

The Sexual Life of Nations

Notes on gender
and nationhood

AF THOMAS HYLLAND ERIKSEN

Køn, seksualitet og slægtskab er centrale elementer i den nationale symbolik og genspejles på flere planer. I krigstid bliver kønnet tematiseret på særlige måder. Aggressiv maskulinitet står i centrum af George Bush' og Osama Bin Ladens statements efter den 11. september 2001.

E S S A Y

Two of the most influential texts about the rise of nationalism both present arguments about nationhood based on technological changes: To Benedict Anderson (1991), the main protagonist in the historical drama of nationalism is print capitalism, which creates conditions for an abstract simultaneity and cultural homogenisation. Currently raised questions regarding the implications of the internet for social identity can easily be raised with his analysis as a point of departure. To Ernest Gellner (1983), the movement from agrarian to industrial society was crucial for the emergence of an overarching ideology of unity in a large-scale society, along with its concomitant organisational principles of anonymity, exchangeability and so on. While Gellner concentrates on the integrative and functional dimensions of nationalism, Anderson's focus is on the symbolic power of nationalism, that is, its existential meaning – Gellner explains how nationalism is integrative at the political le-

vel of the industrial state, while Anderson explains the emotional power of nationalism at the personal level. In this way, the theories are complementary rather than competing.

The canonical literature on nationalism, moreover, emphasises the quality of nationalism as a horizontal ideology of similarity, as an ideology transcending regional and class difference, and as a relational ideology defined and confirmed through contrast with non-nationals (Eriksen 2001). The relationships of nationalism to ethnicity, to minority issues and to issues of race have been carefully researched and theorised in the last decades of the 20th century, but this has not – surprisingly – generally been the case with the gendered aspect of nationhood. Indeed, with a handful of exceptions (notably Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989, Yuval-Davis 1997, Mosse 1985, Parker et al. 1992, Archetti 1999), the gendered dimension of nationhood has largely been neglected in the literature. Apart from a brief remark by Anderson (1991) comparing national identity to gender identity, none of the standard texts take it into account, and it is often taken as an implicit premise that nations are essentially male; created by male pioneers, run by male politicians and defended by male soldiers. This implicit assumption needs to be problematised. What I am going to do in this brief essay amounts to outlining a few of the largely untheorised gender aspects of nationhood. The main objective is to indicate ways in which a critical approach to gender can be incorporated into existing analytical perspectives on nationalism. I will argue that gender feeds directly into nationalism at a variety of levels, and the argument presupposes (a) that metaphors are based on experiences, (b) that those experiences are gendered through fundamental relationships based on socialisation and sex, and (c) that sexual capital is a main scarce resource during situations of stress for the nation (e.g. mass immigration or war). What I am

looking for, in other words, are symbolic connections between widespread personal experiences and symbolism referring to large-scale entities (viz. nations).

GENDER SYMBOLISM IN CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IMAGERY

Metaphors are a device, perhaps the main device (Lakoff and Johnson 1999), conventionally used by humans to simplify the world, giving it a particular shape and making sense of experience. Abstract phenomena such as God, the market and the nation depend for their existence on metaphors drawing on widespread, often taken-for-granted personal experiences. The meanings of metaphors, moreover, change situationally. This entails that if there is a symbolic connection between images of gender, family and the individual on the one hand, and images of the nation on the other, the latter is likely to vary cross-culturally as an implication of variations in the former. One may thus assume a priori that in a matrilineal and patriarchal society, the dominant image of the nation will differ from that prevalent in a society based on bilateral kinship and relative gender equality; similarly, that endogamy at the level of the kin group may reappear as “endogamy” at the national level. Before considering such possible variations, I shall outline some general principles regarding the metaphorical relationship between gender relations and nationhood.

