

Sebastian Thies, Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez,
and Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco (Eds.)

Of Fatherlands and Motherlands
Gender and Nation in the Americas

De Patrias y Matrias
Género y nación en las Américas

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A joint project of Bielefeld University, the University of Leipzig,
and the Colegio de México

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Of Fatherlands and Motherlands. Gender and Nation in the Americas

SEBASTIAN THIES AND GABRIELE PISARZ-RAMIREZ

This volume deals with the interface between gender and nation in the Americas—two discourse formations that have been intricately entangled from the rise of nationalism in the 18th and early 19th century to the present. The way both discourses are historically interlinked has played a key role in legitimizing and upholding the hegemonic order of androcentric nationalism. The nation's pervasive hold on social imaginaries would have been much less compelling had it not been for the transfer of gendered collective symbols, metaphors, and allegories from the area of patriarchal signifying practices to the discourse of nation.¹ At the same time the function of patriarchy to uphold the power structure of national hegemony ultimately also led to the formation of a gender regime based on inequality and exclusion. However, this strategic articulation between the national, i.e. macro level of the social order and the micro level of the gender roles, has always remained a contested terrain.

Feminist self-affirmation came to haunt the establishment of the nation-state from its very beginnings; but it is particularly from the days of second wave feminism in the 1960s and the deconstruction of gender binarisms that androcentric nationalism entered a profound crisis. It had to readjust to a new social reality, which allowed for ample social, cultural, and political participation by women, lesbians, and gay men. An abundance of artistic self-affirming practices shed light on the margins of the social order to explore the repressed history of women and gay people, to expose taboo topics such as female or gay sexuality, and to reflect upon the importance of writing from positions of difference. Although this development has not been exempt from political backlash, there is no doubt that the way national reality is understood and coded symbolically today has been significantly impacted by these phenomena. There is a completely new setting for nation and gender discourse because of the way the truth regimes of postmodernism left no essentialism unquestioned, as well as the massive ef-

¹ The homogenizing concept of patriarchy as employed by feminist theory has been critiqued by Yuval-Davis in her groundbreaking work *Gender and Nation* based on the assumption that, on the one hand, the notion of patriarchy effectively means different things in the different cultures it is applied to and, on the other, that for the male dominated public sphere, citizenship is less molded on patriarchy than on fraternity (7). The editors of this volume acknowledge that there is a need for a culturally differentiated take on patriarchy. This does not mean, however, that the crucial role of patriarchal discourse in the building of the nation must be questioned in general terms.

fects of contemporary globalization, which have come to challenge long-held identities.

This volume approaches these phenomena from two angles: A first series of contributions looks at the nation and gender from a genealogical perspective and shows how gender has come to play an important role in the foundational narration of nation, either stabilizing the predominant ideology, or opening up spaces of resistance, thus allowing for self-determined articulation. In this context, a gendered take on violence as a constitutive factor of nation building and its impact on gender issues are also included. The second series is dedicated to a synchronic focus on recent cultural phenomena related to the inter-discourse between gender and nation from the 1960s onward. Here, issues related to the deconstruction of gender and nation discourse are further explored, as are the gendered geographies of the postmodern nation and its borderlands, as well as the crucial role media plays in the composition of newly- imagined communities.

The American hemisphere is the regional focus, as the continent on which Benedict Anderson, who authored the classic of nation theory *Imagined Communities*, saw the first forays into modern nation-ness in the “Creole” nations’ struggle for independence from colonial rule. Looking into the various ways in which the inter-discourse of nation and gender has evolved in the Americas, this collection of essays forms part of the emergent field of inter-American studies. It presents the outcome of a long lasting dialogue between scholars from Mexico, the United States, the Netherlands, and Germany, which has led to two international conferences: “Of Fatherlands and Motherlands. Gender and Nation in the Americas/De Patrias y Matrias. Género y nación en las Américas” in 2005 at the Center of Interdisciplinary Research at Bielefeld University, and “El género y sus geografías culturales” at the Colegio de México in 2008.

Regardless of the contextual particularities of power structures, the genealogy of the gendered nation is strongly related to transnational trends whereby a North/South dialogue is particularly fitting in order to overcome the limitations of epistemological nationalism and postcolonial regimes of knowledge production. A transnational epistemology suggests awareness of the ways that the construction of social knowledge is embedded in geopolitical structures of North/South (inter)dependence. Because the Americas share, on the one hand, a common legacy of postcolonial *longue durée* and, on the other, a long history of inter-American struggle for hegemony and self-determination, national and gender identities have always had a dialogical dimension. In García Canclini’s words, “identity, as a narrative we constantly reconstruct with others, is also a coproduction” (95). This is particularly true in the current processes of globalization and its new narratives, which try to make sense of changing social realities.

Some aspects related to these studies render this transnational take on the gendered nation particularly fitting. The transnational perspective on the constitutive role of gender issues in the creation, and subsequent critique and deconstruction of nationhood, aims at decentering the methodological nationalism and exceptionalism so characteristic of defining trends in feminist theory in the United States and Europe.²

² Although Latin American societies are stereotyped in Western-centric cultural representation as predominantly (and anachronistically) marked by machismo and rigid gender roles,