

**Zeitschrift:** Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie = Revue suisse de sociologie  
= Swiss journal of sociology

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Soziologie

**Band:** 26 (2000)

**Heft:** 3

  

**Artikel:** Narratives of national identity : sexuality, race, and the Swiss "dream of order"

**Autor:** Mottier, Véronique

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-814804>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 11.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## NARRATIVES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: SEXUALITY, RACE, AND THE SWISS “DREAM OF ORDER”<sup>1</sup>

*Véronique Mottier*  
University of Cambridge, UK

*Choose your spouse from a physically and  
morally healthy, mentally superior family!  
You owe this to your offspring and to the  
Nation.*

1939 information booklet to Swiss youth;  
Schmid, 1939, 44<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Introduction<sup>3</sup>

The modern Swiss federal state was founded a little over 150 years ago. Recent commemorations of this anniversary have given rise to political narratives celebrating the emergence of feelings of national unity and common national identity, despite the linguistic and religious diversity that characterises the Swiss nation.<sup>4</sup> Within these narratives, the political institutions of direct democracy and federalism are emphasised as mechanisms of national integration

1 Apollinaire Mogombaye, Max Bergman and, especially, Brigitte Schwab helped with collecting bibliographical and archive material used in the second part of this article. I am grateful to the Chalumeau Foundation for funding this data collection.

2 Also quoted in Kreis (1992, 184); my translation.

3 Earlier versions of this article were presented to the workshop on “The political uses of narrative”, ECPR Annual Joint Sessions, Mannheim, 26–31 March 1999; the Congrès de la Société Suisse de Sociologie, Fribourg, 30 September 1999; a Staff Seminar at the Department of Political Science, University of Geneva, 17 May 1999; Juliet Mitchell’s Gender Studies Seminar, University of Cambridge, 2 March 2000; to the Gendering Ethics Conference, University of Leeds, 23–25 June 2000 and published as a working paper titled “Sexuality and the Making of the Nation: Eugenics and the Swiss ‘Gardening State’”, *Travaux et Communications* 6, Department of Political Science: University of Geneva. In addition to participants in these workshops, I wish to thank Thanh-Huyen Ballmer-Cao, Max Bergman, Edouard Bizumuremyi, Faustin Kagame, Maya Jegen, Jean Kellerhals, Hanspeter Kriesi, Barbara Lucas, William Ossipow, Lorena Parini, Brigitte Schwab, Lea Sgier, Jean Widmer, Maciej Zaremba and Erwin Zimmermann for comments and helpful advice, and Kim Perren and Ben Musgrave for linguistic improvements. Special thanks to Joane Nagel, whose inspirational work triggered my interest in the connections between sexuality and national identity.

4 Switzerland has four national languages, and two main religions.

which allow for the expression of cultural “difference”. In this article, I propose an alternative account of the construction of Swiss national identity. While not denying the importance of political institutions for the construction of Swiss national identity, I argue that the narrative focus on the institutionalised expression of “difference” leaves aside other important historical discourses and practices, which have been concerned not with respect for diversity, but with the (relative) eradication of some “differences”: those deemed “degenerate” or “un-Swiss”. From this angle, the article focuses on discursive practices concerned with eugenics and the regulation of sexuality, and explores the intersections between the construction of national identity and narratives of sexuality, race, and gender in pre-War Switzerland. It will be argued that these narratives are politically important, not only as symbolic constructions of Swiss nationhood but also as the foundation of social policies which aimed to eliminate the “weeds” from the Swiss garden. The first section of the article explores the contributions of discourse theory to the study of mechanisms of identity construction, while the second part examines the sexual basis of national identity narratives.

## 2. Discourse Theory and Identity Narratives

This article conceptualises national identity, sexuality, gender and race from a discourse analytic perspective. In other words, I assume these concepts to be social constructions whose social and political meanings are contextually bound. Consequently, the nation<sup>5</sup> is not seen as a “given” natural entity but as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) which is constructed through “narration” (Bhabha, 1990), “foundational fictions” (Sommer, 1990) and “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm, 1983).<sup>6</sup> The constructed nature of the national community normally remains unrecognised by its members, who tend to understand their ties to the nation as “natural” (Anderson, 1991, 143). Other

---

5 While recognising the existence of nations without states (see Guibernau, 1999), the concepts of nations or nation-states are used as loose synonyms in this article, and taken to refer to “a political apparatus, recognised to have sovereign rights within the borders of a demarcated territorial area, able to back its claims to sovereignty by control of military power, many of whose citizens have positive feelings of commitment to its national identity” (Giddens, 1989, 303). The concept of state refers to those situations “where there is a political apparatus (governmental institutions, such as a court, parliament or congress, plus civil-service officials), ruling over a given territory, whose authority is backed by a legal system and by the capacity to use force to implement its policies” (Giddens, 1989, 301).

6 Renan’s oft quoted 1882 lecture “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” already conceptualised the nation as an act of political will rather than a “natural” community defined by characteristics such as language or geography (Renan, 1990; see also Gellner, 1987).

identity markers such as gender, race, or sexuality are similarly naturalised in everyday routine interactions.<sup>7</sup> This naturalisation is a central mechanism of the discursive construction of identity, concealing the discursive practices which produce meanings around national identity, sexuality, gender or race (Hall, 1980).

Nations are modern entities whose emergence is the result of particular historical conditions in Europe, as authors such as Gellner (1983), Anderson (1983), Giddens (1985), Hobsbawm (1990) and Smith (1991) argue in different ways. Anderson, for example, highlights the importance of technological innovations such as print capitalism for the development of the modern nation-state, whereas Giddens emphasises the importance of capitalism, industrialism, surveillance and military power. Their explanations contrast with the primordialist accounts promoted by Geertz (1963) or Shils (1957) who view nations as natural, universal entities modelled on kinship relations (see Yuval-Davis, 1997, 1). According to the former perspectives, the constitution of national identity is not a premodern phenomenon, but closely bound up with modernity.<sup>8</sup> However, within the modern nation, premodern ethnic features frequently endure (Smith, 1986). This leads Smith (1995) to caution against an overemphasis on the invented nature of traditions. "Modern" nations are deeply rooted in premodern ethnic identities and in attributes such as language, religion, custom or institutions (Smith, 1991, 69).

This reminder of the persistence of premodern "cultural stuff" within modern national identity is important. However, ethnic characteristics are in turn not simply "natural" or "given". As Smith (1991, 23) puts it, "the *ethnie* is anything but primordial". Primordiality, as Calhoun similarly points out, "may be constructed and relatively new without losing its force or significance" (Calhoun, 1997, 8). Ethnic attributes are articulated and mobilised politically within current discourses of identity. Language and linguistic diversity, for example, are discursively constructed as crucial elements of national identity in the Swiss multilingual context, while religious differences – the cause of civil war in past Swiss history – have lost their importance as identity markers (see Widmer, forthcoming). In addition, ethnic attributes are not necessarily always "premodern". The preparatory events surrounding the 1994 Rwanda

---

7 I also assume gender, race and sexuality to be social constructions rather than natural, given categories. A detailed discussion of this point is beyond the aims of this article (but see Guillaumin (1995) on race and gender, and Weeks (1986) on sexuality, for "classic" elaborations).