Gender and kinship terms figure prominently in portrayals of aspects of the nation, in common terms such as fatherland, mother tongue, brothers and sisters (of the nation) and so on. Less obviously, it may also be argued that the nation is imagined metaphorically as a person (which passes through life stages, emerges out of personal crises etc.), a household or family, a male group of comrades, or a local community or *Gemeinschaft*. There are in other words a bundle of metaphors relating the nation to

primary relationships; all can be invoked, depending on the situation at hand.

In the introduction to *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, the editors (Parker et al. 1992) claim that the nation is an eroticised image, and refer to the concept of “love of nation”. I disagree with this interpretation. Of all the gender relationships that form a symbolic foundation for nationhood, the sexually charged bond is actually the least conspicuous. As argued below, sex enters into national imagery exogamously together with violence, through the idioms of conquest and rape, not through notions of love. The dominant symbolic idiom is rather that of parents and children, which implies the predominance of the sibling relation rather than conjugal love or sexual intercourse. In peaceful times, the nation chiefly belongs to the domestic sphere. It is a wife, sister, mother or daughter who runs the risk of being violated by foreigners or subversive elements from within; and it is a father or brother seeking to protect his female family members. Mrs. Thatcher, when she made her infamous remark that “there is no such thing as society”, very sensibly added that there are individuals *and families*.

In the script of the nation-as-family, each family member has his or her own peculiar part to play:

The mother is typically represented as the guardian of tradition and the reproducer of the nation. In a typical photo of Indian immigrants to Mauritius taken about a hundred years ago, all the women wore saris, while all the men wore Western clothes. The term mother tongue exists in many languages, but no language I am aware of speaks of “father tongues”; this makes sense in so far as mothers, rather than fathers, tend to be mainly responsible for the everyday socialisation of children. The nation as such is often represented as a loving and caring mother, as in “Mother India”.

The father is typically represented as a hardworking farmer tilling the land (which

is feminine, cf. Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989) or as a military officer in command of a troop of soldiers (his sons). The land cultivated and patrolled by fathers is sometimes described as a fatherland or *Vaterland*. A couple of representative lines from the Norwegian national anthem go like this: “As our fathers have fought, our mothers have wept” (*Slig fedrene har kjempet, og mødrene har grædt*).

The ideal son and brother is represented as fraternal to his brothers (in horizontal relationships), obedient to his parents and protective of his sister. In their vertical relationship to the State, all men are represented as sons (of the nation).

The sister and daughter, finally, is given the most passive role in this nuclear family of the nation. Her primary task seems to consist in readiness to make sacrifices.

The Hitler Youth Movement had two mottos, one for girls and one for boys. The girl motto was: “Be faithful, be pure, be German”. The boy motto was: “Live faithfully, fight bravely, die laughing” (Yuval-Davis 1997, 45). Sons/brothers are active; daughters/sisters are passive. Boys are active in public; girls remain in the domestic sphere.

During the war of words following 11 September, George W. Bush said:

“I recently received a touching letter that says a lot about the state of America in these difficult times, a letter from a fourth-grade girl with a father in the military. ‘As much as I don’t want my dad to fight,’ she wrote, ‘I’m willing to give him to you.’ This is a precious gift. The greatest she could give. This young girl knows what America is all about.” (George W. Bush, 7 October 2001)

The female principle in nationhood, expressed through the relational statuses of wife, daughter and sister, is caring and nurturing, but it is also passive, like a fertile field. The complementary male principle is active; it is that of the farmer and soldier.



"Woman as National Boundary Marker".

Illustration fra Anne McClintock: Imperial leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. New York, Routledge, 1995.

GENDER DYNAMICS IN RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

Nations change gender situationally. Their female dimension is foregrounded whenever they appear as victims, but also in the continuity of tradition. Children, the symbolic future of the nation, are associated with women. The female principle is thus not exclusively passive. The male principle of activity and aggression predominates in industrial development and social planning, and more generally in the State's use of force against criminals, subversive elements, minorities, foreign enemies and so on.

