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## Queering the Heterosexual Fantasy of the Nation

The concept of the nation is an amazingly effective amalgam of wildly heterogeneous elements soldered up at a discursive level that emphasizes an overall unity. "The nation" becomes a conceptual center around which there revolve a variety of ethnic, geographical, historical, and socio-political fantasies of unification. At the root of a nationalist sentiment there lies, apparently, the longing for a national coherence, the illusion of which is only possible due to forgetting, excluding, repressing and regulating. "Forgetting [...] is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation", says Ernest Renan in his classical 1882 lecture "What is a Nation?" (Renan 11). He goes on to argue that "unity is always effected by means of brutality" (Renan 11) – or, in other words, that national identity is, at its core, a result of violent acts aimed at a nearly total unification. While some traditions are being invented and reinforced in the course of "building" a national identity, whole classes of (f)acts are being disclaimed or erased from national consciousness.

With a few remarkable exceptions, it is not a common critical practice to relate the discursive creation of nationhood with sexuality, and particularly with its non-normative variations. For example, the 1990 *Nation/Narration* volume, edited by Homi K. Bhabha, contains no references to the interconnections between sexuality and nationality (even though it contains an essay on Walt Whitman's nationalism). Over the last two decades feminist and gender studies critics have started to elucidate the gender assumptions underlying nationalistic ideologies, but it was probably the brave emergence of the "Queer Nation" movement in North America in 1990 that created a critical tension between these two seemingly incongruent terms. The name that the movement adopted had a number of important implications: for one thing, it legitimized the previously dubious use of "queer" as a marker of a new political coalition; for another, it appropriated the

nationalist rhetoric for its own political purposes. It is interesting to observe how “queer” and “nation” modify each other<sup>1</sup>.

What the “nation” rhetoric seems to offer to the queer movement is a new sense of collectivity that goes well beyond local communities. In fact, an attempt to create a “nation” around a coalition of queer subjectivities points in the direction of an *international* movement, since – as Frantz Fanon famously remarks in a different context, “[n]ational consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension” (Fanon 1593). The nationalist discourse remains one of the most powerful and effective instruments in political struggles both within and across political borders, and thus appropriating a term of such currency and efficacy may be expected to lend some of its force to the strivings for a broader recognition of non-normative sexualities. On the other hand, the traditionally abusive term “queer” may seem an unlikely ally in that struggle. If “nation” was solemn and hardly problematic for a major part of the US public, “queer” – with its street-fight history – was provocative, parodistic, potentially dangerous. If the nation promised authenticity and assimilative public participation, queer threatened public spaces with disruption resulting from an aggressive politics of performativity. Actually, “queer” brought with it not only a new critique of identity-based politics, but also a new political momentum. As Judith Butler explains in her much-quoted essay “Critically Queer”, “[q]ueer derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult” (Butler 226). The solemnity of “nation” combined with the subversive force of “queer” proved a new effective tool in the LGBT politics of the 1990s.

Although at some level clearly parodistic, the rhetoric of queer nationalism does not seem to repudiate national discourse as such. Queering the concept of the nation does not have to mean an outright rejection of that concept. It would be at least myopic to simply ignore the fact that in a huge majority of cases nationality remains an important vector of personal subjectivity – including LGBT people, of course. Rather than disclaim “nation” as such, Queer Nation marks “a collective desire to reclaim the nation for pleasure”, as Berlant and Freeman observe (Berlant and Freeman 195). Despite the long history in which queer was either absent or negatively present in the “great narratives” of modern nations, when the nationalistic discourse remained close to the rhetoric of “naturalness” with its normalizing rules of proper conduct and social bonding, Queer Nation exposes the underlying incongruity of national discourses, and consequently claims a radical redefinition of the national itself. In other words, queer nationalism re-opens national space for contestation by proposing that the conflating of the modern nationhood with the “heterosexual contract” (Wittig’s term) is a historical fact that may be revised and re-conceptualized as contingent

rather than essential. Thus, not only did the Queer Nation mark a turning point in the struggles of LGBT people, but it also opened new possibilities for reshaping national discourses.

