

BOOK REVIEWS

Parité: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism. By JOAN WALLACH SCOTT. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005. **Women and Citizenship.** Edited by MARILYN FRIEDMAN. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

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Ségolène Royale, the controversial presidential candidate of the French Socialist Party, who lost her bid in May 2007, makes an appearance in Joan Scott's riveting account of the history of the *parité* movement. "As a result of a law passed in 2003 that required strict alternation of men and women on electoral lists for regional elections" (134), the proportion of women doubled, from 27.5 percent in 1998 to 47.6 percent in 2004, but the presidencies of these councils remained in the hands of men—with one exception, the socialist, Ségolène Royale, who triumphed over the party of the sitting prime minister of the time, thus leading to speculations about her possible candidacy for the presidency (135).

The nomination of a woman to lead France's socialists came at the end of a long political evolution, dating back to the turbulent years of the 1960s and culminating in a strong women's movement, with many different outlooks and interpretations, but united in its demand to increase women's political representation in French public life. French society, in which Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex* in 1948, was a surprisingly traditional one well into the 1960s; women were denied the vote until after WWII, a 1920 law prohibited contraception as well as abortion. In a pattern that is all too familiar, women's wages were consistently lower, "by about 34% in 1968" than men's (37). Only in the 1960s did women enter the labor force in massive numbers. With the growth of the French welfare state, issues such as childcare, health care, care for the aged, and social security assumed center place in French political discourse. It is against the background of such fundamental transformations in French society and culture from the 1980s to the present that Joan Scott studies the *parité* movement. They gave rise first and foremost to a "crisis of representation."

The crisis of representation became visible not only with the entry of women into public life but also with the increasing visibility of France's immigrants and foreign-born citizens, the development of European Union institutions, and increasing globalization, which in France is frequently viewed

as “Americanization.” The myth of homogeneous French nationality rang increasingly hollow. Following French commentators, Scott distinguishes *representation* from *representativity*. Representativity “calls for difference to be made visible, so that rights can literally be seen to be exercised by all. The abstract mode, sometimes referred to as *representation*, requires the assimilation of those previously excluded on account of their differences” (17). The crisis in representation was due to the incapacity of this second model, both at the institutional and at the theoretical level, to achieve the kind of diversity that the “changing face of France” required.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, succeeding governments experimented with France’s citizenship, naturalization, and family unification laws in order to integrate the growing number of young people of migrant origin who inhabited the *banlieues* (housing projects) of Paris and other metropolitan areas. When violence erupted in these neighborhoods in spring 2006, the French crisis of representation became all too visible.

Scott argues that the changing demographic picture of the public sphere was particularly poignant for France, because the French republican model was based on a belief in the capacity of the abstract individual to embody and represent the nation as such. In the searing words of Abbe Sieyes, “Democracy is the complete sacrifice of the individual to the *res publica*, that is to say of the concrete being to the abstract being” (quoted in Scott, 13). But do the representatives alone constitute the nation? Or does the nation *delegate* its sovereignty to its representatives? How can the concrete individual, with specific needs and interests, history and inclinations, be seen to represent the nation as such?

Students of political thought will recognize here the dichotomies that bedeviled Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s political thought as well: the “will of all” versus “the general will.” To the question of how one knows what the “general will” is, Rousseau replied by producing a series of further abstractions, ranging from moral intuitionism that would let each discover “the general will” only if they listened to their heart, to the person of the Divine Legislator who would give the nation the laws consonant with the general will.

The French *parité* movement was unique because it faced the crisis of representativity—namely, the absence in the public sphere of a robust representation of differences among the citizens—head on without forfeiting ideals of republican universalism. It attempted to integrate women into public life without advocating either an affirmative action model as in liberal feminism or an essentialized group understanding as advocated by theorists of female difference. The *paritéristes* observed that women were not a minority, they constituted half the nation. So their presence in public life could not be understood in terms analogous to the integration of discriminated minorities. The abstract individual is also a sexed individual: male or female. Anatomical dualism is ubiquitous; yet how can anatomical dualism be distinguished from

"sexual difference" and from an essentialized understanding of women's lives, consciousness, and practices? Is there room for a discourse of *parité* based on the ubiquity of anatomical difference but that nonetheless avoids the pitfalls of sexual difference? (54). Scott observes that by articulating the justification for a law of *parité*, feminists encountered "the dilemma of difference," using Martha Minow's phrase. "By this," she writes, "I mean the difficulty of desymbolizing the differences between the sexes, thinking about this difference outside its usual social meanings" (56). Maintaining the distinction between sexual difference and anatomical dualism proved difficult, and the history of the *parité* movement documents the unstable vacillation between these two poles.

