Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family[1]

Anne McClintock

All nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous –
dangerous, not in Eric Hobsbawm's sense as having to be opposed, but in
the sense of representing relations to political power and to the
technologies of violence. Nationalism, as Ernest Gellner notes, invents
nations where they do not exist, and most modern nations, despite their
appeal to an august and immemorial past, are of recent invention
(Gellner, 1964). Benedict Anderson warns, however, that Gellner tends
to assimilate 'invention' to 'falsity' rather than to 'imagining' and
'creation'. Anderson, by contrast, views nations as 'imagined communi-
ties' in the sense that they are systems of cultural representation
whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification
with an extended community (Anderson, 1991: 6). As such, nations are
not simply phantasmagoria of the mind, but are historical and insti-
tutional practices through which social difference is invented and
performed. Nationalism becomes, as a result, radically constitutive of
people's identities, through social contests that are frequently violent
and always gendered. But if the invented nature of nationalism has
found wide theoretical currency, explorations of the gendering of the
national imaginary have been conspicuously paltry.

All nations depend on powerful constructions of gender. Despite
nationalisms' ideological investment in the idea of popular *unity*,
nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionaliz-
ation of gender *difference*. No nation in the world gives women and men
the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state. Rather
than expressing the flowering into time of the organic essence of a
timeless people, nations are contested systems of cultural represen-
tation that limit and legitimize peoples' access to the resources of the
nation-state. Yet with the notable exception of Frantz Fanon, male
theorists have seldom felt moved to explore how nationalism is

implicated in gender power. As a result, as Cynthia Enloe remarks, nationalisms have 'typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope' (Enloe, 1989: 44).

George Santayana, for one, gives voice to a well-established male view: 'Our nationalism is like our relationship to women: too implicated in our moral nature to be changed honourably, and too accidental to be worth changing'. Santayana's sentence could not be said by a woman, for his 'our' of national agency is male, and his male citizen stands in the same symbolic relation to the nation as a man stands to a woman. Not only are the needs of the nation here identified with the frustrations and aspirations of men, but the representation of male *national* power depends on the prior construction of *gender* difference.

For Gellner, the very definition of nationhood rests on the *male* recognition of identity: 'Men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as being from the same nation.' (Gellner, 1964) For Etienne Balibar, such recognition aligns itself inevitably with the notion of a 'race' structured about the transmission of male power and property: 'Ultimately the nation must align itself, spiritually as well as physically or carnally, with the "race", the *"patrimony"* to be protected from all degradation' (Balibar, 1991, my emphasis). Even Fanon, who at other moments knew better, writes 'The look that the native turns on the settler town is a look of lust . . . to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man' (Fanon, 1963: 30). For Fanon, both colonizer and colonized are here unthinkingly male, and the manichaean agon of decolonization is waged over the territoriality of female, domestic space.

All too often in male nationalisms, *gender* difference between women and men serves to symbolically define the limits of *national* difference and power between *men*. Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit: 'Singapore girl, you're a great way to fly.' Women are typically construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency. As Elleke Boehmer notes in her fine essay, the 'motherland' of male nationalism may thus 'not signify "home" and "source" to women' (Boehmer, 1991: 5). Boehmer notes that the male role in the nationalist scenario is typically 'metonymic', that is, men are contiguous with each other and with the national whole. Women, by contrast, appear 'in a metaphoric or symbolic role' (Boehmer, 1991: 6). In an important intervention, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias thus identify five major ways in which women have been implicated in nationalism (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989: 7):

● as biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities
● as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups (through restrictions on sexual or marital relations)
● as active transmitters and producers of the national culture

- as symbolic signifiers of national difference
- as active participants in national struggles

Nationalism is thus constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse, and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power. None the less, theories of nationalism reveal a double disavowal. If male theorists are typically indifferent to the gendering of nations, feminist analyses of nationalism have been lamentably few and far between. White feminists, in particular, have been slow to recognize nationalism as a feminist issue. In much Western, socialist feminism, as Yuval-Davis and Anthias point out, '[i]ssues of ethnicity and nationality have tended to be ignored.'

A feminist theory of nationalism might be strategically fourfold: investigating the gendered formation of sanctioned male theories; bringing into historical visibility women's active cultural and political participation in national formations; bringing nationalist institutions into critical relation with other social structures and institutions, while at the same time paying scrupulous attention to the structures of racial, ethnic and class power that continue to bedevil privileged forms of feminism.

The national family of man

A paradox lies at the heart of most national narratives. Nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space. The term 'nation' derives from 'natio': to be born. We speak of nations as 'motherlands' and 'fatherlands'. Foreigners 'adopt' countries that are not their native homes, and are 'naturalized' into the national family. We talk of the Family of Nations, of 'homelands' and 'native' lands. In Britain, immigration matters are dealt with at the Home Office; in the United States, the President and his wife are called the First Family. Winnie Mandela was, until her recent fall from grace, honoured as South Africa's 'Mother of the Nation'. In this way, nations are symbolically figured as *domestic genealogies*. Yet, at the same time, since the mid nineteenth century in the West, 'the family' itself has been figured as the *antithesis* of history.