The discursive construction of the nation is replete with heterosexist assumptions and fantasies, involving mostly the metaphors of marriage and family. As defined – often constitutionally – in all modern states (except the Netherlands, Belgium and two provinces of Canada), marriage is a legal union between a man and a woman<sup>2</sup>. The ritualistic coupling of two persons of a different sex/gender is understood as an inauguration of the “basic social unit”, a family. No wonder, then, that national mythologies contain some originary “marriage” – e.g. that of a royal couple that founded a first national dynasty or, at a more figurative level, the marriage between a “he-nation” and a “she-land”. In the US, for instance, the national imagination has been captured by the marriage between Pocahontas and John Rolfe, where the latter stood for the manly spirit of English colonialism and entrepreneurship (he was a successful tobacco producer), while the former – through a nexus of associations – stood for the land in its “natural” beauty and innocence: she represented the “virgin continent” as both a woman and a Native American. That interracial marriages were soon forbidden (the ban was finally lifted by the U.S. Supreme Court as late as in 1967) did not affect the status of the legend which offered Americans a vision of a harmonious union between the paradigmatic masculine Anglo-Saxon and the feminized New World.

The “marriage myth” underlies the constitution of the Polish nation as well. One good example is the symbolic marriage between the Polish nation and the Baltic Sea, enacted twice. The first ritual took place in Puck on February 10, 1920, when general Józef Haller threw a platinum ring into the waters and put another one on his finger, proclaiming he was “taking possession” of the sea in the name of the Polish Commonwealth. (The scene was monumentalized by the patriotic painter Wojciech Kossak in “The Marriage with the Sea”). This matrimonial gesture was repeated in March 1945 in Kołobrzeg, after the city had been liberated from the Germans. During both events the nation was, typically, represented by soldiers, whereas the feminized Baltic Sea stood for the geographic landmark essentially bound to the nation.

Marriage is a ritualistic introduction into the state of family-life, regarded by a huge majority of “experts” as well as “common people” as the final stage of a mature, adult life. However, recent developments in the human and social sciences have led to a de-naturalization of the seemingly universal category of the family. Anthropologists now define the family (following to some extent Engels’s classical observations) as “an ideological construct associated with the modern state” (Collier 71) or, more specifically, “a unit bounded, biologically as well as legally defined, associated with property, self-sufficiency, with affect, and

a space 'inside' the home" (Collier 76). Broadly speaking, the present – highly patriarchal and heterosexist – model of a family developed concurrently with the consolidation of the modern nation-state around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and then throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The patriarchal family, with its supposedly "natural" harmony and integrity orchestrated by the father, corresponds to the imagined unity of the nation, while the procreative function of the traditional family parallels the procreative ethos of the nation. The most conspicuous example of a grand-scale modern state – the United States – quickly adopted a rhetoric in which its military and political leaders were called the "Founding Fathers", possibly invoking the mythologized "Pilgrim Fathers" of the *Mayflower*. This kind of "state fatherhood" is still present in different parts of the world. A good example is provided by Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan, who analyze the use of such rhetoric in the Republic of Singapore. "Precise adequacy", they assert, "on the part of the citizenry to an ideal standard of nationalism [...] becomes referenced, metonymically, to the successful if fantasmatic reproduction of an ideal image of its fathers" – i.e. the predominantly male, Chinese government members (Heng and Devan 108).

