JPM718: Presentation Handout

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Reading’s Title: Gender, Nation, Rape (Hansen)

**1. Summary of the Reading**

*What is the reading about? What is the author’s main thesis and conclusions?*

Lene Hansen in her article examines the issue of rape of Bosnian women during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s from the point of view of construction of security approach. The main idea of the article is to debate the possible intervention on the war due to the mass raping by the Western powers. The author’s thesis is based on two perceptions of rapes in the war. Firstly, Hansen examines the debate on whether the wartime rapes especially in the case of Yugoslav war should be perceived as an individual security threat or rather a collective security issue. Secondly, the author discusses whether these actions should be described in ethnic and nationalist terms or in scope of gender. In the next part, the article provides us with three different prevalent presentations of the mass rapes in Bosnia. By this, the author aimed to show that different perceptions of rape are rooted in different understanding of security as such.

According to the author, the feminist theories of IR have always challenged the narrow perception of security studies as a field focused only on military security of state actors. When it comes to the dichotomy of individual and collective security. The author argues these two are not mutually exclusive – they can overlap. As the individual security inherently depends on finding common collective solutions, collective security, for example in form of a state, is rooted in individuals’ willingness to give up portion of their freedom and rights. In the case of national/ethnic and gender security, Hansen views both as practically impossible to separate. However, a gender security issues can be neglected if the aims and goals of national security conflict with the gender security.

Furthermore, Hanses discusses the difference between peacetime rape perceived as an individual threat compared to a wartime rape, perceived as an attack on national and ethnic security. She stresses that wartime rapes against women are also attack on men’s perception of masculinity and against the whole nation as such.

In the next part, the article presents three main perceptions of the mass rapes in Bosnia. Firstly, the realist view on security perceives the mass rapes as part of “normal, Balkan warfare.” The main idea is that raping is a predictable part of waging a war, especially in the Balkan region. By this perception, Balkans is constructed as “other”, a society that is not part of the “west”, with its own rules and traditions of brutality. Therefore, this view tells the western powers not to intervene in the war, as the intervention would not solve these deeply rooted issues in the region. According to the author, this perception is based on the nationalist view of security and irrelevance of responsibility for security of others.

Secondly, Hansen presents the perception of rape as exceptional, Serbian warfare. This view was advocated by the representatives of Bosnia at the international stage. It viewed the rapes by Serbian soldiers as a unique occasion. The aim could be to demoralise, and practically destroy Bosnian nation. Serbian nationalism was described as brutal, and this perception called for international intervention on the side of the Bosnians. Hansen argues that this perception merged gender security together with the national security of Bosnia, limiting its scope. Furthermore, this perception does not explain the discrimination and even violence that some Bosnian victims of rape faced in their communities and families.

Thirdly, Hansen explains the view of feminist IR theories, so-called Balkan patriarchy. This perception of rape not only criticises the masculine view on rape, but also blends the division between strategic and emotional rape. It rather explains that both are rooted in the view of women as sexual objects and weaker sex. However, this perception has its flaws, such as romanticised view of women and the fact, that raped women themselves did not blame men, but rather the nation.

In the end, the author states it is difficult to state which perception has been dominant, whether it was not intervening in 1992-1994 (rape as normal, Balkan warfare) or eventual intervention in 1995 (rape as exceptional, Serbian warfare).

**2. Critical Analysis**

Hansen’s examination of the rapes in Bosnia during Yugoslav wars in 1990s and their perception present coherent view of different approaches towards national and gender security.

In one of the parts, Hansen argues that the Balkan patriarchy view lacked evidence in the region itself, as the women raped were often stigmatised and approached the problem with nationalist scope. I would say this could vary from case to case and although prevailing perception of the rapes was from the nationalist point of view, there were arguably many women who felt that whole female population of the region was victim of masculine style of waging a war.

In the end, Hanses argues that it is difficult to say, which of the perceptions prevailed in the western World, as until 1995, there was no intervention, which would point towards prevalence of rape as normal, Balkan warfare view. However, in the end, the intervention happened in 1995. Therefore, I would propose considering the view of rapes as exceptional, Serbian warfare, as the prevailing one, as rapes were one of the reasons for the intervention. Validity of this concept is further supported by the work of international tribunals after the war. In addition to that, arguably, there were other reasons holding back the intentions to intervene and the rapes conducted by Serbian troops had been considered exceptionally brutal in size and other aspects for a longer time.

Overall, the article is written in an easy-to-understand way and provides a lot of food for thought.

**3. Relation to the Main Reading**

The article titled “A Conversation with Cynthia Enloe: Feminists Look at Masculinity and the Men Who Wage War” by Carol Cohn and Cynthia Enloe focuses on the main idea of masculine discourse towards conflicts. First of the points mentioned in the article that related to the article by Hansen is the need to ask “where are the women in the conflict”. Many observers and even scholars could perceive the war in former Yugoslavia as an ethnic and religious conflict and could overlook the role of gender security in it.

Secondly, Enloe mentioned examples of gender security being misused for the goals of national security. The plight of “oppressed women and children” could often be used as a *cassus belli* against a foreign power. Even though these issues seem to be rooted in the gender perspective of security, after achieving national security aims, the gender aspect would be disregarded. This reminds us of one of the perceptions of rapes in Bosnia as brutal Serbian style warfare, and they were one of the reasons used to advocate for intervention on side of Bosnians.

The same idea of intervention by force could be described also by the masculine aspects of the national security, the urge to respond to injustice and threats, as was seen in USA after September 11 attacks and described in the article by Cohn and Enloe.