

**Narratives of National Identity:  
Sexuality, Race, and the Swiss 'Dream of Order'**

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Choose your spouse from a physically and morally healthy, mentally superior family! You owe this to your offspring and to the Nation.

(1939 information booklet to Swiss youth)

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The modern Swiss federal state was founded a little over 150 years ago. Recent commemorations of this anniversary have given rise to political narratives celebrating the emergence of feelings of national unity and common national identity, despite the linguistic and religious diversity that characterises the Swiss nation.<sup>2</sup> Within these narratives, the political institutions of direct democracy and federalism are emphasised as mechanisms of national integration which allow for the expression of cultural ‘difference’. In this paper, I propose an alternative account of the construction of Swiss national identity. While not denying the importance of political institutions for the construction of Swiss national identity, I argue that the narrative focus on the institutionalised expression of ‘difference’ leaves aside other important historical discourses and practices which have been concerned not with respect for diversity, but with the (relative) eradication of some ‘differences’: those deemed ‘degenerate’ or ‘un-Swiss’. From this angle, the paper focuses on discursive practices concerned with eugenics and the regulation of sexuality, and explores the intersections between the construction of national identity and narratives of sexuality, race, and gender in pre-War Switzerland. It will be argued that these narratives are politically important, not only as symbolic constructions of Swiss nationhood but also as the foundation of social policies which aimed to eliminate the ‘weeds’ from the Swiss garden. The first section of the paper explores the contributions of discourse theory to the study of processes of identity construction, while the second part examines the sexual basis of national identity narratives. Different narrative forms will be considered, such as ‘scientific’ discourses of sexuality, policy texts, and pictures.

## Discourse Theory and Identity Narratives

This paper conceptualises national identity, sexuality, gender and race from a discourse analytic perspective. In other words, I assume these concepts to be social constructions whose social and political meanings are contextually bound. Consequently, the nation<sup>3</sup> is not seen as a ‘given’ natural entity but as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983) which is constructed through ‘narration’ (Bhabha 1990), ‘foundational fictions’ (Sommer 1990) and

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<sup>2</sup> Switzerland has four national languages, and two main religions.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, the concepts of nations or nation-states are used as loose synonyms, and taken to refer to “a political apparatus, recognised to have sovereign rights within the borders of a demarcated territorial area, able to back its claims to sovereignty by control of military power, many of whose citizens have positive feelings of commitment to its national identity” (Giddens 1989: 303). The concept of state refers to those situations “where there is a political apparatus (governmental institutions, such as a court, parliament or congress, plus civil-service officials), ruling over a given territory, whose authority is backed by a legal system and by the capacity to use force to implement its policies” (Giddens 1989: 301).

‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawn 1983).<sup>4</sup> The constructed nature of the national community normally remains unrecognised by its members, who tend to understand their ties to the nation as ‘natural’ (Anderson 1991 : 143). Other identity markers such as gender, race, or sexuality are similarly naturalised in everyday routine interactions.<sup>5</sup> This naturalisation is a central mechanism of the discursive construction of identity, concealing the discursive practices which produce meanings around national identity, sexuality, gender or race (Hall 1980).

Nations are modern entities whose emergence is the result of particular historical conditions in Europe, as authors such as Gellner (1983), Anderson (1983), Giddens (1985), Hobsbawn (1990) and Smith (1991) argue in different ways. Anderson, for example, highlights the importance of technological innovations such as print capitalism for the development of the modern nation-state, whereas Giddens emphasises the importance of capitalism, industrialism, surveillance and military power. Their explanations contrast with the primordialist accounts promoted by Geertz (1963) or Shils (1957) who view nations as natural, universal entities modelled on kinship relations (see Yuval-Davis 1997: 1). According to the former perspectives, the constitution of national identity is closely bound up with modernity.<sup>6</sup> However, within the modern nation, premodern ethnic features frequently endure (Smith 1986). This leads Smith (1995) to caution against an overemphasis on the invented nature of traditions. ‘Modern’ nations are nevertheless deeply rooted in premodern ethnic identities and in attributes such as language, religion, custom or institutions (Smith 1991: 69).

This reminder of the persistence of premodern ‘cultural stuff’ within modern national identity is important. However, ethnic characteristics are in turn not simply ‘natural’ or ‘given’. As Smith (1991: 23) puts it, ‘the *ethnie* is anything but primordial’. Ethnic attributes are articulated and politically mobilised within current discourses of identity. Language and linguistic diversity, for example, are discursively constructed as crucial elements of national identity in the Swiss multilingual context, while religious differences – the cause of civil war in past Swiss history – have lost their importance as identity markers (see Widmer, forthcoming). In addition, ethnic attributes are not necessarily always ‘premodern’. The preparatory events surrounding the 1994 Rwanda genocide are a dramatic illustration of this argument. Contrary to most other ethnic groups on the African continent, the Rwandan Tutsis and Hutus have historically shared the same language, religion, customs and territory. Their ethnic categorisation is a modern ‘invention’, which was imposed on them for political reasons by Belgian colonisers. This ethnic classification was – again for political reasons – exploited and exacerbated by the Hutu Power extremists in planned preparation for the genocide against both Tutsis and Hutu moderates. To interpret the genocide in terms of premodern ethnic conflict, as much of the Western press and numerous academics have done, is neither helpful nor accurate. The politicisation of ethnic identities in Rwanda, efficiently assisted by modern media technologies at the time of the genocide (Kagame 1994; Boomkens 1994; Gourevitch 1999), has been a fundamentally modern enterprise.<sup>7</sup>

My adoption of a discursive approach to identity construction does not imply that only symbolic constructions are deemed relevant. Identities - ethnic, national or other – are

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<sup>4</sup> Renan’s oft quoted 1882 lecture ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’ already conceptualised the nation as an act of political will rather than a ‘natural’ community defined by characteristics such as language or geography (Renan 1990; see also Gellner 1987).

