



Essay

NATIONALISM AND FEMINISM IN EUROPE

By *Ida Blom*

Since the nineteenth century, a number of nation states have emerged. The process of nation building and the awareness of national identities ran parallel to what has often been termed ‘first-wave feminism’, that is, the growth in women’s organisations and discussions of gender identities, discussions of how to understand femininity and masculinity. These two historical processes have been studied separately until very lately. Now, some historians have taken an interest in unravelling the interaction of the two ideologies, nationalism and feminism.¹

My own fascination with this question grew out of my work as the main editor of a three-volume women’s world history, written by Norwegian and Danish scholars.² Working on the chapters covering the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I was struck by what to me were unexpected parallels in Asian and Western women’s history; I was less surprised, however, by the huge differences. The wish to compare some central historical aspects resulted in a few smaller studies that I shall summarise in this paper.

But first, a few words on comparative gender history.

Comparative gender history is a new field, not least since much of the knowledge about the history of gender is new and much knowledge is still lacking. Women’s and gender history is, however, well versed in discussions of theory and of the precise

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- 1 See for instance K. Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London, 1986; C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, Cambridge, 1991; Special issue on ‘Gender, Nationalisms and National Identities’, *Gender and History* 5 (1993); A. McClintock, ‘No Longer in a Future Heaven: Nationalism, Gender and Race’, in *Becoming National*, ed. G. Eley, Oxford, 1996, pp. 260-84; N. Yuval-Davis and F. Anthias, eds, *Women – Nation – State*, London, 1990; N. Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, London, 1997; C. Pateman, ‘Equality, Difference, Subordination: the Politics of Motherhood and Women’s Citizenship’, in *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship - Feminist Politics – Female Subjectivity*, ed. G. Bock and S. James, London, New York, 1992, pp. 17-31; I. Blom, K. Hagemann and C. Hall, *Gendered Nations: The Long Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, New York, 2000.
 - 2 I. Blom, ed, *Cappelens kvinnehistorie*, vols. 1-3, Oslo, 1992-3. This article is based on a number of my earlier publications: ‘Feminism and Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century: A Cross-Cultural Perspective’, *Journal of Women’s History* 7, 4 (1995), pp. 82-94; ‘Das Zusammenwirken von Nationalismus und Feminismus um die Jahrhundertwende – Ein Versuch zur vergleichenden Geschlechtergeschichte’, in *Geschichte und Vergleich: Ansätze und Ergebnisse international vergleichender Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. H.G. Haupt and J. Kocka, Frankfurt am Main, New York, 1996, pp. 315-38; ‘Nation – Class – Gender: Scandinavia at the Turn of the Century’, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 21 (1996), pp. 1-16; ‘World History and Gender History: The Case of the Nation State’, in *Between National Histories and Global History: Konferanserapport til 23. det nordiske historikermøte*, ed. S. Tønnessen, Helsingfors, 1997, pp. 71-92; ‘Gender and Nation States: An International Comparative Perspective’ in *Gendered Nations: The Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. I. Blom, K. Hagemann and C. Hall, Oxford, New York, 2000, pp. 3-26.

meaning of concepts, important presuppositions for comparative research. Theories of patriarchy have been used, to explain gender hierarchies, systematic differences between women and men and changes in gender relations. Patriarchal theories have gradually been broadened or even sometimes replaced by theories on interaction of cultural and physiological givens. Many historians now set out from theories of a 'gender system' or a 'gendered order'. According to this way of thinking, gender is a basic social structure, built into all other social structures, be it class, race, religion, etc. In any culture, in any society, gender will have an impact on the socialisation of the individual, on distribution of work, on responsibilities and rights in the family and in society. Gender relations are at work in politics, in economics; they influence inheritance rules, etc. When society changes, so do gender relations, and changes in gender relations influence other social relations.³

The theory of a gender system makes it possible to analyse conflicts as well as cooperation between women and men. The theory may be applied to all areas of historical research, political, economic, social or cultural history. It means that the importance of gender as an analytical category should always be investigated.

I shall attempt to do just that in this analysis of the interaction of nationalism and feminism around the turn of the century. The analysis first involves two nation states, Norway and Sweden. They represent the cultures that I have studied most intensively, and this is therefore also where I will look for patterns to be compared. Subsequently, comparisons will be made between these results and the interaction of nationalism and feminism in two Asian countries, Japan and India. Finally, I shall look both at similarities and differences in the ways nationalism and feminism interacted in European as well as in Asian cultures, as they are represented by these four nations.

Of course, broad comparisons such as these will to some extent neglect important nuances. What will be compared are broad social groups and central political problems, important in many countries around the turn of the century. In this process the historian will run the risk of losing the specific and of disregarding strict chronology. But the gain may be an understanding of general patterns in the interaction of feminism and nationalism, as well as a better awareness of the importance of gender to historical processes. Finally, the gender-specific conditions and possibilities of historical actors will come clearly to the forefront.

