a unified Croatia, and Milosevic pursuing his even grander project of "Greater Serbia", have systematically engaged in them. On the one hand, the above-mentioned strategies and activities have been focused on their respective states' attempted eradication or subordination of internal rivals, be they alleged or real "ethnic minorities", or liberal opponents of authoritarian rule and war mongering. On the other hand, they have also taken care to protect and distribute benefits to their own supporters, while enticing the support of other power-holders in the society by eliminating their rivals. One additional aspect of this state making is the ensuring that the courts and criminal justice system, and those representative assemblies that are allowed to function are actually accessible to clients and pliant interest groups and provide the necessary protection from their enemies. Finally, these strategies and solutions of internal domestication are extended outwards into "external" territory in newly captured regions. Serbian activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina provide the necessary illustrations as rural Serbs attack the privileged urban population of Sarajevo, and in time this city's cosmopolitan population loses its unity as it progressively fractures into Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims who find little left to defend together as war making, state making and protection rackets coincide and fuse.

⁴⁰ Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer and Theda Skocpol, *Bringing the States Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1994, Chapter 5, pp. 169-191.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 169.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 170, 171.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 181.

Rape, Women's Rights and Human Rights

Rossana Favero-Karunaratna

Women's Rights are Human Rights. This statement has been the major starting point to mobilize women from all over the world to highlight the atrocities committed against them because of their gender.

The IVth World Conference on Women's Rights held in China, denounced the violations of women's human rights in different environments and called for the need to address problems by the governments and NGOs together. The Conference raised the issues discussed during the Vienna Conference of Human Rights. The Vienna Declaration recognized that violence, and all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, specially the ones originated in culture, are incompatible with the dignity of the human person.

Even with the importance attached to women's human rights, including different perspectives and continuing debates, violations continue and new forms of violence begin to affect the lives of women. Therefore, it is important to continue working to sensitize law enforcement agents in order to design up to date strategies to prevent and eliminate this situation.

In relation to sexual abuses in the private and public spheres, some explanations have been formulated in order to explain the high incidence of rape in certain societies¹. It has been said that rape tends to occur more frequently in societies where male power has become

unstable, where women have a subordinated status and lower esteem and where rigid definitions of masculine and feminine prevail, connected to strong hierarchies and hegemonies. In contrast, it has been explained that few rapes occur where male supremacy is completely assured or women enjoy respect and honoured status in the culture.

Historically, rape has been part of the life of certain societies. Cases like the "moo-jai" in China represent the virtual acceptance of rape for young women. The moo-jai is a girl who underwent a customary transaction which placed them under the control of the purchaser. Some young virgins lost their virginity through painful practices to overcome their resistance.²

Nevertheless, we must also remember that rape is an experience that tends not to be made visible by women because of many reasons. As such there is still an uncertain number of rapes and sexual abuses not revealed in statistics.

Sometimes rape is encouraged by the existence of ethnic stereotypes, as in the case of Hindu and Muslim relations in India.³

The "reason" for this situation is that generally, women are considered symbols of the honour of the community; therefore to exercise violence against them is a way of humiliating a whole group of people.

In other countries like the United States of America, the issues of rape and race have been historically linked. There still exist assumptions that black men are more "prone" to rape white women than white men to rape black women. It is also said that black rapists tend to get more severe punishment than the white ones.

Whatever the explanations of the causes of this phenomenon, rape is the best expression of the exercise of power and coercion against women and girl children. It is a crime that affects their health,

² Daughters were sold because of the "family poverty". This practice was abolished in 1923, but still continued for some years more. See: Jaschok, Maria; "Concubines and Bondservants", Zed Books, London, 1988.

³ Read Agarwal, Purshot; "Legitimizing rape as a political weapon", in: "Women and the Hindu Right: A collection of essays"; Kali for Women, India 1995.

The author explains that images of lustful muslims are contrasted with self images of docile, passive and impotent hindus.

¹ See: Stilmayer, Alexandra; *The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Univ. of Nebraska Press.

options of life and their right to participate in the development processes all over the world. Rape represents a permanent threat for women, no matter what their age, race, class or economic status. It has also increased the possibilities of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS. As the UN Special Rapporteur for Violence against Women has affirmed in a Preliminary Report, "women's vulnerability to rape is one of the main factors which prevent their empowerment and their enjoying equality for men.... rape prevents women from living in security and dignity and therefore violates international standards set out in the International Covenants and the Universal Declaration".

This paper will not consider cases of rape perpetrated by relatives. It is intended to examine those perpetrated by strangers, by the state, and by armed groups. Rape by relatives is categorized as part of domestic violence or family violence.

Our intention is to classify and initially explore the different forms of rape and their impact on women's lives.

Rape can take a variety of modalities according to the circumstances involved. These are:

- Date rape
- Rape stimulated by the media.
- Custodial rape.
- War-rape as part of military strategies and "ethnic cleansing".
- Rape perpetrated against refugees as a form of coercion.

Law defines rape. Definitions have considered it as the unwilling sexual intercourse between a man and a woman out of wedlock, taking into account the vaginal penetration of the male organ. However, several countries have introduced changes around this concept, considering not only the vaginal penetration of the sexual male organ, but fellatio, anal penetration, including the use of any other parts of the body, objects, animals and other elements which are used against the victims. They have also considered marital rape, which indeed recognizes the right of women to control their own bodies. This is a key point as this right is not generally accepted. Factors like moral and cultural standards tend to exercise pressure on women's sexuality.

Rape generally leaves not only physical but psychological scars as well on victims. Sometimes rapists inflict permanent damage to

several parts of the body to humiliate and expose victims to public opinion or to their partners. This may take the form of scars, tatoos and burns.

Campaigns of different women's organizations around the world have encouraged women to denounce domestic violence. This activism is still inadequate in relation to incidents of rape in the case of adult women, where the fear of public discussion about "private matters" discourages victims to file complaints. Even with the creation of certain facilities such as Special Police Stations for Women⁴, women persist in these attitudes due to certain factors such as the trauma they experience, the pressure of their families to keep the incident secret and the reluctance to subject themselves to a criminal physical examination at the Legal Medical Institute and places where the medical examiners are men.

Another fact that contributes to create obstacles is that some states have made reservations in relation to the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Other States, even though being parties to this international instruments, have promoted legislation in order to facilitate the marriage between the rapist and the victim as a way to avoid prosecution⁵, a situation that in some cultures leads to marriages with a high level of violence against women.

It is important to mention that the World Bank DALY (Disability Adjusted Life Years) analysis, already considers rape and domestic violence as causes of disability and death among women of reproductive age worldwide. We must understand that this statement is quite significant coming from that source and it is expected to increase awareness in every country.

According to UN Reports, in 1992 alone, approximately 12,000 women were brutally raped as part of the on-going war in the former Yugoslavia. The data of the UN High Commissioner on Refugees

⁴ Read Nagib Eluf, Luisa; "A new approach to Law Enforcement: the Special Women's Police Stations in Brazil", in : *Freedom from Violence*, ed. by Margaret Schuler.

⁵ This is the case of Mexico and Peru, for example.

indicate that among the Vietnamese boat people, 39% of the women were abducted and/or raped by pirates of the sea.

Data contained in UN Fact Sheets for the World Conference on Women in Beijing, include the following numbers:

- A 1993 study from Canada based on 420 women found that more than 54% of them had experienced some form of unwanted sexual assault before the age of 16.

- A random sample of 150 women in Trondhjem, Norway, found that 25% of them had been physically or sexually abused by their male partners.

- A Support Center of Rape Victims in Bangkok, Thailand, reported that 10% of its clients contract a sexual transmitted disease as a result of rape.

Rape involves complex elements for discussion. Gail Onvedt⁶, formulating a question around the issues that violence necessarily has a sexual character and that sexuality is inherently biologically linked to force and dominance, attracts our attention to the fact that just linking sexual violence to a biological justification would be a simplistic approach. It is important to consider, at the same time, the ways the state intervenes to create certain forms of violence against women. These are the cases of the promotion or encouragement of prostitution. In many countries prostitution is justified as a way to prevent rape⁷. Another example is the use of rape as a war strategy to express nationalism. It is also evident in the intervention of the state through the institution of the family, defining or excluding rights for men and women and promoting divisions among women, reinforcing stereotypes and the idea of independent women as "bad" and "sexually available".

Some measures have been taken by certain states which are concerned about this human rights violation. The Emancipation Council of the Netherlands Government for the Fourth World Conference on Women, for example, pointed out that sexual violence should be seen as a form of torture (persecution), one of the three elements of the refugee condition.

The Platform for Action of the IVth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, denounced the fact that parties to conflict often rape women with impunity, sometimes using systematic rape as a tactic of war and terrorism. The World Conference also emphasised the fact that women and children constitute some 80% of the 23 million refugees all over the world and of the 26 million of displaced persons. Nevertheless, the Conference generated several debates, especially on sexual issues. Many countries expressed reservations on certain concepts included in the Beijing Declaration in relation to sexual and reproductive rights and interruption of pregnancy. This has generated certain conditions that have created obstacles for a further agreement on these specific issues.

However, it is necessary to explain that the Beijing Declaration includes the statement that violence against women encompasses also "... physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere..., ...include violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict, in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy".

Among the actions to be taken by governments, the Declaration calls for the reinforcement of sanctions, work actively to implement international human rights norms and instruments, implementation of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the need to provide women with access to mechanisms of justice. In fact, affirmative political action will be needed to implement all these measures. However this depends on the "good will of the governments" and their perspective on the promotion of better policies from a gender point of view. Let's remember that United States of America has made reservations to the Convention named above.

The Beijing Conference also highlighted the role of the Special

⁶ See: Onvedt, Gail; *New Movements and New Theories in India*, KALI for Women, New Delhi, India, 1990.

⁷ This was the explanation for the creation of "comfort stations" by Japan, during World War II, as a strategy to prevent Japanese Army members to commit rape. It was thought that prostitution would reduce the number of reports of rape where the Army was based. For further information see the Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, on the Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea and Japan: E/CN.4/1996/5b/Add.1, 4-1-96.

Rapporteur of the Commission of Human Rights on violence against women. The urgency to provide the Special Rapporteur with staff and resources was mentioned. It is also necessary to claim better mechanisms of communication for the different Special Rapporteurs created by the system in order to improve the work of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and her access to information.

The Fourth World Conference for Women gave special consideration to the cases involving women in armed conflicts. It called for effective protection provided by the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war in 1949 and the Declaration of the Vienna Conference on Human Rights. It stated that rape in the conduct of armed conflict constitutes a war crime and under certain circumstances, a crime against humanity and act of genocide.⁸

Rape can assume some of the following modalities according to the circumstances involved:

1. Date Rape:

Date rape is a denomination given to forced sexual intercourse during a date. Campaigns highlight the incidence of date rape among college students. This kind of rape was a matter of discussion all over the world when boxer Mike Tyson was involved in a case against a beauty contestant. It is supposed to be the high incidence of consumption of alcohol that leads to date rapes. However, other factors must be taken into account: the existence of freedom to socialize; mixed attitudes; and the lack of good communication. Some other elements such as lack of education given to men on gender issues have also been considered. It was said that "if a man has been conditioned by older men, his peers, and the media to believe that when a woman says NO, she is just likely to really mean YES, he may ignore what his partner is saying".⁹

Rape perpetrated on dates, can also be encouraged by men's fraternities or by collective experiences their members are involved in. A research study in the Florida State University conducted by Patricia Yancey Martin and Robert A. Hummer¹⁰ concludes that fraternities are concerned with masculinity, working hard to create an image of "macho men", therefore their organization contribute heavily to coercive and often violent sex. In countries where this kind of fraternities does not exist, the same attitude can be encouraged by groups of friends or "gangs".

