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Marques-Pereira, Bérengère; Siim, Birte

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”REPRESENTATION, AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT”

BY
BÉRENGÈRE MARQUES-PEREIRA
AND
BIRTE SIIM

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Bérengère Marques-Pereira and Birte Siim

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Susanne Poulsen, Institut for Historie, Internationale Studier og Samfundsforhold, Fibigerstræde 2, 9220 Aalborg Ø, tlf.: +45 96 35 83 10, fax: +45 98 15 32 98, e-mail: sus@humsamf.auc.dk, www.humsamf.auc.dk/gep/

Representation, Agency and Empowerment

Bérengère Marques-Pereira and Birte Siim

Introduction

Since the French revolution the women's movement has demanded the right to vote and to be present in political assemblies as women citizens in order to influence political decisions and place women's interests, issues and concerns on the political agenda. Second-wave feminism has contributed to politicise women's interests and to institutionalise gender equality, and the political meaning of gender has changed during the last 30 years. Women have in all western democracies moved from the Right to the Left changing their voting behaviour from support for Conservative parties to Socialist and Social Democratic parties, and women's issues like abortion, child care institutions, equal pay and sexual harassment have been included on the political agenda. Women are still underrepresented in politics in Western democracies, except for Scandinavia. This is the background for the present discussion of strategies to include women in politics through demands for parity and quotas that have also raised new theoretical and political questions about representation.

The chapter analyses women's exclusion and inclusion in politics and the focus is on the feminist rethinking of representation, agency and empowerment. In feminist thought the main emphasis has not been on political representation but rather on women's participation in politics and on their mobilisation and organisation from the context of civil society. Representation and participation can be seen as two different perspectives on how to include women in politics. One has focused on women's participation and empowerment 'from below' and the other on representation 'from above' in political institutions. The two perspectives may indeed be interpreted as two different models to include women in politics in order to give them 'a voice and a vote'. We suggest that one of the contributions of feminist scholarship to social and political theory has been to study the connection between representation and empowerment with women's agency as the linkage.

One of the objectives of this chapter is to discuss the feminist contribution to social and political theory, another is to discuss the implications of equal representation for social politics. Representation is contested in both political theory and feminist scholarship. The liberal, republican and deliberative approaches to democracy have not been able to explain why women's exclusion from politics has been reproduced in modern democracies after women have gained the vote. The feminist paradigms have challenged universal models of democratic citizenship based upon the male norm that have not addressed the exclusion of women and marginalised social groups from democratic institutions. Feminist scholarship has recently proposed new models to include women and marginalised social groups.

Feminist scholarship has challenged the dominant principles of political representation and has introduced new visions of democracy able to include women as well as marginalised social groups (Young, 1990, Phillips 1993, 1995). There is an inter-relation between the theory, politics and discourse of representation. During the 1990s feminist scholars have analysed demands for gender quotas and parity as means to include women in politics, place women concerns, interests and social perspectives on the political agenda and transform political in-

stitutions (Phillips, 1995). This new emphasis on representation have raised theoretical questions about the linkage between the different models to empower women 'from below' in civil society and to include women 'from above' in political institutions, as well as about the relation between political representation and power (Young, 2000). One important link between the notions of empowerment and representation is the focus upon women's agency. Feminist theory has raised key questions about what is represented and by whom? Who can represent whom? And where does this representation take place? (Stoltz, 2000; 18).

The chapter first reviews the evolution of the principles of representation and discusses the different feminist arguments for equal representation. This is followed by a comparison of the different arguments to increase women's political representation through demands for gender quotas and parity in Belgium and France. The section ends with a resume of the feminist debate about the relation between representation and interests and about the dilemma of 'identity politics'.

The third section looks at the evolution of the concept of empowerment and agency in feminist theory. Feminist scholarship has criticised women's exclusion from politics and has analysed their inclusion in politics 'from below'. The two concepts were introduced in connection with social movement and welfare state research emphasising women's empowerment in civil society and the role of women's agency in the development of the welfare state (Bock and Thane, 1991, Koven and Michel, 1993). Empowerment understood as 'a voice and a vote' has also been used in connection with the theory of justice and politics of difference (Young, 1990), and here participation of oppressed social groups in civil society is explicitly linked to new principles of representation (Young, 2000).

The fourth section looks at the tensions, and interrelation, between the two models of inclusion of women, in civil society 'from below' and in formal politics 'from above' from the context of Scandinavia. The Scandinavian comparison illustrates that the different feminist strategies to include women in politics based upon equal representation or upon women's empowerment in civil society is rooted in different policy contexts. The increase of women's political representation in Scandinavia raises the question whether Social Democracy has empowered women in relation to social politics, and whether representation has indeed given them more power to transform political institutions.

The cross-national comparison raises questions about the connection between strategies of empowerment, political representation and social politics. The cross-cultural perspective also raises interesting questions about the relation between theory, discourse and politics. And it is indicated that in the case of political representation feminist politics and discourse came before the theoretical rethinking. One example of this is the influential feminist notion of "the politics of presence" (Phillips, 1995) that was inspired by political developments in Scandinavia, especially by the adoption of gender quotas by Norwegian political parties from the mid-1980s (Skjeie, 1992).

In the conclusion we address the controversial questions about the meaning and implications of the feminisation of the political elite for women's political power as well as from the perspective of social politics. Finally we discuss what has been the impact of feminist scholarship on political discourse and theory.

Rethinking Principles of Political Representation

Representation is contested in both political theory and feminist scholarship. In political science the dominant approach has analysed representation as political representation connected to notions of agency and government. This contrast with another approach often inspired by poststructuralism and postmodern thinking that relates representation to ideas about the production of meaning and knowledge. Here representation through language is seen as central to the processes which produce meaning (Ferguson, 1986/87), and the symbolic aspect of representation has received renewed attention (Phillips, 1995; Stoltz, 2000; 18).