Feminism, nationalism and national identities

Let me start by attempting to define the two -isms, nationalism and feminism, and sketching out the nature of one of the central areas of interaction between them.

3 For useful introductions to the development of women's and gender history, see J.W. Scott, 'Women's History' and 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', in J.W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York, 1988, pp. 15-50. See also J. Kelly, 'The Social Relations of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History', *Signs* 1 (1975-76) (also published in J. Kelly, *Women, History and Theory*, Chicago, 1984, pp. 1-18); E. Fox Genovese, 'Placing Women in History', *New Left Review* 133 (1982), pp. 5-29; G. Bock, 'Challenging Dichotomies: Perspectives on Women's History', in *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, ed. K. Offen, J. Rendall and R. Roach Pierson, London, Bloomington, 1991, pp. 1-23. For an introduction to similar developments in Norway, see I. Blom, 'Women's History', in J.E. Myhre, ed., *The Making of a Historical Culture*, Oslo, 1995, pp. 289-310. On comparative gender history, see Blom, 'Das Zusammenwirken von Nationalismus und Feminismus'; Blom, 'Gender and Nation States'.

To define *feminism* is not an easy task, and there are reasons for insisting that to use the concept at all for the turn of the century is an anachronism. Nevertheless, I have chosen to use the concept as a collective denomination of a political ideology, which served as the base for political actions.

The main goal of feminism was – and is – to combat gendered injustices.⁴ Political action to reach this goal can be discerned in at least three areas. One was to gain the same rights for women as for men. In this paper this would translate into seeing women accepted as members of the nation on the same conditions as men, for instance through the vote. The second area was to work to secure women's physical and psychological integrity, for instance through changes of laws, regulations and traditions that had to do with sexuality and family. The third area was to strengthen women's position in the labour market, for instance through better wages and working conditions, better education and so on. Although this is certainly a very important area, I shall not include it in my analysis.⁵

Feminism rested on the basically essentialist assumption of women as a distinct group with visibly common physical characteristics. These common characteristics would distinguish women from men within any other social group, be it class, caste, ethnic group or groups formed on the basis of colour of skin. Many feminists also maintained that women had special psychological characteristics that would distinguish them from men, yet sometimes this was a disputed point.

Nationalism is also a multifaceted concept. Two main forms have traditionally been distinguished.⁶ One was rooted in the desire to create or support a strong state with a

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- 4 The notion of a critique of the subordination of women is central to the concept of feminism, although feminists may differ in strategies adopted to gain better control of their own lives. See K. Offen, *European Feminisms 1700-1950: A Political History*, Stanford, 2000; O. Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement*, New York, 1981; N. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, New Haven, London, 1987; K. Offen, 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach', *Signs* 14 (1988), pp. 119-57; N. Cott and E. Dubois, 'Comments on Karen Offen's Article "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach"', and K. Offen, 'Reply to Cott', *Signs* 15 (1989), pp. 195-209 (reprinted in an abbreviated and slightly reversed form in *Beyond Equality and Difference*, ed. G. Bock and S. James, London, New York, 1992, pp. 89-109); K. Offen, 'Feminism and Sexual Difference in Historical Perspective', in *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, ed. D.L. Rhode, New Haven, London, 1990, pp. 13-20; K. Melby, 'Women's Ideology: Difference, Equality or a New Femininity?' in *Moving On: New Perspectives on the Womens Movement*, ed. T. Andreasen et al. (Acta Jutlandica 67, no. 1, Humanities Series 6), Aarhus, 1991, pp. 138-54.
 - 5 I am well aware of the difficulties involved in such compartmentalisation, but hope they may serve to highlight the broad scope of activities pursued by first-wave feminists. In my own study of the interplay of feminism and nationalism, I have emphasised the second goal, bearing directly on the perception of who constituted the nation. But the other two goals are also crucial to the development of a democratic nation state. Policies to safeguard women's personal, physical and psychic integrity, the respect of their bodies and minds, of women as individuals, often seem to activate deeply rooted perceptions of hierarchical gender relations, easily excluding women from the public and from the nation. Such perceptions may explain why inclusion in the nation by the vote, where it was obtained, after a long time proved to have limited practical consequences.
 - 6 For an excellent introduction, see G. Eley and R.G. Suny, *Becoming National: A Reader*, Oxford, New York 1990; B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1983; E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge, 1990; R. Samuel, ed., *Minorities and Outsiders vol. 2, Patriotism – The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, London, New York, 1989, esp. chap. 24; M. Lake, 'Mission Impossible: How Men Gave Birth to the Australian Nation – Nationalism, Gender and other

leading international position. It was externally aggressive and internally authoritarian and hierarchical. Imperial Germany has been seen in this light. In my paper, the extreme-conservative Swedish nationalists and the Japanese policies after the Meiji Revolution in 1868 will be the examples.