<sup>5</sup> I also assume gender, race and sexuality to be social constructions rather than natural, given categories. A detailed discussion of this point is beyond the aims of this paper (but see Guillaumin (1995) on race and gender, and Weeks (1986) on sexuality, for ‘classic’ elaborations).

<sup>6</sup> Understood not as a philosophical concept but rather in the sociological sense of “modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less world-wide in their influence” (Giddens 1990: 1).

<sup>7</sup> I wish to thank Edouard Bizumuremyi and Faustin Kagame, whose eyewitness descriptions of the 1994 events have provided the basis for this interpretation.

produced, reproduced and transformed through institutional practices (including state policies) and everyday interactions. The term *discourse* will therefore be used not in the narrow sense of ‘texts’ but rather in its Foucauldian sense, as “systems of meaning, including all types of social and political practice, as well as institutions and organisations” (Howarth 1995). However, as discourse theory emphasises, identity is not only constructed in the context of relations of meaning but also within institutionalised relations of power. Discourses around national identity, sexuality, gender or race are not autonomous systems but operate in the context of the institutional supports and practices that they rely upon (Mottier 1997). In contrast to Derridien deconstruction, Foucauldian discourse analysis does not aim to reveal how specific discursive constructions result from the mere play of free-floating signifiers. Instead, it seeks to explore how specific discourses reproduce or transform relations of power as well as relations of meaning. Consequently, I use the term ‘discourses’ to refer to the ‘macro-level’ of structural *orders of discourse* (Foucault 1971): broad historical systems of meaning which are relatively stable over considerable periods of time (As opposed to the ‘micro-level’ of communicative interactions, focused on by social psychologists such as Van Dijk (1993) or Potter and Wetherell (1987)). In other words, the concept of discourse replaces the older, problematic concept of ideology (see Mottier 1994).

Discourses are reproduced (as well as transformed) by specific individual and collective *narratives*. Narratives are variously defined as “a story with a beginning, middle and end that reveals someone’s experiences” (Manning and Cullum-Swan 1998); “an original state of affairs, an action, or an event, and the consequent state of events” (Czarniawska 1998); “any form of communication” (Barthes 1966); or “the main mode of human knowledge” (Bruner 1986). Whereas some uses of the term narrative, such as Barthes’s or Bruner’s, suggest no difference between narrative and discourse, I will consider narratives in the more limited sense of *stories* and *storytelling*. As such, narratives are possible forms of discourse, while discourses include (but are not reduced to) narratives. Specific narratives of the nation are construed as important component parts of broader discourses of national identity. Historical accounts, myths, and metaphors are examples of different narrative forms that contribute to discourses of national identity. Much narrative analysis is concerned with the formal properties of narratives or ‘stories’, such as “act, scene, agent, agency and purpose” (Burke 1945); “building the ‘and, and, and’ connections between action and events” (Czarniawska 1998); or “temporal sequence” (Propp 1928; Labov and Waletzky 1967). However, following Plummer (1995 : 19), my concern here is with the social and political role of narratives.

The narrative conceptualisation of identity emphasises the importance of stories and storytelling for processes of identity construction. Giddens (1991), for example, argues that identity is constituted through the continuous formulation and re-formulation of *narratives of the self*: the stories whereby self-identity is reflexively understood by the individual concerned as well as by others. While Giddens’s therapy-influenced model of self-identity refers to processes of personal identity construction, a similar argument applies to collective identities that are continuously reconstituted in both individual and collective narratives. Borrowing both from Austin’s speech act theory and Goffman’s theatrical model of identity, I want to emphasise the *performative* nature of collective identity narratives (Austin 1962 ; Goffman 1959). Narratives do not simply express a pre-given national identity but function as *performatives: speech acts* which bring into being that which they name. Narratives both enact and perform the nation through *reiteration* (Butler 1993: 20; see also Lloyd 1998). Policy texts, historical accounts or myths (which may or may not be based on historical ‘fact’) are all examples of narrative enactment and performance of national identity.

Individual and collective identities are specific forms of narrative which constitute commonalities and differences between self and others (Yuval-Davis: 43). As Plummer (1995: 19) puts it, “stories mark out identities; identities mark out differences; differences define ‘the other’; and ‘the other’ helps structure the moral life of culture, group, and individual”. National identities are narratives which are concerned with the drawing of boundaries between members of the nation and non-members, between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Such boundaries are crucially bound up with political processes. As Mouffe observes: “Politics is *about* the constitution of the political community, not something that takes place within it” (1993: 81, quoted in Yuval-Davis: 73; my emphasis). Mechanisms of *othering*, of constructing specific groups of people *as* other, as fundamentally ‘different’, are politically important aspects of

identity narratives. At times of war, mechanisms of *othering* of the enemy become particularly intense, often taking the form of presenting the other as non-human or subhuman. In caricatures as well as political discourse, the enemy is frequently represented through animal imagery. Extreme examples are imagery of Jews in Nazi discourse as ‘vermin’ to be exterminated, or of Tutsis as ‘cockroaches’ at the time of the Rwanda genocide.

War has played a central role in the making of the modern nation (Tilly 1975; Giddens 1985; Smith 1991). It has been particularly important to the construction of Swiss national identity. Indeed, the Swiss nation is founded on the struggle against successive forms of foreign domination (Kriesi 1995). The liberation from foreign oppressors is correspondingly central to Swiss founding myths such as the Wilhelm Tell legend. Switzerland was the only country in Europe to recently organise celebrations to commemorate the start of the mobilisation of its army during the Second World War, despite having remained uninvolved in the conflict (Kriesi 1995: 16). The combination of the centrality of war to the making of the Swiss nation and Switzerland’s linguistic and religious diversity results in a national identity that is founded on (real or perceived) external threats, rather than on (real or ‘invented’) common cultural heritage. Current discursive mechanisms of *othering* consequently centre in particular on categories of ‘foreigners’ such as immigrant workers (see Windisch 1978) or asylum seekers (see Parini 1997). These mechanisms condition foreign and trade policy as well as immigration policy (see Sciarini, Hug and Dupont 1997). Swiss national identity has consequently been described as *negative*, emerging through ‘difference’ and in particular through the demarcation of external enemies (Kriesi 1995: 16). However, as discourse theory teaches us, identity is *always* constituted relationally, through demarcation with what it is not (Saussure 1916). In other words, *any* identity is negative. To speak of *negative identity* as exclusively Swiss is therefore problematic. It is not negativity but rather the specific mechanisms of *othering*, and the attendant political processes of inclusion and exclusion from the national community which are based on these, that characterise Swiss national identity.