Could it be said, then, that in some nations, the female principle predominates, while the male principle is more obvious in others? From what I have said so far, this ought to be the case. Hierarchical gender relations would then symbolically feed into aggressive nationalism. Indeed, George Mosse (1985) has convincingly argued that there were important connections between domestic relations in Germany and the growth of aggressive nationalism in the 1930s. However, other factors must also be taken into account. For example, it would seem likely that small and/or poor countries have a less boisterous and expansionist national selfimage than large and/or rich countries. The Scandinavian countries are often seen as somewhat effeminate in their official emphasis on cooperation rather than competition, their considerable efforts in Third World development, and their active role in peace negotiations. In their case, their small size is complemented by relative gender equality. It would nevertheless be easy to find other examples which indicate that there is no simple causal link between size, economic power and domestic gender arrangements on the one hand, and dominance of a particular gender in national imagery on the other – although it is clearly more easy for a small and poor country to embrace the victim role than for a large one; and although domestic gender equality can lead to a general feminization

of politics and thus an “effeminate” national image. This is an area where thorough empirical work needs to be done.

Although gender imagery of nations has been granted little attention in academia, a considerable body of research shows that ethnic minorities, notably indigenous peoples, have often portrayed themselves as female: they are, as it were, nonaggressive, cohesive and non-competitive, soft-spoken, peaceful and harmless. In ethnopolitics, not least among circumpolar peoples and North American Indians, indigenous peoples often represent themselves as carriers of more humane principles than the “insensitive macho majority nation”.

Indigenous peoples, moreover, are also sometimes associated with a “higher ecological morality” than the expansionist, industrial, utilitarianist majorities. Actually, in majority/minority relationships there is a nature/culture dimension which is both gendered and ambiguous. For example: (i) Blacks and Arabs are perceived (not necessarily by themselves, but by their significant others) as sexually aggressive – they are active and male, but also closer to nature than the more refined, civilized “We”. (ii) Indigenous groups are effeminate, irrational and weak. (iii) Elites/middle classes, however, are also frequently seen as effeminate by working classes and peasants. In a racialised country such as Jamaica, blackness symbolises masculine strength, while brownness symbolises effeminate weakness; blacks empirically tend to be working class, and browns tend to be middle class. Generally, it could be said that minorities, working classes and women are naturalised, and the ambiguity concerns whether nature is male or female. This changes situationally. In Mauritius, a society defined on the basis of the Hindu/Creole contrast, Hindu men tend to view Creole men as feminine (irrational, spontaneous); while Creole men tend to view Hindu men as feminine (sexually weak). Both derogative attitudes contain elements of both cultural prejudice and naturalisation.

Designating enemy nations, competing groups or subject peoples as essentially feminine is very widespread. Ashis Nandy (1983) has noted that colonised people were consistently depicted as weak and effeminate by the colonial powers. The sexualisation of colonised peoples took place in the literal sense through massive sexual abuse of slave women, and metaphorically by regarding them as “weak” – not just politically, but in other senses as well. The standard late 19th century social Darwinist view, which was incidentally shared by Darwin himself, was that when two peoples settled in the same area, the superior race would gradually displace the inferior race. Being more fit, it would have more surviving offspring than the weaker people.

Some oppressed people have responded to naturalisation from outside by naturalising themselves as strong and active men rather than weak and passive women. A compelling description of machismo among black South Africans opposed to apartheid is the centrepiece of Andre Brink's *The Wall of the Plague* (1984), a novel which describes the complexities of social classification through a romantic, but tense encounter between a black man and a white woman. The dominant African-American identity is also based on a strong version of machismo; and the same could be said of the dominant ethos among Latin American peasants. In other words, a response to a depiction from an oppressive Other as “naturally feminine” can be to re-define oneself as “naturally masculine”.