The family trope is important in at least two ways. First, the family offers a 'natural' figure for sanctioning social *hierarchy* within a putative organic *unity* of interests. Second, it offers a 'natural' trope for figuring historical *time*. After 1859 and the advent of social Darwinism, Britain's emergent national narrative took increasing shape around the image of the evolutionary Family of Man. The 'family' offered an indispensable metaphoric figure by which hierarchical (and, one might add, often contradictory) social distinctions could be shaped into a single *historical* genesis narrative. Yet a curious paradox emerges. The family as a metaphor offered a single genesis narrative for national history, while, at the same time, the family as an *institution* became voided of history. As the nineteenth century drew on, the family as an institution

was figured as existing, by natural decree, beyond the commodity market, beyond politics, and beyond history proper. (Davidoff, L. and Hall, C, 1987) The family thus became, at one and the same time, both the organizing figure for national *history*, as well as its *antithesis*.

Edward Said has pointed to a transition in the late Victorian upper middle class from a culture of 'filiation' (familial relations) to a culture of 'affiliation' (non-familial relations). Said argues that a perceived crisis in the late Victorian upper-middle-class family took on the aspect of a pervasive cultural affliction. The decay of filiation was, he argues, typically attended by a second moment – the turn to a compensatory order of affiliation, which might variously be an institution, a vision, a credo, or a vocation. While retaining the powerful distinction between filiation and affiliation, I wish to complicate the linear thrust of Said's story. In the course of the nineteenth century, the social function of the great service families (which had been invested in filiative rituals of patrilineal rank and subordination) became displaced on to the national bureaucracy. So, too, the filiative image of the family was projected on to emerging affiliative institutions as their shadowy, naturalized form. Thus, I argue, the filiative order did not disappear: rather it flourished as a metaphoric after-image, reinvented within the new orders of the nation-state, the industrial bureaucracy, and imperial capitalism. Increasingly, filiation took an imperial shape, as the cultural invention of the evolutionary Family of Man was projected both on to the national metropolis and the colonial bureaucracy as its natural, legitimizing shape.

The significance of the family trope was twofold. First, the family offered an indispensable figure for sanctioning social *hierarchy* within a putative *organic unity* of interests. Since the subordination of woman to man, and child to adult, was deemed a natural fact, other forms of social hierarchy could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature. The family image was thus drawn on to figure *hierarchy within unity* as an 'organic' element of historical progress, and thereby became indispensable for legitimizing exclusion and hierarchy within non-familial (affiliative) social formations such as nationalism, liberal individualism and imperialism. The metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial – the 'national family', the global 'family of nations', the colony as a 'family of black children ruled over by a white father' – thus depended on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere.

Secondly, the family offered an indispensable trope for figuring what was often violent, *historical change* as natural, *organic time*. Since children 'naturally' progress into adults, projecting the family image on to national and imperial 'Progress' enabled what was often murderously violent change to be legitimized as the progressive unfolding of natural decree. National or imperial intervention could be figured as an organic, non-revolutionary progression that naturally contained hierarchy within unity: paternal fathers ruling benignly over immature children.

The evolutionary family thus captured, in one potent trope, the idea of *social discontinuity* (hierarchy through space) and temporal *discontinuity* (hierarchy across time) as a natural, *organic continuity*. The idea of the Family of Man became invaluable in its capacity to give state and imperial intervention the alibi of nature.

As Fanon eloquently describes it in 'Algeria unveiled', imperial intervention frequently took shape as a domestic rescue drama. 'Around the family life of the Algerian, the occupier piled up a whole mass of judgements . . . thus attempting to confine the Algerian within a circle of guilt' (Fanon, 1965: 38). The dream of the 'total domestication of Algerian society' came to haunt colonial authority, and the domesticated, female body became the terrain over which the military contest was fought.

In modern Europe, citizenship is the legal representation of a person's relationship to the rights and resources of the nation-state. But the putatively universalist concept of national citizenship becomes unstable when seen from the position of women. In post-French Revolution Europe, women were not incorporated directly into the nation-state as citizens, but only indirectly through men, as dependent members of the family in private and public law. The Code Napoleon was the first modern statute to decree that the wife's nationality should follow her husband's, an example other European countries briskly followed. A woman's *political* relation to the nation was submerged as a *social* relation to a man through marriage. For women, citizenship in the nation was mediated by the marriage relation within the family.

The gendering of nation time

A number of critics have followed Tom Nairn in naming the nation 'the modern Janus' (Nairn, 1977). For Nairn, the nation takes shape as a contradictory figure of time: one face gazing back into the primordial mists of the past, the other into an infinite future. Deniz Kandiyoti expresses the temporal contradiction with clarity: '[Nationalism] presents itself both as a modern project that melts and transforms traditional attachments in favour of new identities *and* as a reflection of authentic cultural values culled from the depths of a presumed communal past' [Kandiyoti, 1992). Bhabha, following Nairn and Anderson, writes: 'Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye' (Bhabha, 1991: 1). Bhabha and Anderson borrow here on Walter Benjamin's crucial insight into the temporal paradox of modernity. For Benjamin, a central feature of nineteenth century industrial capitalism was the 'use of archaic images to identify what was historically new about the "nature" of commodities' (Buck-Morss, 1989: 67). In Benjamin's insight, the mapping of 'Progress' depends on systematically *inventing* images of 'archaic' time to identify what is historically 'new' about enlightened, national progress. Anderson can thus ask: 'Supposing "antiquity" were,

at a certain historical juncture, the *necessary consequence* of "novelty"?'
(Anderson, 1991: xiv).

What is less often noticed, however, is that the temporal anomaly
within nationalism – veering between nostalgia for the past, and the
impatient, progressive sloughing off of the past – is typically resolved by
figuring the contradiction as a 'natural' division of *gender*. Women are
represented as the atavistic and authentic 'body' of national tradition
(inert, backward-looking, and natural), embodying nationalism's con-
servative principle of continuity. Men, by contrast, represent the
progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent and
historic), embodying nationalism's progressive, or revolutionary prin-
ciple of discontinuity. Nationalism's anomalous relation to *time* is thus
managed as a natural relation to *gender*.