## **Boundaries and the National Order**

As Zygmunt Bauman argues in his influential texts *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) and *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), the modern nation-state has emerged through a ‘quest for order’: its aim was to create an orderly society through the twin reigns of Science and Reason. Hobbes’s discovery that order was not natural led to the idea that the social and political order needs to be constructed through the design, engineering and management of existence, combined with the mastery and subordination of nature (Bauman 1991: 7). Under conditions of modernity, old certainties and identities disappeared in the context of rapid social and political change. As a consequence, the concern with boundary-drawing and boundary-maintenance as mechanisms for reducing ambivalence and constructing the social and political order became intense. “Whatever remained of old boundaries needed desperate defence”, Bauman (1991: 40) writes, “and new boundaries had to be built around new identities”.

Derrida and his followers, in particular, have conceptualised the identity boundaries through which order is constructed in terms of binary categorisations such as us/them, inside/outside, man/woman, white/black, or Carl Schmitt’s friends/enemies. The negative (second) term of the binary opposition is seen to give a content to its positive half, as its ‘constitutive outside’, to borrow Derrida’s terminology (see also Mouffe 1993: 141). However, I would argue that processes of identity formation are not neatly binary in nature. Identity narratives are embedded in complex gendered and de-gendered hierarchies of power (Carver 1998). The processes of inclusion/exclusion of members and non-members which construct the order of the nation partly overlap with and crosscut other discursive mechanisms such as classification and hierarchisation. As Nagel (1998b: 4) states, the nation “not only is built on the back of ethnicity, it also represents a particular gendered, sexualised vision of social and political reality”.

Political science narratives of Swiss national identity tend to focus on specific mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion: those concerned with the boundaries of the national community which are coterminous with the nation's borders. These narratives include analyses of Swiss foreign policies, naturalisation procedures, asylum policies, etc. Such studies analyse the regulation and policing of access to national borders and related citizenship rights. However, identity boundaries do not coincide with borders. As Nagel (1998b) points out, within national borders are ethnic boundaries, gender boundaries, and sexual boundaries. Within the national territory we find categorisations and hierarchisations that produce gendered, racialised and sexualised national identities. The racial and ethnic nature of the boundaries of the nation has been extensively discussed in the literature on national identity. In contrast, the gendered basis of national identity has, to date, been little researched (Yuval-Davis 1997). The same is true for the sexual boundaries of the nation.

As a result of these mobile and permeable *crisscrossing boundaries* (Nagel 1998b: 1) the construction of order is a never-ending process. The mechanisms of classification, inclusion and exclusion that construct identity can never fully eliminate *ambivalence*, understood as “the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category” (Bauman 1991: 1). Discursive orderings and fixation of identity are threatened by “polysemy, cognitive dissonance, polyvalent definitions, contingency; the overlapping meanings in the world of tidy classifications and filing cabinets” (Bauman 1991: 9; See also Foucault 1978: 96). Ambivalence is the unintended consequence of classification efforts and calls for yet more classification. Modernity's “bitter and intense war against ambivalence” is therefore “both self-destructive and self-propelling” (Bauman 1991: 3). It is ultimately doomed to fail. As Bauman (1991: 4) writes: “Among the multitude of impossible tasks that modernity set itself and that made modernity into what it is, the task of order (more precisely and most importantly, or order as a task) stands out – as the least possible among the impossible and the least disposable among the indispensable”.<sup>8</sup>

Certain identities have proved particularly resistant to modernity's classification efforts. In this context, Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* argues that, having no territorial state, the allegiance of Jews to specific national communities was traditionally seen as particularly suspect. Communists during the Cold War were similarly the focus of *othering* mechanisms, because their allegiance to a transnational ideology was thought to take priority over their membership of the national community (In the Swiss context, see Kriesi 1995: 17; Kreis 1993). For Yuval-Davis (1997: 47), women are consistently subjected to othering processes because of their ambivalent position in the nation; they are both ‘subjects’ who symbolise the honour and unity of the community, and ‘objects’ who are often excluded from the political community. Finally, Nagel (1998a; 1998b) considers feminism, unruly female sexuality and homosexuality as particular ‘cracks’ in the order of the nation, which in her view is centrally founded on male heterosexuality.

I now move on to focus on these discursive mechanisms of *boundary-drawing*, *boundary-maintenance*, *ordering* and *othering* within specific narratives that enact and perform Swiss national identity.

### **Sexuality and the making of the nation**

Yuval-Davis (1997: 21ff) distinguishes three major dimensions in the making of the nation: constructions based on origin; those based on culture; and those based on citizenship. Following Yuval-Davis, I propose to delineate three major types of narratives of national identity: *Kulturnation narratives* which construct language, religion, traditions or customs as the essential ‘stuff’ of the nation; *Staatnation narratives* which privilege political institutions, citizenship rights and access to State territory; and *Volksnation narratives* which centre on notions of origin of the people or race.

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<sup>8</sup> Bauman goes on to argue that current times, which he diagnoses as ‘postmodern’, are gradually coming to terms with ‘difference’. While I do not share Bauman's postmodern perspective, adopting instead Giddens's diagnosis of today as ‘late’ rather than ‘post’-modern, the pre-War time period which this paper focuses on precedes current developments.

