

## COMMEMORATION AND ITS LIMITATIONS: THE MASS RAPES OF CHINESE INDONESIAN WOMEN MAY 1998

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One of the most violent episodes in Indonesia's 1998 political upheaval was the mass rapes. Over May 13-15 from eighty-five to four-hundred ethnic Chinese Indonesian women reported they were mass-raped (McCormick 2003:26). The rapes were perpetrated mainly in and around Jakarta as part of arguably a systematic ethnically charged riot that included burning, looting and killing (Volunteers 1998:7). A report by *Volunteers Team for Humanity* concluded that the rapes and riots were part of a systematic '*modus operandi*' (TGPF 1998:3; KOMNAS 2003:21). In the wake of these events, newly formed women's political groups rallied and campaigned, calling to public attention the issue of state and military violence against women. Correspondingly, Chinese Diaspora groups in other countries such as Australia expressed their outrage at what they called ethnic violence and sought international support against these abuses of human rights.

In this paper<sup>1</sup>, I argue that both the women's and Chinese Diaspora political groups' representations of the mass rapes have limitations. The representations I drawn on are firstly, a commemorative book with survivor testimonies by *Komisi Nasional Anti*

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*Kekerasan Indonesia Terhadap Perempuan (KOMNAS Perempuan)* or The Indonesian National Commission Against Violence to Women. For Chinese Diaspora, I draw on an SBS Dateline documentary shown by *Huaren*<sup>2</sup>--a Chinese Diaspora political group--at a commemorative public meeting in Sydney, Australia, 1999. *KOMNAS Perempuan*'s representation frames testimonies of rape as trauma within a theoretical discourse of feminism, while *Huaren* used the documentary to represent the atrocity through a human rights framework. In other words, the violence was construed as being against Indonesian women or against ethnic Chinese. Therefore, the representations have play down the specific combination of both sexism and racism endured by the Chinese Indonesian Women.

### **Representations of the mass rapes**

The representations by *KOMNAS Perempuan* and *Huaren* can be compared and contrasted with those of various Indonesian academics who generally viewed the rapes as the Indonesian state's responsibility. Arief Budiman (1999:307) implied that the event was orchestrated by the military's Special Forces to incite racial and religious conflict during the political upheaval. Ariel Heryanto (1999:310) argued that the Suharto New Order government perpetrated 'political rape.' In effect the Suharto regime scapegoated the ethnic Chinese Indonesians inciting mass anger and rapes. In addition, Heryanto maintained that this atrocity forced the Indonesian public to commemorate the rapes through collective narration of trauma in their history.

According to Heryanto, both dominant state and commercial media representations denied involvement of the state in the rapes and/or the need for commemoration. Evidence of the state's denial is found in media reportage of the event, as well as in statements by: top officials in President Habibie's cabinet newly formed in 1998, the armed forces, the Minister for Women's Affairs and major Islamic organisations (Heryanto 1999:310). The mass media reports initially stated that the economic crisis,

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<sup>2</sup> *Huaren* is an online Chinese Diaspora Group whose head organisation is called the World Huaren Federation. This group is based in San Francisco yet claim to speak for the ethnic Chinese as a whole (Tay 2000).

unemployment and hunger directed the masses' anger towards the 3% of the population of Chinese descent who control 70% of the nation's economy (Heryanto 1999:314). As a consequence, the general public emotionally distanced themselves from the event and justified it as a specific ethnic problem arising from prolonged economic disadvantage. The violence towards the ethnic Chinese Indonesians was further justified as a result of their perceived role in the corrupt, nepotistic and collusive Suharto government which favoured them economically.<sup>3</sup>

Heryanto (1999) continues that the May 1998 mass rapes were denied by different power groups with ulterior motives such as denigrating a country where the *pribumis*<sup>4</sup> are of an Islamic majority.<sup>5</sup> The mass media reports then became a debate about 'truth' claims. Groups protecting the victims such as the *Volunteers for Humanity*, were accused of fabricating a sensational story, and demands were made to disclose and persuade the alleged victims to testify in public. Moreover, it was asserted that mass rape could not occur in a civilized and moral society that values women as mother and wife and sanctifies a women's virginity/chastity.<sup>6</sup> However, Indonesian feminist academic, Melanie Budianta (2002:50), noted there were graphic accounts in the tabloid media that contributed to the 'spectacle of violence' in relation to the rapes. The women who were raped were called '*Amoy*'. This term connotes lascivious exotic Orientals (Budianta 2002:50).

