Analyzing the cases of Biljana Plavšić and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, two prominent female politicians accused of perpetrating political violence in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, respectively, this chapter focuses on the ways violent women represent themselves when accused of crimes against humanity, genocide, and genocidal rape. Employing the concepts of twisted motherhood, maternal love, and monstrous mothering, together with maternal naivety about realities of war-fighting, the work first traces the feminist theorization of politically violent womanhood and motherhood; second, the chapter discusses the conceptualization of female violence in relation to the dominant motherhood narratives; and, finally, it offers an alternative critical reading of mothering as connected representation of oneself when politically violent. Studying representation of the violent self through feminist lenses enable one to critically analyze the importance of motherhood narratives in global politics. Both women employ a motherhood narrative as a way to humanize themselves in response to accusations of violent crimes. A mother's violence, in their narratives, is completely unintelligible and impossible, or becomes an unfortunate yet understandable result of a mothering instinct that dictates to protect one's own mythical child. In both cases, the defense rests on narrating themselves as good mothers, disabling other potential narratives to be employed.
Keywords: motherhood; political violence; Plavšić; Nyiramasuhuko; representation; narratives; ICTR; ICTY

P1

Section I

Performances of Motherhood

C2

Chapter 2

A Mother's Violence in Global Politics

An Interrogation of Violent Femininity and Motherhood Narratives

Katerina Krulisova

C2.P1

> I am ready to talk to the person who says I could have killed. I cannot even kill a chicken. If there is a person who says that a woman, a mother, killed then I will confront that person.

C2.P2

—Pauline Nyiramasuhuko (quoted in Hazeley 2011)

C2.P3

There is a growing body of feminist scholarship on women's roles in cessation of hostilities, peace protests, and peace negotiations (Charlesworth 2008; Confortini 2006; Hunt and Posa 2001; McLeod 2015; Skjelsbaek and Smith 2001). The importance of female agency in peace initiatives has now been firmly recognized, both by academics and policymakers (Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011). However, the same cannot be said about the popular recognition of female agency in relation to active participation in political violence, despite the clear interest of a number of prominent feminist researchers in the topic (Brown 2014, 2017; Cohen 2013; Coulter 2008; Gentry and Sjoberg 2015; Gertz, Brehm, and Brown 2018; Hogg 2010; Holmes 2013; Linton 2016; Mailänder 2015, Smeulers 2015). Because giving life is often put into stark contrast with taking life, killing remains one of the most unnatural and deviant actions a woman could take. Even childless women are frequently perceived as possessing maternal qualities, a stereotype based on the biological ability of the female body to give birth. This unconscious ideology (Weber 2005), or myth of

motherhood (Åhäll 2015), then informs the way that violent women are represented, as well as the ways they represent themselves, in popular, political, and legal narratives.

C2.P4 Employing the concepts of twisted motherhood, maternal love, and monstrous mothering, together with maternal naivety about realities of war-fighting, my discussion of motherhood is organized around three broader aims: first, I trace the feminist theorization of politically violent womanhood and motherhood; second, I discuss the conceptualization of female violence in relation to the dominant motherhood narratives; and, third, I offer an alternative critical reading of mothering as connected representation of oneself when politically violent. I therefore move debate beyond the question of "a woman has done that?" (Gentry and Sjoberg 2015) to the perhaps more shocking, "a *mother* has done that?" Here, I hope to provide a nuanced understanding of narratives on violent motherhood and contribute to further development of legal and political debates about murderous and torturous female subjects and their connection to myths of motherhood.

C2.P5 Feminist scholarship has traced the history of female political violence, uncovering the ways that the concept of motherhood is used to make sense of female violence (Åhäll 2015; Gentry and Sjoberg 2015; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). From the ancient myths of the Amazons or Cleopatra to modern tales of Nazi concentration camp guards like Irma Grese (Becker 2015; Mailander 2015), Leila Khaled (Gentry 2011), Lynndie England (Sjoberg 2007), Biljana Plavšić, or Pauline Nyiramasuhuko (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Sjoberg 2016; Smeulers 2015), mothering becomes the

key conceptual lens through which a woman's violent action—both legitimate and illegitimate—is explained to wider audiences. For example, one of the central narratives around Ilse Koch, the infamous World War II criminal accused of extreme cruelty toward prisoners in Buchenwald, states that Koch was an abusive and neglectful mother, letting her children grow up in abject poverty and sending her illegitimate son to foster care; all of these occurrences were used to further vilify Koch and her "unfeminine" actions in Buchenwald (Becker 2015).[1] This chapter focuses on the cases of Biljana Plavšić and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, who represent a sample of the "token" bad women of modern history, whose actual or mythical motherhood is used as a central and defining trait of their personalities and psychological autopsies by a variety of actors, including themselves. I focus on the ways in which the subjects attempt to justify their actions or claim their innocence through motherhood narratives. In the cases of two women accused of genocide and genocidal rape, self-as-mother becomes a prominent narrative that aims to humanize oneself for respective audiences. This motherhood is narrated differently in the two cases, yet I argue serves the same purpose—to present oneself as innocent, naïve, and self-sacrificing and therefore ultimately unable to commit the crimes of which they are accused.