While Swiss political science narratives routinely designate political institutions as the main basis of national identity in Switzerland, all three dimensions have, in fact, contributed to the making of the Swiss nation. With regard to *Kulturnation narratives*, the formation of the federal state in the late nineteenth century<sup>9</sup> was concomitant with the construction of patriotic feelings, through the invention and adaptation of rituals and traditions in which festivals, displays of flags and folksongs played a key role (see Hobsbawn 1984: 6). Somewhat paradoxically, the comparative lateness of the emergence of such constructions in the Swiss context favoured the ‘invention’ of a common culture, despite the country’s linguistic diversity. “The appearance of Swiss nationalism on the eve of the communications revolution of the twentieth century”, as Anderson explains, “made it possible and practical to ‘represent’ the imagined community in ways that did not require linguistic uniformity” (Anderson 1991: 139).

On the level of *Staatnation narratives*, the ‘holy trinity’ of direct democracy, federalism, and ‘armed neutrality’ are seen as the ‘founding institutions’ of Swiss national identity (for example, Kriesi 1995; Sciarini, Hug and Dupont 1997). Through the combination of direct democracy and federalism, the Swiss model institutionalises the expression of particular interests. In Hegelian terms, the Swiss political institutions incarnate political representations that are far removed from the Rousseauian quest for a *volonté générale*. The legitimacy of the Swiss political system therefore rests upon what I have termed elsewhere an *ethos of particularity* rather than an ethos of universality (Mottier 1995). This institutionalised expression of difference is seen as the fundamental basis of the unity of the Swiss nation, while armed neutrality is crucial (at least symbolically) in regulating relations with ‘others’ beyond the national borders.<sup>10</sup>

*Kulturnation* and *Staatnation* narratives structure the national order by drawing gendered, sexualised and racialised identity boundaries. Taking gender as an example, the cultural constructions of nationhood involve definitions of ‘manhood’ and ‘womanhood’ (Yuval-Davis 1997). The chorales, shooting and gymnastic activities that contributed to the cultural ‘invention’ of Swiss national identity (Hobsbawn 1994: 6) are clearly gendered practices, producing gendered bodies (see Klesli 1995; Lengwiler 1998; Hettling 1998). Similarly, in the context of Swiss political institutions, the relation of national subjects to the army is obviously gendered, in that it is men who are soldiers and conduct war (or, alternatively, maintain armed neutrality).

This masculinisation of war is in turn reflected within the cultural narratives of the nation. There is no Boadicea or Jeanne d’Arc in Swiss mythology. The heroic warriors who defend Switzerland against foreign (usually Austrian or French) enemies are men such as Wilhelm Tell or Stauffacher. Women star in supporting roles, as part of the ‘womenandchildren’ (Enloe 1990) who the men are presumably defending. Where women adopt a more active role in the military narratives, their script follows what could be termed a ‘vegetable soup model’ of military action after the story of ‘Mother Royaume’. According to the founding myth of the canton of Geneva (still celebrated yearly), Mother Royaume had left some vegetable soup simmering on the fireplace overnight (illustrating her traditional, nurturing role). When the French Army launched a surprise attack she raised the alarm by pouring boiling soup over the attackers from the city walls, thereby saving the independence of the then Republic of Geneva (though in the role of the ‘accidental hero’ rather than the ‘heroic warrior’).

The political institution of direct democracy has been similarly gendered, in that women did not participate in its practice for most of the history of the federal state. Indeed, women were only granted the right to vote at a federal level in 1971 (!). Finally, through the territorialisation of ‘difference’, federalism has ‘institutionalised out’ the legitimacy of those marginalised interests that are not territorially defined, in particular those of women (see also Kriesi 1995: 67). Puzzlingly, when political scientists emphasise the crucial function of national integration performed by Swiss political institutions, the deeply gendered nature of

<sup>9</sup> The modern federal state was founded in 1948, at the end of a civil war over religious differences.

<sup>10</sup> The Swiss army and military events are correspondingly central to the historical accounts that narrate the Swiss nation, including fairly recent versions. To take an example, Grandjean and Jeanrenaud’s *Histoire de la Suisse* (1965), which was widely used in (francophone) primary school history teaching until well into the mid-1980s, structures its narrative around chapter headings such as ‘Heroic Switzerland’ or ‘Switzerland, A Great Military Power’.

these founding institutions seems to temporarily escape their attention. Both political narratives and political science narratives of Swiss national identity are thus embedded in gendered and de-gendered hierarchies of power.

Much more could be said, of course, about the *Kulturnation* and *Staatnation* narratives and the gender (and other) boundaries that they construct. However, my aim in the next section is to focus on the *Volksnation* dimension of national identity. While I do not claim that the *Volksnation* narrative has been the most important basis for Swiss national identity, I suggest that it has nevertheless formed a crucial dimension of the construction of the national order. As stated earlier, political science narratives routinely highlight the *Staatnation* aspects only, and consequently stress the institutionalised expression of ‘difference’ as a basis of the Swiss nation. I argue that this exclusive focus on the political foundations of national identity neglects other important discourses and practices associated with the *Volksnation* dimension of the nation. These narratives and *discursive practices* have been concerned not with respect for diversity but with the relative eradication of (some) differences. *Staatnation*-centred analyses, as we have seen above, claim that the exclusionary aspects of Swissness centre on the ‘othering’ of foreign people and nations, conflating identity boundaries with national borders. My argument is that the boundaries drawn within *Volksnation* narratives have also structured the order of the nation *within* the national borders, through specific mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, ordering and othering.