The political scientist Hannah Pitkin formulated the classical theory of political representation in the late 1960s. She pointed out that the notion of political representation in German has different meanings: *vertreten*, *darstellen* and *repräsentieren* (Pitkin, 1967). In the former case, the representative is authorised to act 'on behalf of' as an agent or a *trustee* who exercises independent judgement (*Vertreten*). In the latter case, the legitimate representative stands for and must be accountable to those represented (*Darstellen*). The link between these two dimensions is clear in the case of the representative who is representative of or reproducing the characteristics of the body politics. The German term 'repräsentieren' is close to the former but not to the latter.

The word representation may refer to the representatives of the nation, the elected officials, or to the office holders. Representation implies seeing democracy as a microcosm of society as well as a symbolic representation. In the former case, the parliament is a reproduction, on a reduced scale, of society as a whole in proportion to its segments. In the latter case, the member or members of parliament embody and symbolise a cause. The idea of the representative mirroring the characteristics of the voter corresponds to the symbolic requirements, which prove important for those outside the political system. Indeed the de facto minorities or the existential minorities can in this capacity claim representatives who not only defend the interests of these minorities but also enable, through their personal characteristics, the identification and development of the feeling of being present on the political scene (Phillips, 1998, 1999).

The issue of women's minority position in politics has since the early 1990s appeared in public and political debate as an illustration of the "democratic deficit" of political representation. The democratic deficit refers to the systematically under-represented of specific groups, for example women and minority groups, that exclude them from effective participation and control over the political agenda. Parity and quotas are sustained by the discourse on the crisis of representation. They are a challenge to the republican model of representation, a perception of representation in terms of representativeness (which is congruent with the consociative model) and reflect the need to narrow the gap between the representatives and those represented. Parity and quotas appear as two strategies, which might solve the political underrepresentation of women and at the same time be an answer to the "democratic deficit" of representation. With the exception of the Nordic countries, the legislative assemblies and executives remain the monopoly of men, at varying degrees depending on the country. However, this monopolisation does not mean that women are underrepresented, unless it is considered that only women in politics can represent women. Women have now acquired their formal citizen status, but there is still a problem with their citizenship as a practice. They can be rep-

resented in politics by the right to vote, but they are not fully exercising their capacity to be representative, since their right to be elected is far from being effective.

More broadly speaking, parity and quotas are part of the rhetoric of democratic citizenship that crosses the entire social field. The political arena is no longer limited to the competition for political power. It has today become one of the places where identities are expressed and recognised. At the crossroads of the discourses on representation and citizenship, these two problems are a reflection of the claim for equality through difference, or more exactly, the claim for political equality more in terms of subscribed identity than in terms of individuation. In this context parity and quotas can therefore be interpreted not as the response to a crisis of representation but rather one of the expressions of its metamorphoses whose magnitude and limits Bernard Manin (1995) stresses in his book *"Principles of Representative Government"*.

Gender relations ceased to become naturalised and became an issue for public debate through activities of Second wave of feminism. The profound transformation affecting gender relations started with Second wave feminism, but the definition of gender identities was generally not an issue in political representation until the early 1990s. Anne Phillips introduced the notion of "the politics of presence" (1995) institutionally reflected in parity and quotas as a means of "democratising the public" inspired by political developments in Scandinavia. The point is that the electoral choice is personalised in that the candidate runs for office not only as a person but also represents a perspective of difference, in this case a difference in gender.

From one perspective parity and quotas leave the central mechanism of representative government unchanged. Democracy is no more today, than in the past, government of the people by the people. Representative government remains a government of an elite group that is distinct from the overwhelming majority of the population. In the Scandinavian model, gender quotas are the expression of a feminisation of the political elite. This feminisation may be important politically and symbolically. We return to this when looking at the political practice of women representatives and those women represented. It is important to stress that parity and quotas do not modify the distinctive principle of the election, and therefore they are not a response to the concern expressed by the representation crisis, i.e. the continued difference between the representatives and those represented. Parity and quotas do not challenge the two principles of representative government: accountability and the autonomous mandate that is two different ways to understand the relation between the representatives and the constituents.

In Iris Marion Young's latest book *"Inclusive Democracy"* there is an interesting discussion of the principle of representation on the basis of Pitkins theory (2000; pp 128-141). She emphasises the double meaning of representation that involves both authorisation and accountability and discusses how to bring the different aspects together. Young suggests that emphasising representation as a process differentiated and mediated in time and space provides a way to think these different aspects together. Conceptualised as difference representation necessarily involves both a distinction and a separation between representatives and constituents, and the major normative problem is the threat of dis-connection between the one representative and the many he or she represents. Young concludes that interests, opinions and social perspectives are three important aspects of persons that can be represented that are logically independent in the sense that a social perspective determines neither interests nor opinions (p 140). One main point is the need to improve the connection between the representative and

the constituents and the participation of citizens through public spheres of civil society thus provides a link between the principle of representation and the concept of participation 'from below' (Young, 2000;132).

Feminist Arguments to Increase Women's Political Representation

The advocates of a balanced representation of women and men in politics have five basic arguments: justice, proportionality, utilitarianism, differences of interests and needs, and behaviours and values (Marques-Pereira, 1998b).

The argument of justice is based on the idea that expression must be given to the interests of the different social groups and in so doing give substance to a deliberative democracy. The argument of proportionality implies that political representation must reflect as faithfully as possible, in quantity, the relative size of the different social groups in the community. The utilitarian argument underscores the lack of efficiency and legitimacy of a political system where half of society is not involved. This is sometimes followed by a belief that an increase in the political representation of women would lead to a change in politics, which would take greater account of "women's interests". The argument of specific values and behaviours is based on the idea that women have their own identity, separate from men's. From this perspective, an increase in the number of women representatives would mean a change in political values and the way in which politics is conducted.

The last two arguments respectively raise problems about the political content and form of politics (the political action of women representatives) that can translate into an essentialist categorisation of men and women. This is the case if the principle of representing women as women and not as individuals reduces the practice of citizenship to the expression of 'identity politics' and obscures the diversity of gender relations. This is the danger of the maternalistic arguments that authors like J.Elshtain (1981) has advocated with regard to citizenship that support the idea of "care ethics"(see Leira and Saraceno and Hobson and Lister, in this volume). From a perspective of democratic citizenship, Mary Dietz (1987) points out that politics is not related to the presuppositions that govern the mother-child relationship. Whereas this relationship operates in the register of intimacy, authority and exclusion, the relationship between citizens calls upon equality, distance and inclusion. From this point of view, it is clear that there is no reason to expect women to practice another form of politics than men.