The other form of nationalism sprang out of the French revolution, built on ideas of democracy and self-determination as a reaction against absolutism. It formed the basis of nationalist liberation movements, starting in the Western world and later expanding to Asian and African fighters against colonialism. In my paper, Norway and India will serve as examples of this form of nationalism.

Like feminism, nationalism also had an essentialist core – the idea that a certain group of individuals made up the nation. This group would ideally share a common language, a common history and a common religion. It was also seen as embodying common psychological characteristics that would distinguish the group from other groups. Such ideas could lead to discrimination against ‘the others’. Both forms of nationalism in this respect showed a hierarchical tendency, putting one’s own nation in the highest position.

On top of this, conservative nationalism also explicitly ordered the members of the nation in an inner hierarchy, in a well-disciplined pyramid with an elite at the top. But closer analysis reveals that class and gender hierarchies (in some nations also hierarchies built on colour of skin) were innate even to democratic nationalism. Any national identity could therefore split along lines of class, gender and colour of skin.

I shall revert to the problem of identity at the end of my paper. For the moment, it suffices to say that the feeling of belonging to the nation, of individual national identity, could depend on whether or not the individual possessed certain political rights.

Certain criteria were implemented to decide who had the right to take part in the political process of making decisions with implications for the whole nation. This is where I find a major point of interaction between nationalism and feminism. Physical characteristics such as reproductive capacities were important criteria. In no nation state, except for Finland in 1906, were women given the vote at the same time as men. Although women’s capacity to bear children was highly valued, it was never a criterion for granting them political rights. In the USA another physical criterion was long decisive, that of colour of skin. One might say that physical characteristics, such as the capacity to bear children and colour of skin, acted as what Eric Hobsbawm has called ‘visible ethnicity’, dividing individuals in more or less worthy, more or less influential members of the nation.

But criteria were not formulated as physical characteristics. What was made decisive were questions of economic self-sufficiency and intellectual abilities. Such criteria initially also excluded many men – servants, some workers and black men – and all women. All these individuals were in different ways seen as economically dependent. Add to this that women and blacks were regarded as reigned by emotions and intuition, not by rational reasoning, and consequently also fell short when it came to intellectual abilities, the second criterion for being included in the nation through political rights.

Political rights as a sign that an individual belonged to the nation were first bestowed on white men of the upper social strata, then on white male workers and

Seminal Acts’, *Gender and History* 4 (1992), pp. 305-22; K. Offen, ‘Exploring the Sexual Politics of Republican Nationalism’, in *Nationhood and Nationalism in France: From Boulangism to the Great War 1889-1918*, ed. R. Tombs, London, 1991, pp. 195-209.

peasants. Coloured men and all women, regardless of colour of skin, were – in that order – the last groups to be accepted as full citizens. The growth of democratic nation states was clearly influenced by the gender system, as well as by class and race. This was also the case in Scandinavia – as well as in Japan and India.

With these considerations in mind, let us turn to the comparison between Norway and Sweden.

Comparing nation states – Norway and Sweden

The political union between Norway and Sweden was a result of the Napoleonic wars and lasted until 1905 when, after increasing problems with the viability of the union, the two countries formed independent nation states.⁷

Comparing Swedish and Norwegian nation building makes it obvious that the two forms of nationalism were decisive for which groups were accepted as responsible members of the nation. The most conservative and aggressive Swedish nationalists were against incorporating all men in the nation through general suffrage. For them, women's right to vote was not even on the agenda.

Norwegian nationalists, on the contrary, whether they were conservative or liberal, for or against a military solution, had all accepted general male suffrage around the turn of the century. Some of the liberals even worked for women's suffrage.

In both countries, the Social Democrats were opposed to the use of military force. The Swedish Socialists saw general male suffrage as one of their important goals, but did not care much about women's suffrage.

The Norwegian Socialists won general male suffrage in 1898 and were positive to women's suffrage, although male suffrage had been more important also to them.

One could establish a gliding scale with the Swedish Conservatives at one end, and the Norwegian Social Democrats at other. In Sweden, Conservatives, men and women alike, agreed that only men, and not even all men, should be accepted as members of the nation through enfranchisement. The hierarchical thinking was clear. The Norwegian Social Democrats at the other end of the scale fought for the widest possible definition of citizenship, including also all women. The liberal nationalists, who were very pronounced in Norway, ranged somewhere in the middle.

How should such national differences be understood? Despite all the resemblance between the two Scandinavian countries, Norway and Sweden, historical differences are important. The political developments in the two nations must be taken into consideration. The nineteenth century saw a more democratic system emerge in Norway than in Sweden. Norway had a one-chamber parliament, as opposed to the Swedish two-chamber system. Parliamentarianism became an accepted ideal in Norway in 1884, in Sweden not until 1911. General male suffrage was introduced in Norway in 1898, in Sweden in 1909, and general female suffrage followed in Norway in 1913, in Sweden in 1921.