8 Understood not as a philosophical concept but rather in the sociological sense of "modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less world-wide in their influence" (Giddens, 1990, 1).



genocide are a dramatic illustration of this argument. Contrary to most other ethnic groups on the African continent, the Rwandan Tutsis and Hutus have historically shared the same language, religion, customs and territory. Their ethnic categorisation is above all a modern “invention”, imposed on them for political reasons by Belgian colonisers. This ethnic classification was – again for political reasons – exploited and exacerbated by the Hutu Power extremists in planned preparation for the genocide against both Tutsis and Hutu moderates. To interpret the genocide in terms of premodern ethnic conflict, as much of the Western press and at least some academics so routinely have, is neither helpful nor accurate. The politicisation of ethnic identities in Rwanda, efficiently assisted by modern media technologies at the time of the genocide (see Kagamé, 1994; Boomkens, 1994; Gourevitch, 1999), has been a fundamentally modern enterprise.<sup>9</sup>

My adoption of a discursive approach to identity construction does not imply that only symbolic constructions are deemed relevant. Identities – ethnic, national or other – are produced, reproduced and transformed through institutional practices (including state policies) and everyday interactions. The term *discourse* will therefore be used not in the narrow sense of “texts” but rather in its Foucauldian sense, as “systems of meaning, including all types of social and political practice, as well as institutions and organisations” (Howarth, 1995). However, as discourse theory emphasises, identity is not only constructed in the context of relations of meaning but also within institutionalised relations of power. Discourses around national identity, sexuality, gender or race are not autonomous systems but operate in the context of the institutional supports and practices that they rely upon (Mottier, 1998a). In contrast to Derridien deconstruction, Foucauldian discourse analysis does not aim to reveal how specific discursive constructions result from the mere play of free-floating signifiers. Instead, it seeks to explore how specific discourses reproduce or transform relations of power as well as relations of meaning. Consequently, I use the term “discourses” to refer to the “macro-level” of structural *orders of discourse* (Foucault, 1971): broad historical systems of meaning which are relatively stable over considerable periods of time (as opposed to the “micro-level” of communicative interactions, focused on by authors such as Van Dijk (1993) or Potter and Wetherell (1987)).<sup>10</sup>

9 I wish to thank Edouard Bizumuremyi and Faustin Kagamé, to whose eyewitness accounts and analyses of the 1994 genocide I am indebted.

10 In other words, the concept of discourse replaces the older concept of ideology in this article. The concept of ideology is, in my view, problematic, since it stresses the uncovering of the “true meanings” which are “hidden” underneath ideological representations. In contrast, the concept of discourse usefully emphasises that *all* meanings are historically and socially constructed.

Discourses are reproduced (as well as transformed) by specific individual and collective *narratives*. Narratives are variously defined as "a story with a beginning, middle and end that reveals someone's experiences" (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1998); "an original state of affairs, an action, or an event, and the consequent state of events" (Czarniawska, 1998); "any form of communication" (Barthes, 1974); or "the main mode of human knowledge" (Bruner, 1986). Whereas some uses of the term narrative, such as Barthes's or Bruner's, suggest no difference between narrative and discourse, I will consider narratives in the more limited sense of *stories*. As such, narratives are possible forms of discourse, while discourses include (but are not reduced to) narratives. Specific narratives of the nation are construed as important component parts of broader discourses of national identity. Historical accounts, myths and metaphors are examples of different narrative forms that contribute to discourses of national identity.

Much narrative analysis is concerned with the formal properties of narratives or "stories", such as "act, scene, agent, agency and purpose" (Burke, 1945); "building the 'and, and, and' connections between action and events" (Czarniawska, 1998); or "temporal sequence" (Propp, 1928; Labov and Waletzky, 1967). However, following Plummer (1995, 19), my concern here is not with the structural aspects of narratives, but with their social and political role.

The narrative conceptualisation of identity emphasises the importance of stories and storytelling for processes of identity construction. Giddens (1991), for example, argues that identity is constituted through the continuous formulation and re-formulation of *narratives of the self*: the stories whereby self-identity is reflexively understood by the individual concerned as well as by others. While Giddens's therapy-influenced model of self-identity refers to processes of personal identity construction, a similar argument applies to collective identities. Collective identities are continuously reconstituted in both individual and collective narratives. Borrowing both from Austin's speech act theory and Goffman's theatrical model of identity, I want to emphasise the *performative* nature of collective identity narratives (Austin, 1962; Goffman, 1959). Narratives do not simply express a pre-given national identity but function as *performatives*: *speech acts* which bring into being that which they name. Narratives both enact and perform the nation.<sup>11</sup> Historical accounts, myths of origin (which may or may not be based on historical "fact") or policy texts can all be read as examples of narrative enactment and performance of national identity.

11 The importance of *reiteration* in this process of narrative performance of identity has been stressed by authors such as Butler (1993, 20; see also Lloyd, 1998). Although the concept of reiteration tends to overemphasise repetition and reproduction of meanings, it is nevertheless useful in pointing out that it is the repetitive nature of the speech acts which allows for the narrative performance of the nation over time.

Individual and collective identities are specific forms of narrative which constitute commonalities and differences between self and others (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 43). As Plummer (1995, 19) puts it, “stories mark out identities; identities mark out differences; differences define ‘the other’; and ‘the other’ helps structure the moral life of culture, group, and individual”. National identities are narratives which are concerned with the drawing of boundaries between members of the nation and non-members, between “us” and “them”. Such boundaries are crucially bound up with political processes. As Mouffe observes: “Politics is *about* the constitution of the political community, not something that takes place within it” (1993, 81; my emphasis).<sup>12</sup> Mechanisms of *othering*, of constructing specific groups of people *as* other, as fundamentally “different”, are politically important aspects of identity narratives. At times of war, mechanisms of *othering* of the enemy become particularly intense, often taking the form of presenting the other as non-human or subhuman. In caricatures as well as political discourse, the enemy is frequently represented through animal imagery. Taken to extreme, the Jews of Nazi discourse are “vermin” to be exterminated; Tutsis at the time of the Rwandan genocide become “cockroaches”.

War has played a central role in the making of the modern nation (Tilly, 1975; Giddens, 1985; Smith, 1991). It has been particularly important to the construction of Swiss national identity. Indeed, the Swiss nation is founded on the struggle against successive forms of foreign domination. The liberation from foreign oppressors is correspondingly central to Swiss founding myths such as the Wilhelm Tell legend. Switzerland was the only country in Europe to recently organise celebrations to commemorate the start of the mobilisation of its army during the Second World War, despite having remained uninvolved in the conflict (Kriesi, 1995, 16). The combination of the centrality of war to the making of the Swiss nation and Switzerland’s linguistic and religious diversity results in a national identity that is founded on (real or perceived) external threats, rather than on (real or “invented”) common cultural heritage. Current discursive mechanisms of *othering* consequently centre in particular on categories of “foreigners” such as immigrant workers (see Windisch, 1978) or asylum seekers (see Parini, 1997). These mechanisms condition foreign and trade policy as well as immigration policy (see Sciarini, Hug and Dupont, 1997). Swiss national identity has consequently been described as *negative*, emerging through “difference” and in particular through the demarcation of external enemies (Kriesi, 1995, 16). However, as discourse theory teaches us, identity is *always* constituted relationally, through demarcation with what it is not (Saussure, 1916). In other words, from a discourse-analytical perspective, *any*

---

12 Also quoted in Yuval-Davis (1997, 73).

identity is negative. To speak of *negative identity* as exclusively Swiss is therefore problematic. It is not negativity but rather the specific mechanisms of *othering*, and the attendant political processes of inclusion and exclusion from the national community which are based on these mechanisms, that characterise Swiss national identity.

### 3. Boundaries and the National Order

As Zygmunt Bauman argues in his influential texts *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) and *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), the modern nation-state has emerged through a "quest for order": its aim was to create an orderly society through the twin reigns of Science and Reason. Hobbes's discovery that order was not natural led to the idea that the social and political order needs to be constructed through the design, engineering and management of existence, combined with the mastery and subordination of nature (Bauman, 1991, 7). Under conditions of modernity, old certainties and identities disappeared in the context of rapid social and political change. As a consequence, the concern with boundary-drawing and boundary-maintenance as mechanisms for reducing ambivalence and constructing the social and political order became intense. "Whatever remained of old boundaries needed desperate defence", Bauman (1991, 40) writes, "and new boundaries had to be built around new identities".