C2.P6 I start by reviewing discussions about female stereotypical peacefulness in the political realm as linked to the myth of motherhood. Building on the hypothesis that all actors, irrespective of their gender, are capable of extreme violence under certain circumstances, I move to discuss the myth of motherhood and its uses in

representation of political violence perpetrated by women. The concepts of the vacant and deviant womb are closely linked to my understanding of twisted and toxic motherhood as discussed in the existing feminist literatures. After that, I analyze the narratives of self-as-mother as presented in various contexts by Biljana Plavšić and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko. In the two cases, motherhood is central to both accounts, yet in distinctive ways. While Plavšić represents herself as a devoted, naive, and self-sacrificing mother of the nation, Nyiramasuhuko claims that her Rwandan motherhood would simply never allow her to kill a living creature, let alone order mass rape and genocide.

C2.S1

(Non)Violent Mothers and Global Politics

C2.P7

In academic circles, the debate concerning female violence in feminist research remains central to interdisciplinary discussions ranging from politics or criminology to international law (Carlen 2013; Linton 2016; Ringrose 2006; Smeulers 2015). Some arguments for gender equality were, and indeed still are, based on the notion that women are morally superior to men and incapable of violence (Charlesworth 2008; Ruddick 2002; Tickner 2014; Tickner and True 2018; Wibben 2004). This has led to a contemporary critique of some feminist projects being themselves guilty of gender stereotyping and simplification of individual characteristics of violent women (Morrissey 2003). Barbara Ehrenreich (2004), in the context of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, famously argues that “a uterus is not a substitute for conscience,” blaming some feminists for creating a purist image of women, by definition incapable of violence. Caron Gentry and Laura Sjoberg challenge this claim, arguing that it was

not feminism per se that came up with the idea of women being above male sins, but that such conception is rather a product of a variety of dominant discourses of modern history (2007, 19). While some feminists may have (un)consciously reinforced the stereotype of inherent female peacefulness, contemporary research increasingly recognizes that some women do "commit senseless violence because some people commit senseless violence," highlighting the urgent need to study female perpetrators of violence (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007, 148).[2] These literatures follow the hypothesis that the complexity of political agency of any individual cannot be limited to their biological makeup or wishful political thinking. The increasing visibility of women as perpetrators of political violence shows that women, in essence, might not be any better—or different—than men. In other words, women are not morally superior, biologically differently hard-wired, or immune to the pressures and stresses of armed conflicts. Even mothers—a somehow special category of women—cease to be innocent "Beautiful Souls" (Elshtain 1982).[3]

C2.S2

Women as Mothers: The Myth of Motherhood and Nonviolence

C2.P8

Contemporary research has focused on the myth of motherhood and its relation to violent women (Åhäll 2015). Mothering/motherhood becomes what Weber calls an unconscious ideology: an ideology that is not formally named and difficult to identify because it is considered common sense (Weber 2005, 7). Similar to the way in which Cynthia Weber explicates unconscious ideology, Linda Åhäll (2012a, 107) describes the myth of motherhood as being commonly used in writing about women's heroism in national discourses. Linda Åhäll (2012a, 109) argues that motherhood as such is

not natural, but rather is a social and cultural construction, despite being written about as encompassing natural characteristics, or "something that we do not question." She defines motherhood not in an actual or literal sense—referring only to pregnant women or mothers—but rather as the "capacity of female bodies to give life" (2012a, 109). Thus, motherhood appears to be universal, natural, and a purely empirical fact of life that precludes women from becoming violent, particularly in a sexualized way. Maternalism can thus be considered as central to the possibility of writing a heroine-centered story (2012a, 109), but in its corrupted versions causes often-extreme violence (Gentry and Sjoberg 2015).[4]

C2.P9 These heroine-centered stories often focus on mothers as peace protesters and peacemakers. From the Women's International League for Peace, Argentina's Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Northern Ireland's Peace People, the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common in the United Kingdom, Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, Nobel Women's Initiative, and Women in Black to Women Waging Peace, feminist peace studies can provide a number of cases showing feminine and mothering peace potential and its effects on global politics (Blanchard 2003; Cockburn 2010; Hudson et al. 2012; Pankhurst 2003; Reardon 2015; Sylvester 2010). At the same time, women commit unspeakable acts of violence worldwide. Indeed, Sjoberg and Gentry (2007, 1) open their investigation into female violence by arguing that "women are capturing hostages, engaging in suicide bombings, hijacking airplanes, and abusing prisoners. . . . Moreover, they are doing so on the front page of . . . major international newspapers."[5] The use of the motherhood narratives that

narrate these acts of violence is central to understanding of the role of gender in global politics and international law.