Johannes Fabian's important meditation on time and anthro-
pology, *Time and the Other* (1983), shows how, following Darwin, the
social evolutionists broke the hold of biblical chronology (chronicle time)
by secularizing time and placing it at the disposal of the empirical,
imperial project (chronological time). In order to do this, Fabian points
out, 'they spatialized time'. With the publication of *The Origin of
Species*, Charles Darwin bestowed on the developing global project of
empiricism a decisive dimension – secular Time as the agent of a unified
world history. The axis of *time* was projected on to the axis of *space*, and
history became global. Now not only natural space, but also historical
time, could be collected and mapped on to a global, taxonomic science of
the surface. Most importantly, history, especially national and imperial
history, took on the character of a spectacle.

The exemplary figure for spatializing time was the Family Tree.
The social evolutionists took the ancient image of the divine, cosmologi-
cal Tree and secularized it as a natural genealogy of global, imperial
history. In the secularized Tree of Time, three principles emerge.
Mapped against the global Tree, the world's discontinuous 'nations'
appear to be marshalled within a single, hierarchical European ur-
narrative. Second, history is imaged as naturally teleological, an
organic process of upward growth, with the European nation as the
apogee of progress. Third, inconvenient discontinuities are ranked and
subordinated into a hierarchical structure of branching time – the
differential progress of 'racially' different nations mapped against the
tree's self-evident boughs, with 'lesser nations' destined, by nature, to
perch on its lower branches.

Time, however, was thus not only *secularized*, it was *domesticated*,
a point Fabian, for one, does not address. Social evolutionism and
anthropology gave to national politics a concept of natural time as
familial. In the image of the Family Tree, evolutionary 'progress' was
represented as a series of anatomically distinct 'family' types, organized
into a linear procession. Violent national and imperial change thus took
on the character of an evolving spectacle, under the organizing rubric of
the family. The merging of the 'racial' evolutionary Tree and the
'gendered' Family into the Family Tree of Man provided scientific

racism with a simultaneously gendered and racial image through which it could popularize the idea of imperial Progress.

Britain's emerging national narrative gendered time by figuring women (like the colonized and the working class) as inherently atavistic – the conservative repository of the national archaic. Women, it was argued, did not inhabit history proper, but existed, like colonized peoples, in a permanently anterior time within the modern nation, as anachronistic humans, childlike, irrational and regressive – the living archive of the national archaic. White, middle-class men, by contrast, were seen to embody the forward-thrusting agency of national 'progress'. Thus the figure of the national Family of Man reveals a persistent paradox. National 'Progress' (conventionally, the invented domain of male, public space) was figured as *familial*, while the family itself (conventionally, the domain of private, female space) was figured as *beyond history*. With these theoretical remarks in mind, I wish now to turn to the paradoxical relation between the invented constructions of family and nation, as they have taken shape within South Africa in both black and white women's contradictory relations to the competing national genealogies.

One can safely say, at this point, that there is no single narrative of the nation. Different genders, classes, ethnicities and generations do not identify with, or experience the myriad national formations in the same way; nationalisms are invented, performed and consumed in ways that do not follow a universal blueprint. At the very least, the breathtaking Eurocentricism of Hobsbawm's dismissal of Third World nationalisms warrants sustained criticism. In a gesture of sweeping condescension, Hobsbawm nominates Europe as nationalism's 'original home', while 'all the anti-imperial movements of any significance' are unceremoniously dumped into three categories: mimicry of Europe, anti-Western xenophobia, and the 'natural high spirits of martial tribes' (Hobsbawm, 1990: 151). A feminist investigation of national difference might, by contrast, take into account the dynamic social and historic contexts of national struggles, their strategic mobilizing of popular forces, their myriad, varied trajectories, and their relation to other social institutions. We might do well to develop a more theoretically complex, and strategically subtle *genealogy* of nationalisms. In South Africa, certainly, the competing Afrikaner and African nationalisms have had both distinct and overlapping trajectories, with very different consequences for women.

Afrikaner nationalism and gender

Until the 1860s, Britain had scant interest in its unpromising colony at the southern tip of Africa. Only upon the discovery of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) were the Union Jack and the redcoats shipped out with any real sense of imperial mission. But very quickly, mining needs for cheap labour and a centralized state collided with traditional farming

interests, and out of these contradictions, in the conflict for control over African land and labour, exploded the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902.

Afrikaner nationalism was a doctrine of crisis. After their defeat by the British, the bloodied remnants of the scattered Boer communities had to forge a new counter-culture if they were to survive in the emergent capitalist state. From the outset, the invention of this counter-culture had a clear *class* component. When the Boer generals and the British capitalists swore blood-brotherhood in the Union of 1910, the rag-tag legion of 'poor whites' with little or no prospects, the modest clerks and shopkeepers, the small farmers and poor teachers, the intellectuals and petite bourgeoisie, all precarious in the new state, began to identify themselves as the vanguard of a new Afrikanerdom, the chosen emissaries of the national *volk* (Moodie, 1975; O'Meara, 1983).