Some strategies have been designed in order to prevent this kind of rape, including the signature of a written agreement before dating clarifying the conditions for each of the parties. However, debates around this issue must promote the participation of men and women in order to discuss roles and the importance of an assertive communication.

This issue has been highlighted in developed countries, specially in the USA. However, it is a problem which exists everywhere and needs to be studied in order to eliminate gender stereotypes that contribute to the existence of violence against women.

2. Images of Rape Disseminated by the Media:

Rape stimulated by the media is an aspect of a multi-billion industry, in its wide varieties of expression, including the electronic media. The electronic media have recently been portrayed as responsible for the dissemination of images that can increase sexual abuse, especially against girls and women. It has been explained that "images on-line" are more explicit than those in most adult magazines"¹¹. Any person with sufficient computer training can have access to the Internet, including young users who can even copy the information and disseminate it among other children. Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, conducted a study for nearly 18 months and found nearly 1 million sexually explicit computer files. In the Internet's Users Group Service where pictures are often stored,

⁸ See the Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, A/CONF.177/20, United Nations.

⁹ See: Roden, Marybeth; *What men need to know about DATE RAPE*, Rape Treatment Center, Santa Monica Hospital Medical Center, USA, 1990.

¹⁰ In: *Violence against Women: the bloody footprints*, ed. by Pauline Bart and Eileen Geil Moran, Sage Publications, UK, 1993.

¹¹ Read: LLOYD, Christopher; *Something nasty in the Internet*, LANKA GUARDIAN, Vol.18, No. 17, Sri Lanka, 1996.

83.5% of all pictures were found to be pornographic. In one American university, 13 out of 40 most frequently visited news groups had names such as alt. sex. stories. rec. arts erotica and alt. sex bondage, showing explicit sex, lesbianism and sex in groups. Recently some newspapers reported an attempt of rape by a child against a younger girl, influenced by the impact of these images.

The Preliminary Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, focused on pornography which is a specific issue on the debate around how women are portrayed by the media. Pornography, it was said, "sexualizes rape...sexual harassment...;it thereby celebrates, promotes, authorizes and legitimizes it". The Report also included the definition put forward by Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mc. Kinnon of pornography as a practice of sex dissimulation, sexualization and the subordination of women.

In fact, in relation to this concept other definitions have been formulated. Members of the Council of Europe have different national definitions of what constitutes "pornography". One definition is "the explicit description or exhibition of sexual activities intended to stimulate erotic feelings". Other definitions tend to differentiate between erotica and pornography, like the one offered by Eysenck and Nias¹², which explains that erotica include practices that were not essentially harmful and pornography is the depiction of practices which are harmful either to the victims or to the people engaged in these practices, eg. sadistic behaviour.

The existence of different interpretations of both issues generally represents a serious obstacle to bringing about changes. Some governments, as in the case of Japan, have inadvertently suggested that scenes of rape are more tolerable than the exposure of the genitalia on a screen.¹³ This attitude can reinforce the use of violence by the porn industry and generate sophisticated ideas for the sex industry. Reports indicate that in Japan sex is available in the form of well done representations of different scenarios to each customer. Customers can select representations of a classroom, a train wagon or a medical scene

to create their own stories and have sex with a girl who will be dressed according to the place selected. These kinds of experiences can also encourage fantasies of rape, as the girl will act according to the "customer's desires."

3. Custodial Rape:

Custodial rape is rape perpetrated against prisoners as an abuse of authority and torture. Testimonies of women all over the world report being raped in police custody. Some governments have recognized this fact and have taken certain measures to protect women. There is the case of the Peruvian Government in 1988 when detained women were put in custody of female police officers, to prevent rape. Nevertheless, investigations of allegations when this kind of violence is perpetrated are often discouraged by the prevailing systems.

Generally, documenting this kind of rape is very difficult for the victims and their relatives because of the involvement of the authorities and the fear of being even killed if actions are filed. Reports from Peru, India and Kuwait explain the abuse of victims and how the army and police officers refuse to gather evidence that rape has been perpetrated. This is aggravated when there is a lack of protection and legal support for the victim.

The case of Naima Farhat in Kuwait is an example of the complicity of the system in creating conditions favourable for rapists. A chief of the regional police district raped her, shot her and killed her father and brother. She survived but remains disabled. However, she filed action against this person, only to obtain a condemnatory sentence of 15 years for murder and attempted murder. This was later reviewed and the officer was freed from the accusation of rape on the basis that she invented the rape charge to arouse public opinion.¹⁴

¹² See: *Human rights and Gender: the responsibility of the media*; Seminar held in Strasbourg, Netherlands, 1994.

¹³ See different reports done by Tokyo Rape Crisis Center.

¹⁴ See: *A call to action. Governmental failure to investigate and prosecute rape: A violation of Women's Rights*; Draft Position Paper highlighting the case of Maimat Farhat in the Kuwaiti Courts; Center for Constitutional Rights in collaboration with the Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, New York, USA.

Maya Tyagi, from India, suffered this experience in June 1980. She was six months pregnant when travelling in a car with her husband and two of his friends. They stopped at a place called Baghpat to have some drinks; a man started to misbehave with her. Her husband protested and the man, who was Sub-Inspector Narendra Singh ran back to the nearby police station and shouted "Dacoits". He returned with armed constables and shot dead her husband; dragged her and raped her repeatedly at the police station. To avoid being denounced the police also managed to make charges against both dead men.¹⁵

Reports of Human Rights Watch, also highlight the abuse of men and women at the hands of military and police forces. The case of Haiti specially included their civilian auxiliaries and bands of thugs called "zenglendos" - criminals ranging from the marginal social strata found in working class districts to police officers themselves, acting with civilian clothes and official weapons. Reports from women's organizations reveal that women are abused in ways men are not. This situation came out as an effect of the military coup d'état against President Jean- Bertrand Aristide on September 30, 1991.¹⁶ Now that the President is back in the country, action is expected to get compensation for victims and punishment for the abusers.

Torture and abuse of prisoners in police custody is a serious problem also in Pakistan. This situation is especially dramatic for women if they are the victims of rape. According to the system prevailing there the presence of four male witnesses is required to substantiate the accusation. Otherwise the woman can be accused of fornication and detained. According to a 1987 interview with the Inspector General of Prisons, maybe 50% of women in jail are innocent, but they are too poor to hire proper legal aid, they are unaware of their rights, so they are convicted.¹⁷ Benefit of the doubt

is given to the accused, especially when there is no evidence of penetration positively proved.

One case, experienced by Saima Anjum, involved her rape perpetrated by four male police officers who took her to a police station, and stuffed a cloth into her mouth. Two of them raped her and forced chilies into her vagina to force her to confess a theft. She told a female police constable about the rape, and this officer slapped her and said: "Do you dare to blame our officers?" No charges were registered.¹⁸

The US State Department has noted that police abuse in Pakistan is often unreported due to police intimidation, social taboos and family pressure, elements that are common in many countries when this kind of abuse is perpetrated. In USA, sexual abuse of women in state prisons have been denounced by different organizations, such as Human Rights Watch.

However it is quite important to mention that in India burden of proof has been shifted in the case of custodial rape. The burden now lies with the accused and not the accuser.

4. Rape Perpetrated during War or Armed Conflicts.

Recent reports show rape is a common and generalized practice during war. Some of the most well known cases are related to military sexual slavery during the Second World War.¹⁹

Rape also occurs in ethnic-related conflicts, as in the case of Tutsi women that have been systematically raped in Rwanda. In former Yugoslavia, rape was used as a strategical weapon from the early stages of the conflict. In fact, this was an additional method of "ethnic cleansing", that also includes forced displacement. There are film records of rapes perpetrated against Muslim and Croatian women by Serbian soldiers. Cases of unwanted pregnancies also

¹⁵ See report in *India Today*, Dec. 31, 1995.

¹⁶ See: Human Rights Watch - National Coalition for Haitian Refugees; "Rape in Haiti: A weapon of terror", Washington, USA, 1994.

¹⁷ Read: *Double jeopardy. Police abuse of women in Pakistan*, a Report by Asia Watch and the Women's Rights Project; Human Rights Watch, USA., 1992.

¹⁸ Read the Report written by Asia Watch and Women's Rights Project.

¹⁹ See the Report on this issue written by the UN Special Rapporteur for Violence against Women which includes testimonies of human rights violations perpetrated by Japan, in this case against Korean women specifically.

represent a serious concern. In January 1993, in the Women's Clinic of Zegred, there were 119 cases of pregnancy resulting from rape.²⁰

The Commission on the Status of Women in its 38th session held in March 1994 and its Human Rights Resolution 1994/77 of 9-3-93, addressed the case of rape and abuse of women in former Yugoslavia, asking for the establishment of an International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons responsible for serious violations of International Humanitarian Law committed since 1991. The Commission also demanded an end to this practice, and the International Tribunal to give priority to these cases.

5. Rape Perpetrated Against Refugees.

Reports claim that 7 million refugees and internally displaced persons have been recorded in 1995, including over 2 million displaced by the war in former Yugoslavia. Although the majority of refugees are women, usage has usually defined a refugee as a male individual²¹, turning "gender biased" any analysis that can be done. Women and girl refugees have become particularly vulnerable to rape, especially when moving to get some food or fuel.²²

In many cases officers of the state who are supposed to give protection to refugees are involved. There are 2 million Rwandans in refugee camps in Tanzania, Zaire, Burundi and Uganda and there have been reports of sexual abuses by officers of the former Rwandan

²⁰ Stilgmayer, Alexandra; *The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*; University of Nebraska Press.

²¹ The Convention on the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of HIS nationality and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail HIMSELF of the protection of that country; or who not having a nationality and being outside the country of HIS former habitual residence or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

²² Wall, Sima; "Displaced and Refugee Women in Conditions of War and Peace" in *From Basic Needs to Basic Rights*, Ed. by Margaret Schuler, Women Law and Development International, Washington, USA, 1995.

Government and officers of host countries.²³ The same problem has been detected in Kenya among Somali refugees.

The Need of Adequate Responses:

Different modalities of rape need to be addressed according to the characteristics of each situation. Sometimes the access to international protection can be of crucial importance in cases of violations of women's human rights. National systems need to be reorganized because lack of information can become an obstacle difficult to overcome.

However it is difficult to get the necessary data that are required. If we look at the UN system we will observe that only during the UN Decade for Women established from 1975 to 1985, 32 units of the UN Secretariat, 7 UN programmes, 17 specialized agencies and 10 United Nations Research Institutes were set up. At the same time, from 1946 to 1991 511 resolutions and decisions on women and many reports submitted by the Governments in relation to Covenants or Communications were produced. In addition to these inadequacies, there exists a lack of co-ordination within the system, as Savitri Goonesekere explains in relation to the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on Children's Rights. For example, when the Commission on the Status of Women supported a proposal of the UNICEF Executive Board to focus on issues concerning girl children by reference to standards set in both conventions, there were still important differences to discuss in relation to both international instruments as reproductive rights and the concept of family itself.

The problem is not only the number of organisations and resolutions but the approach to women's rights within the system and the process of implementation and prevention of human rights violations.