C2.S3 ## Representation of Mothers' Violence

C2.P10 Focusing on the key aspect of feminist poststructural critique and representation, the stories told about violent women are often traced to motherhood impulses or failures. The instincts to protect one's children and to sacrifice oneself for those children and the fatal disappointment in losing one's family are some of the central themes found in the existing representations of violent women in popular narratives.

C2.P11 Caron Gentry and Laura Sjoberg's (2015) work represents one of the most comprehensive analyses of the representation of female violence in the media. Their discussion groups popular discourses on politically violent women into three categories:

C2.P12 > "mothers," women who are fulfilling their biological destinies; . . . "monsters," women who are pathologically damaged and therefore drawn to violence; and/or . . . "whores," women whose violence is inspired by sexual dependence and depravity. (2015, 12)

C2.P13 They argue that even recent political theories attribute female violence to the notion of revenge "driven by maternal and domestic disappointments" (2015, 71–71). The biologically determinist arguments lead to the notion that the failure of women to become mothers drives them to violence because it represents a traumatic dehumanizing/de-womanizing experience (2015, 73). The authors identify two types of narratives encompassing violent motherhood: the nurturing mother and the

vengeful mother. Whereas the nurturing mother is mostly nonviolent and serves in support roles in mostly terrorist organizations, the vengeful mother is "driven by rage because of her maternal losses, maternal inadequacies or maternal incredulity" (2015, 75).[6]

C2.P14 Åhäll (2015) builds on her conceptualization of the myth of motherhood meta-discourse and identifies two types of construction of female agency in political violence in relation to heroism and monstrosity: the vacant womb and the deviant womb. For the purposes of this chapter, the discussion about the deviant womb is extremely useful, demonstrating how female agency is seen as monstrous when notions of "natural" femininity are significantly challenged. Here, the subject becomes abject and is portrayed as woman-as-monster. Åhäll argues that representations of female agency in political violence "serve the purpose of 'Othering' the subject" (2012b, 110). Importantly, childless women are also deemed deviant, performing inadequate femininity.

C2.P15 Similarly, Caron Gentry (2009) explores the idea of *twisted* maternalism.[7] In this respect, women are believed to act violently from their maternal imperative, which presumes every female must fulfil her sociobiological role as mother (Gentry 2009. 236). Gentry (2009, 236) further argues that "whether or not politically active women are mothers or claim their motherhood, a motherhood ideal is applied to them anyway." Female domesticity, maternal instinct, and belief that women will only fulfill their lives through successful motherhood condition women to think and act differently than men. Consequently, violent political action is often explained through

the unsuccessful realization of motherhood, whatever the reason for such failure might be. Linda Åhäll (2012b, 110) argues that "the [female] subject departs from the norms and boundaries of femininity and a naturalized life-giving identity through being . . . childless by choice, masculine, gay or prostitute." Here, the lack of motherhood clearly leads to differentiation from the rest of the "proper" women and thus "Othering."

C2.P16 The notion of a "proper" woman is also key for feminist criminologists. Connected to the chivalry hypothesis on leniency toward female criminals, the notion of respectability becomes key in sentencing (Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey 2008). Good wives and mothers are expected by some researchers to be treated with greater leniency (Kennedy 1993).[8] Thus, the question of representation of "good" and "bad" motherhood becomes central to a critical feminist analysis of perpetrators of political violence.

C2.S4 Biljana Plavšić and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko: The Mother of the Nation and the Peacemaker

C2.P17 Plavšić and Nyiramasuhuko represent two cases of high-ranking politicians accused of inciting sexualized violence and genocide. Plavšić's hate toward Muslims and Croats, and Nyiramasuhuko's involvement in mass murder of Tutsi women and men, make them two of the most infamous female politicians of the twentieth century. Both tried by special International Criminal Tribunals, the former pleaded guilty to crimes against humanity, while the other was found guilty of seven charges, genocidal rape being one of them. The possible motivations for female involvement in both conflicts

have been covered exhaustively (Adler, Loyle, and Globerman 2007; Brown 2014; Hogg 2010; Smeulers 2015). Similarly, critiques of the essentialist portrayals exist in feminist interdisciplinary literature (Gentry and Sjoberg 2015; Hodgson 2017; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Sjoberg 2016; Smeulers 2015; Sperling 2006). Here, I develop those debates by discussing the representation of motherhood during the trial proceedings of both women. The primary focus is on representation of self as narrated through mothering and motherhood by both accused during their witness testimony (Nyiramasuhuko) or Plea of Guilt (Plavšić).