Derrida and his followers, in particular, have conceptualised the identity boundaries through which order is constructed in terms of binary categorisations such as us/them, inside/outside, man/woman, white/black, or Carl Schmitt's friends/enemies. The negative (second) term of the binary opposition is seen to give a content to its positive half, as its "constitutive outside", to borrow Derrida's terminology (see also Mouffe, 1993, 141). However, I would argue that processes of identity formation are not neatly binary in nature. Identity narratives are embedded in complex gendered and de-gendered hierarchies of power (Carver, 1998). The processes of inclusion/exclusion of members and non-members which construct the order of the nation partly overlap with and crosscut other discursive mechanisms such as classification and hierarchisation. As Nagel (1998b, 88) states, the nation "not only is built on the back of ethnicity, it also represents a particular gendered, sexualised vision of social and political reality".

Political science narratives of Swiss national identity tend to focus on specific mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion: those concerned with the boundaries of the national community which are coterminous with the nation's borders. These narratives include analyses of Swiss foreign policies, naturalisation

procedures, asylum policies, etc. Such studies analyse the regulation and policing of access to national borders and related citizenship rights. However, identity boundaries do not coincide with borders. As Nagel (1998b) points out, within national borders are ethnic boundaries, gender boundaries, and sexual boundaries. Within the national territory we find categorisations and hierarchisations that produce gendered, racialised and sexualised national identities. The racial and ethnic nature of the boundaries of the nation has been extensively discussed in the literature on national identity. In contrast, the gendered basis of national identity has, to date, been little researched. The same is true for the sexual boundaries of the nation.

As a result of these mobile and permeable *crisscrossing boundaries* (Nagel, 1998b, 85) the construction of order is a never-ending process. The mechanisms of classification, inclusion and exclusion that construct identity can never fully eliminate *ambivalence*, understood as “the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category” (Bauman, 1991, 1). Discursive orderings and permanence of identity are threatened by “polysemy, cognitive dissonance, polyvalent definitions, contingency; the overlapping meanings in the world of tidy classifications and filing cabinets” (Bauman, 1991, 9).<sup>13</sup> Ambivalence is the unintended consequence of classification efforts and calls for yet more classification. Modernity’s “bitter and intense war against ambivalence” is therefore “both self-destructive and self-propelling” (Bauman, 1991, 3). It is ultimately doomed to fail. As Bauman (1991, 4) writes: “Among the multitude of impossible tasks that modernity set itself and that made modernity into what it is, the task of order (more precisely and most importantly, of order as a task) stands out – as the least possible among the impossible and the least disposable among the indispensable.”<sup>14</sup>

Certain identities have proved particularly resistant to modernity’s classification efforts. In this context, Bauman’s *Modernity and the Holocaust* argues that, having no territorial state, the allegiance of Jews to specific national communities was traditionally seen as particularly suspect. Communists during the Cold War were similarly the focus of *othering* mechanisms, because their allegiance to a transnational ideology was thought to take priority over their membership of the national community.<sup>15</sup> For Yuval-Davis (1997, 47), women are consistently subjected to othering processes because of their ambi-

13 See also Foucault (1978, 96).

14 Bauman goes on to argue that the current era, which he diagnoses as “postmodern”, is gradually coming to terms with difference. While I do not share Bauman’s postmodern perspective, adopting instead Giddens’s diagnosis of “today” as late- rather than post- modern, the pre-War period which this article focuses on precedes the necessity of such conceptual distinctions.

15 In the Swiss context, see Kriesi (1995, 17); Kreis (1993).



valent position in the nation; they are both “subjects” who symbolise the honour and unity of the community, and “objects” who are often excluded from the political community. Finally, Nagel (1998a; 1998b) considers feminism, unruly female sexuality and homosexuality as particular “cracks” in the order of the nation, which in her view is centrally founded on male heterosexuality.

I now move on to focus on these discursive mechanisms of *boundary-drawing*, *boundary-maintenance*, *ordering* and *othering* within specific narratives that enact and perform Swiss national identity.

#### 4. Sexuality and the making of the nation

Yuval-Davis (1997, 21 ff.) distinguishes three major dimensions in the making of the nation: constructions based on origin; those based on culture; and those based on citizenship. Borrowing and reformulating Yuval-Davis’s distinctions, I propose to delineate three major types of narratives of national identity: *Kulturnation narratives* which construct language, religion, traditions or customs as the essential “stuff” of the nation; *Staatnation narratives* which privilege political institutions, citizenship rights and access to State territory; and *Volksnation narratives* which centre on notions of the origin of the people or race.

While Swiss political science narratives routinely designate political institutions as the main basis of national identity in Switzerland, all three dimensions have, in fact, contributed to the making of the Swiss nation. With regard to *Kulturnation narratives*, the formation of the federal state in the late nineteenth century<sup>16</sup> at the end of a civil war over religious differences was concomitant with the construction of patriotic feelings, through the invention and adaptation of rituals and traditions in which festivals, displays of flags and folksongs played a key role (Hobsbawm, 1992, 6). Somewhat paradoxically, the comparative lateness of the emergence of such constructions in the Swiss context favoured the “invention” of a common culture, despite the country’s linguistic diversity. “The appearance of Swiss nationalism on the eve of the communications revolution of the twentieth century”, as Anderson explains, “made it possible and practical to ‘represent’ the imagined community in ways that did not require linguistic uniformity” (Anderson, 1991, 139).

On the level of *Staatnation narratives*, the “holy trinity” of direct democracy, federalism, and “armed neutrality” are seen as the “founding institutions” of Swiss national identity (for example, Kriesi, 1995; Sciarini, Hug and Dupont,

---

16 The modern Swiss federal state was founded in 1848.

1997). Through the combination of direct democracy and federalism, the Swiss model institutionalises the expression of particular interests. In Hegelian terms, the Swiss political institutions incarnate political representations that are far removed from the Rousseauian quest for a *volonté générale*. The legitimacy of the Swiss political system therefore rests upon what I have termed elsewhere an *ethos of particularity* rather than an ethos of universality (Mottier, 1995). This institutionalised expression of difference is seen as the fundamental basis of the unity of the Swiss nation, while armed neutrality is crucial (at least symbolically) in regulating relations with “others” beyond the national borders.<sup>17</sup>

*Kulturation* and *Staatnation* narratives structure the national order by drawing gendered, sexualised and racialised identity boundaries. Taking gender as an example, the cultural constructions of nationhood involve definitions of “manhood” and “womanhood” (Yuval-Davis, 1997). The chorales, shooting and gymnastic activities that contributed to the cultural “invention” of Swiss national identity were clearly gendered practices, producing gendered bodies (see Klesli, 1995; Lengwiler, 1998; Hettling, 1998). Similarly, in the context of Swiss political institutions, the relation of national subjects to the army is obviously gendered, in that it is men who are soldiers and conduct war (or, alternatively, maintain armed neutrality).

This masculinisation of war is in turn reflected within the cultural narratives of the nation. There is no Boadicea or Jeanne d’Arc in Swiss mythology. The heroic warriors who defend Switzerland against foreign (usually Austrian or French) enemies are men such as Wilhelm Tell or Stauffacher. Women star in supporting roles, as part of the “womenandchildren” (Enloe, 1990) who the men are presumably defending. Where women adopt a more active role in the military narratives, their script follows what could be termed a “nurturer model” of military action – for example, the story of “Mother Royaume”. According to the founding myth of the canton of Geneva, still celebrated yearly, Mother Royaume had left some vegetable soup simmering on the fireplace overnight (illustrating her traditionally female, nurturing role). When the Savoy Army launched a surprise attack she raised the alarm by pouring boiling soup over the attackers from the city walls, thereby saving the independence of the then Republic of Geneva, though in the role of the “accidental hero” rather than the “heroic warrior”.

---

17 The Swiss army and military events are correspondingly central to the historical accounts that narrate the Swiss nation, including fairly recent versions. To take an example, Grandjean and Jeanrenaud’s *Histoire de la Suisse* (1965), which was widely used in (francophone) primary school history teaching until well into the mid-1980s, structures its narrative around chapter headings such as “Heroic Switzerland” or “Switzerland, A Great Military Power”.