The Commission on the Status of Women, a Charter based body, has had an important role in different International Human Rights Conferences and also in planning the Beijing Conference on Women. Since 1947 up to date, the Commission on the Status of

²³ See: HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH WORLD REPORT 1996.

Women has addressed issues mainly concerning civil and political rights such as Citizenship for Married Women, Equal Rights in relation to marriage, Family Planning, etc, basically through the law. This body has the authority to review communications sent by individuals and organizations in order to identify "those that appear to reveal a consistent pattern of reliably attested injustice and discriminatory practices against women"; at the same time it can make general recommendations to the ECOSOC.²⁴ Recently it has made recommendations on the issue of rape in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

Another UN Office which is addressing the problem of violence against women through the design of a new Plan of Action is the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division. This Office is now involved in the proposal of a Plan of Action based on the issue of law enforcement which is certainly a crucial factor in order to prevent and eliminate violations of women's rights. The Plan of Action is expected to consider the issue of rape, in its variety of expressions taking into account every situation and every cultural environment.

It must be mentioned that rape has been understood as a form of torture only recently. However both men and women can be victims of rape. Rape is a gender-based crime and women are a high percentage of its victims. Therefore, the need to combine human rights covenants with the international instruments addressing women's human rights.

There have been demands for mechanisms of accountability to ensure that individuals involved in the perpetration of gender violence are brought to justice, to request governments to provide security for women, call for specific actions to the International Criminal Tribunal, among other measures.²⁵

Individual communication procedures have been established under different conventions such as the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination 1966, the Convention against Torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or

degrading treatment or punishment 1984. Nevertheless, there is no individual communication on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women 1979 or the Convention on the rights of the child 1989, a situation that creates a serious problem when trying to access international protection.

Additionally there exist regional systems such as the inter-American one, which now provides an interesting scenario with the signature of the Interamerican Convention to Prevent, Eliminate and Punish Violence against Women. This regional Convention is also known as the Convention of Belen do Para and it is expected to provide better protection against this kind of gender abuses, including domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, physical and psychological violence against women.

Women from the South have contributed in order to identify several forms of violence such as the existence of female foeticide and infanticide, female circumcision, dowry deaths and sati, labour exploitation in free zones and the denial of the right to organize, trafficking in women and sex-tourism which hides the existence of prostitution.

The document produced in Vienna as a result of the debate tried to present special areas of concerns for women and represented a major step to highlight the severity of the violations of women's human rights. It also emphasized the issue that the needs of women are different in relation to class, economic situation, age, cultural background, etc.

In Beijing, women from Latin America and the Caribbean, represented by CLADEM (Latin American and the Caribbean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights) highlighted the serious situation concerning legal protection for economic, social and cultural rights, agitated for the ratification of the Convention of Belen do Para and presented a proposal for a new Declaration of Human Rights. The NGOs asked for the end of sexual violations, all forms of violence, exploitation and sexual abuse of women and children, including sex trafficking and sexual tourism. The indigenous women asked for the investigation of cases of sexual slavery and rape of women by military officers, in areas like Karen in Burma and Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. They asked from the media special

²⁴ Read: Cook, Rebecca; "Women's International Human Rights Law: The way forward"; in: *Human Rights Quarterly* 15, The John Hopkins University Press, USA, 1993.

²⁵ See the draft position paper, highlighting the case of Naimat Farhat.

consideration in relation to the dissemination of images of indigenous women as sexual objects and objects of study. The need for the creation of effective legal instruments to protect women from violence was also raised by them.

As law is a key area where prejudices are expressed, the Beijing Declaration has considered it as a strategic objective to ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice. This objective, however, will depend especially on the capacities of the community organizations, including NGOs and GOs taking into consideration that the latest are in most cases expressions of the status quo.

All these efforts will have to consider the issue of consent, involving proof of resistance and corroboration as a key legal requirement when filing a case of rape, no matter what the circumstances.²⁶ Sri Lanka has recently introduced changes to this, as physical injury will not need to be shown by the victim.

Other obstacles to study are related to the existence of customary or religious laws, as the case of the Islamic Shariah, that in cases of rape does not value the testimony of the female victims. States like Kuwait, Iran, Mauritania have already made statements around this issue, defending their practices.

Nevertheless in any system, rape appears to be an under-reported crime. Other studies have even stated that acquaintance rapes are far more under-reported than stranger rapes ²⁷.

The attitude of the judiciary and the police is crucial as the victim has to overcome many difficulties to be able to speak about what happened, in addition to being exposed to interrogations and humiliating and long procedures. It will depend on her age, occupation and sometimes even her past sexual life to get a condemnatory resolution against the rapist (s).

There is also a need to improve the quality of the medical reports that in many cases do not contain explicit and clear references to the

damages inflicted reflecting the different circumstances involved. In some cases the victim will be required to undergo a medical examination again after a period of time, a situation that can create evidence against her, producing new harassment and delay in the process. Medical examination has to be practiced on the rapist also, in order to determine the characteristics of the rape and the health condition of the aggressor. New medical technology is not available in all countries.

It is also necessary to highlight the difficulties that emerge when a female victim of rape has an elastic hymen. Prejudices existing among the medical doctors can also represent sometimes a serious bias to obtain a favourable report for the victim.

It is a matter of fact that the judiciary always expects to find evidence of physical injuries on the victim as proof of her struggle against the aggressor. There is a lack of consciousness about the characteristics of this crime that in most of the cases can paralyze a victim making difficult a reaction.

In many countries such as India and Sri Lanka, rape is considered a crime against the State, in the sense that the victim will be represented not by her own lawyer but by the public prosecutor. He/she has the obligation to defend the victim and provide evidence against the rapist. The victim is a witness that will have to explain the events in detail. It is expected from her to be extremely accurate and explicit and there is no recognition of the difficulties she has to undergo to describe the event several times in front of strangers. Sometimes the victim has to give evidence in Court twice, once during the preliminary court procedure and later at the main trial.

Some Reflections;

Regarding all these issues there is a need to prioritize the safety of the victim and her situation. This has to go together with better legislation and sensitization of the agents of justice, not depending on their sex.

It is also important to add that some legislations have eliminated the term "rape" considering it as part of the area of sexual assault. The writer considers that it is important to establish the following categories: rape with its different modalities, sexual assault and sexual harassment, keeping different provisions for children.

²⁶ *Memorandum on Reform of Laws relating to sexual offenses*; prepared by Shomona Khanna and Ratna Kapur; Centre for Feminist Legal Research, New Delhi, India, 1996.

²⁷ Abarbanel, Gail and Richman Gloria; *The rape victim* article written for the Rape Treatment Center in Santa Monica, USA.

Different strategies have also been created in order to improve the situation of the victim. Efforts include legal and psychological services, and medical counselling. Even though victims of rape can also be male, the majority of the victims are women, therefore these services are specially available for women.

This paper specially recognizes the work done by organizations such as Santa Monica Rape Treatment Center and calls for a dissemination of their strategies and approaches. This center has distributed leaflets on a wide range of issues concerning rape and also provides free services and organizes workshops for young men and women.

Long procedures create difficulties. Especially in developing countries where the funds are from foreign sources, a prolonged assistance programme for the victims is difficult to achieve, though necessary. Services must be made available 24 hours a day including emergency telephone lines.

Other strategies include the creation of special police units for women. Although there is no uniform model of assistance, in some countries such units also deal with cases of rape, like the Brazilian Delegacias. Nevertheless, they have not led to improvement in the number of cases filed, because of the prejudices that still exist among some police officers, even though the majority are women police officers.

Different modalities also involve different reactions and effects for the victims and the law enforcers must be prepared to look at them.

FIRE AND ASHES

Regi Siriwardena

1

I stopped outside the tailor's shop. Yes, the notice was still there, hanging from a nail on the door; the untidy lettering, scrawled on a piece of cardboard, said in Sinhala: 'Room to let.' I went in, and the old tailor looked up from where he sat at his sewing-machine, flanked by his two assistants at theirs, and peered through his glasses. The whirring of the machine stopped as the old man said,

'Ah, mahattaya!'

He smiled faintly, showing his few surviving teeth, browned by tobacco. The tailor knew me: I lived down the adjoining lane, and I had from time to time got him to sew a sarong or two, and Minoli had once had a set of serviettes hemmed by him.

'I came to inquire about the room,' I said.

The tailor stared at me.

'For whom is it, mahattaya?'

'For myself.'

'It's not suitable for a gentleman like you,' the old man said.

He looked up at the ceiling as he spoke, as if this movement of his head and his eyes, taking in the surroundings, would explain his remark. The shop wasn't really anything more than a part of the bottom floor of his cramped dwelling, squeezed between an eating-house on the right and a small kadé on the left. A worn and stained curtain separated the shop from a kitchen at the back, from which cooking smells wafted through. The shopfloor was littered with the debris of the tailor's working day — odds and ends of cloth, snippets of thread and

cigarette butts. A narrow staircase on one side led to the upper storey, where, I supposed, the room to let was to be found. Outside on the street a lorry rumbled past, leaving behind it a cloud of smoke that blew into the shop. The old man's wizened frame was shaken by a hacking cough, and I waited till it subsided to answer his last remark.

'I can't pick and choose where I live now,' I said.

The tailor's watery eyes looked at me inquiringly.

'I have no job,' I said. 'I have given notice to quit my flat at the end of the month — that's only a week from now — because I can't afford to pay the rent. I have to find somewhere to live.'

'And your lady?' asked the old man.

'She has left me,' I said. 'Because I can't support her.'

There was a hint of compassion in the old man's look now, but he evidently felt cautious about giving way to this emotion. He reflected for some moments, self-interest perhaps struggling with sympathy. Finally, he dropped his eyes and asked, embarrassed by his own question:

'Then, mahattaya, if you have no job, how can you pay the room rent here?'

'I said I had no job, baas unnehe, not that I had no income. I live now by giving private tuition to pupils. I'll have enough to pay your room rent and meet my other needs, which are very few.'

The tailor reflected again, then asked:

'Would you first like to see the room?'

'Yes.'

The old man rose and led the way up the narrow stairway. On the landing at the top a small girl, about four years old, dressed in a dirty pair of rompers, gazed curiously at me as I came up the steps. I stopped to stroke her head, but she, in a sudden access of shyness, avoided the movement of my hand and ran into a room which faced the landing. Through the open door I could see a young woman, dark, plump, in a frock with a pattern of large pink flowers; she had a garment in her hand she was probably darning. I had seen her once before on one of my earlier visits to the shop and conjectured she must be the tailor's daughter. The child ran up to her knees and put her head on her lap, for protection from the stranger, and I could hear the young woman murmuring something reassuring as I went past. The old man led me

down a short corridor to another room, even smaller than the one I had glimpsed. It was empty.

'There's no furniture,' the tailor said. 'If you want to take it, you'll have to bring your own. But there must be things in your house.'

'I have got rid of most of them,' I said, 'but there are a few things I kept. Anyway, there's room here for a bed, a table and chair, perhaps, but not much more. What about the bathroom and toilet?'

'There's only one for the whole house,' said the old man, 'it's downstairs. I know it's inconvenient, but it can't be helped. I'll show it to you when we go down.'

'And the rent?'

'Two hundred and fifty.'

It was too much for a small cubby-hole, but I didn't feel inclined to haggle. Anyway, I thought, the family probably needed the money. As if in confirmation, the old man said:

'We are letting the room only because we have to find more money. Business is bad, and after my daughter came to live with her child, we have two more mouths to feed.'

