REBEL DAUGHTERS

Women and the French Revolution

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New York
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1992
Flora Tristan: Rebel Daughter of the Revolution

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The nineteenth century is the second wave of the French Revolution. Utopian socialists extended its ideas to the people the revolution had forgotten—women and workers—and thereby deepened those ideas. At this time, one woman, Flora Tristan (1803–44), acting alone, cast upon the political scene a flash of brilliance that lasted but a few years. Through her life and her work, inseparable from each other, she appears the emblematic figure of this second revolutionary wave.

Even more than other feminists of the age, she was erased from the history of ideas and deeds. Then finally, in 1925, the scholar Jules Paeche consecrated a serious study to her—a then silence. In 1946, some excerpts from her writings on socialism were published by Lucien Scheler. Then silence again until 1972. Since that year, on the other hand, theses, studies, and publications on her life and work have multiplied both in France and the United States. And so she is now recognized as perhaps the most vivid, or in any case, the most romantic and talented of the pioneers and founders of French Socialist Feminism. Second to George Sand, you might say? Yes, second to her for talent and renown, but not for conviction or tenacity, in furthering this second wave of the French Revolution.

Flora's writings about her own life—memoirs, a diary, letters—make it seem a novel composed by destiny to illustrate woman's marginality in the early nineteenth century. The gradual recognition of these writings has allowed us to discern behind the blinding sun of George Sand the figure of Flora. Her daily experience, as it appears in the introduction to her memoirs, Peregrinations of a Pariah, sums up all the dramas of the feminine condition, all the denied rights, and all the unfinished tasks of the French Revolution with respect to women—all of them. First, she is an illegitimate child. Then she is unhappily married in a period that outlawed divorce, deprived the mother of all rights concerning her children, and made the father the sole head of the family. She is impoverished in a period that refused to provide trades or

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education to girls without money. She is a wife who leaves her husband and so becomes a delinquent, since the Civil Code of 1803 specifies that the woman is required to live in the conjugal domicile, which belongs to the husband. She is a fugitive she takes her daughter, Aline, with her, and so becomes in addition a "thief." A liberalization, slight but essential, the right to divorce, accorded by the revolution had been taken away by the restoration.

But, you will say, isn't all this the case for George Sand as well? Did these two women have parallel destinies? Yes, they did, but George had the estate of Nohant, powerful friends, illustrious lovers, and a very early fame, all of which helps to lessen the crushing weight of these restrictions. Flora's fate bears witness to the fate of thousands, even tens of thousands, of her contemporaries. She was, in fact, one of the extremely rare women who spoke out and took up the pen precisely in order to bear witness; and to draw from this fate the logical decision: not resignation, but struggle. Yet, the writers who studied the Utopian Socialists, Saint-Simon (1760–1825), Charles Fourier (1772–1837), and their disciples, hardly cited her name although she left behind a significant body of social criticism and theory.

Her works, Peregri nations of a Pariah (1836 in periodical form, 1838 in book form), Promenades in London (1840), and Worker's Union (1843), show first that Flora recognizes the source of her ideas in the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man; second, that she wants to include in these basic rights those people—women and workers—forgotten by the revolution; and third, that in order to do so, she finds it necessary to go beyond the Revolution of 1789. She is unquestionably a rebel daughter of the revolution, which she criticizes and at times rejects because of its inadequacies, but which she reveres for its profound upheaval and fundamental subversion of an entrenched order.

The Saint-Simionists and Fourierists also sought to revive and deepen the gains of 1789 and above all of the never-executed Constitution of 1793. In Flora's first book of sustained social theory, Promenades in London, she distinguishes herself from these other socialists, but without denying them as sources from which her ideas developed. She had visited Fourier while she was beginning to gain social awareness in 1835; she had spoken at length with Owen, whose followers guided her through her investigations of London; and she did not lack contacts—probably stormy—with the Saint-Simonians. But this rebel daughter of the revolution remained alone, outside of any group or movement, except the "Committees of the Workers' Union," which she organized in several cities of France, in 1844 during the last months of her life.

Her work is strewn with evocations of, denunciations of, and appeals to prolong the revolution. For example, in 1840, under the reign of Louis Philippe, she writes in Promenades in London:

[If the principles which triumphed in 1789 and 1830 have not yet been realized anywhere, and if arbitrary rule raises its arrogant head everywhere, the man of faith, contemplating the triumphs of thought, nevertheless feels his confidence in God doubled. He rests assured that the freedoms pro-

claimed by the Constituent, the Legislative, the Convention and all assem-
blies born of the universal suffrage of the people... will be realized because thought never dies... (Promenades, 227).