*KOMNAS Perempuan's* commemorative book (2003) argued that the May 1998 mass rapes were not just a rape of *Amoys*, but a rape of all Indonesian women. Using a feminist narrative, *KOMNAS Perempuan* describes the rapes in terms of a patriarchal state which controls Indonesian women's subjectivity as a political being. Female subjectivity during

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<sup>3</sup> Statement by Abdurahman Wahid (Gus Dur) then leader of the largest Muslim organisation Nahdatul Ullama, (*Living in Fear*, SBS 1998)

<sup>4</sup> *Pribumi* is a term for indigenous Indonesians; Chinese Indonesians in comparison are considered non-*pribumi*. (Tay 2000).

<sup>5</sup> *Komite Indonesia Untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam* (the Indonesian Committee of World Islamic Solidarity) and *Badan Koordinasi Mubalig se-Indonesia* (the Coordinating Body for Islamic Institution in Indonesia) expressed that the issue of rape had been blown up or purely fabricated to discredit Islam and the largest Islamic country, in International forums (Heryanto 2000:321).

<sup>6</sup> Virginity/chastity discourse is the reproduction of gender subordination through sexual control (Heryanto 1999).

the New Order government was characterised as State *Ibusim* (mother and wife) discourse (McCormick 2003). Only state sponsored wives' and mothers' social groups were allowed. Other women's political groups were banned. A virginity/chastity discourse constructed a valued female role as mothers and wives. These discourses further complicate the survivors' ability to speak as they have been classified outside this framework. The testimonies and articles in the *KOMNAS Perempuan* book resist these discourses and give a message that Indonesian women are all survivors of oppression who can fight to empower themselves and advocate their own rights. In addition, the book describes how, through the testimonies, the Chinese Indonesian women are breaking the silence and satisfying the demand for evidence by the general public; to validate the 'truth' of the event.

Likewise, the Chinese Diaspora group in Australia resisted the dominant representations by showing the SBS Dateline documentary for their commemoration public meeting. They pronounced that the documentary was factual evidence and hence the basis for their argument that the May 1998 mass rapes was not just part of a random mass riot. The documentary depicted the military's Special Forces as having deliberate '*modus operandi*'. This culpability was extended to the state as a whole in what was portrayed as human rights abuse. There were footage, interviews, data and reports to show the planned and systematic nature of the event. This human rights framework provided an alternative account to the Indonesian mass media. In interviews, prominent Chinese Indonesian academics Frans Winarta and Ong Hok Ham, both described the ethnic group's oppression and held that the violence towards the Chinese was not justified.

### **Limitations of the representations**

Saul Friedlander (1992) uses the idea of 'limits of representation' to describe an understanding of an event that tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories; an 'event at the limits'. Arguably, the Indonesian atrocity of the May 1998 mass rapes is also an 'event at the limits' because of the social taboo of rape and its use as violence towards a specific ethnicity that the state does not see as 'belonging'.

What are the limitations of the *KOMNAS Perempuan* and *Huaren* representations? In the following pages, I will analyse the representations using Pettman's (1992) notions of dual oppression and Hague's ideas on rape and gender. Jan Pettman's (1992:59) discusses dual oppression of (racially) black women.

Racism and sexism are often talked of as if they are alternative and comparable kind of oppression. The racism/sexism analogy has been used to represent black women as alternative designation. Thus black women are invisible within both the ungendered race and the apparently white 'women' category.

Hague's theory of rape is that to maintain social relations based on male power, the feminine must be constructed as sexually subordinate to the masculine—women are feminine and passive (Hague 1997:51).

Using Pettman and Hague's ideas to analyse the representations, one can ascertain a suppression of the ethnic Chinese Indonesian women's experiences of rape as a dual oppression of racism and sexism. Rather each group takes gender or racial discourse. *KOMNAS Perempuan* presents it as a rape of all Indonesian women.<sup>7</sup> *Huaren* as a rape of all Chinese ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> Identifying themselves as the survivor/victim of the trauma, both groups interpret the injury according to their resistance to and shaping of the public memory. Therefore there is a psychocultural<sup>9</sup> element of the two groups' representation in which they interpret the May 1998 mass rapes for their own political purpose. In the following sections, I consider these limitations in more detail.

