

## [Gender and Nationalism: A Friendly Exchange](#)

Discussion published by jill vickers on Wednesday, June 8, 2016

*Jill Vickers, Distinguished Research Professor in Political Science at Carleton University in Ottawa and a member of H-Nationalism's advisory board, recently asked our list "why are women invisible in our discussions?" Vickers also explored this "invisibility" in her 2015 address as President of the Canadian Political Science Association, "Can We Change How Political Science Thinks? 'Gender Mainstreaming' in a Resistant Discipline" (Canadian Journal of Political Science, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 747 - 770). The ensuing discussion on H-Nationalism inspired Alexander Maxwell, an historian at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand interested in East-European nationalism, to send Vickers a copy of his 2015 article " 'The Handsome Man with Hungarian Moustache and Beard': National Moustaches in Habsburg Hungary" (Journal of Cultural and Social History, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 51-76). Vickers reciprocated with a draft article "Gender Diversity in Nationalist Movements and Nation-State Formation." A lively conversation ensued. The early private conversation appears here lightly edited, along with later exchanges intended for readers of H-Nationalism.*

**JV:** I found your article about the politics of facial hair very interesting. It reminds us that men "have gender" and masculinities define the gender of many nations. However, your theoretical discussion seems rather one-sided focusing mainly on normative texts by Euro-American feminists who are anti-nationalism. You don't consider nationalism scholarship that focuses on both positive and negative outcomes for women and sex minorities of nationalist projects that include them in or exclude them from one or more stages of nation-state making. The focus on the former literature is common because western Euro-American feminist scholarship dominates. Moreover, because the literature occurs in many disciplines, it is hard to be familiar with the various approaches.

**AM:** I discuss Sikata Banerjee and Ranjoo Herr, as well as an article co-written by Hyon Sook Kim. Lambevski, furthermore, is Australian. That said, in a broader sense your criticism probably holds. There's no escaping that most of the footnotes refer to European or American scholars. It is, after all, an article on nineteenth century Hungary, my scholarship does have a European focus. (Indeed, I've recently published a short pedagogical article on the "confessions of a Europeanist teaching world history.")

More generally, however, I can't claim to have wholly mastered the feminist scholarship on nationalism, and I'm sure you can point me to relevant sources I left uncited. I'm primarily a scholar of nationalism in Eastern Europe, and, as you noted in your original post, the majority of that scholarship is gender uncurious. I more or less stand by my article insofar as I think I'm accurately describing the scholarship one would find on an initial trawl through the scholarship on gender and nationalism, since anti-nationalist Euro-American feminists rather dominate that literature, much as Euro-American scholars dominate all sorts of scholarly fields.

Nevertheless, your criticism of my article recalled to me your original post on the invisibility of women in the literature on separatist nationalism. Yes, nationalism studies is not very gender curious, but what gendered work exists is doing just the thing you wanted to see. Yuval-Davis's (1997) widely-cited book emphasizes the participation of women in national movements.

My sense is that what literature there is on gender and nationalism focuses disproportionately on documenting the experiences of women: scholars want to show that women can and do participate in nationalist politics. Indeed, some feminist scholars of nationalism, it seems to me from my reading, are much more interested in documenting women's participation and experiences than in explaining how gender functions as a historical variable. Feminist scholars of nationalism often seem to justify their documentation of women patriots as a form of in-group boosterism that I ultimately don't find very interesting. I've repeatedly trawled through Yuval-Davis for a citation - any citation - just to protect myself from reviewers accusations that I've ignored the prominent scholar, and I just can't find anything relevant to my concerns. I'm happy to acknowledge exceptions but the feminist scholar I found most relevant to my own work is, as you saw in my article, Carole Pateman (1988) and Pateman doesn't talk about the nation at all. I have to reinterpret and expand on Pateman to apply her ideas, and I'm actually getting a bit tired of writing what has become my standard "Pateman has the answers!" paragraph.