THE NATION AT WAR

We now move to considering tense intergroup situations fraught with conflict and struggle. It is quite clear that, notwithstanding their gender ambiguity and hermaphroditic inclinations in peaceful periods, nations tend to become overwhelmingly male during war. That is to say: When they are attacked, they are vulnerable

women whose sexual honour is under threat; when they retaliate or attack others, they appear as male. Thus, when Bush Jr. talked about meeting violence with calm justice (as he did on 20 September, two weeks before the attacks on Afghanistan began), he drew on a set of symbols which are rarely used during war: He spoke of the USA as the cultured (and passive) country opposing the natural (and active) terrorists. This speech was nonetheless only a brief and surprising intermezzo of calmness engulfed by aggressive talk of crusades, infinite justice and aggressive war on terrorism.

The mutual accusations and propaganda speeches of the USA and Osama/Taliban before and during the American campaign in Afghanistan are highly instructive of the gender identity of a nation at war. Both accused each other of being cowards, not being real men. The Taliban, notably, taunted Americans by suggesting that they were womanlike and afraid of death. A Taliban officer said, just before the onset of the rain of bombs, that “Americans love Pepsi-Cola. We love death.”

In his first, and most famous, interview with the independent Al-Jazeera TV channel, recorded shortly after the 11 September attacks, Osama bin Laden said: “From our brothers who fought holy war in Somalia, I have heard how surprisingly weak, vulnerable and cowardlike American soldiers are. After only eight of them were killed, they packed their bags in the darkness of the night and fled without looking back”.¹

Bush Jr., for his part, said (10 October): The USA “is strong and determined and generous”. A few days earlier, he had accused the terrorists of seeking (female) passivity: “Initially the terrorists may burrow deeper into caves and other entrenched hiding places” (7 October), and in the same speech, he spoke of the US campaign as one marked by “determination, and will, and purpose”.

In Bush's speeches before and during



"Gender Upholding Nationalism".

Illustration fra Anne McClintock: Imperial leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. New York, Routledge, 1995.

the attack on Afghanistan, the term “aggressive” crops up regularly. Although this is usually a word with negative connotations, its meaning changes during war: “All law enforcement and intelligence agencies are working aggressively around America” (Bush 7 October). “We are aggressively pursuing the agents of terror around the world, and we are aggressively strengthening our protections here at home” (10 October). Soldier qualities such as endurance and courage are also invoked: “We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail” (21 September).

On 21 September, Bush also made a detour to the essentially domestic imagery of peaceful nationhood, insisting that business should go on as usual in spite of the state of emergency: “Americans are asking: What is expected of us? I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children. I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat.” However, he added, not casting any doubt about the gender of a nation at war: “Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution.”

Osama said, around the same time: “If a target of attack should appear to Muslims thanks to God’s grace, then it must be every single American man. He is our enemy, whether he fights directly against us or just pays his taxes.” Now, Osama bin Laden and the Taliban are poor models of nation-building. Their project is not nationalist, but blends politics and religion in ways that makes it difficult to grasp their objectives from a territorial, nation-centred point of view. In the quoted interview (all Osama quotations in this section are taken from it) and elsewhere, Osama bin Laden has repeatedly accused the USA of *arrogance*, and his plea for justice does not seem to amount to, say, an end to imperialist exploitation or replacing pro-Western lackey regimes with Islamist governments. Rather, he demands respect and recognition for his

brand of Muslim “holy warriors” *as equal men*:

“Take a chicken. If an armed person penetrates a chicken’s home with the intention to harm her, the chicken will inevitably resist. (...) the Palestinians, once famous for their laboriousness and their agriculture and citrus fruits and production of soap, have now become a people of refugees and slaves to the colonizing Jews, who now decide where they may go.”

Osama also explains that:

“... by the grace of God I have joined forces with a great number of my brothers in the International Islamic Front to take on the struggle against the Jews and the crusaders. In my view, many of these brothers are moving in the right direction ...”