*Volksnation* narratives, as explained earlier, are concerned with the origins of the people or the race. Given this concern, sexuality is central to *Volksnation* narratives. Genealogical stories about the ‘purity’ of the race are crucially intertwined with the regulation of sexuality. As Yuval-Davis (1997 : 27) reports, the South African apartheid regime outlawed sexual relations and marriage between people from different ‘races’, while the leader of the Israeli extreme right-wing party Kach, Rabbi Kahana, similarly proposed to introduce legislation forbidding sexual relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel. In this way, *Volksnation* narratives bring together two central components of modern identity; national identity and sexuality. National identities are probably the most important form of collective identity in modernity (Smith 1991). Sexual identity, in turn, constitutes a central component of individual identity in modernity (Foucault 1976). This is not to say that sexuality is a purely individual experience. Sexual identities are not merely the expression of biological promptings but are social and political constructs. As Giddens (1992: 15) puts it: “Somehow... sexuality functions as a malleable feature of self, a prime connecting point between body, self-identity and social norms”. Sexuality connects the individual both to other individuals and to political processes and state policies (see Weeks 1989; Carver and Mottier 1998).

Given that female identity has been traditionally tied up with women’s reproductive roles as the biological producers of the members of the nation, women’s contributions to the biological reproduction of the nation become a particular focus of concern within *Volksnation* narratives. Women and ‘respectable’ female sexuality become the ‘gate-keepers’ of the moral as well as biological boundaries of the national community (Yuval-Davis 1989: 106; Nagel 1998b:12; Amir and Benjamin 1998).

Yuval-Davis distinguishes three major discourses concerned with the regulation of sexuality that underlie specific *Volksnation* narratives: the ‘*People as Power*’ discourse, which constructs the continuous growth of the population as vital for the nation’s interests (whether through immigration, or through the reproductive contributions of the female members of the nation) ; the *Malthusian* discourse, which is concerned with preventing the implosion of the nation through overpopulation ; and the *eugenicist* discourse, which is concerned not with the size but with the ‘quality’ of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997: 26ff.).

In the Swiss context, *Volksnation* narratives have mostly taken the form of the latter. Eugenicist discourses were highly influential in Switzerland from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the end of the Second World War, concomitant with the construction of national identity. Eugenics has therefore made an important contribution to the construction of the *Volksnation* dimension of Swiss national identity.

The term ‘eugenics’ was coined by Sir Francis Galton in 1883, to refer to the genetic improvement of the national ‘stock’ on the basis of the scientific study of “all influences that tend (...) to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had”. Convinced that both

moral and physical flaws were hereditary, Galton advocated social reforms which would encourage procreation by the genetically 'superior' members of the nation. Later followers argued for the need to combine Galton's 'positive' eugenics with 'negative' eugenics, aimed at limiting the reproduction of the genetically 'inferior' (Bajema 1976). Galton regarded the evolutionary processes described by his cousin Charles Darwin, in particular natural selection and the idea of the survival of the fittest,<sup>11</sup> as too slow and uncertain for modern needs. The complexities of modern scientific and cultural developments, he argued, put particularly high demands on the political and other elites, whose intellectual capacities he deemed insufficiently evolved. Galton perceived an urgent need for the management of the consequences of modernity. The dominance of the West's nation-states over others seemed in danger; his theories were formulated in response to this threat. "The feeble nations of the world are necessarily giving way before the nobler varieties of mankind; and even the best of these, so far as we know them, seem unequal to their work" (Galton 1865: 23). The new science of eugenics should assist governments in implementing social policies which would improve the national 'breed'. Hostile to the laissez-faire of political liberalism, eugenics advocated active social engineering. The individual had a patriotic duty to contribute to the improvement of the national community through "conscious race-culture", as Galton's student and successor Karl Pearson put it. "Without high average soundness of body and soundness of mind, a nation can neither be built up nor an empire preserved" (Pearson 1909: 170). The national community was, as the above quote shows, conceptualised in strongly racialised terms.<sup>12</sup> Eugenics was based on narratives of degeneracy and 'racial hygiene'.

Eugenics was thus from its origins deeply intertwined with social and political aims. It emerged as both a science and a social movement. The term caught on rapidly, and numerous eugenics societies were established in Great Britain as well as in other countries to be followed by the creation of International and World Leagues (see Kühl 1997). Through such social reform societies, as well as various scientific disciplines such as psychiatry, anthropology, biology and sexology, eugenicist ideas acquired institutional supports.

The new discipline of sexology was a particularly important site of eugenic narratives. Sex emerged as an object of study within the social sciences around the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (Weeks 1989; Bullough 1994). Darwinian theory had been the main focus of debate in the social sciences during the preceding decades. Darwin's view of sexual selection as the key to evolution became a major impetus for the development of modern sex research. Through the concept of sexual selection, scientific narratives of sexuality were, from their beginnings, concerned with questions of heredity, degeneracy and race (Bullough 1994; see also Mottier 1998). These preoccupations were articulated in the twin rise of eugenics and the sexology of 'perversions'. Eugenics and the medicine of perversions (which replaced previously dominant moral constructions of sexuality) were intertwined through their common focus on 'degenerescence' (Foucault 1978: 118). Flawed heredity produced sexual perverts, which produced degenerescence of future generations and ultimately, of the national race, it was thought. The regulation of sexuality, as the site where the future of the nation's 'stock' is formed, consequently became an important focus of attention. Eugenics and the 'invention' of perversions were the central components of the new *technology of sex*, which turned sex not only into a secular (rather than a religious) concern, but into a concern of the state as well (Foucault 1978: 116).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, eugenics remained mostly a rhetoric with political implications. But the growth of social policies implemented by national states around the turn of the twentieth century provided opportunities for translating the rhetoric into practice. Switzerland was at the forefront on both levels. Swiss scientists made a significant contribution to the international discourse of eugenics, while eugenicist practices and policies were implemented in Switzerland, as will be shown below.

Nowadays, eugenics has become associated with the large-scale social experiments of forced sterilisation and 'euthanasia' of 'unfit' persons by Nazi Germany during the Second

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<sup>11</sup> Darwin adopted the latter idea from Herbert Spencer in 1868.

<sup>12</sup> The concept of 'race' was in this historical context understood primarily in relation to territory; it was usual to speak of the 'Mediterranean' or 'Nordic' race, for example.