According to the perspectives developed by Chantal Mouffe (1993) and Anne Phillips (1991, 1993, 1995), who support, respectively, "radical democracy" and "pluralist citizenship", it is of prime importance to reject essentialism, because each individual has constantly changing and sometimes contradictory multiple identities. In this regard, Phillips and Mouffe have challenged the position, which Iris Young (1990) developed in favour of "differentiated citizenship", because of the possible essentialist implications. For Young, representation in the political processes of the social perspectives of the different oppressed social groups implies the right to propose policies based on their own interests and even a right of veto when general policies risk affecting them. This argument comes from the critical perspective of universalism. Young considers that the idea of equal treatment for all groups is a false universalism that only excludes those who do not comply with the dominant norms and perpetuates de facto discrimination. Unlike Young, Phillips finds that liberal universalism can accommodate differences and that the individual's detachment from his/her particular group (religion, sex,

etc.) remains necessary within the political sphere. Both Mouffe and Phillips, however, reject the anti-quota arguments that are generally based on the idea that men and women are legally recognised as being equal and therefore a law establishing quotas for women would violate formal equality. The point is that defending formal equality in this way only tends to reinforce real inequality.

It is worth emphasising that the notion of equality in feminist thought has evolved from equality before the law and equality of status to equal results, passing through equal treatment, equal opportunity and positive discrimination. This development has raised the problem of the State's regulating role. Equality before the law and equality of status are part of a procedural legal framework, which has made discrimination towards women a matter of legal action. Equal treatment, meaning that individuals in the same situation should not be treated differently, has been a principle applied to court cases, to challenge discrimination based on sex and enabled the person being discriminated against to oppose discrimination. In most cases the burden of proof lies with the person being discriminated against and the person being accused of discrimination has the right to claim the existence of objective reasons justifying this discrimination. Equal opportunity replaced the idea of equal status with the idea of equalisation of chances, of conditions. This is clearly underpinned by an ideology of free competition and meritocracy in the context of distributive justice but does not lead to equal results. The implementation of equal results is based on the idea of proportionality, which has arisen out of positive discrimination, which means giving preferential treatment to marginalised and oppressed groups.

Feminist scholarship has criticised the dominant approaches to political equality and challenged the underlying premise that equality can be achieved without changing the existing institutional framework and the political culture dominated and defined by men. The feminist critique has made a certain impact on theories of democracy, especially on the discourse theory of Jürgen Habermas. In his latest book he supports the feminist critique and emphasises the important connection between the equal right to an autonomous private life and the strengthening of women's position in the political public sphere.

“No regulation, however sensitive to context, can adequately concretize the equal right to an autonomous private life unless it simultaneously strengthens the position of women in the public political sphere and thereby augments participation in the forms of political communication that provide the sole arenas in which citizens can clarify the relevant aspects that define equal status. According to this proceduralist understanding, the realization of basic rights is a process that secures the private autonomy of equally entitled citizens only in step with the activation of their political autonomy (Habermas, 1998: 426)

This is an important vision, although it is still contested how to create an equal representation of women and men in politics and how to change the dominant political and legal discourses as well as the existing institutional framework of the modern democracies and welfare states. These questions about the relation between theory, discourse and politics need to be explored from a cross-national perspective.

The Demands for Parity and Gender Quotas in France and Belgium

The debate about parity and quotas in France and Belgium illustrates the general dimensions of representativeness and the different feminist framing of the arguments to increase women's representation. They also illuminate both the commonalities and differences of the discourse and politics of equal representation in different policy context.

It should first be noted that the principles of quotas and parity represent different perspectives and arguments with different implications. Parity, unlike quotas, is an exclusive principle of differentiation of the electorate based upon the recognition of differentiation of the human gender in two although in some arguments parity is also presented as a political principle to include a social differentiation that is of cultural origin. It has also been used in the US in relation to race. (Millard & Ortiz, 1998). In this sense, but in this sense only, parity, like quotas, requires representativeness based on social groups.

The parity claim intends to remain in the universalist perspective but contrasts the two meanings of the individual which are specific to this viewpoint: the abstract individual and the singular individual. In his/her singularity, the individual is necessarily a man or a woman. By emphasising the duality of human gender, parity seeks to break with the logic of male assimilation. In this way, parity transcends representation by group, because all the socio-legal categories such as minorities or language groups without exception consists of individuals of one sex or the other, placed in a dynamic gender relations (Gaspard, 1996). The French demand for parity is based on gender difference and it has been criticised for closing the door on any policy of recognising linguistic, religious or ethnic diversity or any other form of diversity (Varikas, 1995, 1996).

This perspective contrasts with the requirement of representativeness, which is expressed through the argument of proportionality. This argument implies that political representation must reflect as faithfully as possible the relative importance of the different social groups in the community. The requirement of representativeness contrasts with the republican model of citizenship but is congruent with the consociative model, which is exemplified in the Belgian case.

The consociative model is based on the idea of representativeness (Marques-Pereira, 1989, 1998a, b). Belgium is set up according to a consociative model. This means that the differences in philosophy, class and language are expressed within a system of "pillars" which segments Belgian society into three "worlds": the Christian world, the Socialist world and the Liberal world. These three "worlds" were formed in the 19th century and are reflected in a network of institutions in civil society. Each "world" has its own hospitals and creches, its own social organisations (cultural associations, trade unions, women's and youth movements) and its own political parties. The negotiated settlement of conflicts between "pillars" is based on decisions reached by common accord rather than by the application of majority rule. It is within these three "worlds" that the terms of compromises are forged, and it is the negotiated settlement of conflicts that ensures a form of stability guaranteeing the existing balances between the "pillars" within society. Compromises usually take the form of "package deals" where each group obtains satisfactions in terms of resources and positions of power, even when that group is not part of the government majority. Therefore, the basic principle of such a system is proportionality. The various State reforms resulting in a federal system and the

emergence of parties going beyond the traditional cleavages, such as the Greens in particular have eroded this consociative model. However, the principles of proportionality and representativeness remain the principles of the Belgian political system.