### **Limitations of *KOMNAS Perempuan* 's Representations**

There are three limitations of *KOMNAS Perempuan*'s representation using a gender discourse. First is the rejection of the 'racialisation of the event'. *KOMNAS Perempuan*

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<sup>7</sup> The women that marched in the 1998 Jakarta women's peace rally hoisted banners that say, "These are not the Rapes of Amoy, These are Rapes of Indonesian Women!" (Budianta 2002:50).

<sup>8</sup> The meanings of rape in the context of extreme ethno-cidal violence is rape as an assault on the ethnic Chinese (Tay 2000:29).

<sup>9</sup> Trauma is psychocultural because the injury entails interpretation of the injury influenced by the particular cultural context (Farrell 1998:7).

felt that racialisation is counter-productive to fighting the dominant commercial and state media representation. Racialisation would emulate the divisiveness created, as the violence was to specifically incite ethnic and religious conflict. Moreover, they argued that racialisation re-enforces existing stereotypes that ethnic Chinese Indonesian women are lascivious and exotic. This stereotype justifies the raping of women, who 'brought it upon themselves' because their actions excluded them from the mother/wife or virginity/chastity framework. *KOMNAS Perempuan* argued that the mass media's fascination with the ethnicity of the victims disregarded the gender dimension of violence on women.

There are also strategic political motives to why *KOMNAS Perempuan* rejected the racial representation of the event. Through a homogenous identity *KOMNAS Perempuan* mobilised women from various racial, ethnic, education, social and class categories into political action to change women's status in Indonesian society. Racialisation limits this support as their target audience associates the survivors with a homogenous identity of Indonesian women.

In addition, by avoiding racialisation of the victims, *KOMNAS Perempuan* disassociates the Chinese Indonesian women from only being victims of ethnic violence and change their status into survivors. Being a survivor is a more positive term that can appeal to the larger community of Indonesian women. 'Survivor' is strategic to the *KOMNAS Perempuan* political goals to empower all Indonesian women.

Outright rejection of the racial dimension of the May atrocity is however, limiting because it denies that ethnic Chinese Indonesian women were targeted for rape because of their physical appearance. By not acknowledging their ethnicity as one of the key factors to why they were raped, *KOMNAS Perempuan* disregards the dual oppression of ethnic Chinese minority women. To empower women there must be an understanding of the power relations in society that enable the oppression and violence towards not only a general category of women but also to this ethnic minority group of women. The implication is that *KOMNAS Perempuan* does not acknowledge the position of the

Chinese Indonesian minority women as citizen. As Tjhin notes, Chinese Indonesian was never accepted into the ‘imagined’ national *pribumi* identity of Indonesia, and other-ed. The other-ing of ethnic Chinese Indonesians means that ethnic Chinese-Indonesians are treated not as members of the Indonesian community as a group (Tjhin 2002:9).

The testimonies in *KOMNAS Perempuan*’s book by Chinese Indonesian women contradict the group’s stand on racialisation. The two identifiably Chinese Indonesian women in the testimonies expressed a racial aspect to the violence they experienced. They appear to have experience dual oppression, a gendered racism.

Siska: “Because I am Chinese, wherever I go, I feel like I am being observed by many people, I feel like I could be tortured again at any time, aaaah... I feel like they are all tigers about to pounce” (KOMNAS 2003:31).

They even alluded to the power relations as explaining how such an atrocity could occur to Chinese Indonesian women. This is exemplified in the unnamed Chinese Indonesian woman’s testimony as told by her co-narrator Lani:

“Why is it because of the problems to do with the change of Presidency, there are a number of people who have the heart to rape Chinese people and burn the houses of Chinese people? Why do they have the heart to disrobe and group rape a woman, like an animal? Even though I am of a Chinese descent, I am Indonesian. My ancestors, grandmother and so on were born here. My skin is white, my eyes are slanty, but because of that I had to be treated differently?” (KOMNAS 2003:39-40)

Hence, although motivated by good intentions, the *KOMNAS Perempuan* stance on racialisation is limiting.

The second limitation to the *KOMNAS Perempuan* book is the framing of the ethnic Chinese Indonesian women’s testimonies in line with *KOMNAS Perempuan*’s political messages to empower all Indonesian women. *KOMNAS Perempuan* used the following methods: themes of forgiving and gratitude; unintentional silencing; and non representative inclusion.