If men are the fathers and guardians of the nation, women's role in the nation is defined mainly through the reproductive capacity. As guardians, men are idealized as soldiers; as reproducers, women are idealized as mothers of soldiers. A nearly pure form of this "division of labor" was to be found in the Nazi ideology: "In the education of the girl the final goal always to be kept in mind is that she is one day to be a mother", Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*. The writer and critic of the Nazi education system, Gregor Ziemer, reveals: "The Fuehrer has decreed that the children must belong to him [...] that boys and girls must not be educated in the same schools, since boys will become soldiers and girls will be mothers of soldiers" (quoted in Phillips). A centralized and carefully managed education was crucial for this gender categorization, as it has been for the creation of modern national identities anywhere else. A number of other state laws and institutions – such as compulsory military service or social welfare programs – have been created to achieve the ideal of "[m]en bearing arms, women bearing children", in Heng and Devan's apt phrase (Heng and Devan 111). In their study of Singapore patriarchal ideologies Heng and Devan refer to the "demand that women serve the nation biologically, with their bodies – that they take on themselves, and submit themselves to, the public reproduction of nationalism in the most private medium possible" (Heng and Devan 111). The language of nationalism is often the language of compulsory procreation for women, compulsory military service for men.

Nation (*natio*) revolves around birth. It is about being born, giving birth, controlling the birthrate. Foucault speaks of the "medical – but also political

– project for organizing a state management of marriages, births and life expectancies" (Foucault 118). It was "the family organization", Foucault asserts, that was used "to support the great 'maneuvers' employed for the Malthusian control of the birthrate" (Foucault 100). But the nation is also about death – especially dying for your country posited as the highest ethical duty of men-soldiers. The nation becomes literally a matter of life and death, the be-all-and-end-all of an individual's life.

One of the most fetishized notions in the history of nation-states is that of "sovereignty". As defined by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the notion stands for "supreme authority within a territory", whereas "[t]he state is the political institution in which sovereignty is embodied". (I am not referring here to a different idea of "individual sovereignty" embraced by libertarians.) References to the body are numerous in the encyclopedia's entry: "some body of law" is said to be, in the contemporary era, the source of sovereignty. That body of law is, at most times, a constitution – a word which comes originally from the bodily realm (according to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, constitution meant "health, strength, vitality" from 1553, whereas its political sense evolved after 1689). Quite appropriately, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on sovereignty begins with a reference to the old concept of "the king's two bodies", made famous by Ernst Kantorowicz's classical study. The inviolability of the king's body translates into the impenetrability of the borders of the kingdom. The concern over the integrity of the king's body is thematized in Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, but also in Elizabeth I's posing as the Virgin Queen (see Wessmann). The king's inviolable "mystical body" later evolved into the "body politic" of a nation, a unified collectivity confined within hermetic territorial borders<sup>3</sup>.

Just like modern masculinity, what underlies the construction of the nation is a deep homophobic fear of penetration. In modern times the male body has been defined mostly through its impenetrability. Lee Edelman points to men's anxiety over the control of their sphincters:

the satisfaction that such [intestinal] relief affords abuts dangerously on homophobically abjectified desires, and because that satisfaction marks an opening onto difference that would challenge the phallic supremacy and coherence of the signifier on the men's room door [the 'Gentlemen' mark], it must be isolated [in the toilet stall] and kept in view at once lest its erotic potential come out (Edelman 161).

That masculinity excludes being penetrated, but not necessarily a homosexual act in which the man is the penetrator, becomes clear when one considers the fact that in some cultures (as well as in some periods of Western history) the "active" homosexual is not subjected to the same kind of rejection or humiliation as the

“passive” partner. Even within gay cultures the distinction still holds: despite the fact that many gay men would identify as “switch-role” partners, being the “active” one seems to be more ennobling than being the “effeminate” passive one. By the way, the stereotypical assumption that passive means effeminate and vice versa is, of course, a gross oversimplification.

The phallic male must guard his rectum from any intervention lest he should lose his integrity as a man. Similarly, the nation-state is a (political) body whose self-definition depends heavily on the principle of sovereignty, while sovereignty is based on territorial integrity or impenetrability. The nation, traditionally defined, is a phallic concept – the nation is called upon to “stand erect” among the other (phallic) nations of the world. The military imperative that the banner remain erect or the triumphant raising of the flag over the territory of a defeated enemy are visual manifestations of the phallic fantasizing that underlies the concept of the nation. Presumably ungendered, the national “body politic” is implicitly male. As an agent, an international actor, the modern nation cannot but be male: in order to achieve the status of a sovereign “subject”, the nation claims a universal subjectivity which – to borrow a concept from Simone de Beauvoir – is (however clandestinely) always already masculine.