In this perspective, the representativeness is at odds with the idea of a shared citizenship. In Belgium, citizenship is socially inherent and not nationally transcendent like in France. Citizenship in Belgium is based on a congruence/identity between the political and the social: the public sphere is not considered separate from the social, nor is politics perceived as the forum where a hypothetical general interest is expressed in transcendent national values. On the one hand, politics is entrenched in civil society. On the other hand, citizenship is exercised primarily through specific channels of expression, essentially those that correspond to the partisan extensions of the "worlds" (Paye, 1997).

The requirement of representativeness challenges the French republican model. In this understanding people and nation do not affect the method of representativeness. Only the National Assembly is strictly speaking representative of the people and not its members taken individually. Indeed, there is a belief in the unity of the people/nation formed beyond social or other differences. The French republican model is based on a separation between the political on the one hand and the domestic and social on the other. The political and the non-political are, in the French republican model, two different worlds. From the republican perspective, gender - like language (other than French) or religion (in contrast to secularism) - is one of those particular characteristics that cannot be given a specific role or position in public life and cannot be the basis on which the content of the general interest is defined (Paye, 1997). It is in this context that one finds the first two terms of the republican triad: liberty, equality and fraternity. "The French concept of citizenship means a lot more than the creation of a sphere of liberty and the right to vote and participate directly in government. It also implies the recognition of a collectivity and the legitimacy to act on its behalf in order to achieve social justice. Fraternity, the last element of the republican triad, legitimises the demands for social justice and individual justice." (Jenson & Sineau, 1995:13). From this latter perspective, the French republican model can take into account social difference when fraternity is expressed in the solidarity, which gives real substance to equality. This means that equality is not just political equality as Pierre Rosanvallon seems to suggest (1992) but it may also have a social welfare dimension. It is still true, though, that the demand to include the duality of human gender in the political order partially challenges the republican model of citizenship by acting on the tensions between universalism/particularism and equality/difference (Siim, 2000).

The feminist demands for parity in France represents a critique of universalism and aims to provide an answer to the preliminary question: who is the human person of the Universal Declaration of 1948? Who is the subject of the inalienable fundamental rights? (Vogel-Polsky, 1997). From the parity perspective, it is no longer a question of the abstract individual but of the concrete person. Indeed parity calls for recognition of the duality of the human gender. This is not a right to difference but a right to equality as a fundamental right. The political recognition of the duality of gender is not part of a prescribed identity which would induce a biologization of political relations (Ferry, 1999) or a de-politicisation of suffrages (Schnapper, 1999)? Parity as the political recognition of the duality of human gender expresses the subscribed (and not prescribed) identity of the concrete person. On the one hand, parity translates into the publicisation and the politicisation of that intrinsically political phenomenon of women as a minority in the places of power (Vogel, 1998). On the other hand,

the recognition in politics of the duality of human gender would be the symmetry of the categorisation of sex which occurs in the Law when the individuals are mandatorily listed as male or female in vital public records (Tahon, 1998). Furthermore, parity does not demand a right to difference but legal equality stated in a global manner as a human right, as fundamental as the right to dignity or the right to security. Also, parity would be a way of proceeding from equal rights to equal conditions in which to effectively exercise these rights. Parity would henceforth express the binding nature of the effectiveness of the right of eligibility. In this sense, parity must not be confused with a right to representation.

In the French context, parity is different from gender quota, because it does not intend to assert that women would represent women and men would represent men, but sustains that men and women would equally represent all people. In this way it is a challenge to the abstract and fictional nature of the republican sovereignty. The unitarian fiction of sovereignty is based on an abstraction guaranteed by three conditions that parity only partially calls into question: equal suffrage, freedom of suffrage and indivisibility of the electorate. Parity leaves the first two conditions intact: based on the principle of one person, one vote, men and women freely elect an equal number of men and women who freely run for office. It is not the voters' freedom that is affected but the freedom of the parties.

The theoretical basis as well as the politics of parity is contested. Feminist scholars, like Elena Varikas, interpret it as an exclusive principle of differentiation of the electorate that is the expression of a reactionary rhetoric reactivating prescribed identities (Varikas, 1995, 1996). Other feminists interpret it as the expression of a right to equality based on a subscribed identity of the concrete person and not the acquired identity of the abstract individual. Parity as a right to equality presented as a human right gives legitimacy to a general interest which sustains the demand for an effective right to eligibility. The question remains to what extent resorting to the discourse of human rights gives legitimacy to those advocating parity in relation to those against it. The argument of human rights would in this case introduce parity as a legitimate demand coming from and supported by legitimate actors. The human rights argument being a case of the mobilisation of the general interest reveals the logic of differentiation of the actors in relation to one another with regard to the representation of collective identities. This argument also illustrates the logic of identification that enables women to see themselves as belonging to a social group and to assert their individual identity through their collective identity.

In spite of the strong republican opposition to parity, the principle of parity has recently been inscribed in the French constitution (in 1999) and adopted by law (2000). Leading politicians on both the Left and Right support equal representation of women and men as an expression of the general interest in a modernisation of republican democracy. The opponents of parity argue that parity as a dangerous break with the republican principles that legitimises a particularism of the general interest. In spite of the feminist criticism of parity noted above, feminists have generally supported the new legislation as a way to rethink the principle of political equality to include the duality of gender. The parity legislation was used for the first time in the local elections in March 2001 with the results that the number of female representatives in localities with more than 3500 inhabitants increased dramatically from 25 to 47,5 percent (Sineau, 2001). The acceptance of the discourse and politics of parity can be interpreted as a change in the French political culture. It is, however, too early to evaluate the effect of this on the representation of other kinds of differences, as well as to evaluate the will

and ability of women politicians to place gender issues on the political agenda and to influence social politics.

Equal Representation and the Feminist Debate about Identity Politics

Feminist demands for equal representation between women and men has raised questions about women's interests and about identity politics. Women's interests are of many kinds, can be conflictual and may even be contradictory. "Social and political history shows us that women more often than not have divided interests, that feminist organisations are also divided. It also tells us that women elected as representatives, even when they proclaim to be feminists, often support party positions, that do not necessarily reflect the views of feminist organizations. How then would women elected under a system of parity or quotas (and not on the basis of the pledge to defend women's interests) be able to defend women's interests?" (Peemans-Poullet, 1997: 120).