The differences mirror the stronger Swedish upper classes, consisting partly of an aristocratic nobility with traditions of an important European power. An increasingly industrialised economy there also marked a difference to Norway. The still mainly agrarian Norwegian economy was the basis for a poorer, but socially more homogeneous population than in Sweden. In Norway, due to centuries of political union, first

7 All information on Norway and Sweden may be found in Blom, 'Nation – Class – Gender'.

with Denmark, later with Sweden, the nobility had long lost all importance. Businessmen and academics formed a very small upper class, with less of a distance from the rest of the population than in Sweden.

It should be stressed that citizenship through the vote is, of course, not the only way to be accepted as a member of the nation. Neither is it enough to safeguard democracy. Economic resources and other means of social prestige have kept up social hierarchies within nations. But as long as suffrage was not universal, it was seen as an important key to membership in the nation. In the debate around general male suffrage in 1898, one of the Norwegian members of parliament put it this way: 'Also people who own nothing and who are in a subordinate position in society are important parts of the nation, whom the constitution should guarantee participation in the legislative power.' Another example: in 1905, Norwegian women who had not yet gained the vote, were excluded from the important plebiscite deciding the abrogation of the union with Sweden. The response of one woman, writing in the most influential feminist journal, was to ask: 'Are we women not part of the Norwegian nation?' Without the vote, anybody, in this case women, might feel excluded from the nation.

Two strategies

To understand the gendered character of the nation-building process better, we may analyse the strategies applied to have women accepted as responsible members of the nation.

I have found two strategies, a strategy of equal rights, and a strategy of difference. These strategies should be understood as analytical tools, not as mutually exclusive entities. In fact, the two strategies often coexisted, not just within a certain group, but also within one and the same individual. They were primarily, but not exclusively, rooted in two different understandings of gender. Let us look first at the difference strategy.

The difference strategy built on the dichotomous understanding of gender, propagated with success by Jean Jacques Rousseau in his influential work *Emile*, of 1762. Women and men were understood as individuals with different, but complementary, potentials. Consequently, they also belonged to the nation in different ways, and did not need the same duties and the same rights in the nation. Different functions in family and society should lead to different rights, but different rights should form the foundation of equally important membership in the nation.

This strategy was very easy to locate in both nations. In the cultural component of nationalism, it was visible in the language of symbols. The nation was seen as a home. According to the Norwegian national hymn this home was defended by a strong father and a steadfast mother. Although the hymn ascribed the mother a tendency to sit down and weep, and found men to be the more courageous of the two, the common fight and the democratic character of the Norwegian nation was underlined. Conservative Swedish women also saw women as national mother figures. Their role was to protect the weak, especially the children. Women were also responsible for bringing up future generations to love their country and for preparing young boys to become soldiers to defend the nation. Conservative Swedish women very clearly stated that even without the vote, they felt completely accepted members of the nation. As one of them wrote in 1903: 'with or without the vote, we are responsible for the fate of our country. We – the one half, and the numerically biggest part of the nation – have a responsibility that is no less important than the responsibility resting on the shoulders of a small group of men

who are statesmen and representatives of the people. We are responsible for maintaining the feeling of national belonging and for keeping this feeling on the right track' (Dagny, 1905, no. 12, p. 238).

The idea of the nation as a home, a family, with men and women as strong father- and mother-figures, could further feminist goals. The implicit idea of protecting the weak could arouse and support demands for important feminist causes like protections against the sexual and economic exploitation of women. While the education of the young was stressed as women's special responsibility, this, however, did not change the fact that girls' education did not prepare them to become independent citizens, but to fulfil their role as good housewives and mothers. Seeing boys as future soldiers also underlined gender differences.

When the nation was symbolised by the family and different responsibilities along the lines of gender were emphasised, the limitation of women to the private, of men to the public was implicit. This division was more outspoken in the Swedish than in the Norwegian discourse. Married Swedish women were, until 1921, legally represented by their husbands, while married Norwegian women were already seen as independent legal subjects in 1888. The difference strategy easily led to a gender hierarchy.

Yet a dichotomous understanding of gender might also, and in fact often did, lead to the other strategy, the equal rights strategy. The logic behind the claim that women and men should have the same rights was that feminine elements were needed in society, in the public, to complement masculine influence. In this thinking, the very difference between women and men was the reason for claiming equal rights.

However, the more clear-cut strategy for equal rights, of course, built on natural rights ideas, understanding women and men as individuals with the same potentials, and therefore with a claim to the same rights and the same functions within the nation. This led among other things to claiming the vote for women on the same conditions as for men. In this way of reasoning, unprivileged individuals were seen as spearheads for a progressive democracy, and the alliance with the Social Democrats was a solution.