Just as the penetration of the male body poses a threat to the integrity of man’s identity, so does an external penetration of the “sacred body of the nation” pose a threat to the *national security*. This is particularly evident in the abiding association of gay men with espionage. It is commonly assumed that the fundamentals of England’s intelligence service were laid in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Sir Francis Walsingham, who is believed to have had a love affair with one of his spies, Christopher Marlowe. Whether or not Marlowe was Sir Walsingham’s spy and/or lover is of little importance here; what is much more important is a cultural logic which creates a *need*, a *longing* for the association of gay men with spies. This association is very well-established by now – as a *Sunday Times* article has it, “[g]ay spies are nothing new” (Pendock). The article continues: “In fact, the father of British spying, Sir Francis Walsingham, had an affair with Christopher Marlowe, the spy and playwright who may or may not have written Shakespeare’s plays” (Pendock). Interestingly, the affair between Walsingham and Marlowe is stated as a “fact”, while doubt remains as far as the authorship of Shakespeare’s plays is concerned. That Walsingham is called “a father” of British spying sounds rather ironic in this context: it seems that as an alleged homosexual Walsingham could only “father” a family of gay espionage agents (actually, he had a daughter). What comes into play in this newspaper statement is a complex web of anxieties over fatherhood and authorship, authenticity and sham. While motherhood seems to be mostly unproblematic, fatherhood remains a source of anxiety in that it may be questioned, claimed or denied. Paternal

insecurity may correspond to the infirmities of masculinity, threatened by sexual acts between men (how can a homosexual be a father, after all?). The *Sunday Times* statement revolves around the vexing questions of who may or may not be the father / the author / the spy / the homosexual.

Not surprisingly, the *Sunday Times* article also mentions the famous Cambridge Spy Ring (or the Magnificent Five):

Gay spies are two a penny, as a cursory examination of the Cambridge spy ring of Anthony Blunt, Guy Burgess, Kim Philby and Donald Maclean shows. The first two were exclusively gay (with Burgess outrageously so), Maclean was a transvestite, while married-four-times Philby was something of a rake, with the motto ‘an orgasm a day keeps the doctor away’ (Pendock).

The monetary idiom used in the first sentence is not without its connotations. Interestingly, the word “queer” is also related to a monetary context: it has been applied to counterfeit money for more than 250 years. That some time toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century “queer” became a term for the new identity formed around same-sex desire seems to indicate that within the capitalist framework homosexuality was assigned a status similar to that of counterfeit money: homosexual is to heterosexual as counterfeit money is to genuine cash. In the general social economy (by which term I mean, loosely, the complex networks of economic, social, political and cultural relations) regulated to a large extent by the notions of “truth” and “authenticity”, overt homoeroticism marks the realm of the fake and the illicit. Incidentally, “sovereign” also used to have a monetary meaning: if sovereignty is the guarantee of an “authentic” – and heterosexual – national currency, “queer” is at best a parodistic perversion of that national uprightness. Yet “two a penny” not only means “common”, but also “cheap” and in this sense gay persons are positioned as sellable, so that their cultural position becomes close to that of prostitutes: gay men are “cheap prostitutes” who are ready to sell their services to the enemy.

North America provided numerous examples of equating gay persons with a threat to national security, particularly during the Cold War era. The major part of the homophobic “witch-hunt” took place in the US in the years 1950–1955. In 1950 the Senate Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments issued a report which stated that “[t]he lack of emotional stability which is found in most sex perverts and the weakness of their moral fiber, makes them susceptible to the blandishments of the foreign espionage agent” and concluded:

It is the opinion of this subcommittee that those who engage in acts of homosexuality and other perverted sex activities are unsuitable for employment in the Federal Government. This conclusion is based

upon the fact that persons who indulge in such degraded activity are committing not only illegal and immoral acts, but they also constitute security risks in positions of public trust (Blasius 250).