Demands for a larger number of women in parliament thus raise difficult questions about, who represents whom and what is being represented. These elected women represent political parties and not women's issues, and there is no guarantee that the issues connected with women's situation will be better taken into account in the political agenda. The question is whether women's common experiences with citizenship enable the building of collectivities, though not with identical interest, common points of interests and perspectives? The argument is that women today have shared civil and political incapacity and are still in most countries a political minority, who experience social and professional marginalisation, and often find their reproductive capacities controlled. The question is whether these experiences are sufficient to create the conditions enabling the emergence of critical perspectives upon the content of policies and on political priorities. In other words, is it possible to say that men and women participating in equal number in the voting and decision-making bodies would result in a different criteria for the selection and ranking of political issues? And do these critical perspectives also concern the way in which politics are conducted?

Feminist scholars have argued that the presence of women in political and representative institutions, once a "critical mass" (Dahlerup, 1988) has been reached, can contribute to change the relations of power, because women will be able to use the organisational resources of the institutions to improve their individual and collective position. One crucial question is whether the seat confers power or the power is conferred in the seat? Will parity or quotas change or reproduce the sexual divisions in politics, which tends to identify women politicians with the traditional myths of femininity? Do numbers provide the recipe to transgress, circumvent, resist or oppose the heavily prescribed norms of femininity? It is true that women's virtual exclusion from politics makes them an existential minority who has no choice but to accept their difference as marginalization. In this respect, the feminisation of the political elite is of paramount importance and may be a means to change the gendered norms and the political meaning of gender in politics.

Another question is to what point the feminisation of the political elite challenges the set of assumptions and norms, which are governed by men's experiences, life patterns, and perceptions, as well as the neutrality of political power, paradoxically guaranteed by its monopolisation by men. This seems to be a vicious circle: to achieve a balanced number of women repre-

sentatives, to alter the organisational behaviours and patterns at work. However, behaviours will not change unless there are enough women actively seeking change within the existing political structures.

One criticism of the focus on representation claims that challenging these mechanisms of selection and changing political practices involves addressing broader questions of the nature of the political action: who represents whom and on what basis. It has been argued that political compromise, negotiation and deliberation between the different parties is necessary if there is to be real pluralism. The feminisation of the political elite does not by itself change the nature of compromise and power relations attached to political institutions. According to Mouffe, recognition of differences is not, however, primarily the result of representative democracy but takes place in the political process. And normally it is also true that politics is first a question of balance of power, which implies the exclusion of certain differences and certain identities to the detriment of others. This belief that identities are created through the political processes means that the interests of groups do not exist beforehand and therefore they cannot be represented.

Feminist scholars have also criticised the focus on representation arguing that the "interpretation of needs" cannot be the responsibility of the legislator alone. It is rather in the nooks and crannies of private and public life that women's associations establish themselves as protagonists of the State and of civil society, positioning themselves as players of an "interpretation of needs", (Fraser, 1987). From this perspective the alternative to representation is politics rooted in civil society that gives ample room for deliberative democracy and to local associations in the context of an opening of the public arena. This kind of public forum can lead to citizen control, to the idea of vigilance with regard to the functioning of the machinery and institutions and result in a debate on the forms taken by social exclusion and the limits of inclusion. Public responsibility is based on the capacity of individuals to recognise their problems as being collective. This goes hand in hand with political socialisation and mobilisation which, in the case of women, has meant that the private has been made public. There is no doubt that women's participation in organisations based in civil society has created a public forum making them visible. The question then becomes up to what point this form of politics can be translated into formal politics? At any rate, citizenship in the sense of the capacity of individuals to carry weight in the public arena has not yet translated into a major incorporation of women in the political arena. The implication is that political representation in most countries remains a stumbling block with regard to the private and public autonomy of women.

Agency and Empowerment

We have noticed that the dominant emphasis in feminist scholarship has till recently been on women's agency in civil society rather than on formal political representation. In this context the empowerment approach can be interpreted as one of the specific feminist contributions to democratic theory with different roots and intellectual history than the concept of representation. The notion of empowerment emphasises women's inclusion 'from below' by their participation in social movements, voluntary associations and grass root organisations (Ferguson, 1986, 1987) and developed as part of an interdisciplinary approach often inspired by post-structuralism (Ferguson, 1986, 1987). The concepts of empowerment and agency have also

been used in comparative studies often combining history, sociology and political science (Bock & Thane, 1991, Koven & Michel, 1993). The politics of empowerment focused upon women's collective agency, i.e. abilities to make a difference in civil society by their participation in political organisations, and in the Scandinavian countries often in relation to the welfare state (Hernes, 1988; Siim, 1988).

The work of the political scientist Kathy Ferguson is a good illustration of the empowerment approach. Ferguson developed the concept of empowerment with inspiration from Michael Foucault's discourse theory that emphasises power as social relations. From this perspective, she transformed Max Weber's concept of power focusing on the will of the individual actor to an emphasis on collective action:

'Power could be – not the ability to make people do what they could not otherwise do but the ability to enable people to do what they could not otherwise do. Power could be translated into empowerment' the ability to act with others to do together what one could not have done alone' (Ferguson, 1986; 217)

Empowerment is thus understood as a dynamic transformative concept that focuses upon energies, creativity and collective action. In this approach the barrier to empowerment is bureaucracy in politics as well as in the workplace. Ferguson's concept of empowerment thus presented a radical critique of political science and of the dominant perception of power defined by Robert Dahl as '*A's ability to make B do something that he would not otherwise do*'. In this Weberian perception power is connected with the will of individual actor and is thus both purposeful and visible. This contrasts with Ferguson's emphasis on collective mobilisation of social groups with the objective to change peoples' minds and transform social and political institutions.

Ferguson's has described her approach as 'situated knowledge' that conceptualised women's empowerment and collective agency based upon a normative vision of a new society based upon equality and participation. The objective was to develop *feminist* discourse based upon women's multiple experiences, identities and interests in equality, childcare and abortion based upon class, ethnicity and gender that create both commonalities and diversities in women's lives.