C2.P18 Studying representation of self is, in this case, a methodologically tricky enterprise. Undeniably, an accused witness testimony of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is a narrative cautiously crafted by legal teams, similar to Plavšić's plea of guilt. The original aim of reconciliation through truth telling can thus be overridden by conscious strategies for achieving lighter sentence or greater leniency. Indeed, I agree with Clark (2009, 431) that "truth telling is one thing, deal cutting is another." At the same time, I argue that despite both the restricted nature of Plavšić's statement and preceding plea bargaining, as well as its apparent instrumentality to achieve a lenient sentence, the document in question is still worth analyzing. I concur with Tieger and Shin (2005, 671) that "plea agreements can generate a contribution to the historical record of inestimable value—the indispensable perspective of the perpetrator." From my understanding, the perspectives of Biljana Plavšić, the only female politician tried in front of the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia, and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, perhaps the most prominent female perpetrator of Rwandan

genocide, are key to further understanding of discursive possibilities of representation of self-as-mother.

C2.S5 ## Biljana Plavšić: The Mother of the Nation

C2.P19 Biljana Plavšić, the Vice-President of Republika Srpska and leading political figure during the Bosnian war, pleaded guilty of crimes against humanity—persecution and ethnic cleansing of thirty-seven communities during which almost 50,000 people lost their lives (Smeulers 2015, 236). Voluntarily surrendering to International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 2001, Plavšić originally pleaded not guilty, changing her mind in 2002 in exchange for seven charges, including the charge of genocide being dropped. Plavšić was the first, and at this time only, high-ranking Bosnian Serb politician to plead guilty, a decision that many applauded as a way to reconciliation. Drakulić (2009) writes that:

C2.P20 > the judges of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia took her repentance seriously, hoping that it could influence others awaiting trial. It looked like a brave and moral gesture from a person who understood her crime and who—as she said—wanted to spare the Serbian people from collective guilt by admitting her own.[11]

C2.P21 Reactions like these followed Plavšić's interview with the Swedish magazine *The Local* (January 26, 2009), where she stated:

C2.P22 > I have sacrificed myself. I have done nothing wrong. I pleaded guilty to crimes against humanity so I could bargain for the other charges. If I

hadn't, the trial would have lasted three, three and half years.

Considering my age, that wasn't an option.

C2.P23 Born in 1930, Plavšić, originally a Professor of Natural Sciences and Dean of Faculty at the University of Sarajevo, was a highly regarded academic, publishing more than 100 scholarly papers. A Fulbright scholar, Plavšić often used her academic background in biology and her research to justify and rationalize the crimes committed under her rule; for instance, she regarded ethnic cleansing to be a form of Darwinian natural selection and therefore a biological rather than political matter (Smeulers 2015, 235).

C2.P24 In relation to motherhood narratives, the most visible mothering thread can be found in Plavšić's Plea of Guilt. Inevitably, this narrative is linked to the one of Iron Lady or childless and divorced woman as presented in the media (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). The perceived lack of empathy she showed was linked by the media to her lack of biological motherhood and her unsuccessful marriage; Plavšić actively resisted this positioning through her self-stylization as a symbolic mother of a nation in her final appearance in front of the ICTY.

C2.P25 Here, Plavšić's reasoning as to why she engaged in crimes against humanity is closely connected to her version of the story about the fight for the survival of the once victimized nation against its usurpers. Naturally, she does not mention sexualized violence as a crime she was aware of because that would lead to her further moral condemnation and "Othering" and consequent "monsterization" (Åhäll

2012a). The crimes that Plavšić is accused of are explained by her through the logic of survival and self-defense.

C2.P26 Plavšić opens her guilty plea by stating that she came before the court "to confront the charges and to spare [her] people, for it was clear that they would pay the price of any refusal to come" (*Prosecutor v. Plavšić*, December 17, 2002). She related to the court that, after two years of court proceedings, she came now "to the belief and accepts the fact that many thousands of innocent people were the victims of an organised, systematic effort to remove Muslims and Croats from the territory claimed by Serbs" (*Prosecutor v. Plavšić*, December 17, 2002).

C2.P27 Plavšić's reasoning is based on her apparent belief that the war was a matter of survival and self-defense. She positions herself as a victim of her perception that the life of all Serbs was endangered and needed to be defended by the state. Claiming that this reasoning has led to loss of "nobility of characters" in Serbian leadership, Plavšić explains how she and others have failed to see the truth of being guilty of perpetration of crimes against humanity, a narrative that highlights her momentary moral failure (*Prosecutor v. Plavšić,* December 17, 2002).[12] After proclamation of the collective guilt of the Serbian leadership, Plavšić switches to the first person to justify her role in the conflict, and once again makes case for the collective "survival" reasoning being the motivation behind her *neglect* of reports of human rights violations.