The purging of government agencies began: hundreds of homosexual men were forced to leave their posts. "Sexual perverts" were considered not much different from communists; as the Republican National Chairman put it in 1950, "Perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists are the sexual perverts who have infiltrated our Government in recent years" (Katz 92). As essentially immoral and subversive, homosexuality was categorized as "un-American", which reinforced the potent heterosexist regime underlying conceptions of the nation. Active in the homophobic crusade was Senator Kenneth Wherry, who said in a *Post* interview that one "can hardly separate homosexuals from subversives" (Katz 95). Characteristically, at some point Wherry interrupts the journalist to make a rhetorical appeal to a sense of national collectivity: "But look, Lerner [...], we're both Americans, aren't we? I say, let's get these fellows out of the government" (Katz 97). "We, the people" cannot be other than heterosexual; as such, the fictional "we" must get rid of "these fellows" who do not seem to be allowed to participate in the same collective body. Because "we're both Americans", what *I* say is, no doubt, what *we* want: we want them "out" – in the double sense of "exposed" or "discovered" as well as "eliminated".

Similar events took place in Canada, where the peak of anti-homosexual campaigns based on the "threat-to-national-security" rhetoric came in 1958–1959. According to Gary Kinsman, while anti-gay security investigations did happen prior to 1958, "it seems that it was in 1958–1959 that a more specific focus on homosexuality as a 'security threat' developed in the Canadian State and the concept of 'character weakness' basically became homosexuality" (Kinsman 173). Trying to construct the homosexual as a "high security risk" figure, governmental documents described him (lesbians were less often targeted) in terms of "instability, willing self-deceit, defiance toward society, a tendency to surround oneself with persons of similar propensities, regardless of other consideration" (1959 Security Panel memorandum, quoted in Kinsman 172).

The cultural fantasy that links homosexuals to communists and other kinds of "subversives" did not end with the McCarthy era in the US. As one journalist remarked in 1964, "[a] surviving McCarthyism is that homosexuality and other sexual aberrations are both dangerous to the national security and rife in Washington" (quoted in Edelman 148). The quotation refers to the scandal which shook US public opinion when Lyndon Johnson's chief of staff, Walter Jenkins, was arrested at an Y.M.C.A restroom for performing "indecent gestures". In his essay "Tearrooms and Sympathy", Lee Edelman offers an insightful reading of the representations of homosexuality in relation to the construction of US

national-cultural identity in the mid-sixties. Reportedly, in response to the affair President Johnson invoked familial relations ("I was as shocked as if someone had told me my wife had murdered her daughter"), which – Edelman argues – "figuratively positions homosexual behavior in the context of 'the obliteration of paternal inheritance'" (Edelman 167). Further, homosexuality "figures history as apocalypse, by gesturing toward the precariousness of familial and national survival"; it threatens "destabilization of borders, the subversion of masculine identity from within" (Edelman 168). This kind of rhetoric, Edelman admits, is not limited to the US in the sixties, but has a history that extends back at least to the 18th century and forward into the seventies and later.

In 1989, for example, another scandal occurred: Congressman Barney Frank (by then an openly gay public figure) admitted to having had a relationship with a male prostitute Stephen Gobie. It turned out that the politician's Washington apartment was used by Gobie as a site of sex services, which again raised in the heterosexual public fears of the nation's government being "hijacked" and prostituted by a queer conspiracy. And again, questions of national security were brought up. An even more recent example is connected with the September 11 attacks. In an article entitled ominously "Homosexuals Infiltrate the CIA and NSA" Cliff Kincaid writes:

If you want to know why we have security problems in this country, one reason is contained in the [national security correspondent Vernon] Loeb article. He says gay intelligence officers came out of the closet after Clinton signed an executive order in 1995 prohibiting the denial of security clearances based on sexual orientation. In other words, these gay intelligence officers had been lying about their own sexual orientation. This made them targets of blackmail (Kincaid).