Iris Marion Young's work is a more recent example of a feminist approach that focuses on women's inclusion in democracy 'from below'. Young has employed the concept of *empowerment* in relation to a theory of justice that links self-organisation and group representation. In the book "Justice and the Politics of Difference" Young expands the definition of empowerment to include the "participation of an agent in decision-making through an effective voice and vote" (Young, 1990; 251). Empowerment is here connected to local autonomy and it is a means to include the participation of oppressed social groups on decision-making on all levels of society. Her vision of democracy rests upon social differentiation without exclusion – 'a politics of difference' built upon mutual recognition and acceptance of difference. In Young's framework empowerment was thus as part of the normative ideal of democratic city-life that is able to bring strangers together.

The objective of the book was to develop a pluralist theory of oppression that includes all social groups and to integrate the different dimensions of oppression as part of a normative

political theory of justice. According to Young the concept of oppression has five dimensions: a) exploitation, b) marginalisation, c) powerlessness, d) cultural imperialism, and e) violence. The key notion was “the politics of difference, and Young analysed the institutional conditions necessary to develop individual capacities for self-determination as well as the capacities for marginal social groups to influence society (Young, 1990).

Young’s approach to democracy is inspired by normative political theory and her intention is to make deliberative theory more inclusive and sensitive to difference (Young, 2000). One could say that the discourse theory of Habermas is inclusive in the sense that all citizens should have an equal right to participate in the public dialogue. However, feminist scholars have argued, that the Habermasian discourse theory favours the white masculine elite, because it does not address the discursive disadvantage of social inequalities, including race, ethnicity and gender (Fraser, 1997; 92-93). Young makes the point that the commitment to deliberation assumes a homogenous public and tends to neglect power relations; that deliberation may also serve as a mask for domination. For her, the key question is how to include *difference* in the public arena and create a heterogeneous public (Young, 1990;120).

Young’s approach focuses on social inequalities and the inclusion of difference in politics, and it has been followed by a feminist debate about the meaning and implications of “the politics of difference”. Chantal Mouffe and Nancy Fraser have discussed some of the problems with the politics of difference connected to ‘identity politics’. They find that there is an ambiguity connected with the ‘politics of difference’, because group representation, including group veto power, tends to reinforce rather than to transform existing group identities (Mouffe, 1993; Fraser, 1997). Another critique argues that it is a major challenge today to create responsible citizens that are able to transcend existing group identities. From this perspective the question is how to strengthen the bonds of solidarity with strangers that are not like yourself what Jody Dean (1995, 1996) has recently called ‘reflective solidarity’¹.

Young’s contribution to theory and vision of democracy rests upon a dual need to accept difference and to create mutual recognition and respect that transcends difference – i.e. to reinforce as well as to transform existing group identities. In this context, Young’s recent book (2000) most explicitly integrates the principles of representation in the theory an inclusive communicative democracy. The main argument here is that democracy can be strengthened by pluralising the modes and sites of representation and by improving the connection between representation and the participation of citizens in public spheres of civil society (Young, 2000;132-33).

¹ In the ‘Solidarity among Strangers’ Jodi Dean distinguishes between three forms of solidarity a) affectional solidarity based upon feelings and mutual responsibility, for example between a mother and a child b) conventional solidarity based upon common interests and recognition of members of an organisation, for example the trade union movement and political parties, and c) reflective solidarity of individuals with strangers that you do not know. Dean’s vision is a heterogeneous public based upon reflective solidarity (Dean, 1996).

Representation and Power: The Case of Scandinavia

Feminist scholarship has debated the influence of women's agency and the women's movement in the liberal vs. the Social Democratic states. Has Social Democratic social politics empowered women, or has women been subordinated to class politics? The three Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, have all albeit with different timing and arguments adopted voluntary quota systems in the in the 1980s and 1990s. The question is what has been the dynamic and implication of political representation in terms of both power and democracy. Another question is what are the implications for social politics? The cases illustrate the potentials and limits of a feminisation of the political elite as well as of the tension and connection between inclusion 'from below' through participation in voluntary organisations in civil society in civil and representation 'from above' in political institutions (Bergqvist et. al. eds., 1999).

Feminist scholarship has noticed that Scandinavian democracy rests upon a close interrelation between social and political citizenship. First, the universal welfare state has tied social rights to citizenship, and the institutionalisation of social rights, for example to childcare, has supported women in their roles as mothers, workers and citizens (Hernes, 1987; Siim, 1988). A second characteristic is the Scandinavian tradition for 'active citizenship' based upon the participation of citizens in voluntary organisations in civil society (Bergqvist et. al. ed., 1999). State feminism, defined as the cooperation between women activists 'from below' and women in political and administrative institutions, can be interpreted as a further development of this tradition (Hernes, 1987). Finally, there has been a 'feminisation of the political elite' in the sense that women today comprise between 35 and 45 per cent of the members of Parliament both in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

In spite of these similarities, recent research has illustrated important differences in the dynamic of women's mobilisation and inclusion in politics that has been interpreted as different gender profiles (Borchorst, Christensen & Raaum, 1999; 286-291). During the 1980s and 1990s, Norway, Sweden and Denmark all adopted some forms of voluntary quotas² to increase women's representation in politics, but the timing, the arguments as well as the implications of the quotas were different (Christensen, 1999; 78-84). The Danish case illustrates the social movement model based primarily upon the mobilisation of women and oppressed social groups 'from below'. This contrasts with Sweden that is characterised by the classic party-oriented model that has integrated women through the independent female sections of the political parties combined with a relatively weak women's movement. Norway represents what is called a modern strategy of inclusion of women by means of the most extensive gender quotas in the political parties (Christensen, 1999).