To begin with, however, Afrikaners had no monolithic identity, no common historic purpose, and no single unifying language. They were a disunited, scattered people, speaking a medley of High Dutch and local dialects, with smatterings of the slave, Nguni and Khoisan languages – scorned as the *'kombuistaal'* (kitchen-language) of house-servants, slaves and women. Afrikaners therefore had, quite literally, to invent themselves. The new, invented community of the *volk* required the conscious creation of a single print-language, a popular press and a literate populace. At the same time, the invention of tradition required a class of cultural brokers and image-makers to do the inventing. The 'language movement' of the early twentieth century, in the flurry of poems, magazines, newspapers, novels and countless cultural events, provided just such a movement, fashioning the myriad Boer vernaculars into a single identifiable Afrikaans language. In the early decades of the twentieth century, as Isabel Hofmeyr has brilliantly shown, an elaborate labour of 'regeneration' was undertaken, as the despised *'Hotnotstaal'* ('Hottentot's language') was revamped and purged of its rural, "degenerate" associations, and elevated to the status of the august 'mother tongue' of the Afrikaans people (Hofmeyr, 1987: 97). In 1918, Afrikaans was legally recognized as a language.

At the same time, the invention of Afrikaner tradition had a clear *gender* component. In 1918, a small, clandestine clique of Afrikaans men launched a secret society, with the express mission of capturing the loyalties of dispirited Afrikaners and fostering white male business power. The tiny white brotherhood swiftly burgeoned into a secret, country-wide mafia that came to exert enormous power over all aspects of Nationalist policy (Moodie, 1975; O'Meara, 1983). The gender bias of the society, as of Afrikanerdom as a whole, is neatly summed up in its name: the Broederbond (the brotherhood). Henceforth, Afrikaner nationalism would be synonymous with white male interests, white male aspirations and white male politics. Indeed, in a recent effort to shore up its waning power, the Broederbond is currently debating whether to admit so-called 'Coloured' Afrikaans speaking men into the brotherhood. All women will, however, continue to be barred.

In the voluminous Afrikaner historiography, the history of the *volk* is organized around a male national narrative figured as an imperial journey into empty lands. The journey proceeds forwards in *geographical* space, but backwards in *racial* and *gender* time, to what is figured as a prehistoric zone of linguistic, racial and gender 'degeneration'. The myth of the 'empty land' is simultaneously the myth of the 'virgin land' – effecting a double erasure. Within the colonial narrative, to be 'virgin' is to be empty of desire, voided of sexual agency, and passively awaiting the thrusting, male insemination of European military history, language and 'reason'. The feminizing of 'virgin' colonial lands also effects a territorial appropriation, for if the land is virgin, Africans cannot claim aboriginal territorial rights, and the white male patrimony can be violently assured.

At the heart of the continent, an historic agon is staged, as 'degenerate' Africans 'falsely' claim entitlement to the land. A divinely organized military conflict baptizes the nation in a male birthing ritual, which grants to white men the patrimony of land and history. The nation emerges as the progeny of male history through the motor of military might. At the centre of this imperial gospel, stands the contradictory figure of the *volksmoeder*, the mother of the nation.

The central emblem of Afrikaans historiography is the Great Trek, and each trek is figured as a family presided over by a single, epic male patriarch. In 1938, two decades after the recognition of Afrikaans as a language, an epic extravaganza of invented tradition enflamed Afrikanerdom into a delirium of nationalist passion. Dubbed the *Tweede Trek* (Second Trek), or the *Eeufees* (Centenary), the event celebrated the Boers' first mutinous Great Trek in 1838 away from British laws and the effrontery of slave emancipation. The Centenary also commemorated the Boer massacre of the Zulus at the Battle of Blood River. Nine replicas of Voortrekker wagons were built – the reinvention of the archaic to sanction modernity. Each wagon was literally baptized, and named after a male Voortrekker hero. No wagon was named after an adult woman. One was, however, called generically, *Vrou en Moeder* (wife and mother). This wagon, creaking across the country, symbolized woman's relation to the nation as indirect, mediated through her social relation to men, her national identity lying in her unpaid services and sacrifices, through husband and family, to the *volk*. Each wagon became the microcosm of colonial society at large: the whip-wielding white patriarch prancing on horseback, black servants toiling alongside, white mother and children sequestered in the wagon – the women's starched white bonnets signifying the purity of the race, the decorous surrender of their sexuality to the patriarch, and the invisibility of white female labour.

The wagons rumbled along different routes from Cape Town to Pretoria, sparking along the way an orgy of national pageantry, and engulfing the country in a four-month spectacle of invented tradition. Along the way, white men grew beards and white women donned the ancestral bonnets. Huge crowds gathered to greet the wagons. As the
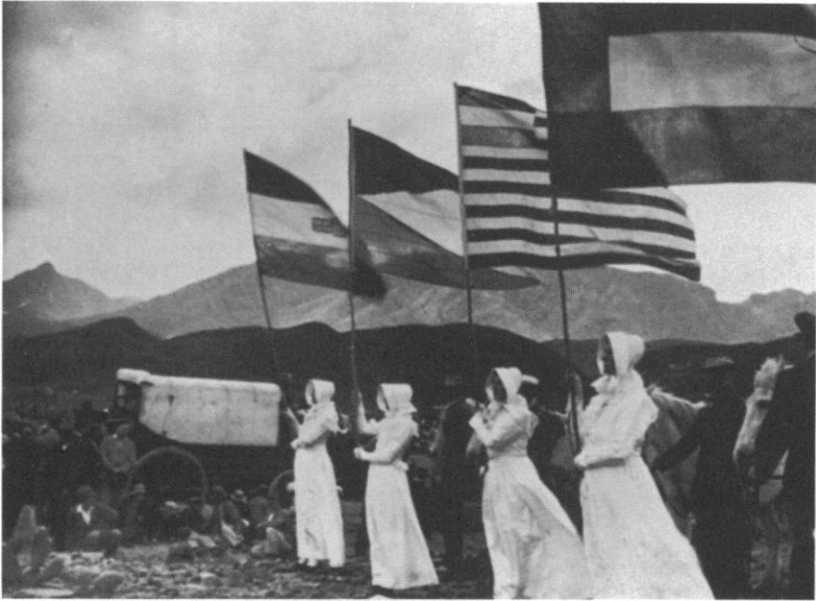
Women as Boundary Markers of the Afrikaans Nation