Both Norwegian and Swedish Social Democrats mobilised the masses by promoting the idea of democracy as the best defence for the nation. In both countries, the Social Democrats supported the formation of nation states, accepting and showing respect for other nation states. An analysis of the Swedish Social Democratic Party maintains that members saw the working class as the true national class, which worked to strengthen the nation by reforms from within. Capitalism, to these Social Democrats, appeared as the expression of a reactionary internationalism and the disregard for national identities.

Such ideas manifested themselves in the Swedish fight for the male vote until 1909. Women's right to vote was hardly mentioned, not even by Swedish Socialist women.

In Norway, where the male vote was won in 1898, the Social Democrats now worked for women's enfranchisement; however, it was women who were more engaged in this than their male comrades. Their fight paralleled that of the liberal bourgeois women and some men, who were also using the national crises to fight for women's suffrage. Social Democratic women saw women's vote as a better defence for the nation than a strong army and navy, because women, according to this opinion, would avert war. They also pointed to the fact that women, in a number of ways, to which I shall shortly revert, had shown their desire and ability to assume national responsibility and therefore deserved the vote. In 1907 limited female suffrage was obtained, among other factors owing to the political rationality women had shown during the national crises of 1905. In 1913 general female suffrage was achieved.

The strategy to form a spearhead for democratic reform had a gender perspective. In Sweden it favoured men's vote, in Norway women's vote. Although time differences were small, the interaction of feminism and nationalism yielded earlier results where liberal nationalism prevailed.

In Sweden, where the more conservative nationalism was strong, national crises did not have any effect on women's suffrage. Women, as we have seen, had to wait for the vote until 1921.

Gendered political activities

Finally, the gendered *forms* of political activities come to the fore in a comparative analysis. In both countries, men gave voice to their political opinions through membership in political parties, through the vote and by supporting the nation also as soldiers. They formed voluntary organizations to act as pressure groups for their convictions.

Women also formed voluntary organisations. Conservative women in both countries created organisations to strengthen the military defence, but they did not work in the same way as men in similar organisations. Women would arrange bazaars and organise other funding activities to collect money for defence. Norwegian women financed a new motor-torpedo boat, appropriately named the 'Valkyrie'. (A valkyrie was a heathen northern goddess who decided over life and death on the battle fields.) Through their organisations conservative Swedish women also worked to promote enthusiasm for the military among young boys. Liberal Norwegian women started the education of nurses to serve at the front in case the crises over the political union should lead to war between the two nations. When, in 1905, a plebiscite was arranged in Norway to decide over the abrogation of the union, women were excluded because they did not yet have the right to vote. Norwegian women's organisations thus arranged a petition, gathering around 300,000 signatures to support the decision to abrogate the union. Using the means at their disposal women showed the intent to take responsibility for the future of the nation.

This part of the paper can be summed up thus: nationalism and feminism interacted in complicated ways in the process of nation building. The gender system stamped national symbols as well as political activities to reach national goals. Although class and political convictions seemed more important than gender when political *opinions* were concerned, gender was decisive for *the forms of political activity*.

However, there was not one single feminist strategy to build a democratic nation. The difference strategy was more acceptable to conservative aggressive nationalism than the equal rights strategy. For this latter strategy, an alliance with the Social Democrats was the most favourable, although gender decided the priority given to this question within the Social Democratic Party as well. In short, central concepts like nation and class were clearly gendered.

Nationalism and feminism in Asian cultures

Is it possible to make comparisons as to the interaction of feminism and nationalism if we extend this study to Asian cultures, such as Japan and India? Would the categories

used to study these phenomena in Scandinavia yield any meanings in a very different cultural setting?⁸

To begin with, there is no doubt that in Asia we also find the two forms of nationalism. At the turn of the century Japan was characterised by conservative and aggressive nationalism. If we move to the 1920s and the early 1930s, we do, however, find a short period when moderately liberal nationalism had the upper hand. It seems no surprise that during that span of years women had better opportunities than before. Yet it was a short period that was silhouetted against the general impression of authoritarian Japanese regimes. The fact that from 1890 to 1945 Japanese women were legally prohibited from taking part in party politics, confirms the correlation between conservative nationalism and a negative attitude to feminist politics that we found in Sweden.⁹

In India, nationalism aimed at loosening, even breaking with, British domination, and may, with all due reservations, be compared to the Norwegian confrontation with Sweden. The cultural component of Indian nationalism had a clearly gendered aspect. When the British pointed to the subjugated position of Indian women as a sign of the uncivilized character of Indian culture, Indian nationalists would cite old Hindu traditions – the ‘shakti’ – where powerful goddesses invested women with strength and steadfastness. Also national policies comprised gendered problems. Reforms, such as the abolition of ‘suttee’ – the burning of widows – and of child-marriages, were proposed by Indian liberal nationalists and partly carried through with the assistance of British authorities. Such reforms belonged to the set of feminist goals mentioned at the beginning: to secure women’s physical and psychological integrity.