Forgiveness and gratitude as a theme in narrating the testimonies of the survivors is exemplified in the story titled ‘In the effort to erase the feeling of hatred and suspicion’ (KOMNAS 2003:27). This is a story of Siska’s journey towards forgiving the Indonesian people who committed the atrocity. Not only did she forgive, her narrative suggests she was able to overcome her suspicion of all Indonesian men. The theme of gratitude is provided by the story titled ‘Thank you Mr. *Haji*’ (KOMNAS 2003:37). This story downplays the ethnic and religious aspect by depicting a Chinese woman’s gang rape experience through the theme of gratitude for the devout Muslim man who saved her life. It provides an alternative representation to the Indonesian media reports that portray the perpetrators of the rapes as Muslims who shouted ‘*Aulahhuakbar*’ or ‘God is Great’ before they committed the act (SBS 1998; Lochore 1998).

Unintentional silencing is through the use of co-narration, using an authoritative voice and adding of linearity to the story. An example analysed as a problematic use of the above method, was the interview chastising Siska fearing Indonesian men and Indonesian people in general. It is problematic because the interviewer (*Zara*) added her own authoritative voice to redirect Siska’s testimony:

Zara: “So do you think because I am Indonesian I will also pounce on you like a tiger?” Siska then chastised herself by saying that her way of thinking is wrong she must stop being so distrustful, accusing other people, and she should always remember that not all Indonesian men with dark skin are evil, there are those who are evil and there are those who are good (KOMNAS 2003:31).

Furthermore, the interviewer added her own writing in between Siska’s testimony putting a timeline and narrative context to what happened. Siska, on the other hand, tells the story in a more non-linear way, jumping from emotions to emotions, more in line with testimony valorised in a psychoanalytic model of reading trauma (Kennedy and Wilson 2003). *Zara*’s addition of a timeline and narrative context construct a shared sense of Indonesian women’s history to guide the readers through Siska’s fragmented memory. However, Siska’s fragmented memory appears to emphasize the power of her testimony, as coming from someone who is still dealing with the overwhelming inability to speak



about a traumatic event. In the testimony her voice is differentiated from her co-narrator's by italics, making it more affecting.

The other testimony by an ethnically Chinese Indonesian woman in the story 'Thank you Mr Haji' was co-narrated by Lani, a volunteer women activist like Zara who accompanied the victim. This unnamed survivor's story was not in an interview format like Siska's. The problem with this different format is that it is unclear which parts are her co-narrator's interpretation and which parts are the survivor's voice.

Non representative inclusion is instanced in the inclusion of two nonethnically Chinese Indonesian women awakening to women's rights. Maria, a Manadonese who was raped because she was mistaken as Chinese Indonesian and Ruminah, a Javanese mother whose son was killed in the burning shopping centre. They also strengthen their theme of empowering Indonesian women in general as the two women became activists after their experiences in the May violence. Their testimonies describe their new political awareness that is in line with *KOMNAS Perempuan*'s political messages.

Maria: "The problems of violence towards women have now become my focus; especially after I become one of the victims...I observed that violence towards women in time becomes more sophisticated. Until when must women continue to fight against this problem?" (KOMNAS 2003:44).

Ruminah: "We build a communication forum for the family of the May victims (FKKM). We made posters, demonstrated, we went to see the Human Rights committee, the General assembly, generals, Amien Rais, President Gus Dur, we were passed over here, there, everywhere, without any meaningful results. Five years have passed, our struggle in a mother's group has not found the light of day, but we as mothers, will not give up, we demand responsibility from those in positions of power to find the actors of the May incident (KOMNAS 2003:36).

*KOMNAS Perempuan* frames and constructs the testimonies in a manner that assimilates and homogenises the ethnic Chinese Indonesian women into an imagined collective identity of Indonesian women. By assimilating the ethnic Chinese Indonesian women, *KOMNAS Perempuan* are using them for their own political purpose. Moreover, the

ethnic Chinese Indonesian women can only become empowered under the homogenised category of ‘survivors’. This denies their racial identity.

Such homogenisation emulates the New Order government’s practice of classifying women as valuable only if they have an essential fixed identity under the State *Ibuism* discourse, headed by state sanctioned mothers and wives group. *KOMNAS Perempuan* has become (1999) a state sanctioned political women’s organisation, and thus can be criticised as practising an institutionalised form of homogenising the Indonesian women’s identity.