trekkers passed through the towns, babies were named after trekker heroes, as were roads and public buildings. Not a few girls were baptized with the improbable but popular favourite: Eeufesia (Centeneria). The affair climaxed in Pretoria in a spectacular marathon, with explicit Third Reich overtones, led by thousands of Afrikaner boy scouts bearing flaming torches.

The first point about the *Tweede Trek* is that it invented white nationalist traditions and celebrated unity where none had existed before, creating the illusion of a collective identity through the political staging of vicarious *spectacle*. The second point is that the Nationalists adopted this ploy from the Nazis. The Tweede Trek was inspired not only by the Nazi creed of *Blut und Boden*, but a new *political style*: the Nuremberg politics of fetish symbol and cultural persuasion.

In our time, I suggest, national collectivity is experienced pre-eminently through spectacle. Here I depart from Anderson, who sees nationalism as emerging primarily from the Gutenberg technology of print capitalism. Anderson neglects the fact that print capital has, until recently, been accessible to a relatively small literate élite. One could argue that the singular power of nationalism has been its capacity to organize a sense of popular, collective unity through the management of mass national *commodity spectacle*.

In this respect, nationalism inhabits the realm of fetishism. Despite

the commitment of European nationalism (following Hegel) to the idea of the nation-state as the embodiment of rational Progress, nationalism has been experienced and transmitted primarily through fetishism – precisely the cultural form that the Enlightenment denigrated as the antithesis of 'Reason'. More often than not, nationalism takes shape through the visible, ritual organization of fetish objects: flags, uniforms, airplane logos, maps, anthems, national flowers, national cuisines and architectures, as well as through the organization of collective fetish spectacle – in team sports, military displays, mass rallies, the myriad forms of popular culture, and so on. Far from being purely sexual icons, fetishes embody crises in social value, which are projected on to and embodied in impassioned objects.[2] Considerable work remains to be done on the ways in which women consume, refuse or negotiate the male fetish rituals of national spectacle.

The *Eeufees* was, by anyone's standards, a triumph of image management, complete with the spectacular regalia of flags, flaming torches, patriotic songs, incendiary speeches, costumes and crowd management. More than anything, the *Eeufees* revealed the extent to which nationalism is a symbolic *performance* of invented community: the *Eeufees* was a calculated and self-conscious effort by the Broeder-bond to paper over the myriad regional, gender and class tensions that threatened them. As a fetishistic displacement of difference, it suc-ceeded famously, for the success of the *Tweede Trek* in mobilizing a sense of white Afrikaner collectivity was a major reason, though certainly not the only one, for the Nationalists' triumphant sweep to power in 1948.[3]

From the outset, as the *Eeufees* bore witness, Afrikaner national-ism was dependent not only on powerful constructions of racial difference, but also on powerful constructions of gender difference. A gendered division of national creation prevailed, whereby men were seen to embody the political and economic agency of the *volk*, while women were the (unpaid) keepers of tradition and the *volk's* moral and spiritual mission. This gendered division of labour is summed up in the colonial gospel of the family, and the presiding icon of the *volksmoeder* (the mother of the nation). The *volksmoeder*, however, is less a biological fact than a social category. Nor is it an ideology imposed willy-nilly on hapless female victims. Rather, it is a changing, dynamic ideology rife with paradox, under constant contest by men and women, and adapted constantly to the pressures arising from African resistance and the conflict between Afrikaner colonialists and British imperialists.

The invention of the *volksmoeder*: mum's the word

The Anglo-Boer War (fundamentally a war over African land and labour) was in many respects waged as a war on Boer women. In an effort to break Boer resistance, the British torched the farms and lands, and herded thousands of women and children into concentration camps,

where 25,000 women and children perished of hunger, desolation and disease. Yet, after the Anglo-Boer War, the political power of the fierce Boer women was muted and transformed. In 1913, three years after Union, the *Vrouemonument* (Women's Monument) was erected in homage to the female victims of the war. The monument took the form of a circular, domestic enclosure, where women stand weeping with their children. Here, women's martial role as fighters and farmers was purged of its indecorously militant potential, and replaced by the figure of the lamenting mother with babe in arms. The monument enshrined Afrikaner womanhood as neither militant nor political, but as suffering, stoical and self-sacrificial (Brink, 1990). Women's disempowerment was figured not as expressive of the politics of gender difference, stemming from colonial women's ambiguous relation to imperial domination, but as emblematic of national (that is, male) disempowerment. By portraying the Afrikaner *nation* symbolically as a weeping *woman*, the mighty male embarrassment of military defeat could be overlooked, and the memory of women's vital efforts during the war washed away in images of feminine tears and maternal loss.

The icon of the *volksmoeder* is paradoxical. On the one hand, it recognizes the power of (white) motherhood; on the other hand, it is a retrospective iconography of gender containment, containing women's mutinous power within an iconography of domestic service. Defined as weeping victims of African menace, white women's activism is overlooked and their disempowerment thereby ratified.