Anyway, back to the point: it's hard to master a scholarly literature, and you're always going to miss things when you go outside your core specialization. But I suggest that there's a large literature on women's participation in nationalist movements, and indeed that the literature on women's participation is richer than the literature analyzing men as men.

I'd like to propose an imperfect analogy: Left-handed people actively participate in nationalist movements, but are not discussed in the theory of nationalism. If a left-handed scholar complained about the invisibility of left-handed people in the scholarship, would that scholar have a case? Would that invisibility constitute the continued oppression of left-handed people? I'm happy to admit that left-handedness is not nearly as important a historical variable as gender, but my analogy has to do with the structure of an argument and doesn't depend on the importance of gender. I suggest that the left handed scholar has an additional case to make: it behooves the left-handed scholar to document why left-handedness is relevant. I suggest that "left-handed people participated in national movements!" is not good enough.

In your original post you specifically wanted to see studies of women in separatist nationalist movements, as opposed to other forms of nationalism. To be honest, I find the absence of gender in that literature unsurprising. A scholar making typologies of nationalism, focusing on separatist vs. state-based nationalisms, has plenty of relevant variables to consider other than gender, and I'd frankly expect other variables to be more important. Rogers Brubaker, in my opinion the cutting edge of nationalism theory, has considered gender in much of his work, but I don't recall gender coming up when he proposed his binary typology of state-based vs. non-state nationalisms. So, perhaps the challenge is to demonstrate that women's participation in separatist nationalisms shows a striking qualitative difference from women's participation in state-based nationalisms. Indeed, if you could document a striking difference in women's participation / experiences in different types of nationalism, I think you'd have made a contribution to the gender-nationalism literature.

What I'd expect, however, is that in different types of nationalism the role of women, both actual and imagined, would be essentially similar. My own research suggests to me that male patriots generally see the nation as a masculine brotherhood, united in fraternity, and see women as members mostly in their capacity as partners / possessions of male patriots who speak about women as collective national possessions: patriots talk about "our women" much as they talk about "our mineral

resources." My comparative book on nationalism and clothing (*Patriots Against Fashion*) looked at a variety of case studies in nationalism, some state-based and some non-state based, and found the same essential pattern over and over again with an essentially monotonous regularity.

**JV:** My objective is to develop ways of comparing women's experiences in nationalist projects across historical contexts and stages i.e. precisely to determine "how gender functions as a historical variable". Regardless of what male patriots think, some contexts require nationalist leaders to recruit entire communities - including women- to win independence. Some contexts also produce "feminist nationalists" (West 1997) as many women see advantages in participation especially if conditions let them organize effectively as women and to win the right to continued participation and political rights at independence.

My hypothesis is that women's role in different types of national projects may **not** be the same but vary according to the context and stage of nation-state making and regardless of patriots' "imaginings". I know from your book *The Comparative Approach to National Movements: Miroslav Hroch and Nationalism Studies* (2011) that we share many views, but as historian (you) and interdisciplinary political scientist (me) we understand comparison differently. When I write about nationalist projects 'including' or 'excluding' women (sexual or race minorities), I am identifying the effects of laws and practices that let or prevent them to participate as actors i.e. with agency, in national projects. Because most feminists texts about nationalism focus on 'gender' in Euro-American projects (e.g. Kaplan 1997) and too often attribute features of extreme nationalisms e.g. fascist or authoritarian types to nationalisms generally, you are correct that they are mostly normative. However, there also is an extensive empirical literature - mainly case studies and multi-national comparisons. In *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1986), e.g. Jayawardena surveyed 12 anti-colonial cases in Asia and the Middle East and analyzed what happened after independence.