'I'll take it,' I said.

We went downstairs, and the tailor showed me the toilet and bathroom in the backyard, detached from the house. From the rear door of the kitchen, a middle-aged woman in a housecoat watched us; her heavy, dark face and her ample body were more elderly variations on those of the young woman upstairs. The toilet was smelly, but I had already decided I wasn't going to be fastidious about such things. I gave the tailor a month's rent, and arranged to move in within the week.

2

I was a casualty of the 1980 public servants' strike. I had been a teacher at a state school, and a member of a teachers' trade union led by a particularly cranky left party that committed itself heart and soul to the strike, believing it was a prelude to revolution. I didn't share these extravagant illusions, but when the union backed the strike, I felt obliged to join it out of solidarity. Even when by the second day it was clear that the strike was collapsing, I didn't go back to work because my friends on the staff, who were devoted members of the party, were staying out, and I considered it dishonourable to desert them.

That, at least, was what I said to Minoli when she pleaded with me — in the first instance, not to strike at all, and later, to heed the Government's threats of dismissal and return to work. After the event I wondered whether in my intransigence there had been a hidden desire to break with that life — with the school and with marriage alike — which had become stale and tedious. Just as when, after two years of difficulties and privations, Minoli decided to leave me, I wondered whether behind her legitimate anger and resentment, there was a degree of relief at the breakup of the marriage. It had been a relationship... but no, it was hardly that, it was a connection built on insubstantial foundations: on my side, I thought, on nothing more solid than the attractions of a bright pair of eyes, a dimpled chin, long slender fingers and a ringing laugh. And on the expectations of an escape from loneliness that turned out to be illusory. But what induced her to accept me? It was a measure of the gulf between us that had never been bridged that I had not enough knowledge of her even for speculation on that question. At the time I made my declaration of love and she said yes, I was too happy to want to scrutinise her feelings for me. But even after four years of marriage, I knew little of her, except for the foods she loved and hated, the colours she chose for her saris, the shades of nail polish she preferred, her affection for dogs and abhorrence of cats (she took her pet dog with her when she left me). I couldn't even have said anything specific about her sexual desires: our love-making had soon become another routine, like the morning bed-tea or the Saturday evening stroll on Galle Face.

Minoli had a just grievance (I could now admit it) that after my dismissal I didn't bestir myself to find another vocation and to earn a steady income. I floated indolently along, finding comfort in my freedom from the morning rush to get to work and in the fact that I had the flat all to myself once Minoli left for her office. I found a few private pupils and made enough to get by and to have a self-defence in answer to Minoli's reproaches, but it wasn't enough to make up for my lost salary or to appease her conviction that I wasn't really trying. Many dismissed strikers were in more desperate straits, but there were a few who had made good, taking advantage of that same open economy that politically they reviled. Ironically, among them were two of the activist fellow-teachers who had been dismissed with me and were now

running a hugely successful tutoring, making three or four times what they had earned as schoolteachers. They invited me to join them, but I declined, preferring the freedom of making my own arrangements and times with my pupils to submission to another set of duties that would probably be no less restrictive than that of my former school.

I didn't feel guilty about my failure with Minoli: we had both made an error of judgment in entering into the marriage, the outcome of shared inexperience and immaturity. Minoli would have been happier with somebody more extroverted, more easy-going, a good mixer and good companion. Perhaps she might find one now. How fortunate it was that we had decided not to have a child in the first years of marriage!

3

Four days later I moved into the room, with such bits of furniture from my flat as I could accommodate in it; the rest I delivered to a small auctioneer's. Once I had completed this operation, locked the flat and handed the keys to the landlord, I felt that one phase of my life, with its mistakes, was finally over, and, for better or worse, I could begin again.

When I moved in, I intended to have my meals out, at the neighbouring small eating-house, but after a few days the inconvenience of this arrangement began to weigh on me. Already within these days there had been occasions when I had felt disinclined to make the effort to change from sarong into trousers and go down the stairs and next door, and I had therefore done without breakfast on two mornings, and once without dinner. It was particularly irksome not to have a cup of tea on waking in the morning unless I went to this trouble to get it. I therefore asked the tailor whether I could come to an arrangement to have my meals supplied by the family. The old man was again hesitant at first, wondering whether their simple food would be acceptable to me, until I assured him that I was no more exacting in this respect than in that of the room.

So every morning now the mother brought me a cup of tea, and three meals in the course of the day, which I ate in my room. Except for the times when I went out to give lessons to my pupils, I stayed for

the most part in that room, lying in bed or sitting in the one chair I had. I had brought a few books with me, and sometimes I re-read one or the other of these, but I never bought a newspaper or looked at one. I felt I was a kind of hermit, and why should I concern myself with the affairs of the world outside my cell?

Sometimes I encountered the daughter on the stairway or on the landing, and on these occasions she passed me with lowered eyes. Even when I once stopped halfway on the narrow stairs and pressed my body sideways against the wall so as to give her free passage, she didn't acknowledge my gesture, or even my presence, with a word or a look. Another time I halted on the landing, seeing her about to make her way up, and she, seemingly embarrassed by a courtesy to which she was unused, stopped too and called out: 'No, come down.' Those were the first words she spoke to me. I knew her name was Lalita because I had heard her mother call her so. But of her husband, of the father of the child, there was no sign. I remembered what the tailor had said on that first day: that she had come with the child to stay with her parents. That seemed to imply that the husband was dead, or that she had left him, or he had left her. I sometimes wondered which of these was true, but I felt it would be improper to show any inquisitiveness on this point by asking the father a direct question. I even reprimanded myself inwardly for my curiosity. What was it to me? Even in my solitary state, there was no danger of any kind of involvement with Lalita (not that I wanted one at that time with any woman), but with her, I reassured myself, it wouldn't arise at all. She wasn't pretty or even attractive, and I had no contact with her beyond the occasional passages on the stairs and the odour of her body, with a slight whiff of sweat, that I caught as she went past in such proximity. Nevertheless, when I heard her quiet voice from the room opposite the landing as I came up the stairs, or heard it drifting from the backyard through the window of my room, most often talking to the child, whether tenderly or rebukingly, I told myself that if the woman matched the voice, she must be a gentle person.

But the child, having overcome her original shyness and impelled by curiosity, often wandered into my room. I used to talk to her or play little improvised games with her until Lalita's voice called to her from the corridor and she ran out. On the first of these occasions I heard Lalita say, as she led the child away: 'Don't go there and worry that

uncle.' But the child wasn't to be deterred, and often, when her mother was busy in the kitchen downstairs or out of the house, she would come. I now bought a small bottle of sweets, and gave her a couple on each of her daily visits.

Then one morning I heard the customary tap at my door that announced the arrival of my morning cup of tea, and opening the door, I found Lalita standing there.

'Amma is ill,' she explained, 'so I made the tea and brought it.'

'What's wrong with your mother?' I asked, taking the cup.

'She has a cold and fever. There's a bad flu going round.'

She came back later with my breakfast, and then looked disapprovingly at the unswept floor.

'Aiyo! how dusty it is! Don't you sweep it?' she asked.

'I don't have a broom,' I said.

'If you asked, we would have given you one. But perhaps you don't even know how to sweep.'

'It's true I've never swept a floor, but I could have learnt if I had a broom.'

'You leave the door of your room open when you go out today, and I'll sweep it.'

'Thank you,' I said, 'if it isn't too much trouble.'

'Better than having you falling ill because of the dust.'

When I came back from my lesson that afternoon, I found her standing in the doorway with a broom in her hand.

'I've finished,' she said, 'but I want to ask you one thing. That bottle of sweets on the window-sill: did you get them for yourself?'

'No, for Nandini.'

'I asked because I know you give her sweets. But I didn't know you had a whole bottle. Don't give her too many at a time. It's bad, she'll get worms.'

'No, I never give her more than two, even when she shouts for them.'

'That's good.'

As she went away, I was struck by the fact that she hadn't called me *mahattaya*, as her parents did, but had said *oya*. This assertion of equality pleased me.

Her mother resumed bringing me meals after two days, but Lalita continued to sweep my room daily. I rarely met her on these occasions because she always came when I was out. But she now acknowledged my existence, when she passed me on the stairs or the landing, with a smile. I discovered that her smile lit up and lightened her heavy features. Also, whenever she came to take Nandini away from my room, she didn't call from the corridor but came up to the doorway, and sometimes I had a brief conversation with her. I found that as in the case of the unswept room, she treated me as somebody who needed to be managed because I was unused to practical affairs, and did things for me without asking me when she felt they needed to be done. One day I missed a shirt that had been hanging in my room and wondered what could have happened because I couldn't suppose that anybody had stolen it. The mystery was solved the next day when Lalita brought it back to me; there was a tear in it that she had darned. Another time she stopped me on the landing when I was taking my dirty clothes to the laundry near by: I carried them in a small open cane basket that was one of the few things I had brought from my old house.

'Let me see what you're taking to be washed.'

I obeyed her, even though I didn't understand what she wanted, and emptied the things from the basket onto the floor.

'You can give the shirts and trousers there: maybe they have to be starched and ironed. But why waste money on having your sarongs washed? Or have you never washed anything?'

'I could wash the sarongs myself,' I stammered, 'but it's difficult, I have to take them to the bathroom downstairs, and I'm never sure when it's free —'

'I'll wash them for you,' she said, picking them up. 'And these handkerchiefs! Isn't it a shame to pay the laundry to wash your handkerchiefs?'

'But those are very dirty,' I protested, 'I don't like your handling them.'

'It won't bother me,' she said. 'I'm not a lady.' And she walked away with the sarongs and the handkerchiefs.

She treated me very much in the same way that she treated her

child — both protective and commanding. Perhaps she was used to looking after her husband's creature-comforts, and was now performing the same role for me. This brought me back to the problem of the absent husband. One day I plucked up courage, and asked her:

'Where is Nandini's father?'

She frowned, as if the question was displeasing to her: but whether she was annoyed with me for asking it, or whether the reminder of her husband was unpleasant, I couldn't tell. But she answered simply enough:

'He has left me.'

I wanted to ask 'Why?' but that would have been presumptuous.

Instead I said:

'Where is he?'

'Far away, in Weligama. He's staying with his sister's family.'

'Does he send you money for the child?'

'No. And I don't want to ask him.'

'It must be difficult for you.'

'Difficult or not, we'll live somehow.'

I had learnt that she did a few hours' work as domestic help for a lady across the street, but from what her father had said, I gathered this didn't bring enough to maintain her and the child. I thought I should do something for her in return for her sweeping and darning and washing, but a tentative feeler in the direction of offering her money was firmly resisted. Then I had an idea when I went to the toilet and glimpsed her, through the open backdoor of the kitchen, squatting on an old-fashioned hiramane and scraping coconut. I bought one of the modern coconut-scrapers with a handle that can be operated while standing up. When I presented it to her, her first reaction was of dismay:

'Aney! It must have cost you a lot of money! Why did you buy it?'

'Because it'll be easier for you than sitting on that hiramane. And for your mother too.'

'But I don't want you to spend money on us. You pay a lot anyway for the room.'

'What about all the things you do for me?'

'But those things don't cost me anything.'

'What about your time, your effort?'

She shrugged her shoulders dismissively. But she did take the coconut-scraper away, and the next day I was gratified to see her working at it, fixed to the kitchen table.

5

The bad flu that Lalita had spoken of got me two weeks later. I had it worse than her mother, with severe headaches and body pains. Both the mother and Lalita nursed me through the illness, bringing me regular cups of koththamalli and Panadol tablets to bring the fever down and Siddhalepa to ease my pains.