C2.P28 Plavšić thus clearly seeks to change the perspective of her extremist nationalism to a heroic defense of her beloved nation and its inhabitants—a mother of nation narrative is clearly visible. By stating that she had a living memory of injustice

done to Serbs during World War II, Plavšić explains that she was simply worried that history would repeat itself (*Prosecutor v. Plavšić*, December 17, 2002). Here, the binary between victim and perpetrator is blurred, as Plavšić represents herself simultaneously as both: she claims to regret her blindness to and failure to address the reported crimes, although she is also associated with the Serbian leadership charged with responsibility for the atrocities.

C2.P29 In her defense narrative, Plavšić places herself as the mother of the nation who sacrifices herself on behalf of all the Serbians. Careful analysis reveals complex construction of motherhood narratives (Åhäll 2012b). In Plavšić's case, she represents herself as a deluded mother, who was certain of the imminent death of her beloved nation had she not intervened. Following the hypothesis that motherly violence is acceptable in defense of her family, Plavšić aims to display a positive emotion coupled with naivety and misinformation as her excuse (Bourke 2000, 318). Thus, the violence perpetrated under her watch appears to be considered just and right at the time by her and her witnesses.

C2.P30 A heroine narrative invokes the ideal of a Just Warrior, "a human being engaged in the regrettable but sometimes necessary task of collective violence in order to prevent some greater wrong" (Elshtain 1982). Plavšić indeed presents her past crimes as regrettable in her guilty plea. She argues that only after examining the evidence has she "come to the belief and accept the fact that many thousands of innocent people were the victims of an organised, systematic effort to remove Muslims and Croats from the territory claimed by Serbs."[13] In this portrayal, Plavšić

allowed atrocities to take place, believing she—a heroine mother—prevented much greater wrongs. Only later realizing that she was mistaken in such actions, Plavšić pleads guilty to spare her nation further victimization and enable reconciliation for everybody affected by the war. Thus, from a feminist perspective, Plavšić represents her actions as grounded in inherent protective, maternal instincts. In Ruddick's (2002) perspective, maternal thinking is described as a way of knowing, not a way of being. Therefore, the fact that Plavšić is not a mother herself does not limit her ability to think like a mother. Here again, the maternal thinking comes into play, together with selflessness and courage to give up one's own life for the benefit of the family/nation.

C2.S6

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko: Denial and Peacemaking

C2.P31

Born in 1946 in Butare, Rwanda, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko trained as a social worker, later becoming part of the Ministry of Family and Women's Affairs, taking over the ministerial role in 1992. Being friends with the former first lady Agathe Kanziga and nicknamed Butare's favorite daughter, Nyiramasuhuko found herself within the center of power just as the genocide was about to happen. In his guilty plea, Prime Minister Kambanda named Nyiramasuhuko to be "among the five members of his inner sanctum where the blueprint for genocide was first drawn up" (Drumbl 2013, 560). Not only had Nyiramasuhuko played an essential role in the genocide, she was also prominent in the instigation of rape and widespread sexual violence perpetrated during the genocide. Alette Smeulers (2015, 239) notes that "she was present at the crime scene and gave direct orders to erect roadblocks and rape and kill Tutsis, even

ordering her own son, who was a leader of [the Hutu paramilitary organization] Interahamwe, to rape women."

C2.P32 Nyiramasuhuko was arrested in 1997 in Kenya and indicted on eleven counts of genocide, crimes against humanity—including genocidal rape, and war crimes (Smeulers 2015, 240). In court, her defense team denied all the charges, heavily relying on her gender—portraying Nyiramasuhuko as a scapegoat for men's violence and incapable of any violent actions because of her womanhood and motherhood (Smeulers 2015, 240). As Carrie Sperling (2005 637) notes, "Nyiramasuhuko stands trial before the International Criminal Tribunal for crimes against humanity and genocide, crimes shocking in their depravity, the press seems more fixated on her gender than the significance of her crimes and her prosecution." Her husband stated in an interview with the BBC that "it is not culturally possible for a Rwandan woman to make her son rape other women. It just couldn't have taken place" (Smeulers 2015, 240). Despite statements like those, Nyiramasuhuko was found guilty of seven out of eleven charges: conspiracy to commit genocide and genocide; crimes against humanity—extermination, rape, and persecution; and war crimes—violence to life and outrages on personal dignity (Smeulers 2015, 240–241). She was sentenced to life imprisonment and appealed the decision; in 2015 the ICTR reduced her sentence to forty-seven years' imprisonment (United Nations 2015).