The final limitation of *KOMNAS Perempuan*’s representation is its conflation of the women’s testimony into a larger community narration. This is exemplified in the stories in the first half of the commemoration book about *KOMNAS Perempuan*’s struggle to bring justice to the women survivors of the May violence, their journey and triumphs. Besides the aforementioned arguments about denying the specificity of the May 1998 mass rape as a dual oppression experienced by Chinese Indonesian women, this final evidence of limitation also points to the traps of homogeneity. The traps of homogeneity are best described by Antze and Lambek (1996) as leading to a locus of struggle over the boundary between the individual and the collective, or between distinct interest groups in which power becomes the operative factor. The boundary of the individual experiences of the Chinese Indonesian women is also blurred in the collective community narration to empower women. Furthermore, this collective narration becomes a struggle against *Huaren*’s racialisation of the event and the dominant media representations that either sensationalize or deny the event.

### **Limitations of *Huaren*’s representation**

Viewed from the perspective of dual oppression, the racial discourse of *Huaren* also is characterised by three forms of limitations. First limitation is the portrayal of women’s bodies as passive objects of the power struggle. In contrast to *KOMNAS Perempuan*’s portrayal of women as survivors and empowered active subjects, *Huaren* portrays

women's bodies as passive objects. Their bodies become an embodied metaphor of their racial identity. The limitations of *Huaren*'s representation is therefore in its reluctance to portray the women as a capable active subject with distinct racial and gender oppression.

The SBS documentary that was shown publicly by *Huaren* is an example of the portrayal of ethnic Chinese Indonesian women as passive objects of the power struggle. The first depiction is through an interview with Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid). The then leader of the largest moderate Muslim organisation was well known as a Chinese supporter. Nevertheless, Gus Dur said that the rape was a result of the Chinese' attitude; who 'brought it upon themselves' for being exclusive. His example of this exclusiveness was that they do not allow their women to marry Indonesian men. The second depiction is of the ethnic Chinese Indonesian woman testifying that she was saved because a *pribumi* man claimed her to be his girlfriend. It was only through her status as a property of the *pribumi* man that she was saved from mass rape. The final depiction is of a Chinese Indonesian man's solutions to the rape situation by selling and advocating a chastity belt. The SBS journalist Mike Carey said that the Chinese women would rather die and wear the corset rather than be raped. This portrays the idea of a valued Chinese Indonesian woman is one who remains chaste / virgin.

A criticism of this representation is that the ethnic Chinese Indonesian women are passive objects of patriarchal control over their rights for marriage, relationship and sexuality. It is men who decide, as the ethnic Chinese Indonesian women are here seen as the property of either Indonesian men or ethnic Chinese men. The ethnic Chinese Indonesian women are feminised with the connotations of a passive being, a victim of her sexual subordination.

The second limitation is the portrayal of rape as a form of de-masculinising the ethnic group. It is limiting because rape becomes a communication between men and not about the dual oppression of ethnic Chinese Indonesian women. In ethno-cidal rape what is feminine and masculine are not necessarily reflections of the sex of the person, it can be ascribed to the whole ethnic group as a form of control. Furthermore, ethno-cidal rape is

actually a form of communication between men who are fighting for control, usually in a war situation (Tay 2000:29). For example in the crime of genocidal rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina, traditional gender assumptions of which persons are masculine and which feminine came under attack, and in many cases were re-asserted, through ascription of national identity (Hague 1997:53). Through the male power struggle, the rapes had symbolised the most brutal act to de-masculinise and thus feminise the other ethnic group who cannot protect their women. The Chinese Diaspora group in their online posting communicates this form of exercising power through ascribing a de-masculinising feature to a whole ethnic group. The subject is: *Chinese Indonesian men are a bunch of cowards*, written by someone with an online identity as a Chinese man (Nigel Ng) not from Indonesia but identifies as belonging to the diasporic community.

The first thing that came to my mind when reading the rape report was: ‘Where were the men?’ There was no mention whatsoever of any resistance put up by Indonesian–Chinese men to protect the safety and honour of their women. They seem to always rely on their money to ‘buy’ some soldiers or security guards for their protection. What a bunch of cowards! You gave bad name to all Chinese (Tay 2000:29-30).

This reflects the theory on ethno-cidal rape where representation of the event utilises the patriarchal discourses of masculinity, male honour, women and their bodies as property to be protected (Tay 2000:30). The women are raped because they are cultural symbols, through rape their bodies are the graffiti for the racial slur. This is how they become embodied metaphors for their ethnic identity, while denying their specific gendered oppression.