In this imagined community, there is no place for women or – presumably – male homosexuals. The absence of the domestic sphere and gender relations from Osama/Taliban public statements is puzzling. (When asked, a Taliban spokesman once explained the absence of women from official positions, by saying, “how can you trust a person who bleeds on her own accord for several days every month?” This is a rare comment on gender relations from the Taliban.) The image created is that of an all-men, all-holy warriors, all-*Jihad* world, although the feminine principle is present, as something abhorrent, in the description of the symbolically castrated Palestinians and the humiliated Arabs who have to witness the presence of American fighter planes in the land of the Prophet.

To sum up, the nation becomes emphatically masculine in situations of violent inter-group competition, with a feminine dimension as a back-drop and the symbolic violation of “our women” as a justification for violence.

NATIONHOOD AND ENDOGAMY

The previous comments concern the masculine/feminine dimension of nationhood in conflictual international relationships. I now turn to another aspect of gender symbolism in nationalism, namely that pertaining to procreation and the (symbolic and biological) reproduction of the nation. It is assumed that a role of women consists in reproducing the nation both biologically and culturally, and that their sexual activities are monitored by men. Many nations are based on ethnicity (i.e. imputed kinship) in the sense that biological impurities are seen as tantamount to contamination of the nation. In the USA, unlike in the Caribbean and elsewhere, the “one drop principle” still regulates race relations: if you have three white grandparents and one black grandparent, you are considered black. Intercaste marriages are problematic in India for similar reasons of contamination. I mention this because endogamy does, of course, not apply only at the international level. What chiefly concerns us here, however, are the ways in which sexual violence is used to symbolise national enmities; and, by extension, the relationship between (symbolic and real) endogamy and exogamy in recruitment and reproduction.

Along with the more obvious literal slaughter of enemy soldiers, rape is the ultimate act of war and perhaps its most potent metaphor, as the recent Balkan wars have reminded us. A bestseller in the USA during the Gulf War was entitled *The Rape of Kuwait*. In a study of pre-revolutionary Iran, Gustav Thaiss (1978) noted that the public metaphors used by Iranian revolutionaries were strongly sexual and gendered, with “Uncle Sam” featuring as the great rapist. The revival of an Islamic way of life, of the Muslim family, and (as a consequence) the toppling of the Shah regime, were thus seen as a necessary reaction to the massive rape inflicted on Iranian society by the West. Similarly, the protection of the virtue of one’s metaphoric sisters is the ultimate

patriotic act by men. Characteristically, neo-Nazi leaflets often describe how black men (naturalised by referring to their proverbially uncontrollable sexual desires and large penises) violate the essentially innocent blonde and blue-eyed daughters of the nation, calling for immediate retaliation by men of a patriotic bent. The opposite type of relationship – white men and black women – is never mentioned in this material. In nationalist imagery as elsewhere, the golden rule seems to be that sperm is cheap while eggs are expensive.

In this context, the nation appears as a unit of procreation and perceived threats from the outside as sexual threats to the virtue of the nation as woman. “American imperialism” and “westernisation” often get this part, as dirty, immoral and insistent seducers or rapists penetrating the inner sanctum of domestic bliss through advertising, television and so on. Cultural nationalism is a typical counterreaction.

A more literal case from my own country is this: During the German occupation of Norway from 1940 to 1945, many Norwegian girls had affairs with German soldiers. Some of them had children with them. These children, who in most cases grew up in Norway without knowing their fathers, have suffered unspeakable humiliation and stigmatisation. Some were put into asylums for no apparent reason; others were by default considered mentally retarded and placed in special classes at school; some actually fled the country in order to escape the inevitable stigma. A leading psychiatrist in post-war Norway even stated that the girls who had affairs with Germans were generally below average concerning intelligence. The denigrating term *tyskertøs* (“German’s tart”) is still commonly used. As late as 2001, the plight of the “war children” was taken up by several media (including the BBC), and it was suggested that they might receive some form of compensation from the State. At the time of writing, no decision has been reached, and

in any case any compensation would be too late to save their lives, since they are approaching retirement age. This example could serve as a reminder of the strong passions aroused by the heady mix of foreign (potential enemy) powers, sex and procreation involving native women.² The virtue of protecting one's own country against foreign powers is literally embodied in attempts at "protecting" women of one's own nation against foreign seducers.