My temperature returned to normal after all these ministrations, but I still felt too weak to resume my lessons, and I had a continuing cough and sore throat. One morning Lalita came into my room and handed me a cup of hot water.

'I've stirred some balm into it,' she said. 'Drink it, it'll be good for that throat of yours.'

I did as I was told, and as I put the cup down and she reached out to take it, I felt a sudden rush of tenderness towards her, and on the impulse, I grasped her hand and kissed it.

She laughed.

'If you play those games while you're ill, it might make you worse.'

Strange! I thought, after she had gone. I had loved Minoli's hands, with their long fingers and long shapely nails that she cut so that they tapered to a point, and painted so that they went with the shade of the sari she was wearing that day. Nothing could have been less like them than the hand I had just kissed. Lalita's fingers were short and stubby, and her nails looked as if they had never fully emerged from the flesh in which they were embedded.

She said nothing further about the incident, but there seemed to be now an unspoken question behind the way she looked at me when she came into the room. A few days later I felt fit enough to go back to my pupils. That night I had put out the light and retired to bed; the rest of the house was evidently dark too.

A few minutes later I opened my eyes and sat up: I had heard a footfall. A figure approached my bed. I heard Lalita's voice whisper:

'Are you awake?'

'Yes,' I said.

She sat down beside me and began stroking my face and caressing my arms and chest. I responded by embracing her and pressing my cheeks against hers, and my mouth sought her lips; but then she stood up, and in the vestiges of light that came through the window I saw she was taking off her clothes. My heart leapt, but I felt I had a duty to her to be sensible.

'I don't want you to fall into any trouble,' I said.

'Don't be afraid,' she said. 'I took a Preethi.'

She lay down alongside me. She made love with an intensity that astonished me, in the gentle person I had taken her to be. She nuzzled my face continually, cried out in an overflow of pleasure when I pressed her nipples, and her body throbbed and quivered at the climax of the act. After it, she clung to me and drew my mouth down to hers repeatedly. I wanted to start from there again, but she stood up and began putting on her clothes.

'I would like to sleep here the whole night,' she said, 'but I must go.'

She gave me a last kiss, and left.

6

After that she came to my bed most nights, except when, as she hinted, she had her periods. Once the child cried out when we were in the middle of the act itself, and she hastily disengaged herself, snatched up her clothee and ran out of the room without even waiting to put them on.

It was impossible that her parents didn't know what was going on. At night they occupied the room opposite the landing, while Lalita slept with the child on a mat in the space between that room and the stairs. Her comings and goings couldn't very well have remained unnoticed by them. Was it that they didn't want to interfere? Or could it even be that since she was husbandless, they welcomed the prospect of a man who, they might hope, would look after her and the child, and perhaps ease them of their financial burdens? I didn't trouble myself with further thought on this subject, and didn't even ask Lalita about it, but was grateful that there seemed no likelihood of intervention.

One day I felt a desire to draw. That had been the main interest of my life at one time: when I was a university student, I even had an exhibition of my pictures together with those of three other young artists. I had never taken to oils, but I had been fond of pen and ink, charcoal and pastel drawings, specialising in faces and bodies of people. I even sold some pictures at the exhibition, and there were people who said encouraging things about my work, and one newspaper review picked me out among the four for special commendation. But after I graduated and began to teach, I had drawn less and less often, and stopped completely after my marriage. Now I wanted to unearth my talents, such as they were, again. But I had nothing to draw with.

I went into the backyard where I had noticed the remnants of a wood fire, and picked up some pieces of charcoal. They weren't as good, of course, as the specially prepared charcoal sticks that professional artists use, but I had worked with such things before, and I thought these would do. I took them up to my room and tried one of them out on a piece of paper, after making a kind of point with a blade. Yes, good enough. But I had nothing to draw on. I went out and found a shop where I was able to buy a roll of cheap brown wrapping paper. I came back with it, cut it up into rectangular pieces, spread one out on the table and began to draw.

What I drew was Lalita, as I had glimpsed her through the backdoor of the kitchen, working at the coconut-scraper I had given her, in a characteristic posture of hers that I had noticed, balancing the weight of her body between one foot planted on the floor and the other resting on a horizontal strut that joined two of the table legs. Lalita wasn't pretty, but her ample, earthy, full-bosomed body was better material for an artist than that of many conventional beauties. I worked for the rest of the morning on the picture, and was rather satisfied with it. At least I was getting my hand in.

When Lalita came in to sweep, I held up the picture for her. She looked at it, expressionless.

'Do you like it?' I asked.

'I don't know about such things,' she said.

'I'm not asking what you know. Just look at it, do you like it or not?'

'I don't know,' she repeated.

It struck me that perhaps she would have been more impressed if I had painted something like the gaudy calendar picture of a girl with a bird that hung above the space where she slept. I didn't pursue the subject, but I went on drawing, producing more pictures, day by day, but always of her in different situations, actions, postures. Sometimes of her and the child, but with the focus of interest again on her and on what she was doing, on the movement of her body arrested in time, or its still weight and gravity.

7

I couldn't conceal from myself that while I was grateful for Lalita's... what was it — love? affection? desire?... I craved a more complete relationship that I didn't have. I had discovered that she had an inflexible code of behaviour that she wouldn't relax to please me. She seemed determined to confine our links with each other to the nightly moments of passion, except for the trivialities of our daytime dealings and conversations. If she ran into me on the street outside, as sometimes happened when I was going to a lesson or returning from it and she was going out to work or on one of her marketing errands, she passed me, let alone without a smile, without even a look or nod of recognition. I made one or two attempts to push the relationship into the open, only to be rebuffed. There was a film by Tissa Abeysekera that I wanted to see, and I thought she too might find it interesting, and I invited her to come. She turned down the invitation with a forthrightness that suggested I had tried to transgress the rules.

'But why, Lalita?' I asked.

'All these people around know I'm a married woman. I don't want them to see me going about with another man. And they know you're married too.'

'But your husband has left you. And my wife has left me.'

'That won't make other people think it's alright.'

'It's strange. You don't want to go with me to the pictures, but you don't mind coming to my bed.'

'That's different. They don't see that.'

I recognised it was futile trying to persuade her. But my need to deepen the relationship kept pushing me into other fruitless attempts

— for instance, to give her a pair of bangles I had bought for her.

'I won't take presents,' she said.

'But you took the coconut-scraper,' I objected.

'That was different. That was for the house. Mother uses it as well as me.'

The bangles continued to lie uselessly among my clothes. What was behind her inflexibility? I continually turned over this problem in my mind. If her refusal to go out with me was due to a shame about what the neighbours might say, why should she refuse to take from me a present whose source they couldn't know? Was it a concern not to place herself in the position of a mistress, a kept woman, who benefits materially from the surrender of her body? Was it that whatever she gave me, she wanted to give freely, without a recompense that would degrade the act and herself in her eyes? Or was it that she didn't want finally to close the possibility of a reconciliation with her husband, if he were to come back? That line of thinking led to the questions that nagged me from time to time and tantalised me in my ignorance: Why had her husband left her? What were her real feelings about him? Would she accept him if he returned? She never spoke about him, and my few attempts to learn something of him and of their relationship had been rebuffed either by silence or by a direct refusal to say anything.

These questions that troubled me were unanswerable. Thinking about them, I could imagine a dialogue with one of my old friends if I were to confide in him (not that I could or wanted to confide in anybody):

'She's probably just a calculating woman, who decided to entice you for what she could get out of it.'

'But a calculating woman would have encouraged me to spend money on her. She refuses to take money, or anything else from me.'

'She gets sex.'

'Well, so do I, so what's wrong with that?'

'Is that all there is in it? You're not in love with her?'

'In love? Can all the infinite possibilities of feeling of a man for a woman be contained in a four-letter word? All I know is that I'm absolutely dependent on her and I can't do without her.'

'But you told me yourself you didn't even find her attractive.'

'No, I don't, if I compare her with a pretty woman passing on the

street. But that doesn't seem to matter when I make love to her in the dark.'

'But you don't even get any real companionship out of her.'

'That's true. That can't be helped.'

But that dialogue would have been incomplete because it would have left out what reconciled me to the imperfection of my relationship with Lalita — my intense involvement with her double that I knew through charcoal and paper. I sensed that my pictures fed on both the experienced sensations and emotions of the passionate encounters of the night and on the unfulfilled desires for a deeper engagement with her self that I could enjoy only in the imagination, in the activity of drawing.

One day I decided to draw a nude of her. I had never actually seen her body fully unclothed because she bared it only in the dark; and once, when I had wanted to switch on the light just after our love-making, she had refused to allow me to do that until she put on her clothes. So, in drawing the nude, I had to try to translate into lines and forms on paper the perceptions of my hands and limbs that knew her naked body, of which my eyes were ignorant, eked out by the imagination that comes to supply the imperfections of all the senses. I rather enjoyed attempting this, and when I finished, I was pleased. My skills had grown since that first day with the charcoal and brown paper, and precisely because this picture was harder to bring off than anything I had done before, I inwardly congratulated myself on it.

I wondered what Lalita would say if I showed her the picture. It was hardly likely she would approve of it, considering all her reticences and restrictions; but once the idea of displaying it to her had occurred to me, my curiosity about exactly how she would react was too strong to be mastered. That she might be embarrassed, or even annoyed, I could have predicted: what she actually did was something I hadn't foreseen.

'Chee! A dirty picture!' she exclaimed, and, before I could stop her, she tore it in four, and flung the pieces on the floor before flouncing out of the room.

I regretted the loss of the picture, on which I had expended so much thought and labour, but I was even more worried that she might be so deeply offended as not to come back to me; but she came that

night as usual, and said not a word about the unfortunate nude. In an unexplainable way, however, this incident marked a turning-point in my drawing. I had for some time been growing dissatisfied with simple charcoal and brown paper. I felt the need for some colour: not that I wanted to move entirely out of the medium of line in which I was convinced my strength lay, but I thought an occasional touch of colour — some spots of earth-brown, some patches of dull yellow or even a shade of dark green — would help to give substance and solidity to my shapes. Also, I missed the possibilities of contrast between a white surface and black lines. Lalita's destruction of my nude fortuitously seemed to bring these dissatisfactions to a head, and to mark the appropriate time for a change of medium. So I bought a drawing-book with white pages such as schoolchildren use and a child's box of pastel crayons — a medium I had worked with in the past. I thought the switch had helped my drawings, and though I never dared to draw a nude again, even secretly, I looked forward to extending my visual territory more and more.

8

One day the tailor came upstairs and said to me:

'There's a gentleman down there asking for you.'

I wondered who it could be. Since the breakup of my marriage I hadn't kept in touch with my former friends, and it was unlikely that any of them knew where I lived. Halfway down the stairs, I recognised the visitor. It was Serasinghe, a journalist who worked for an English-language paper, and often covered current activities in the arts. It was he who had written that review many years earlier in which my pictures had been favourably noticed. Since then I had met him and spoken to him often at exhibitions, plays and concerts.

After we greeted each other, I asked:

'How did you find out where I stayed?'

'You thought you had successfully gone into hiding, did you?'

'But tell me how.'

It turned out that one of my pupils was a cousin of Serasinghe, and at the time I was ill with flu I had sent him a note to excuse myself from a lesson, and to this note I had unwarily appended my address.

'I ferreted you out because I have something to discuss with you.'