Three of my articles (2006; 2008; 2013) also report on 15 cases from all global regions. I found that in 2/3 of the cases (10) women weren't active participants in nationalist mobilizations; whereas they were in 1/3 of the cases (5). (Note they are cases including stages in nation-state making.) Such a comparison is hardly 'boosterism': my goal isn't showing that women participate, but developing testable hypotheses about conditions associated with women's absence or active participation. To do so, I used a provisional typology of exclusionary and inclusive national projects that could be correlated with different contexts and aspects of various cases. By identifying cases in which women were active participants in nationalist mobilizations and the contexts they occurred in, I theorized that even in Europe women were active participants in nationalist mobilizations in small states seeking independence i.e. in anti-imperial contexts as in Finland. To generate categories, I built on Hroch's distinction between the path European 'great powers' took to nation-statehood and the path of small nations struggling to gain independence from empires and to form independent states. In the former, nation-states emerged within societies through conflicts over control of an existing state; in the latter, nationalist leaders had to mobilize whole communities - including women - to win independent states. This also resembles Brubakers' categories of state-framed and non-state framed national movements.

Another approach is to "gender" existing typologies. Further, Voloukos (2007) and I compared women's participation through the multiple stages of Greece's nation-state development to show how the changing models of the nation adopted by elites changed gender regimes as their need for

women's participation changed. There are a number of empirical gender scholars of nationalism - not that I dismiss normative approaches as easily as you do. I think it is useful to focus on how gender studies of nationalism relate to mainstream theories. For example, one of my key questions is how the presence or absence of women as actors in national mobilizations and in stages in nation-state formation affect the rise, spread and intensity of nationalist movements. I agree that establishing that "left-handed people participate in national movements!" forms of analysis are not good enough nor very interesting. Nonetheless, it is important to distinguish between your "left-handers" and half of all human societies, that women represent. Theories that can't explain half the adult population's experiences aren't good theories.

I don't find the normative dismissal of all nationalist mobilizations asserted by many feminist critics defensible given the importance of 'the nation' as a basic concept in theorizing democracy. Consequently I advanced as a testable hypothesis the proposition that women's absence from many nationalist movements may relate to their legal exclusion from political rights e.g. to the vote or confer nationality on their children or partners for very long periods in many Euro-American cases. Hence, women gaining nationality is an important part of democratization.

In terms of whether or not gender analysis adds something new and important to our understanding of secessionist movements, I note that gendered analyses of the Quebec movement (e.g. de Seve 2000; Le Clerc and West 1997) suggest that women's participation as feminist nationalists affected the movement's propensity for violence and may have kept the initial violence from escalating. So another testable hypothesis is that women's presence as nationalist actors may lessen secessionist movements' propensity for violence, affect its duration and reduce its intensity when violence does occur. This isn't because women are inherently less violent, but because they usually have more at stake when violence occurs. Of course, an important issue is the direction of the causal arrow...are women involved in these movements because violence is limited? Or does their presence lessen violence? Nonetheless, I find the absence of gender analysis in the secessionist literature surprising which is why I wrote the original post.

**AM:** You note that "[t]here are a number of other gender theorists of nationalism whose focus isn't normative." I have read plenty of solid gender scholarship, but, that said, gender studies seems to me a more normative field than history as such. And I should add that I am, perhaps, unusually allergic to normative yardsticks. When it comes to how gender studies of nationalism can challenge mainstream theories, my sense is that the gender and nationalism literature and other branches of nationalism studies do not so much conflict as fail to overlap. I wonder what you think about reformulating the question as: "what can gender studies of nationalism add to mainstream theories?" or "What can gender curiosity bring to the study of nationalist movements?" I also wonder what you think about the tendency to conflate "gender" with "women."