The political institution of direct democracy has been similarly gendered, in that women did not participate in its practice for most of the history of the federal state. Indeed, women were only granted the right to vote at a federal level in 1971. Finally, through the territorialisation of "difference", federalism has "institutionalised out" the legitimacy of those marginalised interests that are not territorially defined, in particular those of women (see also Kriesi, 1995, 67). Puzzlingly, when political scientists emphasise the function of national integration performed by Swiss political institutions, the deeply gendered nature of these founding institutions seems to temporarily escape their attention. Both political narratives and political science narratives of Swiss national identity are thus embedded in gendered and de-gendered hierarchies of power.

Much more could be said, of course, about the *Kulturnation* and *Staatnation* narratives and the gender (and other) boundaries that they construct. However, my aim in the next section is to focus on the *Volksnation* dimension of national identity. While I do not claim that the *Volksnation* narrative has been the most important basis for Swiss national identity, I suggest that it has nevertheless formed a crucial dimension of the construction of the national order. As stated earlier, political science narratives routinely highlight the *Staatnation* aspects only, and consequently stress the institutionalised expression of "difference" as a basis of the Swiss nation. I argue that this exclusive focus on the political foundations of national identity neglects other important discourses and practices associated with the *Volksnation* dimension of the nation. These *discursive practices* have been concerned not with respect for diversity but with the relative eradication of (some) differences. *Staatnation*-centred analyses, as we have seen above, claim that the exclusionary aspects of Swissness centre on the "othering" of foreign people and nations, conflating identity boundaries with national borders. My argument is that the boundaries drawn within *Volksnation* narratives have also structured the order of the nation *within* the national borders, through specific mechanisms of *inclusion* and *exclusion*, *ordering* and *othering*.

*Volksnation* narratives, as explained earlier, are concerned with the origins of the people or the race. Given this concern, sexuality is central to *Volksnation* narratives. Genealogical stories about the "purity" of the race are crucially intertwined with the regulation of sexuality. For example, as Yuval-Davis (1997, 27) reports, the South African apartheid regime outlawed sexual relations and marriage between people from different "races", while the leader of the Israeli extreme right-wing party Kach, Rabbi Kahana, proposed to introduce legislation forbidding sexual relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel. In this way, *Volksnation* narratives bring together two central components of modern identity: national identity and sexuality. National identities are probably

the most important form of collective identity in modernity (Smith, 1991; Calhoun, 1997). Sexual identity, in turn, constitutes a central component of individual identity in modernity (Foucault, 1978). This is not to say that sexuality is a purely individual experience. Sexual identities are not merely the expression of biological promptings but are social and political constructs. As Giddens (1992, 15) puts it: "Somehow ... sexuality functions as a malleable feature of self, a prime connecting point between body, self-identity and social norms". Sexuality connects the individual both to other individuals and to political processes and state policies (see Weeks, 1989; Carver and Mottier, 1998).

Given that female identity has been traditionally tied up with women's reproductive roles as the biological producers of the members of the nation, women's contributions to the biological reproduction of the nation become a particular focus of concern within *Volksnation* narratives. Women and "respectable" female sexuality become the "gate-keepers" of the moral as well as biological boundaries of the national community (Yuval-Davis, 1989, 106; Nagel, 1998b; Amir and Benjamin, 1998).

Yuval-Davis distinguishes three major discourses concerned with the regulation of sexuality that underlie specific *Volksnation* narratives: the "*People as Power*" discourse, which constructs the continuous growth of the population as vital for the nation's interests (whether through immigration, or through the reproductive contributions of the female members of the nation); the *Malthusian* discourse, which is concerned with preventing the implosion of the nation through overpopulation; and the *eugenicist* discourse, which is concerned not with the size but with the "quality" of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 26 ff.).

In the Swiss context, *Volksnation* narratives have mostly taken the form of the latter. Eugenicist discourses were highly influential in Switzerland from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the end of the Second World War, concomitant with the construction of national identity. Eugenics has therefore made an important contribution to the construction of the *Volksnation* dimension of Swiss national identity.

The term "eugenics" was coined by Sir Francis Galton in 1883, to refer to the genetic improvement of the national "stock" on the basis of the scientific study of "all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had" (Galton, 1883, 25). Convinced that both moral and physical flaws were hereditary, Galton advocated social reforms which would encourage procreation by the genetically "superior" members of the nation. Later followers argued for the need to combine Galton's

"positive" eugenics with "negative" eugenics, aimed at limiting the reproduction of the genetically "inferior" (Bajema, 1976). Galton regarded the evolutionary processes described by his cousin Charles Darwin, in particular natural selection and the idea of the survival of the fittest,<sup>18</sup> as too slow and uncertain for modern needs. The complexities of modern scientific and cultural developments, he argued, put particularly high demands on political and other elites, whose intellectual capacities he deemed insufficiently evolved. Galton perceived an urgent need for the management of the consequences of modernity. The dominance of the West's nation-states over others seemed in danger; his theories were formulated in response to this threat. "The feeble nations of the world are necessarily giving way before the nobler varieties of mankind; and even the best of these, so far as we know them, seem unequal to their work" (Galton, 1865, 23). The new science of eugenics should assist governments in implementing social policies which would improve the national "breed". Hostile to the laissez-faire of political liberalism, eugenics advocated active social engineering. The individual had a patriotic duty to contribute to the improvement of the national community through "conscious race-culture", as Galton's student and successor Karl Pearson put it. "Without high average soundness of body and soundness of mind, a nation can neither be built up nor an empire preserved" (Pearson, 1909, 170). The national community was, as the quote above shows, conceptualised in strongly racialised terms.<sup>19</sup> Eugenics was based on narratives of degeneracy and "racial hygiene".

Eugenics was thus from its origins deeply intertwined with social and political aims. It emerged as both a science and a social movement. The term caught on rapidly, and numerous eugenics societies were established in Great Britain as well as in other countries to be followed by the creation of International and World Leagues (see Kühl, 1997). Through such social reform societies, as well as various scientific disciplines such as psychiatry, anthropology, biology and sexology, eugenicist ideas acquired institutional supports.

The new discipline of sexology was a particularly important site of eugenic narratives. Sex emerged as an object of study within the social sciences around the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (Weeks, 1989; Bullough, 1994). Darwinian theory had been the main focus of debate in the social sciences during the preceding decades. Darwin's view of sexual selection as the key to evolution became a major impetus for the development

---

18 Darwin adopted the latter idea from Herbert Spencer in 1868.

19 It is important to point out that the concept of "race" had different connotations from its present meanings. The concept of race was in this historical context often understood primarily in relation to territory as well as "blood" (rather than skin colour). It was usual to speak of the "Mediterranean" or "Nordic" race, for example.

of modern sex research. Through the concept of sexual selection, scientific narratives of sexuality were, from their beginnings, concerned with questions of heredity, degeneracy and race (Bullough, 1994; see also Mottier, 1998b). These preoccupations were articulated in the twin rise of eugenics and the sexology of “perversions”. Eugenics and the medicine of perversions (which replaced previously dominant moral constructions of sexuality) were intertwined through their common focus on “degenerescence” (Foucault, 1978, 118). Flawed heredity produced sexual perverts, which produced degenerescence of future generations and ultimately, of the national race, it was thought. The regulation of sexuality, as the site where the future of the nation’s “stock” is formed, consequently became an important focus of attention. Eugenics and the “invention” of perversions were the central components of the new *technology of sex*, which turned sex not only into a secular (rather than a religious) concern, but into a concern of the state as well (Foucault, 1978, 116).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, eugenics remained mostly a rhetoric with political implications. But the growth of social policies implemented by national states around the turn of the twentieth century provided opportunities for translating the rhetoric into practice. Switzerland was at the forefront on both levels. Swiss scientists made a significant contribution to the international discourse of eugenics, while eugenicist practices and policies were pioneered and implemented in Switzerland, as will be shown below.