C2.P33 In Nyiramasuhuko's case, the analysis of motherhood in media narratives is complex. It follows different, yet interconnected, narratives employed by the commentators and herself in an attempt to make sense of the crimes as well her

(in)ability to commit them. Being trained as a social worker, Nyiramasuhuko's crimes are put into stark contrast of her professional role. For example, the NGO Aegis Trust clearly points out the connection between her motherhood and social work, stating that "[i]t is shocking that *this mother* and former social worker, trained to protect life, could instead have been responsible for such appalling crimes" (June 2011, emphasis mine). Thus, on this view, Nyiramasuhuko is not only biologically predisposed to protect life as a woman, she is furthermore trained to do it. Prominently, the toxic relationship between her and her son is exposed, claiming that Nyiramasuhuko either ordered her son to rape/turned him into rapist and killer or rewarded him and his men by allowing and encouraging them to commit sexual(ized) violence. Finally, Nyiramasuhuko is portrayed not only as a mother but also as a grandmother, and her age is highlighted in the reporting.

C2.P34 As noted, Nyiramasuhuko never admitted her guilt and kept reassuring the court and media that she was incapable of committing such acts she was accused of. Already in 1995, when interviewed for the BBC, she categorically denied any blame:

C2.P35

> [w]hen asked what she did during the war, Pauline replied: "We moved around the region to pacify. We wrote a pacification document saying people shouldn't kill each other. Saying it's genocide, that's not true. It was the Tutsi who massacred the Hutu." Told that witnesses had accused her of murder, Pauline shot back: "I cannot even kill a chicken. If there is a person who says that a woman—a mother—killed, then I'll confront that person." (Landesman 2002)

C2.P36 In her interpretation, Nyiramasuhuko's denial is based on her motherhood and the idea that mothers are unable to take part in killings and rapes:

C2.P37 > "I am a mother, like the others . . . ," said Nyiramasuhuko, speaking in the Rwandan language. "I was hurt to discover that women were among those behind the imprisonment of myself and my son. But I forgive them. I ask you to restore my rights. . . . Maybe I was prosecuted because I was a minister, because I was a member of the party of the President [Juvenal Habyarimana] who had just been killed." (Landesman 2002)

C2.P38 Similarly, her lawyer contends the validity of the accusation, claiming that "[i]t's an abomination to claim that Pauline Nyiramasuhuko went so far as to order her son to rape young Tutsi women" (Landesman 2002). The narrative of a good, nurturing, and peace-loving mother is rearticulated many times to fit Nyiramasuhuko's range of responses to a variety of allegations.[14] For example, she was asked about agreeing to publish the names of people trained by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, a rebel organization fighting against the government during the genocide, which would mean certain death for those people. She vehemently replies that "[a]s *a parent, as a mother and as someone who is peace-loving,* I could not support such a publication" (*Prosecutor v. Nyiramasuhuko et al.,* September 22, 2005, 58, emphasis added).[15]

C2.P39 Nyiramasuhuko also directly links her womanhood to her effort to restore peace. When asked about her role in attending the swearing-in ceremony of the préfet, an event that is considered as a start of mass killings in Butare, she states, "all I did

was aimed at restoring peace. In fact, I was playing the *role of a woman* in the — in restoring the peace. That was my objective" (*Prosecutor v. Nyiramasuhuko et al.,* September 29, 2005, 12, emphasis mine). The narrative of peace-loving Nyiramasuhuko is directly connected to her womanhood and motherhood throughout the rest of her testimony. Highlighting the physical motherhood as well as a Rwandan construction of proper mothering, Nyiramasuhuko explains that for her to kill and rape is simply unintelligible.

C2.P40 Here, Nyiramasuhuko's motherhood and womanhood are used as the central argument of her defense, categorically denying that any mother would be able to commit such abominable crimes, or even think about ordering her son to rape. Connecting her actual motherhood to the cultural tradition of motherhood in Rwandan society, her involvement in such actions becomes unimaginable. Thus, in her defense, Nyiramasuhuko is positioned into ideal-typical motherhood and womanhood, together with being portrayed as a good wife (Morrissey 2003). This clearly contrasts with the media and witness narratives of an evil mother—one that got her son—at the time a young and newly married university student—involved in sexual(ized) violence and other despicable crimes. In another account, she merely allows her son and militiamen to rape as a reward. The juxtaposition of crimes of genocide and indictment to rape with peaceful womanhood is clearly visible in Nyiramasuhuko's case. The toxic relationship with her son is highlighted both in the media and during trial proceedings. Nyiramasuhuko chooses to portray herself as a polar opposite to a sexually deranged,

cruel murderess. In her own words, she is a victim of a smear campaign and actually is a loving mother and a peacemaker.