There is thus no space for ethnic Chinese women’s different experiences of oppression in these representations besides the racial category. Nigel Ng’s posting reflects the contradiction inherent in homogenising an essential category of ‘Chineseness’ and the complicated positioning of Chinese women in this identity. Chineseness transcends national boundaries and become its own transnational category. Ien Ang (2001), an Australian academic of Chinese descent born in Indonesia stated that she refused the *Huaren* when approached to write about the May 1998 mass rapes as she find this

homogenising construction of identity under the racial category of Chinese problematic. Her reluctance is to identify with an imagined collective group because they create boundaries based on an enforced essential identity intent on a single normative truth of its victimized state.

The final limitation of *Huaren*'s representation is the normative truth of the ethnic Chinese Indonesian women's identity as a victim. Examples are evident in the messages at the *Huaren*'s commemoration public meeting. Firstly, that the women raped were called the casualties of the larger human rights abuse against the Chinese ethnic group. Secondly, is the message that the rape is committed to put the Chinese ethnic group in their place; that they would never belong in the construction of their adopted national identity. Thirdly, the lack of any gendered racism narrative. Racism itself became the main issue. This is exemplified in the Chinese male speakers, who during the ceremony, talked about their experiences of oppression under the New Order government. When a speaker talked about the rape and said that this should never happen again, he followed this statement with a call for abolishing racism. The problem with these messages is that descriptions of victims of racism are frequently not gendered, yet it seems likely that women in some ways experience racism differently from men (Pettman 1992:115).

### **Political Strategy of empowerment**

The Chinese Indonesian women's trauma and testimonies of the May mass rapes were targeted as mechanisms to promote women's and ethnic political national processes of empowerment. This involvement in a national process of empowerment is best described in Anthias and Yuval Davies (1992:115) theory of women enduring an 'intersection of subordination'. Women are enduring not only racism and sexism but also subordination as biological producers of members of ethnic collectivities; as transmitters of culture, as signifiers of ethnic or national differences. Anthias and Yuval Davies therefore argue that women are targeted by and participate in ethnic and national processes of oppression/empowerment.

Through the use of the experiences of the Chinese Indonesian women these two groups attempted to bring about positive change to Indonesia's discriminative and oppressive laws. Indonesian women are now allowed to organise political groups and have a more active political voice. On behalf of the women who were raped, *KOMNAS Perempuan* also managed to get an official statement of apology from President BJ Habibie for the violence perpetrated during the May riots (KOMNAS 2003).

The same sort of success to bring about political and social change was achieved by the *Huaren* who organised the commemoration ceremony in 1998. By using a Human rights framework they brought the specific ethno-cidal element of the May riots into international forums through petitions and lobbying to the United Nation's Human Rights Commission. This brought pressure into consequent Indonesian governments to abolish discriminative laws towards this ethnic group such as the banning of Chinese cultural products, writings and Chinese New Year celebration.

The two political groups use the May mass rape strategically by ascribing an essential and fixed category of either Indonesian women or ethnic Chinese to the victim/survivor; and thus achieve their political goals. Gayatri Spivak (1996:204) has termed this activity as 'strategic essentialism'. Spivak praises "subaltern's strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (1996:205). This use of an essential identity as practiced by the dispossessed can be powerfully disruptive and effective in dismantling structures or alleviating suffering.

Spivak maintains that strategic essentialism should only be used in specific historical moments temporarily. If they are not used only temporarily, the political groups are enforcing the same form of homogeneity that they had initially sought to break away from. Women organising around their oppression resists and contests labelling of themselves and their problems by more powerful others (Pettman 1992:142-143). Therefore, both groups discussed made a political act for celebrating their essential identity that enabled the experiences of rape to take on a national political agenda. Pettman however, warns that celebrating identities without situating them within the

politics of difference and the power relations within which they are constructed simply encourages a cultural relativist position. This argument can be taken further to state that it should not only be situated within the politics of difference but within specific historical moments and thus be used temporarily.

## Conclusion

Representing the trauma of mass rapes is difficult in an ethno-cidal context. There is a need to break the silence about the atrocity to challenge the voices of denial and blame. On the other hand, it is 'demanding' on those victim/survivor of various forms of oppression who are vulnerable to another form of violation through the reliving of the event by testifying and giving voice. Pettman and Hague's analyses suggest that the voices of the victim/survivor must therefore be accompanied by an understanding of the limit of their representation by a group with political motives who need to narrate under an essential identity. The implication for dealing with trauma as a subject is that it is always more than just a symbol, or a representation of a group's political struggle.

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