I turned to the tailor, who had resumed his usual place at the sewing-machine.

'Is it all right, baas unnehe, if I take my friend to my room?'

'No problem, mahattaya.'

I led the way up the stairs, and only halfway up did I remember my drawings were piled up on my table, because I had no other space for them. Serasinghe was bound to notice them. But it was too late to turn back. Sure enough: the drawings were the first things Serasinghe paid attention to. He picked up the drawing book and leafed through it; then he went through the drawings on the sheets of brown paper that lay under the book. Having silently completed his inspection, Serasinghe asked:

'How long have you been doing this kind of thing?'

'Only a few months.'

'These are good. They remind me of Degas' drawings of women.'

I laughed.

'That's just like you critics. Everything reminds you of something else. Can't you ever look at anything in its own right?'

'Don't be upset. I wasn't saying you were imitating Degas. I just said some things in these drawings reminded me of him. Most people would have taken that as a compliment.'

'I didn't care two hoots about Degas or anybody else when I drew them. I just drew what I saw.'

Serasinghe abandoned that line of conversation.

'As I said, they're good, very good. You should exhibit some of them.'

'I don't give a damn about exhibiting them. I didn't do them for anybody else to see. I did them just for myself.'

'And for that woman I saw as I came up the stairs?'

'She's just the subject. She couldn't care less about my pictures.'

I knew that Serasinghe was burning with curiosity, wanting to ask me what my relations were with my 'subject'. By now my friends must be aware that Minoli and I had parted. But Serasinghe must have felt the atmosphere wasn't favourable for such a question. Instead he said:

'I told you the drawings were good, and I meant it, but they could have been better.' He looked through the drawing-book again, and found a picture I had done of Lalita feeding her child. 'There you are, that particular green isn't quite right with that brown.'

'Maybe, but that's all I had.'

'I thought so.' He nodded towards the box of pastels on the table. 'Are those all the colours you have to work with?'

'Yes.'

'And what's the charcoal you used?'

'Bits from the backyard fire.'

'That leads me to what I came for. I didn't know you had all these pictures done, but it's quite a coincidence because I came to talk to you about a project.'

'What project?'

'Some people I know want to get up an exhibition of the work of talented but lesser-known artists. I've promised to help in getting the people and the stuff together. So will you come in?'

'I told you. I don't want to exhibit.'

'Listen. We aren't just going to collect a lot of pictures and hang them at the Wendt, or wherever. The idea is to take about a year and stimulate artists to create before we put the exhibition on. People like you who have the talent but who don't have the means. We'll get funding for it. We'll get you the proper materials you're starved without. At the exhibition, I'm sure you'll be able to sell a lot of pictures. You'll get known. It could be the beginning of an entirely new career.'

'I don't want a career. I just want to exist.'

'But are you happy, living like this?'

Serasinghe waved his arms as he said this to take in the room and the surroundings, and I knew he meant, 'In this hellhole', and probably also, 'with that slut who can't appreciate your art.' I replied:

'When could I honestly say I was happy? But I don't want to change this existence for any other, not by my choice, anyway.'

It was only a week after Serasinghe's visit that the blow fell. Lalita had come to me as usual and we had made love. Soon after it was over, she said quietly:

'I'm going away tomorrow.'

'Where?' I asked.

'To Weligama. My sister-in-law has written to say my husband is ill with T.B. She begs me to come and help to look after him. He has also said he wants to see me — and the child.'

'But are you coming back?'

'That I can't decide now. It doesn't depend only on what I want.'

If Lalita had hit me on the head, I would have felt less pain. I wanted to go down on my knees and beg her not to leave me, but I knew that wouldn't change her mind. After a silence, I said:

'But you don't have an obligation to him. He left you, and he hasn't even supported you.'

'Still, he's the father of my child.'

I couldn't bring myself to ask: 'If he gets well and wants you back, will you agree?', still less: 'If he dies, what will you do?' I knew that to any such questions Lalita would respond only with 'I don't know.' I asked only: 'When are you going?'

'Tomorrow morning.'

In the morning she, and not her mother, brought me, first, my bed-tea, and then, my breakfast, as if these were a farewell gesture. I wanted to offer her money for her needs, but I knew she would refuse it. When she had packed and changed into a sari for the journey, she came to the doorway of the room with Nandini and said simply:

'I'm going.'

In silence I gave Nandini a whole bottle of sweets — a new one I had bought for her and hadn't yet opened.

'Thank you, Uncle,' she beamed.

'You'll break it,' Lalita said, took it from her, and put it in her bag.

After they had gone, I lay in bed the whole morning, numb with grief. What could I do? The thought of waiting in the uncertain hope of her return was intolerable to me. Nor could I bear the prospect of

living on there, in a place saturated with so many memories. I would have to find somewhere else to stay and move on again.

I didn't get out of bed until the mother brought me lunch. She looked searchingly at me, perhaps to ascertain how I was taking Lalita's departure, but she had never discussed my relations with her daughter, and she evidently wasn't going to start now.

After I had eaten I thought I would go out and start looking for other lodgings at once. But first, there was a funeral rite to be performed. I took the drawing book and the pile of pictures on the table. The pieces of the picture Lalita had torn up were still there, at the bottom of the pile. I bundled them all together. Taking them with me, I bought a box of matches at the kadé next door. I knew there was a plot of empty ground down the adjoining lane, where the boys of the neighbourhood played cricket in the evenings.

When I got to that waste ground, nobody was there in the hot afternoon. I squatted on the ground, and tore the pages from the drawing book. Then I lit a match and held up the first page to the flame. There was a breeze blowing from the sea, so it took some time to get a fire started, but once the first two pages were alight, there was no difficulty in sustaining it.

By the time I finished with the drawing book a small boy, followed by a dog, wandered across from one of the neighbouring houses, and watched me curiously, while meditatively sucking his thumb. I now took the drawings on brown paper and fed them one by one to the fire. The ashes of the drawing book had remained in a compact pile, but the thinner sheets of brown paper, as they burnt, were carried by the wind, and the remnants of ash blown and scattered across the waste plot.

Finally I reached the fragments of the torn nude and gave them to the fire. The pieces twisted and curled, face or hand or breast lit up momentarily by the flame before they were consumed.

As I picked up the box of matches before going, the small boy began jumping up and down on the pile of ashes that was left, turning it all to dust.

Book Reviews

Carl Muller, *Colombo: A Novel*, Delhi, Penguin Books, 1995.

"It is easy enough to complain about *Colombo*. Its sensationalized sex, pessimistic politics and histrionic history might well put off the pious, the loyal, the booster - any personality that believes in speaking only with kindness, charity and forbearance..."

Robert Siegle

Lanka Guardian 15 July 1996.

Carl Mullers' *Colombo* is a large, sprawling, untethered narrative, positively heaving with life, very much like the city it describes. And of course, it does provide this sensationalized sex, pessimistic politics and yes, a somewhat histrionic history, as it were. Some of these issues - particularly the first - have been freely dissected in the popular press with regard to his previous works. Unlike these, however, it is a peculiarly unwieldy book, full of repetitive mini-narratives. It is perhaps unfair to expect the life of a city to be neatly compressed into distinct compartments; but at one level, in *Colombo* lots of people seem to be doing much the same thing in different guises.

Yet at the same time, it is perhaps profitable to adopt a larger view. Novels such as this, like many works of art vast in scope, frequently are able to transcend authorial intentions. At a more general level, then, it seems to me that *Colombo* is essentially about new modes of consumption; in this instance, the consumption of modernity itself. Modernity, like all material items is consumed variously in diverse cultural contexts. Like the ubiquitous McDonalds' beefburger which in its original commercial environment is a cheap, tacky junk-food item, but becomes a high prestige object of conspicuous consumption in newly modernising China, or for that matter, in Colombo today. In an environment of consumer scarcity everyday items take on a fetish value not associated with its consumption in the commercial cultures of its origin.

So what is our concept of modernity? Modernity is often defined as a state of mind, a way of looking at things. Thus we speak of the modernist novel, modern art. But modernity is also inextricably tied to the centre, to the Euroamerican metropolis, to the mainstream of events. This being so, those of us who are located at the margins become consumers of modernity, rather than producers of the modernist experience.

But at the same time this process of consumption is not always a passive one, but is frequently selective: we choose, for better or worse, what we would consume. Similarly, the imperatives of modernity introduced into peripheral societies by the colonial endeavour, ie mass consumerism, the commercialisation of art and culture, the growth of the tourism/sex industry, the creation of new public arenas in the form of electronic and tabloid media etc. are each consumed in a unique way in every socio-cultural milieu. It is this specificity of Colombo's consumption of modernity which appears to be under the critical gaze of the author. His creative project then, has to be to narrate how Colombo's story differs from that of say, Bangkok, Bombay, Manila or Rio de Janeiro.

It is this specificity of social experience, then, that is relevant. It is not the excesses of modernity per se, but what is distinctive about the way in which such excesses manifest themselves in the post-colony, in the form of ethnic/political strife, breakdown of law and order, abject bureaucratic corruption, creeping authoritarianism, child sex, pornography etc in the city of Colombo that is significant. For clearly the writer, whose commitment to Colombo as an entity I would not question, is convinced that such a specificity does exist.

At the same time, *Colombo* is an unrelieved indictment of the failures of modernity - there appear to be few happy endings to any of the narrative strands that comprise the first 22 chapters of his *Colombo*. Its denizens seem to have given themselves up entirely to the rapacious and sleazy demands of the modernizing city - today's Colombo is full of predators and victims, with not much in between. Recent political history and the deep social crises of the last decade may make it easy to empathise with this view of Colombo. The difficulty here is that the writer's critical project would appear to be an essentially sociological one with a large slice of political history thrown in. To achieve this aim

in the genre of creative writing then demands a formidable talent.

The book is divided into two sections, the first of which consists of 22 chapters, each of which is a cameo of city life. The brief second section (approx. 60 pages) is a fairly straightforward historical account of the fall of the city in the modern period. It is semi-fictionalised, but clearly the writer relies much on archival material. As such, it is not clear to me what advantage such an account of events has over a straightforward piece of writing by a scholar in modern history. I shall therefore focus on the first section.

The name "Colombo" argues Muller, stems from the Sinhala words *kola amba*, literally 'the *Mango* tree that doesn't bear fruit' but "... only a poison milk from every branch." (p 22). This lack of productivity becomes the underlying theme. In this first section, the writer appears to be tracing what I can only describe as the lumpenization of Colombo in the post-colonial phase. This lumpenization involves an abject impoverishment of body, mind and spirit. It issues from the fact that the denizens of the city, irrespective of social class, contribute nothing to its productive growth, and their own energies are in turn vitiated by the inhospitable city environment.

For the monetization of the countryside did not lead to the breakdown of pre-modern social structures such as caste, ethnicity and religion as predicated by the great modern social theorists Marx, Weber and Durkheim. At the same time, social class emerged as a further cleaving factor in these highly differentiated societies. Universal adult education creates new public arenas, ie the school, the workplace, the electronic and tabloid media; in a word a new and dynamic political culture for newly emergent social constituencies, each less tolerant of the needs of any other. And all of this must add up to a highly volatile mix, typically exemplified by Colombo. In many ways then, the malaise of Colombo seems symptomatic of that of the body politic at large.