C2.S7

Conclusion

C2.P41

In the cases of Plavšić and Nyiramasuhuko, feminist lenses provide the ability to critically analyze the importance of motherhood narratives in global politics. Both women employ a motherhood narrative as a way to humanize themselves in response to accusations of violent crimes. A mother's violence, in their narratives, is both completely unintelligible and impossible, or becomes an unfortunate yet understandable result of a mothering instinct that dictates to protect one's own mythical child. In this narrative, the mother of the nation realizes too late that she has been blinded by love and willingly ignored the crimes perpetrated by those she was so desperately trying to protect.

C2.P42

Plavšić's lack of actual motherhood and her divorce were highlighted in the press coverage of her case, linked to her lack of empathy; this narrative is complicated by her "mother of the nation" self-representation, with the nation serving as a substitute for children. This mythical motherhood counter-narrative is highlighted in her plea of guilt, where Plavšić places herself in the position of the mother of the nation who sacrifices herself on behalf of all the Serbians. Linking the representation of motherhood to the respective feminist literature reveals a complex construction of motherhood narratives in both of the cases (Åhäll 2015). In this case, Plavšić represents herself as a deluded mother, who was certain of the imminent death of her beloved nation had she not intervened. Following the hypothesis that motherly

violence is acceptable in defense of her family, Plavšić aims to display a positive emotion coupled with naivety and misinformation as her excuse (Bourke 2000). Thus, the violence perpetrated under her watch appears to be considered just and right at the time by her reasoning.

C2.P43 The motherhood narrative is also visible in the case of Nyiramasuhuko, who stood accused of rape as a crime against humanity together with her son, Arsene Shalom Ntahobali. Thus, Nyiramasuhuko's actual motherhood forms a central narrative of her political (mis)conduct. Since she was found guilty of aiding and abetting rapes, where Shalom and his militiamen perpetrated rapes, her toxic mothering is described as having a corruptive influence over her only son. In her account, however, Nyiramasuhuko equates parenthood, and Rwandan motherhood particularly, with automatic desire for peace, and emphasizes that her womanhood allowed her to negotiate a restoration of peace. This strategy is defining of Nyiramasuhuko's representation of her motherhood. Denying that any parent could supervise one's child raping women, her motherhood becomes central to her defense. On top of that, by stating that it would be "impossible" for her to kill or order rape precisely because she is a mother and a woman, who in Rwandan tradition renders such possibilities as unintelligible, she appears to be rather naive about human nature (Elshtain 1982).

C2.P44 In the cases of Plavšić and Nyiramasuhuko, I suggest that, no matter what their actions were, these women were predominantly judged by their ascribed capacity to mother/nurture/kill for their actual or mythical children. This primacy of

motherhood within the representation of the female political figure is troubling because it portrays women in a simplified good/bad mother frame (Åhäll 2012a). Importantly, it appears to force them into conformity with this frame when representing themselves as innocent, disabling other potential narratives to be employed. Both women base their defense on narrating themselves as good mothers—mothers who are caring, self-sacrificing, and rather naive about the evils of wars. While Plavšić accepts the responsibility for crimes she stood accused of during the trial, she represents herself as less guilty primarily because of her unwillingness to believe her beloved nation would be capable of mass murder. Nyiramasuhuko never ceases to deny her guilt and builds her defense on her Rwandan motherhood identity. This conformity with established mothering frames of representation then dictates all narratives and disables the subject to represent herself as a nonmother, reinforcing motherhood as the most significant role to which a woman can ever aspire.

C2.S9

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C2.P148 # Notes

[1] "The beast/bitch of Buchenwald" was accused of using the tattooed skin of prisoners as lampshades and other household goods (Becker 2015, 55). The judge concluded that Koch was a "ruthless and hard-headed woman who had been aware of beating, whippings, and hangings of the prisoners . . . [and] had done everything in her power to worsen the condition of those poor tortured men" (ibid). Koch was also accused of being a nymphomaniac and ordering orgies that led to an illegitimate son (ibid).

[2] Patricia Pearson (1997, 32) warns that "we cannot insist on the strength and competence of women in all the traditional masculine areas yet continue to exonerate ourselves from the consequences of power by arguing that, where the course of it runs more darkly, we are actually powerless. This has become an awkward paradox in feminist argument."

[3] Elshtain argues that the broader narrative of Beautiful Soul and Just Warrior strongly permeates popular thinking about women, men, and armed conflicts across cultures and time periods. She concludes that women have been historically cast as society's beautiful souls and thus "served as the collective

projection of pure, self-sacrificing, otherworldly and pacific Other" (1982, 342). The femininity represented in the Beautiful Soul narrative is fragile and delicate and is naive about the reality of war-fighting and state conduct. In matters of war and peace, the female Beautiful Soul is strictly bound to her private nonviolent sphere, and "cannot put an end to suffering, cannot effectively fight the mortal wounding of sons, brothers, husbands, fathers" (Elshtain 1985. 45).