The Campaign for a Domestic Partnership Law waged by homosexual and lesbian couples for legal recognition of their status, exacerbated this vacillation between the anatomical and the symbolical further in that it challenged the norm of "heterosexuality" on which the language of anatomical difference rested (109). Ironically, however, the work that swayed many legislators and politicians to finally support the law of *parité* was based on a robust understanding of sexual difference. In 1998, Sylviane Agacinski published "Politique des sexes," in which she argued that the difference of the sexes is a formative model for all societies (116); the heterosexual couple symbolized the "complementarity" at the origin of life; this complementarity needed to be brought into the political realm. Scott quotes Agacinski: "*Parité* ought to be the complementarity of the 'national representation' in its entirety, in order to represent the humanity of the nation in its entirety" (118). Having drifted away from its original and cautious anti-essentialist discourse in the hands of Françoise Gaspard, Claude Servan-Schreiber, and Anne LeGall (58), when the French *parité* law finally passed, the rhetoric accompanying it was the all-too conventional discourse of heterosexual complementarity between men and women.

Through a series of negotiations that lasted from January to June 6, 2000, the French *parité* law was finally adopted. The effects of the law, while not guaranteeing fully equal representation of women in public offices, were considerable: in towns with more than 3,500 residents, 47.5 percent of women held municipal seats as opposed to 25.7 percent in the past. The Senate elections of 2001 were affected more incrementally, with the percentage of women from 5.9 to 12 percent by 2005 (136). The overall effect of the *parité* law did not produce the kind of result the *paritéristes* hoped for. Scott tentatively concludes that "there was considerable distance between the original conception of *parité* and the law that was passed in its name" (147). Some of this was the result of the commitment of the *paritéristes* to an abstract notion of representation that abhorred group categories; in part, the distinction between anatomical dualism and the symbolic order of sexual difference proved extremely difficult to sustain. Scott refrains from saying whether she thinks this distinction to be at all conceptually coherent and hopes that history may resolve what philosophers have been unable to clarify further (151).

Despite limited success, the *parité* movement has been one of the most captivating examples of the exercise of citizenship in recent years. "Citizenship," as Marilyn Friedman observes in her introduction to an engaging collection of essays, "is multiple and various. It can be an identity; a set of rights, privileges and duties; an elevated and exclusionary political status; a relationship between individuals and their states; a set of practices that can unify—or divide—the members of a political community, and an ideal of political agency" (3). The essays in this volume range from the late Iris Young's deconstruction of the logic of masculinist protection as exhibited by the discourse of the security state to women's community activism (Martha Ackelsberg) to Chicanas and cultural citizenship (Aida Hurtado) to women, Islam, and the kin contract (Suad Joseph and Amina Wadud) to battered women (Sandra Bartky) to women's education (Martha Nussbaum). Under the title "French Universalism in the Nineties," Joan Scott also contributes an essay on *parité* to the volume.

An interesting tension exists between these two volumes. When compared with much feminist theorizing on women's entry into the public sphere as citizens, the *parité* movement appears formalistic and much too focused on affecting change from within established political channels. These limits of *parité* are indirectly illuminated by several of the essays in *Women and Citizenship*. In "Women's Community Activism and the Rejection of 'Politics,'" Martha Ackelsberg examines the ambivalence of women activists toward institutionalized politics and their reluctance to call what they are doing politics (73). In "Care as the Work of Citizens," Joan Tronto defends broadening this concept to refer "to the dispositional qualities we need to care for ourselves and others . . . as well as to the concrete work of caring" (130). She argues that care work should not only be recognized by the state but that we should also all pay heed to the "international commodification of care work." The women who care for our children; the nurses who staff our hospitals, nursing homes, and homes for the aged; the voices at the other end of the phone in utility companies; and customer services and sales agencies are those of women, and very often, of third-world women of color who become an "imported commodity" to perform care work. Tronto pleads for overcoming "the epistemology of ignorance" (136), which privatizes and renders care work invisible, and points out that since "the conditions of the postmodern age make care and its provision into a more central part of our collective concerns" (138), care work should become more public and immigrant care workers should be acknowledged as citizens for the labor they perform.