In Norway gender quotas have been supported by the major political parties that have adopted quotas during the 1970s and 1980s, and women were included in politics on the basis of what has been called a "mandate of difference" (Skjeie, 1992). This contrasts with the Danish and Swedish cases where gender quotas have been controversial means to achieve gender equality. In Denmark only the Socialist Folks party and Social Democratic Party adopted gender quotas, and both parties abandoned them again in 1996, and today there is no political party

² In the Nordic countries, there two different forms of gender quotas in the political parties: a) candidate quotas designed for elections and the system of representation, and b) party quotas that are 'internal' quotas within the party organisations designed for party democracies (Christensen, 1999; 80)

in Denmark with gender quotas in politics. In Sweden the political forces on Right and Left have also strongly opposed gender quotas, and it was not till 1993 that the Social Democratic Party as the only party adopted gender quotas in public elections (Christensen, 1999).

One controversial question is what is the political meaning of representation and whether it gives women more power? Hege Skjeie's study of women and men in the political elite in Norway (1992) concluded that women were included in political parties on 'a mandate of difference', i.e. with different experiences, identities and interests than men, and that women gained new power resources by their inclusion in 'representative' politics. She argued that one implication of women's inclusion in the political elite was a political compromise between women's representatives from Left and Right about social policies that increased women's economic independence of individual men through an expansion of the number of places in childcare institutions (Skjeie, 1992).

In Denmark the new feminist liberation movement has raised feminist issues to the political agenda, and during the 1970s many feminists joined the political parties on the Left, especially the Socialist Folks Party, which became the representative of 'movement politics' (Dahlerup, 1998). Feminists in the Socialist Folks Party formed women's groups, and they played a major role in the decision to adopt of voluntary quotas in 1986. The main argument for gender quotas stressed women's common experiences with oppression and discrimination in the party. They were abandoned again with arguments from young women that there was no longer any need for gender quotas in the party (Christensen, 1999). Gender quotas have been controversial in the Danish political culture, and they are no longer on the political agenda. In spite of this the number of women in parliament increased slightly to 37 per cent in the last general elections in 1998.

The Scandinavian feminist studies illustrate the different political meanings connected with the feminisation of the political elite as well as the dilemma of representative politics: *Who is represented and who has the authority to speak for women*. On the one hand, the feminisation of the political elite is the result of pressure from the women's movement that has increased the power of women politicians. On the other hand there is no longer one organised women's movement to speak for women and no agreed upon feminist agenda. The dilemma of political representation without a feminist mobilisation is one of the major problems today that is probably most visible in Denmark where the social movement model has been strongest.

One controversial question in Scandinavia is whether transformative politics is connected to women's autonomous organisations rather than to representative politics? The belief that more women in the political elite would transform politics and put women's issues on the political agenda has been one important argument for political representation? Arguably the representation of women in Parliament does have an important symbolic meaning, and it has contributed to make political assemblies without women illegitimate in Scandinavia. The feminisation of the political elite has contributed to place women's issue and gender equality on the political agenda, and it has illustrated the point that women politicians do not agree what are indeed 'women-friendly' policies. From a perspective of democracy it is crucial that women representatives become included in the deliberation of the common good succeed in placing women's concerns for childcare and equality politics on the political agenda. In some cases representation has indeed made it possible for women to influence social policies

through cross-party alliances. In other cases representation has made conflicts about family and childcare between women politicians on the Right and Left more visible in the 1990s (Bergqvist, Kuusipalo & Styrkasdottir, 1999). The Scandinavian cases thus illustrate the point that party politics has usually been more important than gender.

From the perspective of power, women's political representation illuminates new concerns and problems for women. One crucial issue is the gap between the feminisation of the political elite and the fragmentation of women's organisations and feminist politics during the 1990s. One of the implications seems to be that in order to transform political institutions feminist politics need to develop a synthesis of the two models of inclusion through participation 'from below' and through representation 'from above'. In Denmark the majority of citizens are not concerned with party politics, instead they participate in relation to politics of everyday life, for example as 'citizen-parents' in relation to schools and childcare institutions (Siim, 2000). This has led to a problematic gap between women's political participation, empowerment and identification with issues related to everyday life and to the local arena and their lack of involvement in party politics on the national and transnational level.

Conclusion: The Feminist Contributions to Theory, Politics and Discourse

The present crisis of representation is an indication of deep-going changes in democracy with implications for the inclusion of women in democratic citizenship. The inclusion of women in politics is a dynamic process. Women's politics has during the last 30 years been associated mainly with the participation of women's agency in civil society, and 'movement politics' has been a crucial arena for the creation of a feminist consciousness. The feminisation of the political elite in Scandinavia has made it possible to raise new issues of social politics of concern to women to the political agenda. The cases illustrate that empowerment in civil society and representation in public life have not been competing models but have both been crucial for strategies to include women in democratic citizenship. The parallel increase in women's representation in many European countries during the 1990s and fragmentation of women's organisations has, however, illustrated the feminist point that there ought to be a close relation between 'women's politics' in civil society and 'representative politics'. Today one of the new challenges is to move beyond the nation state and link participation in civil society with the representation in political institutions as well as with the inclusion of women and marginalised social groups in relation to trans-national politics.

Feminist scholarship has debated the influence of women's agency and the women's movement in the Social Democratic states, and there has also been conflicting interpretations of the feminisation of the political elite in terms of influence and power. The debate can be illustrated by the different feminist interpretations of the Scandinavian political development. Women's representation has by feminists like Yvonne Hirdman (1990) been regarded as relatively unimportant compared to persistence of male domination in political and economic life reproduced through the gender system based upon segregation and male hierarchy. Other feminist scholars like Barbara Hobson has suggested that the mobilization of women has led to increased political presence and power resources to influence the policy outcomes (See Hobson, 1999). And the Norwegian political scientist Hege Skjeie (1992) has put forward a competing interpretation of women's representation as a new arena for women's power. The cross-national comparison illustrates the different connection between the two models to in-

clude women in democracy through participation and representation. It also indicates that the feminisation of the political elite has empowered women politicians but there is no indication that political representation has become an arena for women's collective power.