Nowadays, eugenics has become associated with the large-scale social experiments of forced sterilisation and “euthanasia” of ‘unfit’ persons by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. In the post-War era, Swiss narratives of eugenics and racial hygiene<sup>20</sup> are routinely seen to reflect German influence. For example, shortly after the end of the War, the Swiss state deprived the psychiatrist Ernst Rüdin of his Swiss citizenship<sup>21</sup> for having damaged the international reputation of Switzerland through his scientific ideas, which were termed “fundamentally foreign” to the Swiss (Weber, 1993, 284). Rüdin had played a central role as a consultant expert in the formulation of the notorious 1934 German Law to Prevent Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, which had been the legal basis for hundreds of thousands of forced sterilisations within Germany. He had also become an enthusiastic member of the NSDAP in 1937. However, the claim that Rüdin’s racial hygiene views were “un-Swiss” is, as Aeschbacher (1998) puts it, “absurd”. Such ideas were scientific orthodoxy in pre-War Switzerland and their respectability was not called into question at the time. This respectability was also recognised internationally, as Rüdin was elected

20 In the Swiss context, the terms racial hygiene and eugenics were used interchangeably, the first concept being the most widely used (see Schwank, 1996).

21 Rüdin had dual nationality, both Swiss and German.

president of the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations in 1934 (Aeschbacher, 1998, 281). It is therefore useful to remember that it was the U.S., Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries<sup>22</sup> who were in fact the pioneers of eugenicist theories and policies – although it is important to emphasise that none of these countries ever went as far as Nazi Germany in their implementation. A crucial difference is that while Swiss, U.S. and Scandinavian policies aimed to “regenerate” the nation through improvement of the “quality” of coming generations, Nazi policies involved the physical elimination of “flawed” individuals from the existing national community as well.

It is thus important to emphasise that Switzerland’s racial hygiene discourses developed prior to and autonomously from Nazi versions of eugenics, as other authors such as Kreis (1992, 177) and Jeanmonod and Heller (2000) have similarly pointed out. The latter, however, in their eagerness to dissociate Swiss practices from Nazi policies, overemphasise the lack of connections between German and Swiss pre-War eugenics. In fact, Swiss practices constituted a source of inspiration for German admirers. Several of Germany’s main eugenicist advocates had been trained in Switzerland.<sup>23</sup> As Weiss (1987, 153) reports, at least some German eugenicists, envious of American, Swiss and Danish policies, seem to have seen in the National Socialists their only hope of translating race hygiene concerns into concrete policies.<sup>24</sup> Several key international conferences on sexology had taken place in Switzerland in the 1920’s and 1930’s, such as the World Population Congress in Geneva in 1927 (which was concerned with the Malthusian theme of overpopulation and attracted many racial hygiene experts), the International Conference for Birth Control in Zürich in 1930, and the Conference of the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations in Zürich in 1934. These and other events encouraged personal links between Swiss and German sexologists. As a result, when German sex reformers who were hostile to Nazi policies began to be persecuted within Germany, the vast majority of those who fled went to Switzerland, either directly, or on their way to other safe havens (Grossman, 1995). As this example illustrates, while eugenics is often associated with extreme right-wing politics, eugenicist concerns were in fact found across the political spectrum

---

22 Great Britain was at the forefront of eugenic ideas and organisations but, contrary to the other three cases, did not implement a sterilization programme (see King and Hansen, 1999).

23 See, for example, the case of case of Robert Ritter who, after his return to Germany, called for legislation on the internment and sterilisation of gypsies. This law was subsequently commended by the Swiss Society for Psychiatry (Aeschbacher, 1998, 301).

24 In this context, it should be noted that Auguste Forel, one of the main Swiss proponents of eugenics and racial hygiene (see below), supported the German doctor Gerhard Boeters in his crusade to grant far-reaching legal powers to doctors to carry out forced sterilisations (Aeschbacher, 1998, 287).



and included socialist and anarchist thinkers. This was also the case in Switzerland.<sup>25</sup> In other words, eugenicist versions of *Volksnation* narratives were articulated from within opposite political projects.

## 5. Narratives of Eugenics, “Homo Alpinus Helveticus” and the “Woman Question”

Eugenicist versions of Swiss *Volksnation* constructions sprang up in various forms and from multiple sites. However, they initially emerged as scientific narratives. My aim in this section is not to discuss all of these narrative forms or sites but to focus on a few examples which illustrate the discursive mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, ordering and othering through which these narratives perform Swiss national identity. As discussed above, the eugenicist regulation of sexuality aimed to improve the quality of the national race. These aims were cast in narratives of degenerescence and racial hygiene. An example is the work of the anthropologist Otto Schlaginhaufen, one of the key proponents of racial hygiene in Switzerland. Schlaginhaufen was the first president of the Julius Klaus Foundation for Heredity Research, Social Anthropology and Racial Hygiene which was founded in Zürich in 1922 (and still exists today). The aims of this Foundation were “the promotion of all scientifically based efforts, whose ultimate goal is the preparation and realisation of practical reforms to improve the white race”, including special efforts “for the benefit of the physically and mentally inferior” (see Schwank, 1996, 469 ff.). Schlaginhaufen’s main scientific concern was the identification of the racial origins of the Swiss population. From 1927 to 1932, his team of researchers measured over 35’000 male army recruits. The results of his study were published only in 1946, as *The Anthropology of the Confederation*. Using complex statistical calculations as well as special technical tools for measuring physical characteristics, they catalogued 7’456 photographs of the young men’s faces. Complex racial categories were created based on differences in bodily characteristics such as hair type (curly, straight, etc.), eye colour, and distance between eyes and nose. The research team carefully crafted an endless series of maps which represented the racial differentiations found within the Swiss territory according to the statistical research results.

---

25 See, for example, Ehrenström (1991) and Jeanmonod and Heller (2000) for analyses of the political debate in the Canton of Vaud around the 1928 cantonal law which provided the first legal basis for sterilisation without consent of “mentally handicapped or feeble-minded” individuals, with the explicit aim of preventing a “flawed offspring”.

Schlaginhaufen's maps both constitute and explore the racial structure of the Swiss nation. Seen as narratives, they tell stories of origin and decay, of racial purity and racial mixing. They narrate the obsessive quest for the pure Swiss race, the "Homo Alpinus Helveticus". The "Homo Alpinus" proved elusive, however. According to Schlaginhaufen's own criteria, only 8,661% of the Swiss were of "pure race", and only 1,41% of these were part of the Alpine race. The great majority were categorised as the products of mixing between six races ("Alpine", "Nordic", "Eastern-European", "Dinaric", "Ibero-insular" and "Littoral"), as a result of past foreign settlings in the Swiss territory, particularly via Geneva and Basel. Schlaginhaufen's narrative thus constructs strongly racialised boundaries *between* the (originally pure) Swiss and the foreign races which contaminated this purity as well as *within* the Swiss modern nation. However, in addition to this narrative performance of the nation, we find an additional story: that of the triumph of science. Indeed, within Schlaginhaufen's main story, there are numerous substories which emphasise the scientific nature of the study. A large part of the text is dedicated to detailed descriptions of the research methods and tools. In addition to the pictures and tables that map Swiss boundaries of racial identity, numerous pictures of the research team and process were included.

Such pictures of the "researchers at work" performatively construct the scientificity of the narrative. This strategy of legitimisation through science is twinned, however, with the appeal to the interests of the nation. Indeed, Schlaginhaufen saw his own work as a contribution to the eugenicist cause. To quote his 1921 introduction to *The Anthropology of the Confederation*: "Research that aims to contribute to racial hygiene must be able to draw on previous anthropological studies, and the anthropological inventory of the country is therefore amongst the most important conditions of the realisation of eugenicist aims" (Schlaginhaufen, 1946, 7; my translation). The mapping of the racial structure of the Swiss nation was therefore an "important scientific, and patriotic task" (Schlaginhaufen, 1946, 7).