The process of lumpenisation as depicted by Muller touches a spectrum of new social classes and groupings that comprise modern Colombo, the tree that bears no fruit. Interestingly here his treatment of some groups are clearly more empathetic than others. In the suburb of Kotahena Portuguese soldiers, Dutch officers and British Colonial functionaries have given way to new indigenous urban strata, the

"shabby people" whose "clothes are dirty, (their) linen grimy, (their) shoes beaten raw, (their) very eyebrows thick with dust" (p 24). Politically, these are the masses. They are characterised by a certain "seediness", and wait with incredible patience and dullness for that bus to take them home. The city environment deprives them of energy and somehow exudes inertia. The shabby people seem to depress Muller no end.

Other communities capture his interest better. One of the earliest sites of modernization remains the Colombo harbour. A complete commercial and social enclave on its own, here petty officers, signalmen, harbour workers and boatman interact with the international seafaring traffic in the form of steamboats, barges and ships. Here, in this little oasis within an increasingly controlled economy, pilferage becomes lifestyle..."all through the night thieving fingers worked swiftly, and with an efficiency that bore the stamp of the professional pilferer" (p 37). By the early post-colonial phase politics had begun to creep in, and strikes became part of everyday reality. The Colombo harbour then is one of the first arenas where social class manifested itself; the new assertiveness of organised labour which was to become a feature of the post-colonial political culture. It is also a hard, predatory masculine environment - raw new recruits are ritually ravaged by older officers and signalmen. Sexual aggressiveness becomes an unquestioned expression of power relations. Nonetheless, perhaps because of his seafaring background, Muller appears to find more to identify with in this community than the previous one.

Another interesting group depicted are the canal bank dwellers of Wellawatte, a squatter community to which Muller keeps returning throughout his book. Muller has a special affection for this underworld community of drifters, illicit liquor brewers, pushers and addicts, the flotsam and jetsam of the city. He provides a background account of the Dutch project of building the waterways, a not insignificant engineering feat, and its subsequent transformation into the canal community where all the excesses of modernity, of urban marginalisation such as rape, incest and child prostitution are everyday occurrences. In these overcrowded and mosquito-ridden conditions Jeronis the drifter rapes his own daughter, while his wife drives her

younger sister into the street and into prostitution to keep her out of her father's way. Narratives such as these are presented almost unemotionally, with the drama inherent in the events allowed to speak for itself, and are therefore very persuasive..

Commercialisation has also created new groups of mendicants, i.e. the disabled, the deformed and the sick who beg for a living. This constitutes a transformation of older institutions. Historically, groups such as the Rodiyas were indeed professional beggars who sang, told fortunes and sold woven baskets. But they provided a service for contributions received. Alternately there was the figure of the sanyasi, the religious mendicant who rejects householding responsibilities and is given food by the lay community. The new mendicants are also artists in their own way; they perform, armed with framed certificates, references and pictures of dependents. This community is handled with much irony, but not unsympathetically.

A powerful theme that runs throughout Colombo is the vulnerability of the young and the powerless to the rapaciousness of the predatory city. Little Nelum, who lives on the canal-bank runs away on hearing her father's plan to sell her, but is captured by a rogue three-wheel driver and sold into prostitution. 7-year old Nila, brought as a domestic aide to foreigners, is set to work as a child prostitute. 11-year old Lakshmi, whose father has developed an incurable lung-condition kills herself and her younger brother and sister because she has no means of caring for them. 11-year old Somalatha, child domestic, is repeatedly raped by the leering son of the house. Pedophiles and deviants of various shades pounce on the weak and powerless. Yet victims and victimisers alike are portrayed as equally products of modernity. Here again the effectiveness of such narratives derives from the simple and matter-of-fact storyline. It is however, not clear if the writer believes that victims inevitably become victimisers, in a simple cycle that reproduces itself endlessly.

Some readers may of course object to such a description of Colombo life, but I would like to point out that Muller's perception here is not that of your average middle-class intellectual, but rather, that of the street-wise news reporter/investigative journalist who presumably spent much of his early career going from police station to police station collecting data on crime trends. Thus what is depicted

is perhaps a face of Colombo that is not overtly visible to his respectable middle-class Colombo 3,5,7 readership. but this does not mean that it is an aspect of Colombo that can be wished away. No informed reader of the tabloid press today can say with confidence that many of the individual narratives that make up the text of the first section of the novel have no substance in present-day Colombo, and definitely no social scientist or lawyer can maintain such a position. The fact that it offends our middle-class sensibilities and sense of what our city exemplifies is simply not good enough reason to reject any attempt to provide an alternative picture. In this instance, the enemy is the social reality, not the writer.

What of the middle classes? Have they benefited from the new commercialisation? For Muller, Colombos' soaring skyline represents above all a city on the make - "a new asian Babylon, sordid, greedy, lecherous, unbelievably corrupt" (P 121). Here Muller clearly seeks to occupy the moral high ground - consumption rather than production is seen as the contribution of the middle classes. Yet the middle classes also consume modernity in a specific way. For Mavis, secretary in a 'plush' city office and mistress to a married man, her workday and sex life quite detached from her domestic world and that of her respectably impoverished middle-class family's conventional expectations of her. They wish her to marry a 'suitable' person. She straddles these diverse arenas with equal ease. Helen, Accounts Assistant in an advertising company and part-time masseur, is engaged to the Art Director of the same firm. The epitome of the 'acceptable fiancée,' the Art Director is good-looking, comfortably off and 'modern'. But she also works after hours at the Health Centre to make a bit extra. She provides sex for those clients who request it at an extra charge. Her mother worries that she works too many long hours and buys her multi-vitamin pills as she plans her daughter's impending wedding. Mavis and Helen then typify the new middle-classes who live simultaneously in two worlds, equally at home in each.

Other recurrent themes are the corruption of public office, and consequent breakdown of law and order. Here the perception appears to be that the breakdown of law and order issues simply because of the misuse of power by elected leaders. But again, this is a somewhat reductionist view that does not sketch out the complexity of the

problems. Clearly, as societies evolve, the community is no longer able to order itself with the social authority of tradition. The onus for social order is now removed from the local community and becomes vested in public institutions i.e. police, security services, state administrative services. For highly variegated multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies, social order becomes a particular problem, for the area of consensus on what constitutes public offense is drastically narrowed down. By the first decade of the 20th century the ethnic mix of Colombo included the Sinhala, Tamils, Burghers, Colombo Chetties, Moors, Malays, Sindhis and Bohras among others. The religious mix ranged from Buddhists, Hindus, Protestants and Catholics, to Muslims and Zoroastrians.

Thus the compression of numerous social classes into a confined environment, which is what the city does, is also a recipe for disaster, especially when such classes are cleaved along ethnic and religious lines. It then becomes easy to identify class differences as ethnic differences - the minority Tamil and Colombo Chetty communities are perceived as rich because of their ethnic origin rather than their access to capital.

Such variety, social, ethnic and religious then, adds up to a particularly volatile mix. Law and order becomes a perennial problem for it is seen by each community or strata to be achieved only by the suppression of every other group but itself; each group becomes a mini-nation within the Nation. National sovereignty itself equips a dominant ethnic/religious group to take on the mantle of defender of the status quo. Such a dominance is frequently maintained, not surprisingly, at the expense of minority groupings. Modernity, with its notions of individual rights allows for conditions of collective oppression that does not augur well for social calm. Thus by the mid 1980s, the Tamil separatist struggle on the Northern and Eastern fronts had accelerated as a result of the anti-Tamil pogroms of the late '70s and early '80s. Further the second uprising of the radical populist JVP had already heightened the threshold of instability. Other secular developments such as the open economy laid open new opportunities in drug trafficking, prostitution and child slavery. Colombo becomes the site on which all these epic struggles are simultaneously waged.

The transformation of urban society in the modern period has

for Muller precipitated a transformation of the forces of law and order. Notwithstanding the violent battles it had seen between the Sinhala and the Portuguese, the Portuguese and the Dutch, the Dutch and the English, today's onslaughts by the Tamil separatists, Sinhala insurgents and criminal gang warfare are enacted on a different plane. Even law enforcement entities now play a different role. By the mid-'80s death squads and contract killers abound on all sides... "the Portuguese knew where death came from. War was a more straightforward business in the 16th century. But Colombo today walks on a tight-rope". But by the late '80s the security forces seemed to be getting the upper hand. They have now taken over the activities of all the other groups. A new phase begins.. "The country palpitates under a state of Emergency. Years of Emergency. A condition which gives the police and armed forces a 00-license with no questions asked" (p 265). The disappearances begin in earnest.

Many of Muller's narratives have to do with young lives destroyed by state terror. Namal, a university student is removed from his home in the dead of night because the police officers who come for him are 'busy' during the day. He is taken so that he may "identify" some other students at the same university who are described as 'dissidents'. Subsequently the same figures return, ransack the house, and finding what they impute to be 'dubious' materials in his room, fling his mother onto the floor, stamp on her stomach with the words "it was from here that you kept and brought forth, no?" Namal is finally released without charge, requested to sign a form confirming his release from the police station. He is subsequently shot dead anyway. His father is given a document which states that Namal has voluntarily left the police station premises. I have recounted this episode, which is of course only one of many, to give a sense of the writer's anger and sense of futility at the state of affairs that have come about. Such a state of mind can only be understood within the context of the purposeless violence that has epitomised the late '80s and early '90s.

Yet despite its acuity in many things, its ardent defense of the rights of the under-privileged, ultimately *Colombo* remains a partial, pessimistic narrative. What of the other face of Colombo -the vibrant stage-drama, street theatre, cinema and dance forms that have evolved out of the old traditions? and that have received new energy from the

tragic experiences of the last 20 years? The dynamic new genres of teledrama and short story that give artistic expression to the Colombo experience? the exuberant working class cultures, the peace movement, the women's movement and the wide range of tabloid media that explore such collective experiences? Many societies have learnt from the traumas of the past; how can we maintain that we, the Sinhala, Tamils, Burghers, Moors and Malays, all of us with such a long collective historical tradition, are not equipped to do so?

I argued at the beginning of this review that though we in the periphery may be consumers of modernity rather than initiators of the modernist experience, we are still able to choose what aspects of modernity we would consume; ours is not entirely a passive role. And I think Colombo today is more in control of her own social and political destiny than Muller would admit, and despite the sufferings of the last 15 years, there is still cause for celebration.

Jani de Silva

Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott*, Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1996.

In 1894, as he contemplated the violent demise of the era's last great railway strike, the Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs described the fate of America's working class, using a line resonant in recent literature about Sri Lanka: "Every prospect pleases," he wrote, quoting the English missionary Reginald Heber, "and only man is vile." Heber's phrase was a common cliché of the age; Debs meant no reference to the Anglican Bishop or to Sri Lanka. Indeed, it is hard to imagine two more dissimilar places than gilded-age industrial America and colonial Sri Lanka. The disjunction alone makes the life of Colonel Henry S. Olcott -- who forsook a place in New York's gentry in order to lead the life of multi-religious booster in South Asia -- a story worth exploring.

But according to Stephen Prothero's new biography of Olcott, the distance between the Colonel's two lives was not so great as one might think. A life-long proponent of "reform," Olcott merely traded in the perceived vilenesses of the urban United States for the perceived vilenesses of British-dominated Sri Lanka, and the upliftable masses of North America for the upliftable masses of Asia. In both places, Olcott was a tireless salesman of pleasing prospects. And Prothero's sophisticated text ultimately concludes that the ideological, theological, and cultural prospects he offered were in many instances almost identical.

