



# **Sovereign Masculinity: Gender Lessons from the War on Terror (Studies in Feminist Philosophy)**

*Bonnie Mann*

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After 9/11/2001, gendered narratives of humiliation and revenge proliferated in the U.S. national imaginary. How is it that gender, which we commonly take to be a structure at the heart of individual identity, is also at stake in the life of the nation? What do we learn about gender when we pay attention to how it moves and circulates between the lived experience of the subject and the aspirations of the nation in war? What is the relation between national sovereignty and sovereign masculinity?

Through examining practices of torture, extra-judicial assassination, and first person accounts of soldiers on the ground, Bonnie Mann develops a new theory of gender. It is neither a natural essence nor merely a social construct. Gender is first and foremost an *operation of justification* which binds the lived existence of the individual subject to the aspirations of the regime.

Inspired by a reexamination of the work of Simone de Beauvoir, the author exposes how sovereign masculinity hinges on the nation's ability to tap into and mobilize the structure of self-justification at the heart of masculine identity.

At the national level, shame is repeatedly converted to power in the War on Terror through hyperbolic displays of agency including massive aerial bombardment and practices of torture. This is why, as Mann demonstrates, the phenomenon of gender itself demands a four-dimensional analysis that moves from the phenomenological level of lived experience, through the collective life of a people expressed in the social imaginary and the operations of language, to the material relations that prevail in our times.

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