On the other hand, one of her very last written utterances, just before her death during her "tour of France" to organize the Workers' Union, is a long bitter cry against the shortcomings of political revolution. Having just been harassed and threatened by the police of Agen at her hotel after a meeting with local workers, she writes in her private diary, called the Tour of France:

It is in the name of the king that they operate, exactly as in 88. Good grief, what's the use of guillotining two or three—of expelling 4 or 5—just to return 56 years later to the old formula, "in the name of the king".

It must be admitted that political revolutions are first-rate farces!... But it's more than a farce. It's stupid, atrocious!—Fight, workers, go ahead and kill yourselves in order to change governments. Yes, you'll be repaid handsomely! Oh how governments must laugh at the workers!"}

This disillusioned denunciation appears in her diary on September 23, 1844, during one of her many despairing moments in the days of police harassment, physical exhaustion, and failing health before her death on November 14 of that year. By contrast, two months before, in Avignon, it is the heiress of the Jacobins who expresses anger with those "proletarians" who wanted to speak "patois" (that is to say Occitan) as opposed to French: "It is a misunderstanding of the great and sublime idea of the Revolution of 89 to thus disrupt the unity of the country. What was our fathers' motto? The French Republic, one and indivisible." (Tour, 177). She goes on to praise the Convention for its desire to establish schools so that all children "would speak the same language." For Flora, the illegitimate daughter of a Spanish father, half foreign wherever she went, language was the homeland. And so she laments that "since the fall of the glorious Revolution, no government has set itself the task of realizing this idea, the most urgent of all, of the national Convention." Flora is thus truly a daughter, both loyal and rebellious, of the revolution.

In Promenades in London Flora develops explicitly the foundation of her social ideas in the principles of the revolution as well as the need to go beyond them. If the people, she says "are raised in the principles of liberty and equality," they will have "learned to consider that not only is the resistance to oppression the natural right of man, but also that when the people are oppressed, insurrection becomes a sacred duty" (Promenades, 50). She tells the French workers: "The English people have not, like your fathers and yourselves, begun to win equality and freedom through glorious revolutions" (Promenades, 51). Yet she goes on to warn them of the limitations of revolutions modeled on 1789: "you should consider political rights uniquely as a means through which you can put yourself in a position to attack legally the ill at its source. ... It is with the social order, the foundation of the edifice, that you should be concerned, and not with politics, which is only a facultious power ..." (Promenades, 51). Flora shared this view with all the socialists before Marx. Like them, she believed: "Until the present, politics have been an
Flora says, where she met a Peruvian aristocrat, Don Mariano Tristán de Moscoso. On the other hand, her father, as a Spanish cavalier, in the service of the king of a country where no revolution had as yet swept away the old regime, needed the personal permission of the Spanish king to marry. Flora's parents thus "married clandestinely, and it was a French émigré priest who performed the marriage ceremony in the house where my mother was living" (Intro. to Per., xxxvi). The marriage would not be recognized as valid. The father's death in Paris when Flora was four plunged mother and daughter into dire poverty. Flora passed from the aristocracy to the working class without ever experiencing bourgeois life. She knew about "the poor" not through hearsay, but because she did not have wood to keep herself warm. At fifteen, in love and beloved, she was rejected by the young man's family because of her "illegitimate" birth.

At the age of fifteen, therefore, this adolescent knew a triple marginality—as "bastard," foreigner, and destitute—from a society that rejected her. Before the age of eighteen she was married to an engraver, André Chazal, for whom she worked as a "colorist." Although her letters to her fiancé show her trying to persuade herself that she loves him while her body refuses him (Letters, 43), she later writes in Peregrinations of a Pariah: "my mother compelled me to marry a man I could neither love nor respect. I owe to this union all my misfortunes" (Intro. to Per., xxxvi). Chazal rapidly proved to be an alcoholic, a gambler, lazy, and no doubt, violent. In less than four years, Flora was three times a mother, first of two sons ... and then when she discovered herself pregnant for a third time at the age of 20, she fled.