The cross-national approach has illuminated that different arguments for quotas and parity are embedded in different political philosophies and national contexts, and it has illustrated that feminist models and strategies have different implications for women's political power as well as for social politics. In France we noted that the demand for parity was framed within a Republican discourse, and the main arguments emphasise equal rights based upon a new kind of universalism between men and women. This contrasts to the Belgian case where demands for quotas were framed within a Consociative model, and the main arguments emphasise proportionality for different groups in society. It can be argued that the Belgian development resembles the Norwegian case, although it is different from the Danish case. Here demands for voluntary quotas came mainly from women within the socialist parties as a means to catch up with men and to give substance to democracy within a pluralist model of justice. And quotas were abolished once the democratic deficit seemed to be solved. The recent adoption of parity in French legislation and of gender quotas in Law has been interpreted as a major ideological shift that will change the under-representation of women in the political elite. It is, however, too early to say whether and how this change of the principle of representation will also affect social politics.

Feminist arguments for quotas and parity have challenged the dominant discourses and models of democracy and citizenship, and one question is whether feminist scholarship has indeed had any impact on political science and philosophy. The liberal model has been criticised, because it emphasises representation of ideas and has not been able to include marginalised social groups. And the deliberative model has been challenged, because the normative vision of inclusion often masks the domination of excluded social groups. We suggest that feminist scholarship has had a certain impact on liberal and deliberative theories of democracy, for example through notions like the 'politics of difference' and the 'politics of presence'. The universalist republican model has till recently been hostile to the political representation of women as a separate group, and the inclusion of the principle of equal representation in the republican discourse and politics is therefore surprising. This indicates that feminism has often been more successful in influencing discourses and politics rather than political theory.

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- 3-2000 John Andersen in co-operation with Gestur Hovgaard Soeren H Jensen: *The Politics of Ambivalence and Gambling in Copenhagen.*
- 1-2001 Ann-Dorte Christensen og Birte Siim: *Tabelrapport: Køn, demokrati og modernitet.*

CONFERENCE REPORT:

GEP International Conference.

New Challenges to Gender, Democracy, Welfare States. Politics of Empowerment and Inclusion. Vilvorde Kursuscenter, August 18-20, 2000.



GEP - FORSKNINGSPROGRAM OM KØN, MAGT OG POLITIK

GEP - FORSKNINGSPROGRAM KØN, MAGT OG POLITIK beskæftiger sig med den ændrede politiske betydning af køn i de moderne samfund. Kvinders stilling i det danske demokrati har gennem de sidste 30 år ændret sig fra politisk magtesløshed til politisk tilstedeværelse og indflydelse. Denne udvikling har haft vidtgående konsekvenser - ikke kun for kvinder, men også for mænd.

Programmets overordnede formål er at analysere samspillet mellem på den ene side forandringer og opbrud i kønsrelationer og kønsopfattelser og på den anden side ændringer i de europæiske velfærd- og demokratimodeller. Den grundlæggende antagelse er, at politikken spiller en central rolle for konstruktion af køn - og omvendt at ændringer i kønsrelationerne påvirker den politiske diskurs og de politiske institutioner. Ud fra denne dobbelte problematik rejses der en række nye spørgsmål bl.a. til samspillet mellem det civile, politiske og sociale medborgerskab.

Der lægges især vægt på to faktorer: For det første på at synliggøre processer og mønstre bag de dobbelte tendenser til "empowerment" og marginalisering med basis i køn og klasse. For det andet på at differentiere i gruppen af kvinder og i gruppen af mænd ved at undersøge samspillet mellem køn og klasse. Samtidig med, at kønsperspektivet fastholdes vil disse differentieringer bl.a. synliggøre generationsforskelle og forskelle mellem resourcesvage og resourcestærke grupper.

Gennem delprojekter og konkrete casestudier vil områder som fx den offentlige ligestillingspolitik, baggrunden for den stigende kvinderepræsentation, betydningen af kvinders deltagelse i de politiske fællesskaber og i den politiske elite, samt strategier mod marginalisering og fattigdom blive behandlet.

JOHN ANDERSEN
Institut for Samfundsøkonomi
og Planlægning
Roskilde Universitetscenter
Bygning 23.1., PO 260
4000 Roskilde
Tlf.: 46 75 77 11
Fax: 46 75 66 18
E-mail: johna@ruc.dk

ANETTE BORCHORST
FREIA - Center for
Kvindeforskning
Aalborg Universitet
Fibigerstræde 2
9220 Aalborg Ø
Tlf.: 96 35 84 27
Fax: 98 15 32 98
E-mail: ab@humsamf.auc.dk

ANN-DORTE CHRISTENSEN
FEIA - Center for
Kvindeforskning
Aalborg Universitet
Fibigerstræde 2
9220 Aalborg Ø
Tlf.: 96 35 83 92
Fax: 98 15 32 98
E-mail: adc@humsamf.auc.dk

DRUDE DAHLERUP
Statsvetenskapliga Institutionen
Stockholms Universitet
S-106 91 Stockholm
Sverige
Tlf.: +46 (0)8 16 49 65
Fax: +46 (0)8 15 25 29
E-mail: drude.dahlerup@statsvet.su.se

JØRGEN ELM LARSEN
Sociologisk Institut
Københavns Universitet
Linnésgade 22
1361 København K
Tlf.: 35 32 32 80
Fax: 35 32 39 40
E-mail: Joergen.Elm.Larsen@
sociology.ku.dk

BIRTE SIIM (KOORDINATOR)
FREIA - Center for
Kvindeforskning
Aalborg Universitet
Fibigerstræde 2
9220 Aalborg Ø
Tlf.: 96 35 80 12
Fax: 98 15 32 98
E-mail: siim@humsamf.auc.dk

PERNILLE T. ANDERSEN
(PH.D.-STUDENT)
Sociologisk Institut
Københavns Universitet
Linnésgade 22
1361 København K

Phone: +45 35 32 39 03
E-mail: Pernille.T.Andersen@
Sociology.ku.dk

JENS ULRICH
(PH.D.-STUDENT)
Inst. for Historie, Internationale
Studier og Samfundsforhold
Aalborg University
Strandvejen 19
DK-9000 Aalborg
Phone: +45 96 35 80 80
Fax: +45 98 15 32 98
E-mail: jensu@socsci.auc.dk

GERDA THORSAGER
(PH.D.-STUDENT)
Department of Sociology
Copenhagen University
Linnésgade 22
DK -1361 Copenhagen K
phone: +45 35 32 39 45
Fax: +45 35 32 39 40
E-mail: gerda.thorsager@
sociology.ku.dk