A very different view of nationhood is prevalent in some parts of the world, perhaps especially in the Americas. According to this ontology of the nation, natives can be created through immigration and assimilation. Eating local food as a means to become a kinsperson is often associated with certain Papuan peoples, but this is also seen as a significant act of inclusion in a country such as Argentina (Archetti 1999). This model of nationhood, in other words, is exogamous: Foreigners do not pose a threat so long as they can be domesticated; indeed, they bring vitality into the nation. In the USA, the term "naturalisation" is used about changes in citizenship in the USA, but not in Europe. Although the term may exist juridically, hardly anybody speaks of "naturalised" Danes, Germans or Brits. To put it simplistically, it may seem as if the "New World" nationalisms which take immigration past or present as a necessity for the nation's vitality, see the perils of inbreeding as a greater problem than the contamination of domestic genetic capital.

In an increasing number of countries ("New World" or otherwise), mixing or hybridisation is widely seen as an expression of creativity and sexual energy. This is clearly the case in Blair's multiculturalist "Cool Britannia", and in postcolonial, polyethnic Trinidad & Tobago, the quintessential sexy woman is a "red woman", that is a girl of mixed African-European origins. White girls even get perms to look more like "red" girls. This aesthetic represents the

opposite of the "one drop" principle. On the other hand, the most marginal character in the national cast of Trinidad & Tobago is without doubt the *dougl*, a person of mixed African-Indian heritage. In other words, not all kinds of openness, mixing or exogamy are encouraged even here.

The general issue here concerns degrees and forms of endogamy and exogamy at the national level: Which forms of genetic mixing with outsiders are encouraged, and how do such values feed into the overarching ideology of abstract nationhood? An additional question concerns possible gender differences.

MAKING THE WORLD LESS AMBIGUOUS

The bellicose language recently employed by the Bushes and the bin Ladens of the world portray the current conflict as one between good and evil, between hero and coward, between freedom and terror (or between virtue and decadence), between perpetrator and victim. As Bush himself put it: "In this conflict, there is no neutral ground" (7 October) and, most infamously: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (21 September).

In this binary world of black and white, all shades of grey are suspect. Homosexuality thus poses an obvious threat in this cosmological scheme of things. Among all the subversive jokes that have circulated on the net since 11 September, one is particularly memorable: It is a manipulated photo portraying bin Laden and Bush Jr. in a homosexual act. Just as the nation is imagined as bounded, sovereign and inherently limited, there is an analogous drive to make gender boundaries and sexual practices clear and unambiguous. Unproductive sexuality, notably homosexual practices, cannot be seen as nation-building in any way: They fail to reproduce the metaphorical foundation for the nation (the family, with its complementary roles) and even

more obviously, they fail to reproduce the nation biologically.

A FEW GENERAL REMARKS ON IDENTITY

In this brief and programmatic paper, there are numerous issues I have not dealt with at all, since the focus has been on the substantial connections between gender and nationhood, that is the various ways in which nations are gendered. The most obvious omission is probably the relationship between theories of nationhood/ethnicity and theories of gender. There are many parallels between majority/minority relations and gender relations, to do with symbolic power, muting and so on. Allow me therefore to end with some general remarks on the double movement of inclusion and exclusion inherent in all processes of identification. Given that nations are relational (just like gender, and minority/majority relations, and class), there are some formal features shared by these and similar identity formations.