Her flight completes her marginality, and forces her to live according to the double standard of a society whose laws compel her to lie in order to survive. According to the Napoleonic Civil Code: "The wife is obligated to live with the husband and follow him everywhere" (article 214). It is the husband alone who determines the "conjugal domicile" of the wife and children. Leaving this domicile is a crime. Flora thus calls herself a "fugitive slave" (Intro. to Per., xxxviii), living a life that has become a series of violent scenes. Chazal continually tries to take the children and set the police upon his delinquent wife, until she finally wins her struggle against him and the regime he represents, in 1838. But from 1827 to 1838, she must transform herself from a fugitive slave into a prophet of the new revolution.

In this process, she cannot fail to link her personal drama to the need for broad social reform through the mediation of the Revolution of 1789. For instance, on December 20, 1837, she formulates her position on marriage, often expressed in her books and her letters, in a "Petition for the Re-establishment of Divorce" submitted to the Chamber of Deputies: "The ills produced by the indissolubility of marriage are generalized in a way that is strikingly clear to everyone. God has not grantedcontinuity to any but a very small number of our affections, and yet we wish to impose immutability upon the most variable of them all" (Letters, 74). These remarks, which bear the influence of Charles Fourier, are shortly followed by a reference to the only historical model for the establishment of divorce, the Revolution of 1789:
Gentlemen, our glorious revolution had as its goal the emancipation of thought, and it was greeted by an acclamation of the people... divorce by mutual consent or by the desire of one of the parties was instituted, separation in deed was followed by legal separation, and the legislator was no longer forced by dogma to recognize a fictive paternity” (Letters, 74).

Addressing herself to men elected under a royalist regime (although it is bound by a Charter), Flora knows that she will be heard only by the “liberals,” those for whom the constitutions of revolutionary governments represent a lost progress. She adds: “Despotism needs merely obedience. Napoleon wanted to make divorce a royal prerogative... He made it almost the exclusive right of the husband” (Letters, 74). Yet, as Flora says, Napoleon did “not dare abolish” (74) divorce. Not until the Restoration did the kings dare to do so “in opposition,” she says, “to the freedom of religion.” Turning back the clock on the progress of the revolution, this “anti-social law” had the effect of creating chaos. Invoking the “annual declaration of illegitimate but legally recognized children,” Flora says: “In France there exist more than 300,000 disunited marriages” (Letters, 75). Exposing the condition of women with neither profession nor money, burdened with children and either forced to leave their husbands or abandoned by them, she argues that “the illicit unions they form must be attributed to the law itself” (Letters, 75).

In this same official petition, filled with logical arguments and statistics, she makes a brief allusion to her own destiny between the ages of twenty-one, when she had fled from Chazal’s home and thirty-four, when she is beginning to write her memoirs, saying: “Gentlemen, I have undergone the severe trials resulting from the indissolubility of marriage. Forced to separate from my husband, although I had no financial resources, I was obliged at a very young age to provide for my needs and those of my children by myself” (Letters, 75).

The memoirs, Peregrinations of a Pariah, recount an arduous and adventurous journey to Peru, which begins with her desire to better her personal situation, and which results in her decision to engage in the second wave of the revolution. On her thirtieth birthday, April 7, 1833, having confided her daughter Aline to the care of a friend, she embarks upon an ocean journey of 133 days, without having said anything to her mother, who continues to act as informant to Chazal. Flora describes herself hiding her marital state from the ship’s captain Chabrié, whose amorous feelings for his passenger both protect and discomfit her, as she goes from port to port, learning first hand about the stark reality of slavery, the slave trade of blacks, and the condition of women slaves.

She reports seeing two black women condemned to death for infanticide and feeling that the gaze of one of them “seemed to say to me: ‘let my child die because I knew he would not be free like you; I preferred him dead to enslaved’” (Per., 352). For Flora, these two slaves become the epitome of every servitude that, imperceptible or horrifying, symbolizes the condition of woman, especially in their will to “die without being bent to the yoke” (Per., 352). According to her narrative, she tells a slave owner: “Monsieur, a revolution whose motives were the most generous had to be roused to indignation by the existence of slavery. The Convention decreed the emancipation of Blacks, out of enthusiasm, and without appearing to suspect that they would need to be prepared to make use of their liberty” (Per., 349). For the entire gamut of problems from her personal confinement in indissoluble marriage to the most extreme forms of oppression in slavery, the Revolution from 1789 to 1793 arises as the historical model for solutions.