Gender-specific realities were also expressed in the language of national symbols. Both in Japan and in India, good housewives and mothers were used as symbols for the strong and healthy nation. Indian nationalists used the term ‘Mother India’, just like the Scandinavians who talked about the national home with a father and a mother. But it must not be forgotten that where the family functioned according to a patriarchal model, such symbols were prone to uphold women’s subordination and men’s domination. Although we find conservative as well as liberal nationalism and shared national symbols in European as well as in Asian cultures, comparisons across cultural divides must take cultural differences into account. The same concepts do not necessarily have the same meaning in different cultures.

Nevertheless, the two strategies found in Norway and Sweden may also be located in a Japanese and an Indian setting. There is a parallel between the importance Swedish

8 This part of the paper is built on I. Blom, ed., *Cappelens Kvinnehistorie*, vol. III, Oslo, 1992-3, pp. 170-228. See also Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*; B. Ramusak, ‘Women in South and South East Asia’, in *Restoring Women to History: Teaching Packets for Integrating Women’s History into Courses on Africa, Asia, Latin America, The Caribbean and the Middle East*, ed. I. Berger et al., Bloomington, 1988, pp. 1-63; S.L. Sievers, ‘Women in China, Japan and Korea’, in *Restoring Women to History: Teaching Packets for Integrating Women’s History into Courses on Africa, Asia, Latin America, The Caribbean and the Middle East*, ed. I. Berger et al., Bloomington, 1988, pp. 63-118; S.L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan*, Stanford, 1983; L. Kasturi and V. Macumdar, *Women and Indian Nationalism*, New Delhi, 1994; A. Basu, ‘Women in Politics. India’, in *Women’s Politics and Women in Politics*, ed. S. Sogner and G. Hagemann, Oslo, 2000, pp. 165-72.

9 Another interesting comparison would be between Japan and Germany. There were a number of German states, where from 1852 until 1908 women were also prohibited from participating in party politics.

conservative women attributed to the education of boys to become soldiers, and the Aikoko Fujinkai, the biggest Japanese women's organisation. This organisation worked around the turn of the century to support Japanese authorities, among other things by trying to make women see their sons as the sons of the Japanese emperor and to prepare mothers to proudly sacrifice their sons for the fatherland. The Japanese tradition of the subservient wife may be seen not just as an expression of the patriarchal family model, but also of conservative Japanese nationalism.

Indian nationalists put forth the argument that women had a special role as guardians of the old Hindu traditions, so important to the national movement. The 'swadeshi' movement, expressing its criticism of British sovereignty just after the turn of the century through boycott of British goods, recruited many women who worked hard to give priority to Indian products by organising meetings and boycott activities. If we move into the interwar years, Gandhi's ideas of femininity are easily translated into the difference strategy. Women should take part in the national struggle, but preferably in other ways than men. They were not welcome in the public protest marches, but all the more welcomed when they were seen busily producing Indian cotton cloth and wearing Indian costumes. Gandhi saw the goddess Sita, the faithful, self-sacrificing wife, as the ideal woman. He also found women especially well prepared for 'satyagraha', that is, nonviolent resistance.

In both countries we also find examples of the equality strategy. This was no doubt the strategy applied by the 23-year-old Japanese woman Fukuda Hideko, when, in 1883, she spoke to an auditorium about women's right to the same education as men and suggested the same economic, legal and moral rights for women as for men. Hideko envisaged what she termed 'a civilised democratic Japan'. The Japanese reform organisations of the 1880s also saw liberal feminist politics as part of their programme. But Hideko was soon arrested, and the Liberal Party was dissolved. Japanese women had to wait until 1945 to get the vote.

In India, women's organisations such as the All India Muslim Women's Conference and the Women's Indian Association, formed in 1914 and 1917 respectively, may be seen as examples of the equal rights strategy. The support given to limited women's suffrage in some Indian provinces in the 1920s and for all India in 1935, as well as women's active participation in Gandhi's civil disobedience strategies, may testify to the existence of equal rights strategies in the formation of the Indian nation. So would the fact that – although Gandhi disapproved – many women took part in the big salt march of 1930 after Gandhi was arrested.

In Asian cultures, too, political activities appeared in gender-specific forms. Women could not participate in politics in the same ways as men and therefore they would build their gender-specific organisations. In Japan, they were lawfully excluded from party politics. Although, in India, they were not forbidden to take part in politics, women were only slowly accepted as partners in political processes.

Parallels between Asian and European cultures

Let me sum up the similarities between Asian and European cultures in the interaction of feminism and nationalism.

First, gender has everywhere been important for nation building. National symbols were imbued with gendered meanings. Central concepts like 'political rights' were not

gender neutral, and purposeful political action was needed to make this concept include women.