While Schlaginhaufen's anthropological study is a good example of racial hygiene narratives of Swiss identity, it is not an exception. Dozens of other studies within anthropology and geography were similarly concerned with mapping the racial boundaries of the Swiss nation.<sup>26</sup> However, the most important sites of racial hygiene discourse in Switzerland were psychiatry and the emerging discipline of sexology. Indeed, the three most important Swiss "degeneracy

---

26 That these concerns did not disappear with the end of the War is illustrated by a study on "The racial structure of Switzerland, in its regional variations", which was published in 1962. The study emphasised the need to continue Schlaginhaufen's racial analysis, in the context of "our ignorance of the hereditary transmission of characteristics" (Gloor, 1962, 13).



experts" (Aeschbacher, 1998, 291) were psychiatrists Eugen Bleuler, Nazi-sympathiser Ernst Rüdin (mentioned earlier) and Auguste Forel. Bleuler's widely used psychiatry textbook, published in 1916, emphasised the threat of "*Volksdegeneration*" through hereditarily transmissible mental illness, especially in Jews, whom he deemed particularly predisposed to mental illness (Aeschbacher, 1998, 285). The psychiatrist Forel (1848–1931) was also amongst the leading sexologists of his time, and was a particularly influential pioneer of eugenics both nationally and internationally. His most important book, *La Question Sexuelle* [*The Sexual Question*] (1906), was translated into numerous languages. He was elected member of the Advisory Board of the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations (Keller, 1995). At the Sex Reform Congress in London in 1929, Forel was cited as one of the founding fathers of sexology, along with the British sexologist Havelock Ellis and the German doctor Iwan Bloch (Bland, 1998, 13). His enduring prestige within Switzerland is reflected by the place of honour accorded to his portrait, which graces current 1'000 francs bills.

In stark contrast to Rüdin, Forel promoted eugenics from a socialist perspective. In addition to his psychiatric and sexologist activities, he was a social reformer who campaigned for sexual education at schools, women's voting rights, abstinence from alcoholic drinks and other "poisons", pacifism, etc. The science of eugenics would provide the impetus for social, moral and racial purification, he argued. Rejecting the "false patriotism" of militaristic capitalist nationalism (Forel, 1925, 15), Forel promoted the construction of a social order based on the scientific management of reproduction as a moral duty to the future of the national community. "The regulation of procreation through appropriated means is a moral task. It is necessary to the hygiene of our race. Only this, combined with the elimination of narcotic poisons, will be able to block the increasing degenerescence of our race, and bring us a better future. We owe this to the progress, happiness and health of the future generations, for whose quality we are responsible" (Forel, 1916, 12; my translation).

The hereditary degenerescence of the race, Forel argued, was not only physical but also moral. As a consequence, there had been an important increase in the number of "hypocrites", of "stupid and egoistic idiots", who were incapable of thing of the common good of the nation, as he argued in a lecture on "The Role of Hypocrisy, Stupidity and Ignorance in Contemporary Morals" (1916). This argument is illustrated in a 1910 conference on the topic of "morals", where an allegorical narrative form appears within his larger tale of moral degenerescence. Forel started the conference with the long description of a dream that he claimed to have had. In the dream, various animals explained

to him their idea of "morals". Amongst these, the narrative of the ant is an important substory in Forel's moral allegory (Forel happened to be a great specialist on ants). In Forel's dream, the ant tells him: "What makes our anthill prosper is good. What damages it is bad. (...) Morals consist of the duty that every ant has to work from birth; to live and die for its anthill, its *patrie*: You humans, you are stupid and immoral not to understand this, as a result of your hereditary incapacity to grasp and to practice the basics of social morals!" (1910, 6 ff., my translation).

However, it was unfair to hold people responsible for having such hereditary dispositions, Forel thought. The construction of the social order should therefore not centre on the management of deviants, but rather on the eugenic prevention of degeneracy, Forel argued in "The True Socialism of the Future" (Forel, 1925, 23). Consequently, the worst enemies of eugenics were war (which selects the best to be killed) and alcoholic drinks and other "narcotic poisons" which damage the mind as well as the body (Forel, 1925).

The bases of the social order were hereditary dispositions on the one hand, education on the other (Forel, 1910). While "only a healthy selection of the race" could improve the former, this sexual selection should be combined with active education campaigns based on Science and Reason. Given the importance of sexual selection for the regulation of procreation, sexual education was strongly promoted by Forel. It was crucial, he thought, to teach young people about the consequences of having sexual relations with "inferior" partners, and about the corresponding necessity to gather information on the hereditary background of the potential spouse. "Each fiancée has the right and, in the interest of the future children, the holy duty, to know the sexual antecedents of their future spouse" (Forel, 1916, 12; my translation).

Women were a site of narrative ambivalence in Forel's writings. On the one hand, he discursively constructed women as political subjects, promoting political equality between the genders and especially women's voting rights. On the other hand, the reproductive role of women was a particular source of narrative anxiety. Given their reproductive responsibilities to the nation, women were seen as particularly important targets for the eugenic education and regulation of sexuality that he called for. "Well-informed and superior women will be the ones, I expect, who will participate most energetically and most successfully in human selection" (Forel, 1906, 575; my translation). Women's "instincts of procreation", which he considered "much stronger in woman than in man", were combined with the will to "give herself passively", to be "conquered, mastered and subjugated" (Forel [1906] 1998, 29). In Forel's narratives, female identity is thus ambivalently performed. Women are both political subjects, and sexual objects.

Within Forel's eugenicist narrative, the mechanisms of *othering* centre on different categories that are seen to form hereditary "threats" to the nation: criminals, prostitutes, alcoholics, immoral people, the mentally ill, haemophiliacs, people with tuberculosis, drug addicts, gypsies, vagrants. Strong boundaries are drawn between the national, white race and the 'inferior' races (Jews, "Negroes", the Chinese, etc.). "How is our Aryan race and its civilisation to guard against the danger of being passively invaded and exterminated by the alarming fecundity of other human races? One must be blind not to recognise this danger. (...) Up to what point can the Mongolian, and even the Jewish race, become mixed with our Aryan or Indo-Germanic races without gradually supplanting them and causing them to disappear? (...) The connection of this with the sexual question is not difficult to understand" (Forel, 1906, 222 ff.). Different categories of sexual "perversion" such as sadism or masochism (considered hereditarily transmissible) were similarly *othered*. In contrast to other eugenicists, however, Forel was little worried by the sexually "inverted" (homosexuals). Although he considered them to be "psychopaths" and "neurotics", they would not reproduce anyway. "As long as homosexual love does not implicate minors, or the feeble-minded, it remains rather innocent, because it does not produce any offspring and will therefore become extinguished automatically through the process of selection. When two individuals are adult and consenting, it is certainly less harmful than prostitution, which is legally protected" (Forel, 1906, 270; my translation).

The sharpest identity boundaries were drawn through sterilisation discourses and practices. Sterilisation practices constitute radical mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of the national community. On the level of discourse, Forel constantly called for the sterilisation of the above mentioned "degenerate" categories of the population, as a rational measure to prevent their reproduction. He put his ideas into practice by pioneering the very first sterilisations without consent within German-speaking nations in 1892 (Aeschbacher, 1998, 286). According to Aeschbacher (1998, 299), for decades Switzerland "occupied a 'top position' in this domain, which was only surpassed by the U.S. and within Europe, by Germany after 1933". However, some caution should be exercised in estimating the extent of these practices in various Swiss cantons since systematic data are not (yet) available and more archive work needs to be done. Until then, it remains difficult to judge whether the Swiss sterilisations without consent exceed the number of those carried out in Sweden, for example, where recent research has shown that between 1934 and 1976, some 63'000 individuals were sterilised on the basis of eugenic sterilisation laws (Runcis, 1998). Historians agree, however, that the practice became relatively widespread in Switzerland although sterilisations without consent did not acquire a legal basis until much later.