Indeed, in the early decades of this century, as Hofmeyr shows, women played a crucial role in the invention of Afrikanerdom. The family household was seen as the last bastion beyond British control, and the cultural power of Afrikaner motherhood was mobilized in the service of white nation-building. Afrikaans was a language fashioned very profoundly by women's labours, within the economy of the domestic household. 'Not for nothing' as Hofmeyr notes, 'was it called the "mother tongue".' (1987)

In Afrikaner nationalism, motherhood is a political concept under constant contest. It is important to emphasize this for two reasons. Erasing Afrikaner women's historic agency also erases their historic complicity in the annals of apartheid. White women were not the weeping bystanders of apartheid history, but active, if decidedly disempowered, participants in the invention of Afrikaner identity. As such they were complicit in deploying the power of motherhood in the exercise and legitimation of white domination. Certainly, white women were jealously and brutally denied any formal political power, but were compensated by their limited authority in the household. Clutching this small power, they became complicit in the racism that suffuses Afrikaner nationalism. For this reason, black South African women have been justly suspicious of any easy assumption of a universal, essential sisterhood in suffering. White women are both colonized and colonizers, ambiguously implicated in the history of African dispossession.

Gender and the ANC: 'No longer in a future heaven'

African nationalism has roughly the same historic vintage as Afrikaner nationalism. Forged in the crucible of imperial thuggery, mining capitalism and rapid industrialization, African nationalism was, like its Afrikaner counterpart, the product of conscious reinvention, the enactment of a new political collectivity by specific cultural and political agents. But its racial and gender components were very different, and African nationalism would describe its own distinct trajectory across the century.

In 1910 the Union of South Africa was formed, uniting the four squabbling provinces under a single legislature. Yet at the 'national' convention, not a single black South African was present. For Africans the Union was an act of profound betrayal. A colour bar banished Africans from skilled labour, and the franchise was denied to all but a handful. And so, in 1912, African men descended on Bloemfontein from all over South Africa to protest a Union in which no black person had a voice. At this gathering, the South African Natives National Congress was launched, soon to become the African National Congress.

At the outset, the ANC, like Afrikaner nationalism, had a narrow class base. Drawn from the tiny urban intelligentsia and petite bourgeoisie, its members were mostly mission-educated teachers and clerks, small businessmen and traders, the kind of men whom Fanon described as 'dusted over with colonial culture'. They were urban, anti-tribal and assimilationist, demanding full civic participation in the great British Empire, rather than confrontation and radical change. They were also solidly male (Lodge, 1991).

For the first thirty years of the ANC, black women's relation to nationalism was structured around a contradiction: their exclusion from full political membership within the ANC contrasted with their increasing grass-roots activism. As Frene Ginwala (1990) has argued, women's resistance was shaped from below. While the language of the ANC was the *inclusive* language of national unity, the Congress was in fact *exclusive* and hierarchical, ranked by an upper house of chiefs (which protected traditional patriarchal authority through descent), a lower house of elected representatives (all male), and an executive (all male). Indians and so-called 'coloureds' were excluded from full membership. Wives of male members could join as 'auxiliary members', but were denied formal political representation, as well as the power to vote. Their subordinate, service role to nationalism was summed up in the draft constitution of the SANNC (later the ANC), which saw women's political role within nationalism as mediated by the marriage relation, and as replicating wives' domestic roles within marriage: 'All the wives of the members . . . shall ipso facto become auxiliary members. . . . It shall be the duty of all auxiliary members to provide suitable shelter and entertainment for delegates to the Congress.'
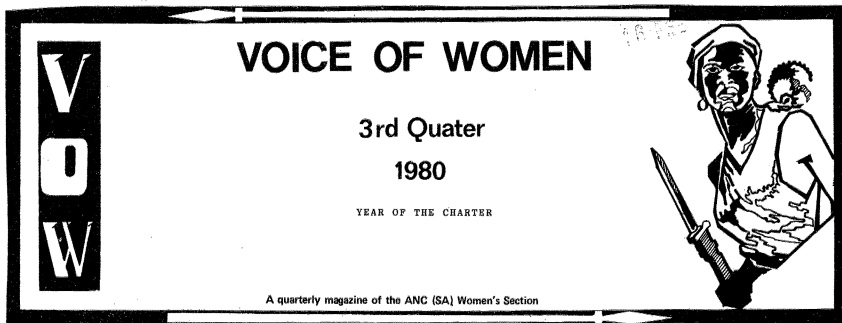
In 1913 the white state saw fit to impose passes on women in an effort to pre-empt their migration to the cities. In outraged response,

hundreds of women marched mutinously on Bloemfontein to fling back their passes, and for their temerity met the full brunt of state wrath in a barrage of arrests, imprisonment and hard labour. Women's insurgence alarmed both the state and not a few African men. None the less, the climate of militancy gave birth to the Bantu Women's League of the African National Congress, which was launched in 1918, drawing by and large, but not solely, on the tiny, educated, Christian élite. Thus from the outset, women's organized participation in African national-ism stemmed less from the invitation of men, than from their own politicization in resisting the violence of state decree. At this time, however, women's potential militancy was muted, and their political agency domesticated by the language of familial service and subordi-nation. Women's volunteer work was approved in so far as it served the interests of the (male) 'nation', and women's political identity was figured as merely supportive and auxiliary. As President Seme said: 'No national movement can be strong unless the women volunteers come forward and offer their services to the nation.'[4] At women's own insistence, the ANC granted women full membership and voting rights in 1943. It had taken thirty-one years. None the less, women's national mission was still trivialized and domesticated, defined as providing 'suitable shelter and entertainment for members or delegates.'[5]

After the Urban Areas Act of 1937, which severely curtailed women's movements, new insistence began to be voiced for a more militant and explicitly political national women's organization: 'We women can no longer remain in the background or concern ourselves only with domestic and sports affairs. The time has arrived for women to enter the political field and stand shoulder to shoulder with their men in the struggle.' (Mpama, 1937) In 1943, the ANC decided that a Women's League be formed, yet tensions would persist between women's calls for greater autonomy, and men's anxieties about losing control.