According to Peregrinations, it is this voyage to Peru, these twenty-two months of discoveries that transform Flora’s world view in this way. The book recounts her first-hand experiences with a feudal despotism ruled by her uncle Don Pio. He reigns over plantations, factories, and workers, even over the monks in a convent located on his property, and he rules doubly over a whole kinship of poor women, aunts, cousins, unmarried daughters, and poorly married widows who surround him with a docile court. He grants a fifth of the Tristan inheritance to his brother’s “bastard” and invites her to stay with him, where he will arrange her marriage. As on Chabrié’s ship, Flora once again confronts the fear of bigamy. To no one does she reveal her true situation, preferring to pass as a spinster, or in France even as an unmarried mother, since this is at least not a criminal offense. The necessity of living a false role in the luxurious and medieval microsociety of Arequipa gives her such a horror for life that in the process of her personal transformation to revolutionary apostle, she more than once contemplates suicide.

Flora’s despair thus reaches its depth in this world where neither ideas nor morals were changed by the revolution or even by the generously liberal inspiration of her father’s friend, Simon Bolivar the “Liberator,” whose letters to her parents Flora will later publish. She begins to climb out of this despair through the excitement of an event, not exactly a revolution, but a coup d’état and resulting siege at the end of January 1834. Because this Parisian has experienced the July Days of 1830, she is, as she describes it, treated as a kind of strategic counselor. Yet it is after her uncle’s party is defeated and he immediately allies himself with the winners that Flora undergoes the strange adventure, which will lead her through a tortuous path to become the revolutionary writer of The Peregrinations.

Among the victors, Flora meets Colonel Escudero, Spaniard, journalist, musician, and above all, political counselor and intimate companion of “La Presidente” Doña Pencha de Gamarra, the adventurous and repudiated wife of the former president, and leader of Don Pio’s party. From the moment of Escudero’s first visit, Flora is attracted to him, and it seems she has finally met a man with whom she falls in love. “He was ugly in the eyes of the world, but not in my own” (Per., 290), she writes, and even goes so far as to admit: “I have the deep conviction that had I become his wife, I would have been very happy” (Per., 290).

But the amorous attraction is fed by another kind of attraction. Writing in 1838, she makes a revolutionary admission about her frame of mind in 1834: “the desire to contribute to the public good had been the constant passion of my soul and an active, adventurous career one of my lifelong preferences”
his lengthy response calls her “one of the women the most gifted in love, intelligence and zeal for the cause of social reform,” but questions her ideas on organization.  

When her Peregrinations of a Parish: 1833–1834 appears as a two volume work in 1838, its combination of autobiographical revelation and appeals for social reform produce dramatic effects. In Peru, her uncle allows her book and portrait to be burned in the public square and takes away her pension (see Letters, 88). André Chazal, who has been drinking more and more and whose guardianship over their children had been revoked by the courts, is enraged upon seeing the story of their harrowing marriage in print. Delirious, he writes threatening letters, buys a pair of pistols, and on September 10, 1838, wounds Flora in broad daylight, in the middle of the street. A bullet lodges itself near her lung and cannot be extracted. That night the rumor spreads through Paris that George Sand has been murdered by her husband, but the Journal des débats puts the rumor to rest on September 12 by reporting that Sand had been at the theater on that fateful night.  

Flora becomes famous.  

The shooting and the dramatic trial that followed made the book a commercial success, and a new edition was published. While Flora is busy writing articles, publishing Bolivar’s letters to her parents, having her portraits painted by Jules Laure, and writing her only novel, Méphits or the Proletarian, she also prepares for Chazal’s trial, by, among other things, presenting a petition against the death penalty to the Chamber of Deputies, on December 19, 1838 (Letters, 91).  

From Chazal’s failed attempt at murder comes her liberation. His trial, before a full house, receives lengthy, detailed reports in Le Droit and La Gazette des Tribunaux.  

Chazal’s attorney, the soon to be famous Jules Favre, brandishes Flora’s Peregrinations and reads from it truncated passages as proof of her guilt, as he turns the victim into the accused. The misconduct of this bad wife, claims Favre, pushed his client to crime. Flora’s sudden appearance in court creates a sensation. She cries out that the work is a novel and faints at the bar. In a letter to an unknown correspondent, Flora writes that “my wretched assassin” had tried “to assassinate me morally after putting a bullet in my chest . . .”  

Now finding herself among the celebrated queens of Paris, Flora could choose to play the role of an elite woman of letters. But the rebel daughter of the revolution remains faithful to herself. Preferring to serve the cause of the oppressed, she leaves for London. Although she had been a “female companion,” or really lady’s maid, in London before her voyage to Peru, she returns to investigate the social conditions in the capital of the most advanced industrial country in Europe. She prepares a book, Promenades in London, which will describe the atrocious poverty of the workers, the degradation of the poor, and the depravity of wealth.  