Political actions mostly took on different forms for men and women. This happened even in cases where political opinions were gender neutral, such as in the question of resistance to Western culture in India and Japan and in Norwegian discontent with the union with Sweden.

Everywhere there is reason to believe that part of national identity had a gender-specific connotation.

The comparison also shows different patterns in the interaction of feminism and nationalism. The contrast that may be discerned between conservative and liberal nationalism in Scandinavia becomes much more prominent in the case of Japan and India.

Further, two feminist strategies are found in all of the four nations under study. One understood women as basically different from men, but nevertheless as important as men to the nation. The other saw reforms, including women in the nation through the same rights as men, as an expression of the equal potential of the two sexes. Although the difference strategy could also lead to this conclusion, there was a tendency for this strategy to uphold existing gender hierarchies. Difference strategy consequently was the preference of conservative nationalism.

How may we explain these parallels? If we see them as expressions of a universal gender system, how may that system be explained?

The cross-cultural parallels may point to universalisms in human behaviour. Gender identities seem to rest on deep mental structures, regulating feminine and masculine behaviour and changing only very slowly. Consciously or unconsciously, these mental structures may influence expectations as to acceptable thoughts, actions and strategies by the two sexes. Basic gender relations, the very understanding of feminine and masculine identities, seem to transcend cultural differences. A universal gender hierarchy has given rise to theories of patriarchy, seeing the dichotomies 'man-woman', 'public-private', 'strong-weak', and so on, as universalisms.

Does this mean that gender was more important than class or nationality? My answer is, sometimes yes, sometimes no. The interaction of feminism and nationalism created identity conflicts everywhere and in every individual. One may also speak of competing loyalties. In some situations, gender identities were stronger than national identities. In Scandinavia, for a long time, and despite the national crises, middle-class feminists cooperated in a sisterly fashion across the Norwegian-Swedish border. For women and men of the Social Democratic Parties, the national conflict brought no problems for their cooperation. Gender – and class – proved more important than nationality.

Alliances across national borders were also important in Asian nations. Japan found inspiration for political reform in Western cultures, among other things for a modern education for middle-class women. The All India Women's Conference cooperated with the British suffragists.

Yet the harder the national conflicts grew, the more problematic became alliances across national divides. Increasingly it turned out to be a problem for different identities to coexist. Conflicts of loyalty arose. As I understand, at some point cooperation between Indian and British feminists in the question of female suffrage became extremely difficult. The heated atmosphere between the two nations made national identity prevail over gender identity. No doubt, Western inspiration for changes in the situation of Japanese women was short-lived, and even for one of the leading Norwegian feminists, Gina

Krog, national identity outweighed gender identity in 1905. Swedish feminists were appalled when Krog called Sweden 'a sly, malignant robber'. Scandinavian sisterly cooperation entered an extremely chilly period.

The varying reactions, in some cases based on gender identity, in some cases on national identity or in other cases on class identity, may be explained by the concept of fractured identities. Seeing identity as a prism, reflecting varying situations, helps understand changing priorities. The Finnish philosopher Tuija Pulkkinen maintains that one part of a person's identity will come to the foreground the moment this part is threatened or otherwise activated.¹⁰ This will explain the changing reactions charted by my comparisons. A national crisis activated national identities, gender conflicts activated gender identities, just as class conflicts brought class identities to the forefront.

No doubt, there were a number of parallels between European and Asian cultures in the interaction of feminism and nationalism. But there were certainly also obvious differences.

Cultural differences between Asian and European Cultures

My research has shown that when similar strategies were applied within different cultures, variations between cultures were striking. Despite many similarities, the interaction of feminism and nationalism was basically different in European and Asian cultures.

One of the main differences were the very dissimilar feminist goals. In Asia, priority was given to safeguard women's physical and psychic integrity, what I have identified as one of the important goals of feminism at the beginning of my paper. Asian feminist politics were enacted within a culture where the fight was about child-marriages, about concubinage, about the total submission under husband and mother-in-law, about the prohibition of widow marriages, etc. In this setting, to see women as members of the nation in the same way as men was a distant goal for a very small part of the population.

Gender relations in Scandinavia were totally different. Feminist goals were the same education for women as for men, the right of married women to have an economic activity of their own outside the family, etc. The idea of including women in the nation by giving them the vote on the same conditions as men was not a distant one.

Consequently, despite common deep-seated ideas of gender differences, cultural variations were decisive in the interaction of feminism and nationalism.

What may be seen as central elements in these cultural differences? Cultural and economic structures should be examined, and I would especially highlight the very different importance given to collective and to individualism.