Various cantons subsequently introduced legislation permitting forced sterilisation of the mentally ill (a loose category which could include vagrants, people of “weak morals”, delinquents, etc.). The canton of Vaud was the first to do so in a 1928 law which stated: “When it can be expected that a person who has a mental illness or a mental defect which is proven to be incurable, will have a degenerate offspring,<sup>27</sup> this person can become the target of medical measures to prevent the birth of offspring” (my translation).<sup>28</sup> Reflecting the eugenicist focus on women as the reproducers of the nation, the sterilisation of inferior categories of the population was a strongly gendered practice. An evaluation of the application of this law in the canton of Vaud carried out in 1944 reported that nine out of ten sterilisations were carried out on women (Ehrenström, 1991, 74).<sup>29</sup>

## 6. National Identity, Sexuality, and the Swiss “Gardening State”

This article has explored the Volksnation dimension of the Swiss nation, highlighting the sexual basis of national identity. Eugenic narratives express the nation in sharply exclusionary terms. They construct a national order based on sexual, racial and gendered boundaries. Through the exclusion of degenerate categories both outside and within the national borders, they narratively perform a racially, morally and socially regenerated *Volk*. As Yuval-Davis points out, “the myth of common origin or shared blood/genes tends to construct the most exclusionary/homogeneous visions of ‘the nation’” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 21). Given the importance of eugenic narratives of degeneracy and racial hygiene in the first decades of the construction of Swiss national identity, the latter has become particularly exclusionary, I argue.

The construction of Swiss national identity was at least partly founded on what I propose to term the Swiss “dream of order”. The social and political order was seen to be “troubled” by various categories of citizens and non-citizens, such as Jews, “vagrants” (Jenitsch and other “travellers”), the mentally ill, the physically handicapped, etc. The eugenic “imagination” of the national order was concerned with the elimination of such “troubles” through, in particular, the rational management of sexuality. The emerging Welfare state, concerned with regulation as well as protection, provided the means to translate eugenic

---

27 The original phrasing is “une descendance tarée”.

28 Recueils des lois et décrets du Canton de Vaud, Lausanne, Sept. 1928; quoted in Ehrenström (1991).

29 Similarly, Runcis (1998) reports that almost 95% of the Swedish sterilisations were carried out on women.

narratives of the nation into large-scale social experiments. While sterilisation policies were the most extreme expression of othering and ordering practices, other mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the national community with eugenic overtones included marriage interdiction laws targeting the mentally ill<sup>30</sup> or that of the removal of gypsy children from their parents, to be raised in State orphanages – a practice which continued until well into the 1970's.<sup>31</sup> While eugenic ideas were articulated within opposite political projects, these projects shared a common call for interventionist state policies in this domain. Eugenicist versions of *Volksnation* narratives provided the ideological basis for the Swiss “Gardening State”, concerned with eliminating the “weeds” from the national garden.<sup>32</sup>

## REFERENCES

- Aeschbacher, Urs (1998), *Psychiatrie und “Rassenhygiene”*, in: Mattioli, Aram, Ed., *Antisemitismus in der Schweiz 1948–1960*, Zürich: Orell Füssli Verlag.
- Amir, Delila and Orly Benjamin (1998), *Sexuality and the Female National Subject: Contraception and Abortion Policy in Israel*, in: Terrell Carver and Véronique Mottier, Eds., *Politics of Sexuality: Identity, Gender, Citizenship*, London: Routledge.
- Anderson, Benedict ([1<sup>st</sup> ed.1983] 1991), *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso.
- Austin, John Langshaw (1962), *How to do Things with Words*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Bajema, Carl Jay, Ed., (1976), *Eugenics Then and Now*, Stroudsburg: Dowden, Hutschinson & Ross.
- Barthes, Roland (1974), *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of the Narrative*, New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1989), *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1991), *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bhabha, Homi (1990), *Narrating the Nation*, in: Homi Bhabha, Ed., *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge.
- Bland, Lucy (1998), *Introduction*, in: Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, Eds., *Sexology Uncensored. The Documents of Sexual Science*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Bland, Lucy and Laura Doan, Eds., (1998), *Sexology Uncensored. The Documents of Sexual Science*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Bleuler, Eugen (1916), *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*, Berlin: Julius Springer.
- Boomkens, René (1994), *Mille Collines. Over taal and geweld*, *Krisis* 56.
- Bruner, Jerome (1986), *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

30 As Wecker (1998, 169) reports, Switzerland was the first European country to introduce such eugenically motivated legislation in 1912.

31 The official dates are 1926–1973.

32 I borrow the term “Gardening State” from Bauman (1989). Gardens are a familiar metaphor for order (as well as, in other contexts, recreation or pleasure: Whitebrook, 1995, 1). This metaphor appears a lot in eugenicist discourses, including that of Auguste Forel.



- Bullough, Vernon (1994), *Science in the Bedroom: A History of Sex Research*, New York: Basic Books.
- Burke, Kenneth (1945), *A Grammar of Motives*, New York: Prentice-Hall.
- Butler, Judith (1993), *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, New York: Routledge.
- Calhoun, Craig (1997), *Nationalism*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Carver, Terrell (1998), Sexual Citizenship: Gendered and De-Gendered Narratives, in: Terrell Carver and Véronique Mottier, Eds., *Politics of Sexuality: Identity, Gender, Citizenship*, London: Routledge.
- Carver, Terrell and Véronique Mottier, Eds., (1998), *Politics of Sexuality: Identity, Gender, Citizenship*, London: Routledge.
- Czarniawska, Barbara (1998), *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dijk, Teun Van (1993), Stories and Racism, in: Dennis Mumby, Ed., *Narrative and Social Control: Critical Perspectives*, Newbury Park: Sage.
- Ehrenström, Philippe (1991), Eugénisme et politique: réflexions sur une étude de cas, *Les annuelles 2*, Lausanne: Université de Lausanne.
- Enloe, Cynthia (1990), Women and children: Making Feminist Sense of the Persian Gulf Crisis, *The Village Voice*, 25 Sept.
- Forel, Auguste (1906), *La question sexuelle exposée aux adultes cultivés*, Paris: Steinheil.
- Forel, Auguste ([1906] 1998), The Sexual Question, in: Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, Eds., *Sexology Uncensored. The Documents of Sexual Science*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Forel, Auguste (1910), *La morale en soi*, Lausanne: Administration de la libre pensée.
- Forel, Auguste (1916), *Le rôle de l'hypocrisie, de la bêtise et de l'ignorance dans la morale contemporaine*, Lausanne: Libre Pensée Internationale.
- Forel, Auguste (1925), *Le vrai socialisme de l'avenir*, Lausanne: Imprimerie populaire.
- Foucault, Michel (1971), *L'ordre du discours*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel ([1976] 1978), *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, London: Penguin.
- Galton, Francis ([1865] 1976), Hereditary Talent and Character, in Carl Jay Bajema, Ed., *Eugenics Then and Now*, Stroudsburg: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross.
- Galton, Francis (1883), *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*, London: Macmillan.
- Geertz, Clifford, Ed., (1963), *Old Societies and New States*, New York: Free Press.
- Geertz, Clifford (1983), *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, New York: Basic Books.
- Gellner, Ernest (1987), *Culture, Identity and Politics*, Cambridge: C.U.P.
- Gellner, Ernest (1983), *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Giddens, Anthony (1985), *The Nation-State and Violence*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, Anthony (1989), *Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, Anthony (1990), *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, Anthony (1991), *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, Anthony (1992), *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gloor, Pierre-André (1963), La structure raciale de la Suisse dans ses variations régionales. Application de la méthode de Czekanowski-Wanke, in *Anthropologie générale*, Genève: Imprimerie Albert Kundig.
- Goffman, Erving (1959), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London: Penguin.