World War. In the post-War era, Swiss narratives of eugenics and racial hygiene<sup>13</sup> are routinely seen to reflect German influence. For example, shortly after the end of the War, the Swiss state deprived the psychiatrist Ernst Rüdin of his Swiss citizenship<sup>14</sup> for having damaged the international reputation of Switzerland through his scientific ideas, which were termed “fundamentally foreign” to the Swiss (see Keller 1995). Rüdin had played a central role as a consultant expert in the formulation of the notorious 1934 German Law to Prevent Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, which had been the legal basis for hundreds of thousands of forced sterilisations within Germany. He had also become an enthusiastic member of the NSDAP in 1937. However, the claim that Rüdin’s racial hygiene views were ‘un-Swiss’ is, as Aeschbacher (1998) puts it, “absurd”. Such ideas were scientific orthodoxy in pre-War Switzerland and their respectability was not called into question at the time. This respectability was also recognised internationally, as Rüdin was elected president of the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations in 1934 (Aeschbacher 1998: 281). It is therefore useful to remember that it was the US, Great Britain, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries who were in fact the pioneers of eugenicist theories and policies – although none of these countries ever went as far as Nazi Germany in their implementation. Switzerland’s racial hygiene discourses developed autonomously (Kreis 1998: 177) and Swiss practices constituted a source of inspiration for German admirers. Several of Germany’s main eugenicist advocates had been trained in Switzerland.<sup>15</sup> As Weiss (1987: 153) reports, at least some German eugenicists, envious of American, Swiss and Danish policies, seem to have seen in the National Socialists their only hope of translating race hygiene concerns into concrete policies.<sup>16</sup> Several key international conferences on sexology had taken place in Switzerland in the 1920s and 1930s and this encouraged personal links between Swiss and German sexologists.<sup>17</sup> As a result, when German sex reformers who were hostile to Nazi policies began to be persecuted within Germany, the vast majority of those who fled went to Switzerland, either definitively, or on their way to other safe havens (Grossman 1995). As this example illustrates, while eugenics is often associated with extreme right-wing politics, eugenicist concerns were in fact found across the political spectrum and included socialist and anarchist thinkers. This was also the case in Switzerland. In other words, eugenicist versions of *Volksnation* narratives were articulated from within opposite political projects.

### **Narratives of Eugenics, ‘Homo Alpinus Helveticus’ and the ‘Woman Question’**

Eugenicist versions of Swiss *Volksnation* constructions sprang up in various forms and from multiple sites. However, they initially emerged as scientific narratives. My aim in this section is not to discuss all of these narrative forms or sites but to focus on a few examples which illustrate the discursive mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, ordering and othering through which these narratives perform Swiss national identity. As discussed above, the eugenicist regulation of sexuality aimed to improve the quality of the national race. These aims were cast in narratives of degenerescence and racial hygiene. An example is the work of the anthropologist Otto Schlaginhaufen, one of the key proponents of racial hygiene in Switzerland. Schlaginhaufen was the first president of the Julius Klaus Foundation for Heredity Research, Social Anthropology and Racial Hygiene which was founded in Zürich in 1922 (and still exists today (!)). The aims of this Foundation were “the promotion of all scientifically based efforts, whose ultimate goal is the preparation and realisation of practical

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<sup>13</sup> In the Swiss context, the terms racial hygiene and eugenics were used interchangeably, with the first concept being the most widely used (see Schwank 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Rüdin had dual nationality, both Swiss and German.

<sup>15</sup> An example is the case of Robert Ritter, who, after his return to Germany, called for legislation on the internment and sterilisation of gypsies. This law was subsequently commended by the Swiss Society for Psychiatry (Aeschbacher 1998: 301).

<sup>16</sup> In this context, it should be noted that Auguste Forel, one of the main Swiss proponents of eugenics and racial hygiene (see below), supported the German doctor Gerhard Boeters in his crusade to grant far-reaching legal powers to doctors to carry out forced sterilisations (Aeschbacher 1998: 287).

<sup>17</sup> For example, the International Conference for Birth Control in Zürich in 1930; the World Population Congress in Geneva in 1927 (the latter congress was in fact concerned with the Malthusian theme of overpopulation and attracted many racial hygiene experts); the Conference of the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations in Zürich in 1934.

reforms to improve the white race”, including special efforts “for the benefit of the physically and mentally inferior” (see Schwank 1996: 469ff). Schlaginhaufen’s main scientific concern was the identification of the racial origins of the Swiss population. From 1927 to 1932, his team of researchers measured over 35 000 male army recruits. The results of his study were published only in 1946, as *The Anthropology of the Confederation*. Using complex statistical calculations as well as special technical tools for measuring physical characteristics, they catalogued 7456 photographs of the young men’s faces. Complex racial categories were created based on differences in bodily characteristics such as hair type (curly, straight, etc.), eye colour, and distance between eyes and nose. The research team carefully crafted endless series of maps which represented the racial differentiations found within the Swiss territory according to the statistical research results.

(pictures 1 and 2 about here) (see page 19)

Schlaginhaufen’s maps both constitute and explore the racial structure of the Swiss nation. Seen as narratives, they tell stories of origin and decay, of racial purity and racial mixing. They narrate the obsessive quest for the pure Swiss race, the ‘Homo Alpinus Helveticus’. The ‘Homo Alpinus’ proved elusive, however. According to Schlaginhaufen’s own criteria, only 8,661% of the Swiss were of ‘pure race’, and only 1.41 % of these were part of the Alpine race. The great majority were categorised as the products of mixing between six races (‘Alpine’, ‘Nordic’, ‘Eastern-European’, ‘Dinaric’, ‘Ibero-insular’ and ‘Littoral’), as a result of past foreign settlings in the Swiss territory, particularly via Geneva and Basel (see also Kreis 1992). Schlaginhaufen’s narrative thus constructs strongly racialised boundaries between the (originally pure) Swiss and the foreign races which contaminated this purity as well as *within* the Swiss modern nation. However, in addition to this narrative performance of the nation, we find an additional story: that of the triumph of science. Indeed, within Schlaginhaufen’s main story, there are numerous substories which emphasise the scientific nature of the study. A large part of the text is dedicated to detailed descriptions of the research methods and tools. In addition to the pictures and tables that map Swiss boundaries of racial identity, numerous pictures of the research itself were included.