During the turbulent fifties, however, the ANC Women's League thrived. This was the decade of the Defiance Campaign, the Freedom Charter, the Congress Alliance, and the Federation of South African Women. In 1956 thousands of women marched on Pretoria to once more protest against passes for women, and the Women's Charter was formed, calling for land redistribution, for worker benefits and union rights, housing and food subsidies, the abolition of child labour, universal education, the right to vote, and equal rights with men in property, marriage and child custody. It is seldom noted, however, that this charter preceded the Freedom Charter, and inspired much of its substance.

Within African nationalism, as in its Afrikaans counterpart, women's political agency has been couched in the presiding ideology of motherhood. Winnie Mandela has long been hailed as 'Mother of the Nation', and Miriam Makeba, the singer, is reverently addressed as 'Ma Africa'.[6] Motherhood, however, is less the universal and biological quintessence of womanhood, than it is a social category under constant contest. African women have embraced, transmuted and transformed

VOICE OF WOMEN

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YEAR OF THE CHARTER

A quarterly magazine of the ANC (SA) Women's Section

the ideology in a variety of ways, working strategically within tra-
ditional ideology to justify untraditional public militancy. Unlike
Afrikaans women, moreover, African women appealed to a racially
inclusive image of motherhood in their campaigns to fashion a non-
racial alliance with white women. A Federation of South African
Women pamphlet of 1958 exhorted white women: 'In the name of
humanity, can you as a woman, as a mother, tolerate this?' In 1986
Albertina Sisulu appealed impatiently to white women: 'A mother is a
mother, black or white. Stand up and be counted with other women.'

Over the decades, African women nationalists, unlike their Afri-
kaans counterparts, have transformed and infused the ideology of
motherhood with an increasingly insurrectionary cast, identifying
themselves more and more as the 'mothers of revolution'. Since the
seventies, women's local rites of defiance have been mirrored on a
national scale in rents and bus boycotts, organized squatter camps,
strikes, anti-rape protests, and community activism of myriad kinds.
Even under the State of Emergency, women have everywhere enlarged
their militancy, insisting not only on their right to political agency, but
also on their right of access to the technologies of violence.[7]

Black women's relation to nationalism has thus undergone signifi-
cant historical changes over the years. At the outset, women were

denied formal representation, then their volunteer work was put at the service of the national revolution, still largely male. Gradually, as a result of women's own insurrections, the need for women's full participation in the national liberation movement was granted, but their emancipation was still figured as the handmaiden of national revolution. Only recently has women's empowerment been recognized in its own right, distinct from the national, democratic and socialist revolution. None the less, the degree to which this rhetorical recognition will find political and institutional form remains to be seen.

Feminism and nationalism

For many decades, African women have been loath to talk of women's emancipation outside the terms of the national liberation movement.[8] During the sixties and seventies, black women were understandably wary of the middle-class feminism that was sputtering fitfully to life in the white universities and suburbs. African women raised justifiably sceptical eyebrows at a white feminism that vaunted itself as giving tongue to a universal sisterhood in suffering. At the same time, women's position within the nationalist movement was still precarious, and women could ill afford to antagonize men so embattled, and already so reluctant to surrender whatever patriarchal power they still enjoyed.

In recent years, however, a transformed African discourse on feminism has emerged, with black women demanding the right to fashion the terms of nationalist feminism to meet their own needs and situations.[9] On 2 May 1990, the National Executive of the ANC issued an historic 'Statement on the Emancipation of Women', which forthrightly proclaimed: 'The experience of other societies has shown that the emancipation of women is not a by-product of a struggle for democracy, national liberation or socialism. It has to be addressed within our own organization, the mass democratic movement and in the society as a whole.' The document is unprecedented in placing South African women's resistance in an international context, in granting feminism independent historic agency, and in declaring, into the bargain, that all 'laws, customs, traditions and practices which discriminate against women shall be held to be unconstitutional.' If the ANC remains faithful to this document, virtually all existing practises in South Africa's legal, political and social life will be rendered unconstitutional.

A few months later, on 17 June 1990, the leadership of the ANC Women's Section, recently returned to South Africa from exile, insisted on the strategic validity of the term 'feminism': 'Feminism has been misinterpreted in most third world countries . . . there is nothing wrong with feminism. It is as progressive or reactionary as nationalism. Nationalism can be reactionary or progressive. We have not got rid of the term nationalism. And with feminism it is the same.' Rather, feminism should be tailored to meet local needs and concerns.

Yet very real uncertainties for women remain. So far, theoretical

and strategic analyses of South Africa's gender imbalances have not run deep. There has been little strategic rethinking of how, in particular, to transform labour relations within the household, and women are not given the same political visibility as men. At a recent COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) convention, trade union women called for attention to sexual harassment in the unions, but their demand was brusquely flicked aside by male unionists as a decadent symptom of 'bourgeois imperialist feminism'. Lesbian and gay activists have been similarly condemned as supporting lifestyles that are no more than invidious imports of empire.