In Japan and India, the Confucian, the Hindu as well as the Muslim religion strengthened the concept of a stable and strongly patriarchal family and a submissive

10 These considerations rest on T. Pulkkinen, 'Citizens, Nations and Women: The Transition from Ancient Regime to Modernity and Beyond', Paper for the International Federation for Research in Women's History Symposium, 'Rethinking Women and Gender Relations in the Modern State', Bielefeld, April 1993. See also P. Pascoe, 'Introduction' and 'Race, Gender and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriages', *Frontiers* 12 (1991), pp. 1-18; Catherine Hall's excellent discussion of the interplay of class, race, and gender in Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, pp. 199, 205-54; G. Lerner, 'Reconceptualizing Differences Among Women', *Journal of Women's History* 1 (1990), pp. 106-22.

wife. In Asian cultures, the family was the only safety net in case of need, when sickness, accidents, poverty or old age threatened the individual. Consequently, the family was the most important centre of all loyalties. This would put an obstacle in the way of any desire for individual rights. In many cases such a wish would not even arise. With a patriarchal family system, individual rights would certainly be a more far-fetched idea for women than for men.

In Europe, on the other hand, and especially in Northern Europe, the Lutheran religion had been stressing individual freedom for a long time. Industrialisation had also loosened the ties between family and individual. At the end of the nineteenth century the first steps towards the welfare state were taken, gradually providing a public safety net around the individual to secure basic needs. This added to the weakening of collective family ties and made the road to individualism easier. But, even in Scandinavia, this road had higher barriers for women than for men.

However, it is important not to see cultures as absolute entities. Internal fractures and conflicts over values and ideas characterise any culture, among these conflicts over gender relations. Comparative studies may help us to understand cultures as multifaceted entities, and to seek parallels between groups of similar opinions within different cultures.

Also, in Western culture there were regional differences, which might sometimes be more or less the same as the differences between Western and Asian cultures. The question of loyalty to the family, of collectivism versus individualism, as well as religious and economic circumstances, differed widely from Northern to Southern Europe. Around the turn of the twentieth century Catholic religion and the agrarian economy of Southern Europe could result in tendencies towards collectivism and family loyalty that would impede the fight for equal rights for women in similar, although not as drastic ways, as in Asian cultures. An indication of the regional differences may be the much later date of women's enfranchisement in most Southern European countries, that is, after the Second World War (except for Spain). In Northern Europe female suffrage was obtained around the First World War.

Within Asian cultures, also, there were important variations. The fight for women's physical and psychic integrity was extremely important for some groups in Japanese and Indian societies, and shows that collectivism would not necessarily lead to less respect for individual rights. Consequently, the historian should be careful not to talk about cultures as monolithic entities. Studies of internal differences are important to understand the working of any cultural system, as well as to make meaningful comparisons between cultures.

Conclusion

Comparing fractured cultures and fractured identities may make the image of 'the other' more nuanced, and build bridges of understanding, not just between seemingly very different cultures such as Asian and European cultures, but also between women and men within the same cultures. Seeing individual identities as fractured and contextual and applying the theory of the gender system to the complicated interaction of nationalism and feminism, elicits knowledge that would otherwise remain concealed.

Comparative gender history, like any comparative history, may indicate general patterns and hint at major problems and tendencies. To acquire a deeper understanding of special cultures, the historian will have to analyse the culture in question more

thoroughly – at the regional, the national or even local level. Such analysis will add nuances to general patterns, give them more precise meanings and probably also sometimes falsify them.

Cross-cultural perspectives on the interaction between nationalism and feminism should, therefore, rest on intimate knowledge of the cultures involved. What I have done in this paper – sketching common strategies and certain patterns of interaction between two ideologies – is, of course, only a small and uncertain start. Comparative gender history, just like most other comparative history, needs a multitude of studies clarifying similarities and differences between the phenomena that are being compared. Results, I think, will nevertheless tend to be patterns of thinking rather than verifiable knowledge.

However, I would maintain that my comparison highlights the importance of gender to central historical processes and the gender-specific circumstances and possibilities for historical actors. I would also contend that these comparisons add many nuances to theories of patriarchal subjection of women. Women and men often shared understandings of femininity and masculinity, and such understandings might be very stable through long periods. But when important changes in society occurred, such as the formation of nation states, this also affected gender relations. Finally, the often suggested polarisation of women and men as actors within the private and the public arenas respectively, does not hold true. Although political action took gendered forms, both sexes were actively engaged in the process of nation building. This process comprised the home and family as well as public parliaments and political parties.

Consequently, to fully understand a phenomenon such as nationalism and nation building – in fact, I think, to fully understand most historical phenomena – the analytical category of gender should be taken into account.

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Zuerst erschienen in: Kaelble, Hartmut (ed.), *The European Way: European Societies in the Nineteenth Twentieth Centuries*, New York 2004, pp. 205-225.

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Blom, Ida: Nationalism and Feminism in Europe. Contribution to the web-feature „European history – gender history“. In: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte (2009), URL: <<http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2009/Article=421>>.