There is a tension between analogue and digital aspects of identity: The analogue refers to a continuum with no sharp boundaries and large fuzzy areas; the digital to the either-or aspect. As every student of ethnicity and nationalism knows, these identities can be seen as attempts to transform a world of many small differences and gradual transitions into a world of few, large differences and sharp boundaries. In Marxist theory of class, large groups in contemporary society are ambiguous, including most public servants (neither bourgeois, petty bourgeois nor working class). From my youth, I remember a heated argument in a Norwegian Marxist party about the class membership of nurses – whether they were bona fide workers or not. Concerning theories of gender, homosexuals, “mannish” women such as Mrs. Thatcher, and many other groups are ambiguous. Just as the “hybrids” and “creoles” in theories of ethnicity tend to be glorified, femi-

nist theory tends to encourage an analogue view of gender – and in both cases, it must be said, with a limited success outside of academia. Unlike the theories of class, which were fashionable a short generation ago, current theories of group identity, in so far as they have a normative element, tend to nudge the social world towards a less rigid, less bounded state than what is commonly assumed.

In gender theory as well as theories of nationhood, there is also a tension between horizontal and hierarchical aspects of relationship. In one sense, nations are related to each other horizontally; that is in essence what the principle of sovereignty amounts to. In another sense, everyone knows that there are enormous power discrepancies between countries. Gender relations are usually construed as hierarchical by feminist scholars, but they can also be viewed as horizontal in two ways: As complementary (that would be the view of “difference feminists”, whose thinking is reminiscent of “difference multiculturalism”) or as symmetrical (anything a man can do, a woman can do at least as well). In popular discourse, gender relations are almost everywhere seen as chiefly complementary and hierarchical. Similarities with majority/minority relationships are many and obvious, but one important difference is that many dominant majorities have exterminated minorities physically – it would be difficult to envision a male-dominated society wishing to do so to women, although it could be argued that the Taliban, depriving women of their personhood, come close.

“The Clasp of Imperial Trade”.

Illustration fra Anne McClintock: Imperial leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. New York, Routledge, 1995.



Finally, both gender and national/ethnic identity has a personal dimension and a political one. It is sometimes said about politicized religion such as Indian *hindutva* or political Islam that they take the religiosity out of religion. In this, it is implied that the essence of religion lies in its capacity to generate deep personal experiences, which are interfered with and ultimately destroyed when religion becomes politicized. Similarly, both nationhood and gender identity clearly have an important existential, emotional dimension which serves to define the bearer as a person. Both kinds of identity are also politicized, like virtually any identity these days. Gayatri Spivak's controversial notion of "strategic essentialism" (pretend that you believe in bounded groups for political reasons, Spivak 1988) can be invoked by both feminists and ethnic activists. Although it is commonly assumed that gender identity is primarily personal while national identity is primarily political, these two dimensions – the instrumental and the symbolic – merge in practice.

Ambivalence and fundamentalism; openness and closure; analogue gradients and digital contrasts; equality and hierarchy; symbolic meaning and political power – these and other binaries can be identified as significant in almost any process of identification. What I have endeavoured to show in this sketchy contribution, is that any account of nationalism must look for other modes of identification with which the national identity is articulated, and that gender is the most obvious one. Unlike what some of the "culture and personality" theorists of the interwar years may have believed (such as Mead 1935), I do not think a change in gender relations would be sufficient to change the form and content of a national identity, but until proven wrong, there is good reason to believe that it would help.

NOTER

1. This quotation, and the many that follow, from bin Laden and Bush were reproduced during September–October 2001 in many media. All of them can be consulted in Norwegian in *Morgenbladet's* special issue on 11 September (*Morgenbladet* 2001). All are easily available from a variety of sites and in assorted languages on the World Wide Web as well.
2. Any sex involving Norwegian men and German women would presumably be treated in a more relaxed way. See Warring (1994) for a Danish perspective on the same issues.

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SUMMARY

Although nationalism has been extensively theorised in the last decades, it is rarely seen in relation to gender. The article addresses this shortcoming and identifies a number of clearly gendered aspects of nationalism. At the level of symbolic imagery, nations have a male (largely active) and a female (largely passive) pole, and family metaphors incorporating a gendered division of labour are common. Gender symbolism is particularly poignant in the context of war and statements from Bush and Osama bin Laden after 11 September are applied to show how metaphoric sexual violation and masculine retribution serve to justify war.

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