- Gourevitch, Philip (1999), *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, London: Picador.
- Grandjean, Henri, and Henri Jeanrenaud (1965), *Histoire de la Suisse II* (6<sup>th</sup>. Ed.), Lausanne: Payot.
- Grossman, Anita (1995), *Reforming Sex. The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform 1920–1950*, New York: O.U.P.
- Guibernau, Montserrat (1999), *Nations Without States*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Guillaumin, Colette (1995), *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology*, London: Routledge.
- Hall, Stuart (1980), Encoding/Decoding, in: Stuart Hall et al., Eds., *Culture, Media, Language*, London: Hutchinson.
- Hettling, Manfred (1998), Die Fähnlein der Treffsicheren. Die eidgenössische Schützenfeste im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, in: Lynn Blattman and Irene Meier, Eds., *Männerbund und Bundesstaat. Über die politische Kultur der Schweiz*, Zürich: Orell Füssli Verlag.
- Hobsbawm, Eric (1990), *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge: C.U.P.
- Hobsbawm, Eric ([1<sup>st</sup>. ed. 1983] 1992), Inventing Traditions, in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: C.U.P.
- Howarth, David (1995), Discourse Theory, in: David Marsh and Gerry Stoker, Eds., *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan.
- Jeanmonod, Gilles and Genevieve Heller (2000), Eugenisme et contexte socio-politique: l'exemple de l'adoption d'une loi sur la stérilisation des handicapés et malades mentaux dans le canton de Vaud en 1928, *Revue d'histoire suisse*, vol. 50, 20–44.
- Kagamé, Faustin (1994), Je n'ai pas vu le même film d'horreur que vous, *L'Hebdo*, 19 mai.
- Keller, Christoph (1995), *Der Schädelvermesser. Otto Schlaginhaufen – Anthropologe und Rassenhygieniker. Eine biographische Reportage*, Zürich: Limmat Verlag.
- King, Desmond and Randall Hansen (1999), Experts at Work: State Autonomy, Social Learning and Eugenic Sterilization in 1930's Britain, *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 29 part 1 (January).
- Klesli, Eva (1995), Education physique féminine entre 1900 et 1930, in: Rudolf Jaun and Brigitte Studer, Eds., *Weiblich-Männlich. Geschlechterverhältnisse in der Schweiz: Rechtsprechung, Diskurs, Praktiken*, Zürich: Chronos.
- Kreis, Georg (1992), Der "Homo Alpinus Helveticus". Zum schweizerischen Rassendiskurs der 30er Jahre, in: Guy Marchal and Aram Mattioli, Eds., *Erfundene Schweiz. Konstruktionen nationaler Identität*, Zürich: Chronos Verlag.
- Kreis, Georg, Ed., (1993), *La protection politique de l'Etat en Suisse. L'évolution de 1935 à 1990*, Bern: Haupt.
- Kriesi, Hanspeter (1995), *Le système politique suisse*, Paris: Economica.
- Kühl, Stefan (1997), *Die Internationale der Rassisten. Aufstieg und Niedergang der internationalen Bewegung für Eugenik und Rassenhygiene im 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.
- Labov, William and J. Waletzky (1967), Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience, in: June Helm, Ed., *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Lengwiler, Martin (1998), Männlichkeit und Nervenstärke. Zur Bedeutung von Militär und Krieg für die Gründung des Bundesstaates, in: Lynn Blattman and Irene Meier, Eds., *Männerbund und Bundesstaat. Über die politische Kultur der Schweiz*, Zürich: Orell Füssli Verlag.



- Lloyd, Moya (1998), Sexual Politics, Performativity, Parody: Judith Butler, in: Terrell Carver and Véronique Mottier, Eds., *Politics of Sexuality: Identity, Gender, Citizenship*, London: Routledge.
- Manning, Peter and Betsy Cullum Swan (1998), Narrative, Content, and Semiotic Analysis, in: Denzin, Norman and Yvonna Lincoln, Eds., *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Mottier, Véronique (1995), Citizenship and Gender Division in the Swiss Direct Democracy: From Structures to Political Action, *West European Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 1.
- Mottier, Véronique (1998a), Subjectivity and Social Theory: Merleau-Ponty, Lacan and Foucault, Ph.D Thesis, University of Cambridge.
- Mottier, Véronique (1998b), Sexuality and Sexology: Michel Foucault, in: Terrell Carver and Véronique Mottier, Eds., *Politics of Sexuality: Identity, Gender, Citizenship*. London: Routledge.
- Mouffe, Chantal (1993), Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?, in: Judith Squires, Ed., *Principled Positions*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Nagel, Joane (1998a), Provocative Performances: Cruising and Crossing Ethnosexual Frontiers, Working Paper, University of Kansas.
- Nagel, Joane (1998b), Ethnic Troubles: Gender, Sexuality, and the Construction of National Identity, in: Hanspeter Kriesi et al., Eds., *Nation and National Identity: the European Experience in Perspective*. Chur: Verlag Rüegger.
- Parini, Lorena (1997), *La politique d'asile en Suisse: une perspective systémique*, Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Pearson, Karl ([1909] 1998), The Scope and Importance to the State of the Science of National Eugenics, in: Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, Eds., *Sexology Uncensored. The Documents of Sexual Science*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Plummer, Ken (1995), *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*, London: Routledge.
- Potter, Jonathan and Wetherell, Margaret (1987), *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*, London: Sage.
- Propp, Vladimir ([1928] 1968), *Morphology of the Folktale*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Renan, Ernest (1990), What is a Nation?, in: Homi Bhabha, Ed., *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge.
- Runcis, Maija (1998), Sterilization in the Swedish Welfare State, English summary of doctoral thesis, University of Stockholm.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de ([1916] 1972), *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris: Payot.
- Schlaginhaufen, Otto (1946), *Die Anthropologie der Eidgenossenschaft*, A. Textband. B. Atlas, Zürich: Orell-Füssli.
- Schmid, Werner (1939), *Jung-Schweizer! Jung-Schweizerinnen! Das Schicksal des Vaterlandes ruht in Euch!*, Erlenbach: Rotapfel Verlag.
- Schwank, Alex (1996), Der rassenhygienische (bzw. eugenische) Diskurs in der schweizerischen Medizin des 20. Jahrhunderts, in: Sigrid Weigel and Birgit Erdle, Eds., *Fünfzig Jahre danach. Zur Nachgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus*, Zürich: Hochschulverlag ETH.
- Sciarini, Pascal, Simon Hug and Cédric Dupont (1997), Example, Exception or Both? Swiss National Identity in Perspective, *EUI Working Papers* 97/32, Florence: E.U.I.
- Shils, Edward (1957), Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties, *British Journal of Sociology*, 7.
- Smith, Anthony (1986), *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*, Oxford: Blackwell.

- Smith, Anthony (1991), *National Identity*, London: Penguin.
- Smith, Anthony (1995), *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Sommer, Doris (1990), Irresistible Romance: The Foundational Fictions of Latin America, in: Homi Bhabha, Ed., *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge.
- Tilly, Charles (1975), Reflections on the History of European State-Making, in: Charles Tilly, Ed., *The Formation of National States in Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Weber, Matthias (1993), *Ernst Rüdin. Eine kritische Biographie*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
- Wecker, Regina (1998), Eugenik – individueller Ausschluss und nationaler Konsens, in: Guex et al., Eds., *Krisen und Stabilisierung. Die Schweiz in der Zwischenkriegszeit*. Zurich: Chronos.
- Weeks, Jeffrey (1986), *Sexuality*, New York: Routledge.
- Weeks, Jeffrey (1989), *Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, London: Longman.
- Weiss, Sheila Faith (1987), *Race Hygiene and National Efficiency. The Eugenics of Wilhelm Schallmayer*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Whitebrook, Maureen (1995), *Real Toads in Imaginary Gardens: Narrative Accounts of Liberalism*, London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Widmer, Jean (Forthcoming), *Langues et espace public. Une analyse sociologique de l'identité collective*.
- Windisch, Uli (1978), *Xénophobie? Logique de la pensée populaire*, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira and Flora Anthias, Eds., (1989), *Woman-Nation-State*, London: Macmillan.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira (1997), *Gender & Nation*, London: Sage.

*Author's address:*

Dr. V. Mottier  
 University of Cambridge  
 Jesus College  
 Cambridge CB5 8BL, UK  
 E-mail: VM10004@hermes.cam.ac.uk