(pictures 3 and 4 about here) (see page 20)

Such pictures of the ‘researchers at work’ performatively construct the scientificity of the narrative. This strategy of legitimisation through science is twinned, however, with the appeal to the interests of the nation. Indeed, Schlaginhaufen saw his own work as a contribution to the eugenicist cause. Quoting a text written by himself in 1921, he wrote in the introduction to *The Anthropology of the Confederation* “Research that aims to contribute to racial hygiene must be able to draw on previous anthropological studies, and the anthropological inventory of the country is therefore amongst the most important conditions of the realisation of eugenicist aims” (Schlaginhaufen 1946: 7; my translation). The mapping of the racial structure of the Swiss nation was therefore an “important scientific, and patriotic task” (Schlaginhaufen 1946: 7).

While Schlaginhaufen’s anthropological study is a good example of racial hygiene narratives of Swiss identity, it is not an exception. Dozens of other studies within anthropology and geography were similarly concerned with mapping the racial boundaries of the Swiss nation.<sup>18</sup> However, the most important sites of racial hygiene discourse in Switzerland were psychiatry and the emerging discipline of sexology, however. Indeed, the three most important Swiss ‘degeneracy experts’ (Aeschbacher 1998: 291) were psychiatrists Eugen Bleuler, Nazi-sympathiser Ernst Rüdin (mentioned earlier) and Auguste Forel. Bleuler’s widely used psychiatry textbook, published in 1916, emphasised the threat of ‘*Volksdegeneration*’ through hereditarily transmissible mental illness, especially in Jews, whom he deemed particularly predisposed to mental illness (Aeschbacher 1998: 285). The

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<sup>18</sup> That these concerns did not disappear with the end of the War is illustrated by a study on ‘The racial structure of Switzerland, in its regional variations’, which was published in 1962. The study was financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation and conducted by Pierre-André Gloor who emphasised the need to continue Schlaginhaufen’s racial analysis, in the context of “our ignorance of the hereditary transmission of characteristics” (Gloor 1962: 13).

psychiatrist Forel (1848-1931) was also amongst the leading sexologists of his time, and was a particularly influential pioneer of eugenics both nationally and internationally. His most important book, *The Sexual Question* (1906), was translated into numerous languages. He was elected member of the Advisory Board of the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations (Keller 1995). At the Sex Reform Congress in London in 1929, Forel was cited as one of the founding fathers of sexology, along with the British sexologist Havelock Ellis and the German doctor Iwan Bloch (Bland 1998: 13). His enduring prestige within Switzerland is reflected by the place of honour accorded to his portrait, which graces current 1000 francs bills.

In stark contrast to Rüdin, Forel promoted eugenics from a socialist perspective. In addition to his psychiatric and sexologist activities, he was a social reformer who campaigned for sexual education at schools, women's voting rights, abstinence from alcoholic drinks and other 'poisons', pacifism, etc. The science of eugenics would provide the impetus for social, moral and racial purification, he argued. Rejecting the 'false patriotism' of militaristic capitalist nationalism (Forel 1925: 15), Forel promoted the construction of a social order based on the scientific management of reproduction as a moral duty to the future of the national community. "The regulation of procreation through appropriated means is a moral task. It is necessary to the hygiene of our race. Only this, combined with the elimination of narcotic poisons, will be able to block the increasing degenerescence of our race, and bring us a better future. We owe this to the progress, happiness and health of the future generations, for whose quality we are responsible" (Forel 1916: 12; my translation).

The hereditary degenerescence of the race, Forel argued, was not only physical but also moral. As a consequence, there had been an important increase in the number of "hypocrites", of "stupid and egoistic idiots", who were incapable to think of the common good, as he argued in his 1907 lecture on 'The Role of Hypocrisy, Stupidity and Ignorance in Contemporary Morals'. This argument is illustrated in a 1910 conference on the topic of 'morals', where an interesting allegorical narrative form appears within his larger narrative of moral degenerescence. Forel started the conference with the long description of a dream that he claimed to have had. In the dream, various animals explained to him their idea of 'morals'. Amongst these, the narrative of the ant is an important substory in Forel's moral allegory (especially since Forel happened to be a great specialist on ants). In Forel's dream, the ant tells him: "What makes our anthill prosper is good. What damages it is bad. (...) Morals consist of the duty that every ant has to work from birth; to live and die for its anthill, its *patrie*: You humans, you are stupid and immoral not to understand this, as a result of your hereditary incapacity to grasp and to practice the basics of social morals!" (1910: 6ff., my translation).

However, it was unfair to hold people responsible for having such hereditary dispositions, Forel thought. The construction of the social order should therefore not centre on the management of deviants, but rather on the eugenic prevention of degeneracy, Forel argued in "The True Socialism of the Future" (Forel 1925: 23). Consequently, the worst enemies of eugenics were war (which selects the best to be killed) and alcoholic drinks and other 'narcotic poisons' which damage the mind as well as the body (Forel 1925).

The bases of the social order were hereditary dispositions on the one hand, education on the other (Forel 1910). While "only a healthy selection of the race" could improve the former, this sexual selection should be combined with active education campaigns based on Science and Reason. Given the importance of sexual selection for the regulation of procreation, sexual education was strongly promoted by Forel. It was crucial, he thought, to teach young people about the consequences of having sexual relations with 'inferior' partners, and about the corresponding necessity to gather information on the hereditary background of the potential spouse. "Each fiancée has the right and, in the interest of the future children, the holy duty, to know the sexual antecedents of their future spouse" (Forel 1916: 12; my translation).