In spite of a strong personal, emotional aversion for England, in all
likelihood born of her previous humiliations as a servant there, Flora succeeds in tracing a striking sociological tableau of London. She depicts the horror of working people defenselessly handed over to an all-powerful capitalism, which exploits the new Third Estate, a “Fourth Estate” called the proletariat. With a style marked by a strong, romantic subjectivity, she describes all the “alienations”—of proletarians, prostitutes (including children of both sexes), prisoners, the mentally ill, and what we would call “ethnic minorities.” Among these are the Jews, whom she describes with an edge of contempt, and the Irish, whom she describes with admiration.

Although Flora is escorted into every social milieu—sweat shops, slums, haunts of vice and prostitution, Bedlam, prisons, and even the House of Lords, where she is disguised as a man—by the Owenites, especially Anna Wheeler, and although she has great admiration for Robert Owen, whom she had met in Paris in 1837, she maintains her independence. Just as she is a rebel daughter of the revolution, she is a sort of rebel sister to its heirs, the utopian socialists of the 1830s. Influenced by all of them, she also criticizes them all and joins with no movement, preferring to organize on her own.

While Promenades in London aroused indignation in certain British social spheres, French social reformers took the book seriously. The Fourierist Jean Czynski wrote enthusiastically and at length about it in Le Nouveau Monde, as did the proletarian writer Vinçard in La Ruche populaire and in La Revue du Progrès, published by Louis Blanc.39 From this time forward, Flora Tristan counts among the social reformers. After its first two editions in 1840, and a third edition in 1842, Promenades in London is reprinted in a low-cost format in 1842, with a new “Dedication to the Working Classes.”21 Here she writes that the purpose of her book is to “instruct” the workers “on the causes of their suffering and the means to remedy it” (Promenades, 54, emphasis in text), and announces the principle of class struggle: “Proletarians, my work is the exposition of the great drama that England is going to play out before the eyes of the world... It prepares you for the appearance of the great events of this terrible struggle that is forming between the proletarians and the nobles of this country” (53). As remedy, the book calls for a social, rather than a political, revolution. Commenting on her impressions of the English factories, Flora says:

If at first I felt humiliated upon seeing man annihilated, reduced to operating like a machine himself, I soon saw the immense improvements which would one day come from these discoveries of science: brute force abolished, material work performed in less time, and more leisure time for man to cultivate his intelligence; but the realization of these great benefits requires a social revolution. It will come! For God has not revealed to man these wonderful inventions in order to reduce them to mere slaves of a few manufacturers and landowners (Promenades, 116–17).

In his excellent introduction to the modern edition of Promenades, François Bédarida, is struck, as I am, by the “cross references” between this book and Friedrich Engels’s Conditions of the Working Class in England of 1845. But Bédarida believes I am wrong to think that young Engels had read Flora. "Engels," he says, “researched his book with recourse to exclusively English documentation” (Intro. to Promenades, 44). Given the bulimia of reading that Engels shared with Marx, who read the French publications, as well as the troubling similarity between the two books and the respective dates of their publication, I maintain that Engels was familiar with Flora Tristan. I also maintain my hypothesis that if this great quoter does not quote her, it is because a “lady’s work” would not be considered a serious reference. Yet in their first collaborative work, The Holy Family, Engels and Marx mention Flora Tristan favorably in their critique of the German socialist Bruno Bauer, thus showing that they knew of her existence and her ideas.22

After writing Promenades in London, Flora feels endowed with the mission to disseminate her ideas. She considers herself the “Woman-Guide” she had written about in her novel Mélis, much as the Saint-Simonian leader Prosper Enfantin had proclaimed himself the Messiah and the Supreme Father ten years earlier.23 Going beyond the revolution of the bourgeois Third Estate, Flora tells the workers, in her manifesto Workers’ Union, as Marx would later tell them, to take their cause into their own hands.

In so adopting her new messianic identity and crossing the line from bourgeois to proletarian revolution, Flora enters a dilemma that her forebears of 1789 did not have to face, but that neither Marx, Engels, nor Lenin will escape. She is the leader of a movement for autonomous proletarian power but is not herself a worker. Indeed, as she organizes the workers, she is on more than one occasion insulted by the proletarian wives because she is a “lady” and turns their husbands towards politics. She thus opens the insoluble combat between the “workerism” of revolutionary formations and the intellectuals as bearers of doctrine.