[4] Linda Åhäll (2012b) highlights that motherhood, similar to gender, is a social construct. She contends that "unconscious ideologies write motherhood as natural, something that we do not question, when it is in fact not natural, but a social and cultural construction" (ibid, 109). She (2012b) further argues that female agency in political violence is communicated and negotiated primarily through motherhood, even in cases where such principle might not be immediately apparent. She discusses the notion of female heroism in battle, armed conflict, or any violent encounter and concludes that the "construction of heroines seems to depend on ideas of female bodies' association with motherhood; motherhood seems to function as heroism's constitutive other" (Åhäll 2012a, 287).

[5] The presence of women and girls as fighters and war crime perpetrators has been established in many of the post–Cold War conflicts. Perhaps most prominently, Sierra Leone's female fighters attracted feminist research. Chris Coulter (2008, 55) estimates that between 10 and 30 percent of all the fighters

were women and girls. Most of them have been abducted, raped, tortured, and forced into marriage, becoming so-called bush wives (ibid).

[6] Possible maternal loss can be childlessness, whether chosen or forced on a woman. Åhäll (2012b, 110) argues that "the [female] subject departs from the norms and boundaries of femininity and a naturalised life-giving identity through being . . . childless by choice, masculine, gay or prostitute." Here, the lack of motherhood clearly leads to differentiation from the rest of the "proper" women and thus "Othering." Whereas motherhood is clearly one of the dominant themes (mis)used as a motivational factor for female (non)violence, the understanding of what it means to be a mother in relation to violent world politics is largely fragmented between feminists themselves.

[7] This is applied to the case of maternalism in relation to Palestinian female self-martyrs and the representation of their decision to kill (Gentry 2009).

[8] However, feminist criminological scholarship further highlights the disparity between the rhetoric/myth of leniency and the actual practice. The argument of (unconscious) chivalry—or that women are treated more leniently by courts simply because they are women—has been challenged by many authors (Silvestri 2007). It has been shown that what appears to be a certain degree of leniency is rather an "oppressive and paternalistic form of individual justice" based on "gendered criminal justice system, characterised by gendered organisational logics and gendered agents of power" (Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey 2008, 33–34). Also, the concern is that magistrates and judges become

harsher in their judgment of women over time (ibid). This is closely connected to the rising panic surrounding the concepts of "mean girls" and "ladettes."

[11] On realizing that Plavšić only admitted guilt to escape almost certain death in prison, Drakulić concludes: "I wrote about Biljana Plavšić as a positive example of a woman who had the courage to admit her wrongdoings during the war. I admired her, because such an act demanded great courage and moral stamina. In my view she also taught a lesson to the Balkan man in hiding: men like Karadžić, Mladic and Gotovina. *I was terribly wrong"* (2009, emphasis added).

[12] Plavšić further states: "I believe, fear, a blinding fear that led to an obsession, especially for those of us for whom the Second World War was a living memory, that Serbs would never again allow themselves to become victims. In this, we in the leadership violated the most basic duty of every human being, the duty to restrain oneself and to respect the human dignity of others. We were committed to do whatever was necessary to prevail" (*Prosecutor v. Plavšić*, December 17, 2002).

[13] Crucially, she adds: "[a]t the time, I easily convinced myself that this was a matter of survival and self-defence. In fact, it was more. Our leadership, of which I was a necessary part, led an effort which victimised countless innocent people. Explanations of self-defence and survival offer no justification" (*Prosecutor v. Plavšić*, December 17, 2002).

[14] Here, Nyiramasuhuko's mother also refuses to believe any allegations against Nyiramasuhuko: "[i]t is unimaginable that she did these things," she said. "She wouldn't order people to rape and kill. After all, Pauline is a mother" (Landesman 2002). Nyiramasuhuko herself continues to claim that she was framed, stating that "people wanted to prove at all costs that a woman, a mother, was involved in the unspeakable" (ibid). She represents herself as a token victim, a woman who is taking the punishment on behalf of all the women who participated in the genocidal violence—interestingly, at the same time that this is deemed impossible for Rwandan women.

[15] Nyiramasuhuko also aims at highlighting her peacefulness through a story about how she chose a rather unusual name for her son, Shalom: "Shalom was born in Israel. In Rwanda, a child is only named by the father; and when I went to Israel, I did not have a name for my baby. And when I had this baby, I was asked to name the baby. I went through all the first names that I knew, and I said to myself that if I gave my son a name which meant peace, it would mean a lot to me" (*Prosecutor v. Nyiramasuhuko et al.,* August 21, 2005, 32). In a similar tone, Nyiramasuhuko's husband claims his wife must be innocent: "[s]he was committed to promoting equality between men and women," he said defiantly. "It is not culturally possible for a Rwandan woman to make her son rape other women. It just couldn't have taken place." Pauline's only error, he insisted, was in belonging to the side that lost (Landesman 2002).