Women were a site of narrative ambivalence in Forel's writings. On the one hand, he discursively constructed women as political subjects, promoting political equality between the genders and especially women's voting rights. On the other hand, the reproductive role of women was a particular source of narrative anxiety. Given their reproductive responsibilities to the nation, women were seen as particularly important targets for the eugenic education and regulation of sexuality that he called for. "Well-informed and superior women will be the ones, I expect, who will participate most energetically and most successfully in human

selection” (Forel 1906: 575; my translation). Women’s “instincts of procreation”, which he considered “much stronger in woman than in man”, were combined with the will to “give herself passively”, to be “conquered, mastered and subjugated” (Forel 1906: 29). In Forel’s narratives, female identity is thus ambivalently performed. Women are both political subjects, and sexual objects.<sup>19</sup>

Within Forel’s eugenicist narrative, the mechanisms of *othering* centre on different categories that are seen to form hereditary ‘threats’ to the nation: criminals, prostitutes, alcoholics, immoral people, the mentally ill, haemophiliacs, people with tuberculosis, drug addicts, gypsies, vagrants. Strong boundaries are drawn between the national, white race and the ‘inferior’ races (Jews, ‘Negroes’, the Chinese, etc.). “How is our Aryan race and its civilisation to guard against the danger of being passively invaded and exterminated by the alarming fecundity of other human races? One must be blind not to recognise this danger. (...) Up to what point can the Mongolian, and even the Jewish race, become mixed with our Aryan or Indo-Germanic races without gradually supplanting them and causing them to disappear? (...) The connection of this with the sexual question is not difficult to understand” (Forel 1906: 222ff.). Different categories of sexual ‘perversion’ such as sadism or masochism (considered hereditarily transmissible) were similarly *othered*. In contrast to other eugenicists, however, Forel was little worried by the sexually ‘inverted’ (homosexuals) since they would not reproduce anyway. “As long as homosexual love does not implicate minors, or the feeble-minded, it remains rather innocent, because it does not produce any offspring and will therefore become extinguished automatically through the process of selection. When two individuals are adult and consenting, it is certainly less harmful than prostitution, which is legally protected” (Forel 1906: 270; my translation).

The sharpest identity boundaries were drawn through sterilisation discourses and practices. Sterilisation practices constitute radical mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of the national community. On the level of discourse, Forel constantly called for the sterilisation of the above mentioned ‘degenerate’ categories of the population, as a rational measure to prevent their reproduction. He put his ideas into practice by pioneering the very first forced sterilisations within German-speaking nations in 1892 (Aeschbacher 1998: 286). The practice became relatively widespread in Switzerland. For decades, Switzerland “occupied a ‘top position’ in this domain, which was only surpassed by the US and within Europe, by Germany after 1933” (Aeschbacher 1998: 299). However, sterilisations without consent did not acquire a legal basis until much later. Various cantons subsequently introduced legislation permitting forced sterilisation of the mentally ill (a loose category which could include vagrants, people of ‘weak morals’, delinquents, etc.). The canton of Vaud was the first to do so in a 1928 law which stated : “When it can be expected that a person who has a mental illness, or who has a mental defect which is proven to be incurable, will have a degenerate offspring,<sup>20</sup> this person can become the target of medical measures to prevent the birth of offspring” (my translation).<sup>21</sup> Reflecting the eugenicist focus on women as the reproducers of the nation, the sterilisation of inferior categories of the population was a strongly gendered practice. An evaluation of the application of this law in the canton of Vaud carried out in 1944 reported that 9 out of 10 sterilisations had been carried out on women (Ehrenström 1991: 74).

(picture 5 about here) (see page 21)

### **National Identity, Sexuality, and the Swiss ‘Gardening State’**

This paper has explored the *Volksnation* dimension of the Swiss nation, highlighting the sexual basis of national identity. Eugenic narratives narrate the nation in sharply exclusionary terms. They construct a national order based on sexual, racial and gendered boundaries. Through the exclusion of degenerate categories both outside and within the national borders, they narratively perform a racially, morally and socially regenerated *Volk*. Given the importance of eugenic narratives of degeneracy and racial hygiene in the first decades of the

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<sup>19</sup> This ambivalence takes a different form from that described earlier by Yuval-Davis (1997) (see page 6 of this paper).

<sup>20</sup> The exact terms are ‘une descendance tarée’.

<sup>21</sup> Recueils des lois et décrets du Canton de Vaud, Lausanne, sept. 1928; quoted in Ehrenström (1991).

construction of Swiss national identity, the latter has become particularly exclusionary, I argue. As Yuval-Davis points out, “the myth of common origin or shared blood/genes tends to construct the most exclusionary/homogeneous visions of ‘the nation’” Yuval-Davis (1997: 21).

The construction of Swiss national identity was at least partly founded on what I propose to term the Swiss ‘dream of order’. The social and political order was seen to be ‘troubled’ by various categories of citizens and non-citizens, such as Jews, ‘vagrants’ (Jenitsch and other ‘travellers’), the mentally ill, the physically handicapped, etc. The eugenic ‘imagination’ of the national order was concerned with the elimination of such ‘troubles’ through the rational management of sexuality. While eugenic ideas were articulated within opposite political projects, these projects shared a common call for interventionist state policies in this domain. Eugenicist versions of *Volksnation* narratives have provided the ideological basis for the Swiss ‘Gardening State’, which is concerned with eliminating the ‘weeds’ from the national garden.<sup>22</sup> The emerging Welfare state, concerned with regulation as well as protection, provided the means to translate eugenic narratives of the nation into large-scale social experiments.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> I borrow the term ‘Gardening State’ from Bauman (1989). Gardens are a familiar metaphor for order (as well as, in other contexts, recreation or pleasure) (Whitebrook 1995: 1). This metaphor appears a lot in eugenicist discourses, including that of Auguste Forel.

<sup>23</sup> This will be the topic of a separate paper.

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*Pictures 1 and 2*

*Pictures 3 and 4*

*Picture 5*