Whereas Tronto pleads for strengthening the welfare state and the public provision of care further, in a theoretically trenchant essay, Alison Jaggar, under the heading, "Arenas of Citizenship: Civil Society, the State, and the Global Order," begins with an observation that joins the by now all-too-familiar theme of the "decline/transformation of the nation-state." "The state is becoming less

central in political life," she observes, "and the seeming decline in its importance generates a multitude of questions for political philosophy. . . . I consider the recent emphasis on civil society," she continues, "as a terrain of democratic empowerment" (91). Jaggar, like Ackelsberg, looks at women's community activism, at movements such as Mothers against Drunk Driving, Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and the organization of women in the Global South against rural poverty and oppression (also discussed by Martha Nussbaum), and concludes that "citizens may be female but also that women and men may often *do* citizenship differently from each other and do it in different locations" (95). Civil society, a concept that Hegel first theorized in comprehensive fashion and sharply distinguished from market relations, is often the arena for women's activism in families, social movements, voluntary, nonprofit associations, and nongovernmental organizations. Civil society has also been privileged in recent discussions as being the appropriate terrain for women's activism because of its diversity, tolerance, solidarity, responsiveness, and democracy (Ann Philips).

By focusing on the proliferation of nongovernmental organizations throughout the 1990s, some of which have become "women's auxiliaries" for government or business (99), Jaggar shows how such civil society organizations have fallen prey to professionalism, expertism, and "the simplistic use of binary oppositions, such as uppers/lowers, North/South, professional/local knowledge, micro/macro, margins/center, local/elite, and powerless/powerful" (101). When women's struggles are no longer conceived as struggles for citizenship but "framed as disputes for private resources" (102), the work of NGOs may undermine the citizenship entitlements of poor women and weaken the legitimacy of weak states. The oppositions of civil society, the state, and the market, which seemed so promising to so many, are based on simplifications: the point is to rethink their interdependence and to do so not only within the confines of the nation-state but also within the framework of a global economy. Jaggar sees transnational feminist movements, such as those coalesced around the various U.N. conferences on women, as well as transnational networks such as Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network, Women Living under Muslim Laws, and ABANTU for Development, as a terrain for local as well as global activism, so that "global feminist citizenship is not an alternative to national citizenship" (108).

Jaggar's sharp analysis is precisely on the mark: women's citizenship is transformative. It cannot be successfully exercised when it is confined either to the non-state sector of civil society and NGOs alone, nor can it reveal its full potential when it is exclusively caught in the discourse of "representativity." Women's citizenship, as much as feminist thought and practice, is most successful when it reveals interdependencies and establishes interconnections between public and private; the economy, family, and state; civil society and the market; care work and capitalist labor; the Global South and professional

women in the First world; and the local and the global. These are the news sites for women's theory as well as activism.

The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction. By LISA GUENTHER. Albany: SUNY Press, 2006.

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Lisa Guenther's *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction* is a book I have been waiting for a long time. It is one of the first studies to undertake the ambitious project of articulating the philosophical and the ethical significations of maternity in the context of feminist politics of reproduction and abortion rights. *The Gift of the Other* shifts philosophical discussions of finitude from mortality to natality and proposes to approach the event of birth not as a fact of biology but as a primary ethical gift that orients human existence toward being with others prior to becoming oneself. Yet, as Guenther argues, given the history of the political exploitation of maternal responsibility and the history of forced reproduction, any ethics of birth depends on the politics of reproductive freedom for women. Thus the book negotiates between the ethical significance of birth and the politics of reproductive choice—a negotiation that shows the political implications and interventions of ethics into abortion debates, and provides an alternative justification of reproductive freedom to the one offered by the liberal notion of the self-possessed individual.

Drawing her inspiration from a number of philosophical and ethical orientations—existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and French and American feminisms—Guenther argues that birth is a primary ethical gift of generosity that founds the subjectivity it welcomes to the world. Such a gift then is both aporetic and anarchic: aporetic insofar as it blurs the boundaries between the recipient and the gift; anarchic because the recipient of the gift has never been cotemporaneous with the event of generosity that founds her existence. As an ethical event, birth opens a dimension of temporality that has never been present to experience. Evocative of the temporality of Emmanuel Levinas's trace of the other, the event of birth belongs to the anarchic past, which can neither be remembered nor forgotten by the recipient of that gift. According to Guenther, the anarchic temporality of birth as the gift of another undermines the self-possession of subjectivity and constitutes it as always already open and responsible to others. As she puts it, "to be born is to be given to another in a time of irrecoverable pastness that is not my home, but rather a time *from* the Other and ultimately *for* the Other" (10). Consequently, we learn about our birth only retrospectively from the stories