There is not only one feminism, nor is there one patriarchy. Feminism, like nationalism, is not transhistorical. Feminism is imperialist when it puts the interests and needs of privileged women in imperialist countries above the local needs of disempowered women and men, borrowing from patriarchal privilege. In the last decade, women of colour have been vehement in challenging privileged feminists whose racial and class power seems invisible to them. In an important article, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Mohanty, 1991) challenges the appropriation of women of colour's struggles by white women, specifically through the use of the category 'Third World Woman' as a singular, monolithic, and paradigmatically victimized subject.

Denouncing all feminisms as imperialist, however, erases from memory the long histories of women's resistance to local and imperialist patriarchies. As Kumari Jayawardena notes (Jayawardena, 1986), many women's mutinies around the world predated Western feminism, or occurred without any contact with Western feminists. Moreover, if all feminisms are derided as a pathology of the West, there is a very real danger that Western, white feminists will remain hegemonic, for the simple reason that such women have comparatively privileged access to publishing, the international media, education and money. A good deal of this feminism may well be inappropriate to women living under very different situations. Instead, women of colour are calling for the right to fashion feminism to suit their own worlds. The singular contribution of nationalist feminism has been its insistence on relating feminist struggles to other liberation movements.

All too frequently, male nationalists have condemned feminism as divisive, bidding women hold their tongues until after the revolution. Yet feminism is a political response to gender conflict, not its cause. To insist on silence about gender conflict when it already exists, is to cover over, and thereby ratify, women's disempowerment. To ask women to wait until after the revolution, serves merely as a strategic tactic to defer women's demands. Not only does it conceal the fact that nationalisms are from the outset constituted in gender power, but, as the lessons of international history portend, women who are not empowered to organize during the struggle will not be empowered to organize after the struggle. If nationalism is not transformed by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations and male privilege.

All too often, the doors of tradition are slammed in women's faces. Yet traditions are both the outcome and the record of past political contests, as well as the sites of present contest. In a nationalist revolution, both women and men should be empowered to decide which traditions are outmoded, which should be transformed, and which should be preserved. Male nationalists frequently argue that colonialism or capitalism has been women's ruin, with patriarchy merely a nasty second cousin destined to wither away when the real villain finally expires. Yet nowhere has a national or socialist revolution brought a full feminist revolution in its train. In many nationalist or socialist countries women's concerns are at best paid lip service, at worst greeted with hilarity. If women have come to do men's work, men have not come to share women's work. Nowhere has feminism in its own right been allowed to be more than the maidservant to nationalism. A crucial question remains for progressive nationalism: can the iconography of the family be retained as the figure for national unity, or must an alternative, radical iconography be developed?

Frantz Fanon's prescient warnings against the pitfalls of the national consciousness were never more urgent than now. For Fanon, nationalism gives vital expression to popular memory and is strategically essential for mobilizing the national populace. At the same time, no one was more aware than Fanon of the attendant risks of projecting a fetishistic denial of difference on to a conveniently abstracted 'collective will'. In South Africa, to borrow Fanon's phrase, national transformation is 'no longer in a future heaven'. Yet the current situation gives sober poignancy, especially for women, to the lines from Pontecorvo's famous film on the Algerian national war of liberation, *The Battle of Algiers*: 'It is difficult to start a revolution, more difficult to sustain it. But it's later, when we've won, that the real difficulties will begin.'

Notes

Anne McClintock is an associate professor at Columbia University, where she teaches gender and cultural studies. She is currently researching nationalism and gender in South Africa on an SSRC-MacArthur International Peace and Security Fellowship. Her book *Maids, Maps and Mines: Gender and Imperialism* is coming out in 1993.

1 Parts of this paper appeared in 'No Longer in a Future Heaven', (1991) *TRANSITION* 51, 104–23.
2 I critique the Freudian/Lacanian theory of fetishism in 'The return of female fetishism and the fiction of the phallus', in *New Formations* Spring 1992. I expand on the fetishistic nature of national spectacle in my book, *Maids, Maps and Mines: Gender and Imperialism* (forthcoming, 1993).
3 Indeed, the degree to which the *Eeufees* papered over fatal divisions within the white populace, became most manifest in 1988, when during the height of the State of Emergency, no less than two competing Treks set out to re-enact

the re-enactment, each sponsored by two bitterly rivalrous white nationalist parties.

4 As Ginwala notes: 'A pattern had been established of grassroots mobilization and participation by women, while dealing with the authorities at the local or national level was to remain the province of men.' 90:

5 Constitution, 1919.

6 As Gaitskell and Unterhalter (1989) have argued, the ideology of the 'Mother of the Nation' differs in some important respects from the iconography of the *volksmoeder* in Afrikaner nationalism.

7 On 9 August 1985, the 29th anniversary of South African Women's Day, the ANC's Women's Section called on women to 'take up arms against the enemy. In the past we have used rudimentary homemade weapons like petrol bombs. Now is the time that we use modern weapons.'

8 The ANC delegation to the Nairobi Conference on Women in 1985 declared: 'It would be suicidal for us to adopt feminist ideas. Our enemy is the system and we cannot exhaust our energies on women's issues.'

9 At a seminar entitled 'Feminism and National Liberation', convened by the Women's Section of the ANC in London in 1989, a representative from SAYCO (South African Youth Congress) exclaimed: 'How good it feels that feminism is finally accepted as a legitimate school of thought in our struggles and is not seen as a foreign ideology.'

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