He goes on to suggest that the failure on the part of security agencies to prevent the terrorist attack of September 11 was somehow caused by the liberal policies pursued by those agencies, particularly by CIA director George Tenet who "holds the dubious distinction of being the first CIA director to preside at a 'Gay Pride Day' at the agency" (Kincaid). This "sodomization" of CIA and NSA renders America vulnerable, exposed to an external penetration by a lethal enemy. What is more, the figurative association of terrorist subversions with viral infections opens fertile ground for a new wave of epidemiological panic, a new mutation, as it were, of the HIV panic. With the immunity or defense system impaired by the virus of homosexuality, the nation finds itself in a critical situation, its very physical existence jeopardized. Underlying these anxieties is the cultural definition of homosexuality as a contagious disease that leads to degeneration and, finally, death of the national body. Not only simply unproductive (dues

to lack of procreation), homosexuality also becomes an active agent of waste, death, and destruction – a threat, indeed, to civilization itself.

A number of popular assumptions may account for the persistence of the association between gay men and spies. In the first place, both espionage agents and homosexuals work in secrecy or under cover. Their activities are based on pretense and deception and their job is to seduce and recruit. The rhetoric of infiltration and penetration is used commonly for both gay men and spies: gay men know how to penetrate “from behind”, without being noticed or recognized – which successful spies, of course, are also expected to do. Gay men are essentially “not-us”, no matter how good they are at the art of deception. No doubt they have a hidden agenda, a secret plan, they’re working for an alien empire (or simply a gay empire), conspiring to bring the government down and to dismantle the perfect unity of the nation. Behind such logic is the “popular perception of gay sexuality as an alien presence, an unnatural because un-American [or, more generally, anti-national] practice” (Edelman 158). Homosexuals constitute an alien body in the healthy and holy body of the nation.

One of the few examples in which building a national (if somewhat postmodern) identity is linked more or less explicitly to homosexuality is the nationalistic discourse in Quebec. Describing “a new nationalist project [...] that is progressive in its social objectives” Robert Schwartzwald states that “traitors or sell-outs to the cause of national revolution are gendered as passive/seductive men” embodied by the figure of the “federast” (Schwartzwald 1993: 179). Interestingly, it was the nationalist Parti Quebecois government that introduced – for the first time in North America – laws against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. At the same time, however, in the discourse of Quebecois nationalists (which Schwartzwald calls “the discourse of phallo-national maturity” (Schwartzwald 1991: 181)) homosexuality – somehow descriptive of Quebecois national identity – is represented as an intermediate stage on the road to “normal” (Schwartzwald 1991: 184). The 1980 defeat of the referendum on sovereignty association was read as not only a failure in a collective national identity, but also – if not primarily – as a failure of “mature masculinity” that should normally be confirmed by a heterosexual regime. In other words, even if the homosexual is adopted as a figure representative of the Quebecois nationality, the purpose of this is a reproach and an urge to reclaim the virility lost or impaired under colonial rule. What is at stake here are less questions of the choice of one’s sexual object, and more questions of male gender conceptualizations. As long as the construction of masculinity (and male-inflected nationalism) involves a ban on homosexuality, the figure of the homosexual will be (as it has been) represented as anti-national. Yet assuming that the definition of masculinity itself may change in the future to accommodate sexual relations between men (whether we see it as likely or not),

what seems less open for redefinition is the nation as a fundamentally masculine formation. Were that to happen, we would witness a social/national arrangement that Luce Irigaray calls – with a dint of insensitivity to the histories of gay men in the West – “hom(m)osexuality”.

Is it conceivable, then, that when the traditional religious/political ban on homosexuality collides with evolving lifestyles (an increasing tolerance for same-sex orientation, for example) which may threaten the construction of masculinity, the heterosexual contract may finally be broken and that virility rather than heterosexuality would be defended in the first place? This might be happening in Mexico already. As Matthew C. Gutmann observes, while “nationalism in Mexico has had a special affinity for male society”, following the gay and lesbian rights movements “clichéd truths about sexuality came to be broadly questioned” (Gutmann 202–203). In result, “[h]omophobia is a code of boyish insults, while sexual experimentation by young men with young men and young women with young women is increasingly seen as legitimate” (Gutmann 203). This must lead to a redefinition of national space; it remains debatable, however, whether the change will help overcome nationalistic homophobia, and if so – whether the same process will diminish or end male domination over women. Because, arguably, what is fundamentally anti-national even more than homosexuality is the feminine: “Women, and all signs of the feminine, are by definition always and already antinational”, as Heng and Devan conclude their essay (Heng and Devan 116). As soon as homosexuality is defined other than through effeminacy (or gender inversion), some kind of “reconciliation” between national and homosexual discourses seems to become plausible.