**JV:** Good questions. Perhaps gender scholarship seems more normative because its authors want to achieve change given the frequent exclusion and marginalization of women and the oppressive nature of many nations' gender regimes. Further, the exploitation of gender and race diversity are central elements in most Euro-American nationalisms. 'Gender' is often conflated with "women" because like Europe's experiences of nationalism, men's experiences are universalized thereby making their "gender" invisible. As I argued in my Presidential Address, half a century of "adding" knowledge about "women and politics" has had little effect on how my discipline thinks about national

phenomena. While a mountain of gender-focused literature has been added, the knowledge produced remains invisible because it isn't read by mainstream scholars. Pushing back from the other side, I ask: "What do nationalism theories have to add to our understanding of how patriarchal dominance changes as ways of organizing state power and collective identity in relation to territory?" Very few mainstream nationalism scholars (Hearn, Ely) consider that question.

The historic exclusions of women from citizenship, nationality and the public sphere in many Euro-American nationalist mobilizations isn't just "interesting" - it's a central feature of modern nation-state making along with the invention of a bourgeois public sphere. So the conflation between women and "gender" bothers me because ignoring masculinities and sexual minorities results in the universalization of heterosexual men's experiences with nationalisms. I've made similar points in my texts about race and Indigenous peoples. Clearly these are important normative questions that shouldn't be ignored. However, differentiating between nationalisms in which women and sexual minorities participate and those from which they are absent, often excluded by law, isn't just "normative". This also requires an empirical differentiation that is more complex as shown by comparing the differences in gender regimes between the French and American revolutions.

**AM:** It's indeed very complex, and I don't see why the questions I posed seem to you to lack complexity. However, it's intriguing how often our discussions return to the issue of normativity. I'm surprised and intrigued at your argument that there's no normative dimension to classifying nationalism, in a particular place, on the yardstick of whether women and sexual minorities are included or excluded. I suggest that if you as analyst are sympathetic to one side or the other, then your dichotomy is normative. If you were to say of a certain society at a certain time that it excluded women from political life, I would read that as a criticism. It also seems to me that normative concerns permeate your discussion. Above, you praised a study of Quebec arguing that women's participation in the national movements prevented violence. Isn't the presence or absence of violence a normative issue? "Patriarchal dominance" also strikes me as a normative concept. Yet our discussion began with you criticizing my alleged over-reliance on "normative texts by Euro-American feminists," suggesting that we both perceive an analytical problem with normative preoccupations, somewhere or another.

**JV:** While it often has a normative dimension, classification also involves empirical indicators. Had I used women's *presence* or *absence* as actors in national mobilizations and nation-state making instead of *inclusion* or *exclusion* would you have considered my classifications less normative?

Surely neither of us considers concepts *either* "normative" or "empirical"? I understand them to have both normative and empirical dimensions, and the focus may be one or the other. You say that "patriarchal dominance" ... strikes me as a normative concept" and it may be. But historian Gerda Lerner in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1987) theorized that the "invention" of patriarchal dominance and its embedding in the Mesopotamian legal system was key to the stabilizing of the archaic states - surely an empirical study? Lerner also theorizes that this "invention" required elite women's active participation for the emerging political form to be stabilized.

**AM:** The rise of nationalism brought about such sweeping transformations that perhaps attempting to remain entirely "objective" is impossible. Some gender scholarship takes the approach that scholars should situate themselves by identifying themselves and thus their potential biases. Scholars thus

begin their remarks with disclaimers, e.g. “speaking as a middle class white woman” or “reflecting my own perspective as a black homosexual, disenfranchised both by race and sexuality.” Some of my non-gender-curious colleagues poke fun at such formulae, but I’ve often wondered if the scholarship on East-European nationalism would benefit if East European scholars prefaced their remarks with “as a half-Slovak, half-Jewish historian of Hungary” or whatever. And it now occurs to me that I only asked myself this question because I started reading gender scholarship. Thinking about gender indeed made me think about nationalism in a new way, even in the context of a question that itself has little to do with inclusion or exclusion of women and gender minorities.

Perhaps we can end our discussion by jointing urging our colleagues to think more about gender?

**JV:** I too hope that our exchange will provoke the interest of some of our colleagues and join you in urging them to start considering the benefits of “gendering nationalism”.

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