Henry Steel Olcott was born in New Jersey in 1832, to parents of solid Yankee stock. Olcott's birth coincided with the re-election of President Andrew Jackson and the rise of the Protestant religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening. Though Olcott would eventually embrace both Buddhism and the Republican Party, Prothero maintains that his family's amalgam of The Great Awakening's enthusiastic Protestantism and Jackson's populist democracy would influence young Henry Olcott over the entire course of his life.

By the time Olcott left home, revivalism and Jacksonianism had receded as Americans embraced an age of unprecedented economic prosperity, unrivaled national self-esteem, and apparently unlimited personal opportunity. Olcott took hold of this opportunity. The energetic

white man in 1850s America was free to move -- with an ease impossible either before or afterwards -- from one profession or interest to another, all the while earning a comfortable living. By 1865, Olcott had been a farmer, a teacher, a journalist, an army officer, and a bureaucrat. But Prothero detects a common calling beneath all of the Colonel's jobs: He was a "professional reformer." Engaging in reformist crusades both before and after the Civil War, Olcott bridged, in a way many reformers did not, two historical periods. Prothero describes his zeal as a synthesis of reform styles, mixing the broadly-focused, optimistic, anti-institutional, and highly religious nature of antebellum "universal reform" with the more specific, limited, technocratic and secular characteristics of post-Civil War "progressive reform." By 1878, the year he left for Asia, Olcott had preached reform by advocating spiritualism, cremation, chastity, and the abolition of America's greatest sin, slavery. Yet he had also tackled more prosaic reforms in such morally neutral fields as the military procurement system and urban machine politics. Prothero argues that Olcott's ability to combine a zeal for fixing machines with a zeal for uplifting hearts and minds would be a key to his experience abroad.

The same impulses which led Olcott towards reformism also led him away from his religious background. Prothero notes that the regions of America most affected by revivalism were most given to Spiritualism; early Spiritualists shared with universal reformers their passion, optimism, and disdain for institutions. Working as a farmer while living with relatives in Ohio, Olcott declared himself "a convert" at age 20. Prothero makes no judgements about the veracity of Spiritualist claims about supernatural tremors and the like. But he notes that Olcott seemed genuinely taken with Spiritualism. Though at this point he never dedicated himself full time to religion, Olcott began contributing to a Spiritualist journal. However, his role in a Spiritualist "movement" declined during the Civil War and immediately afterwards. In the early 1870s, he was living what Prothero calls the typical life of America's middlebrow educated elite, practising law, raising a family in New York, and generally subscribing to the sorts of opinions one might have found in *Harper's Magazine*. His involvement with alternative religions and his move away from family, profession, and milieu, only began once again when, as a writer for Horrace Greeley's

New York Tribune, Olcott was dispatched to investigate Spiritualist occurrences at a farm in rural Vermont. There he met Helena Blavatsky, and was eventually spurred back into religious activity with a familiar cause: reform.

Spiritualism was popular and had no internal regulations whatsoever. Blavatsky and Olcott saw that this state opened it up to frauds, phonies, and widespread ignorance. The Theosophical Society was initially founded to reform spiritualism, by giving it the same sort of scientific ordering Olcott's articles from Vermont had featured, and by delineating its central concepts. But Olcott was also a talented diplomat. When this first theosophical incarnation seemed about to fall apart amidst the Society's institutional bickering, he shifted the focus to Blavatsky's intellectual interest in Asian traditions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. What was born as an organization dedicated to investigating occult phenomena in America became an organization officially dedicated to interpreting foreign religious knowledge for Americans.

Stephen Prothero originally wrote *The White Buddhist* as a doctoral dissertation at Harvard Divinity School. His field of specialty is American Religion. Central to the argument he puts forth is the critique of an American religious world-view particularly popular in the scholarly field of religious studies: what he calls "religious liberalism." As Prothero describes it, religious liberalism holds no dogma except the firm belief that dogmas are bad. Prothero characterizes this notion, which is fundamentally tied to a specific history of Protestantism in the West, as central to Olcott's religious understanding. He attributes to it Olcott's many successes, such as his ability to empathize with people from many traditions, and to muster his considerable organizational skill to both enlarge the possibilities in American religion and to help indigenous reformers and revivalists in Asia. He also blames religious liberalism for Olcott's many failings: his unwillingness to grasp the whole meaning of the religions he championed, his persistent Orientalist understanding of Asia and Asians, and his ultimate inability to get beyond the colonial-era assumptions about East and West, even as he attacked colonial regimes. This critique assumes prominence once *The White Buddhist's* narrative moves from North America to South Asia.

Colonel Olcott's experiences in India and Sri Lanka, which form the bulk of this book, are more widely known than his American background. He spent the final three decades of his life in South Asia, returning home only once between 1878 and his death in 1907. Though he departed for India promising to be nothing but a humble student, Olcott was preaching to the crowds within months of his arrival. Prothero notes that Olcott's own laundry list of proposed changes was as lengthy as that of any missionary: he advocated sexual equality, technological progress, educational transformation, democracy, and so on. While it was officially Hinduism -- and, soon after that, Buddhism, Islam, and even Zoroastrianism -- that the Colonel promoted, Prothero argues that his messages boiled down to a consistent one, which was just as alien as that of the missionaries Olcott so despised. To demonstrate this, Prothero borrows from the field of linguistics the term "creolization." Creole languages, like the one spoken in Haiti, tend to evolve when a population grafts a new vocabulary on to an inherited grammatical structure. Thus he goes on to demonstrate that Olcott's Buddhism employed the vocabulary of Theravada tradition while retaining the institutional and philosophical undergirdings of the 19th century genteel culture, American democratic reformism, and liberal Protestantism which characterized the Colonel's background.

To cite these criticisms is not to say that Prothero judges Olcott's entire Asian errand a disaster. He is particularly complementary to Olcott's work in education. When he arrived in Sri Lanka, there were just four Buddhist schools. By the year of his death, there were 183, with over 20,000 students. Olcott, of course, did not found all of them, but he is the figure most associated with launching indigenous institutions -- schools as well as publishing houses, tract societies, social clubs, and so on -- which aimed to match the colonialists at their own game. He also took the side of the island's Buddhists against the British regime in various legal disputes, going to London on a mission to have Vesak made a holiday alongside the already official Christian holidays. In India, Olcott contributed to the birth of the Indian Renaissance. Prothero praises Olcott's work on behalf of untouchables. Though his Indian schools provided little more than servants' basic training similar to that being offered to freed slaves in the United States, Olcott is judged to have used his prestige and his empathy to

establish a reformist institutional infrastructure where none had existed before.

But as a student of religion, Prothero must ultimately weigh Olcott's own religious contributions and theory. Here, he is not as charitable as he is when judging the Colonel's place in social history. (The two, of course, are difficult to separate.) Olcott remained unwilling to grasp the whole of the religions he ostensibly promoted. Despite his many years in South Asia and his proximity to the sub-continent's most eloquent religious minds, most of what he knew of its religious traditions still came from western academic orientalists. Like them, he tended to see the world through the Victorian dichotomy, with a masculine, active West and a domestic, spiritual East.

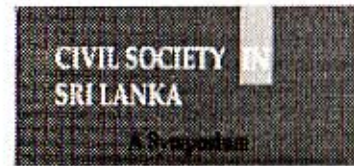
Worst of all, Olcott fell victim to the orientalist trap of seeing the other merely as a reflection of himself. He simply ignored those parts of Buddhism or Hinduism which disagreed with his own opinions. At times these traits made for high diplomatic intrigue: Prothero describes in some detail the back and forth between Olcott and Hikkaduve Sumangala as the Colonel tried to gain the monk's endorsement for his Buddhist Catechism, which initially described a Buddhism as Yankee as it was Sinhalese. Other times, they made for farce: witness Olcott telling successive audiences that he was a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Moslem, a Zoroastrian, and a Jew. But ultimately, they made for disappointment and anger. Olcott's myriad attempts through congresses, confederations, and catechisms to unify people -- Buddhists and non-Buddhists, Theravada and Mahayana, Theravada and other Theravada, Theosophists and anybody who was willing -- engendered some worthwhile dialogue, but never reached their goals. And Olcott's one-time ally, Anagarika Dharmapala, broke furiously with Olcott towards the end of the American Buddhist's life. It seemed that the Colonel, who as he neared retirement failed to promote Dharmapala or other Asians to leadership roles, and continued to ignore their worries about the contents of his creed, was too American, and insufficiently Buddhist.

Although *The White Buddhist* was written in that most tedious genre of books -- a doctoral dissertation -- it is a remarkably readable piece of work. Sophisticated while avoiding the kind of semantic acrobatics that too often characterize works about cultural interaction,

Prothero's book captures the three crucial stories of the Olcott odyssey. First of all, Olcott's is a remarkable human story. The introduction points out that the classic fish-out-of-water formula is always reliable entertainment; Prothero does not disappoint. Secondly, Olcott's story is an important piece of history. The institutions and movements with which he was involved have had an important impact in Sri Lanka. Prothero ably explains their genesis and avoids exaggerating the Colonel's role therein. In terms of American history, recent religious historians have maintained that American religion has long been a much more diverse place than scholars once suspected. Prothero firmly places Olcott's history in this tradition. Finally, Olcott's life offers scholars a theoretical feast. Prothero's meditations on cultural interaction are both nuanced and sensitive, examining Olcott's role while taking into account the agency of New England's spiritualist enthusiasts, Sri Lanka's Buddhist revivalists, and anyone else Olcott tried to save or reform.

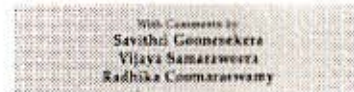
Olcott was the first non-Asian American citizen to convert to Buddhism. Many followed, and I think that Olcott's form of creolized, attenuated, naively innocent and exotified faith is typical of the American embrace of non-Western traditions. Likewise, Olcott was an early example of the American who goes abroad vowing innocent friendship and equality, but preaching a message that sooner or later becomes disturbing and alien. One might have been tempted to extrapolate from both of these traditions, and to use Olcott as an excuse to meditate on the more interesting general question of how Americans interact with the world, both at home and abroad. Perhaps wisely, Prothero doesn't really do so. But a good biography should raise questions about the world while answering them about one person. On this count, too, *The White Buddhist* succeeds admirably.

Michael Schaffer



CIVIL SOCIETY IN SRI LANKA A Symposium

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Charles Abeysekera
Bradman Weerakoon



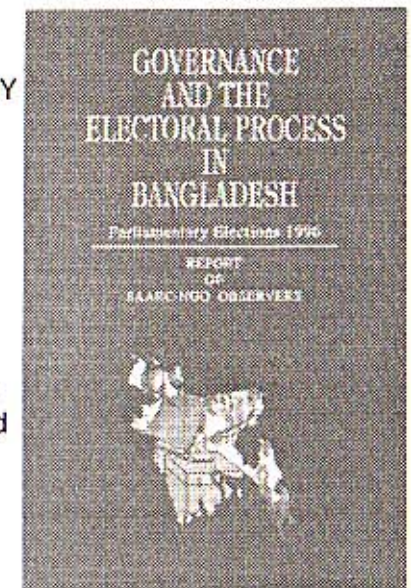
With Comments by
Savithri Goonesekera
Vijaya Samaraweera
Radhika Coomaraswamy
ICES, 1997. 38p. Rs.75.00
U.S. \$5.00



GOVERNANCE AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN BANGLADESH: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 1996.

Report of SAARC-NGO
Observers. ICES. 1996. 184p.
Rs.275.00 U.S. \$15.00

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