If in the classical nationalist discourses the *raison d’être* of a nation is procreation (reproduction of “the same”) and defense of its borders, then homosexual activity must be perceived as an unpardonable waste associated with death – but not the heroic death of a soldier sacrificing his life for the nation, but the death of the nation itself, the death of *natio*, the death of birth, so to speak. In a perfect nation queers ideally do not exist, or if they do, they are represented as a threat to the moral integrity, if not the physical health, of the nation, and/or a threat to the national security. If the conceptualization of the nation is in many ways congruent with the logic of rejection and abjection, queers are positioned as one of the multifarious “others” that allow the “same” of the nation to constitute itself. Defined through birth, the nation is a “natural” thing, and therefore homosexuality as an “unnatural” and non-procreation activity will remain, by definition, anti-national.

But the idea of queer nationality opens ground for a new understanding of the nation. Contesting the idea of the nation may begin with a contestation of masculinity itself. To avoid a slippage into “hom(m)osexuality” – some

hidden pact between hetero- and homosexual men in the name of an overarching category of “man” – queer theory, as I see it, should target the very concept of “man”. Where Wittig boldly proclaims that lesbians are *not* women, queer theorists might want to undermine any “contracts” between gay men and the heterosexual establishment by claiming that homosexuals are *not* men. Once the concept of masculinity is redefined, nationality can no longer stick to its sexist presumptions. Similarly, heterosexuality (as sanctioned by the institution of marriage) must itself be contested, which has nothing to do with denying sex between different (rather than “opposite”) sexes or repudiating procreation. What we might get rid of, then, is the great narrative of a high romance between the he-nation and the she-land. Finally, redefining the idea of the nation depends largely on reshaping the dominant notions of the family to incorporate a great variety of sexual / economic / emotional relations that go far beyond the traditional “nuclear family” model. This work has already been taken up by many feminist and some queer theorists.

The Queer Nation movement not only re-appropriates (perhaps ironically) the conceptual construction of nationality, but also seems to promise a new kind of community, a community that cuts across ethnic or class distinctions. Such a community may itself be easily deconstructed as a white Anglo-Saxon middle-class fantasy, a new romanticized fiction in which all gay persons, regardless of their background, unite into a global community. Still, the concept of the Queer Nation seems to have some real potential for a critical revision of social bonding. From this new perspective, a nation may be redefined as an aggregate of ever-shifting communities, constituencies, and coalitions. Rather than strive to create a new “grand narrative” of the nation’s historical mission, the discourse of the Queer Nation may propose new perspectives on community-making, including a new model of the family. Rather than a safeguard of authenticity and naturalness, the nation may be reconceived in terms of conscious performativity. If a queer community is another fiction, so be it; at least we should be able to choose the fictions we live by.

### Notes

1. Let me remark at this point that throughout the essay I concentrate on male rather than female homosexuality, largely because of the long-lasting association of “the nation” with masculinity. I also realize that I use terms such as “national discourses” or “national identity” somewhat imprecisely, moving through different historical periods and geographical places, but my intention here is to sketch the queer-national dynamics in rather broad strokes.
2. As I am writing these words, the question of “homosexual marriages” has

become a hot issue again. Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has just issued a document condemning homosexual unions. In the Pope’s native Poland, at the same time, a legislative project has been proposed to create the institution of civil unions between persons of the same sex.

3. See also Elizabeth A. Povinelli’s article “Sex Acts and Sovereignty. Race and Sexuality in the Construction of the Australian Nation”.

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