The agonies of this experience do not befall her, however, until after months of disappointed hopes, she finally succeeds in publishing her Workers’ Union by subscription at the end of 1843, and sets off on her “tour of France.” Her book creates an original synthesis of the current reformist ideas that only through association among themselves and through recognizing the equality of women will workers gain freedom. In their excellent introduction to the modern edition of Workers’ Union, Daniel Armoaghe and Jean Grandjone, from whom I will borrow several points of analysis, cite the article from The Encyclopedic Review of 1832 in which Jean Reynaud defines the “proletarians”: “I call proletarians men who produce all of the nation’s wealth, who possess nothing but the daily earnings of their labor, and whose work depends on causes outside of their control.”24

Stressing repeatedly that it is addressed to workers of both sexes, Workers’ Union enlarges the proletariat to include not only the 7 or 8 million factory workers, but also the 25 million or so artisans, whom Flora calls upon to constitute themselves as a class and elect a defender to represent their interests and demand their rights before the nation. To a critic who called her project too utopian and impractical, Flora responded by presenting herself as a savior carrying the tradition of the French Revolution to its next historical level:
Before effecting its realization, one must first posit the law. —Catholicism was not definitively established until the sixth century, but Christ had posited the law 600 years before. —The constitution of the bourgeois class was not established until 89, but the law had been posited in the first Estates General. —I bring you the law, and as to its realization, Gods [Dieux] will sound its hour” (Tour, 12).

But why “Gods”? This plural signifies that God “is father, mother and embryo.” Flora’s new trinity fits in with the religious ideas of the utopian socialists. Just as the Revolution of 1793 had replaced the old mystical gods with their rationalist Supreme Being, the social movement of the 1830s replaced the old male gods with new bisexual gods. Flora’s friend, the sculptor Simon Ganneau, preached a “Mapa,” a mama-papa god. The Saint-Simonians under the leadership of Enfantin preached that god is both “father and mother.” (La Tribune des femmes, 193, emphasis in text). But Flora conceived her “Gods” as a family triangle, with the embryo providing “the germ as indefinite progress” (Postface to Testamenti, 19), the promise of the future. In her 1838 novel Méphist it is neither the proletarian hero nor the rebellious heroine Marequita who holds the key to liberate humanity, but their daughter, the future “Woman-Guide.”

“Gods” then will realize this Law through a union between woman, the oppressed sex, and the most oppressed class, the proletariat. Therefore, according to Flora, all women, even the most privileged, must ally with the working class. The notion of the link between women and the proletariat had been expressed many times by the Saint-Simonians. In 1833, for instance, the Saint-Simonian Claire Démair had written: “the emancipation of the proletariat, of the poorest and most numerous class, is possible, I am convinced, only through the emancipation of our sex.” Flora develops this concept in both theory and practice. The Emancipation of Woman and the Testament of the Pariah, published posthumously from her notes by Abbe Constant, and doubtless revised, contains the phrase: “The most oppressed man finds a being to oppress, his wife: he is the proletarian of the proletarian.” Thus forty years before Engels articulates in more developed form the thought for which he is more famous: “Within the family he is the bourgeois, and the wife represents the proletariat.”

In this analysis, Workers’ Union sees the liberation of women and workers as a continuation of the incomplete work of the French Revolution:

What happened for the proletarians [in '89] augurs well, it must be agreed, for women when their '89 will sound. —A very simple calculation makes it obvious that the wealth of society will grow indefinitely from the day that women (half the human race) are called upon to bring to social activity the sum total of their intelligence, strength and ability. . . . But alas, we are not yet there, and as we wait for this felicitous '89, let us see what is happening in 1843” (WU, excerpt in OVM, 403).

In order to bring about this new feminine 1789, Workers’ Union sets forth a detailed plan of action, and its author travels from city to city setting up “Committees of Correspondence” that are to be joined in a tight network.

And where the revolutionaries of 1789 sought to establish the nation, Flora’s new 1789 is conceived in the name of internationalism. As an eternal foreigner, a French woman in Peru and England, and always exotic and out of place in France; a lady among the workers, while too passionate and intolerant a militant among the intellectuals, Flora believes in a “Universal Union of working men and women” (WU, excerpt in OVM, p. 389). In her study of 1918, “An Unknown, Flora Tristan, the True Founder of the International,” the feminist pacifist Helen Brion sees Flora as the precursor of the First International.

Paradoxically, however, those qualities which make her an internationalist also make her a loner, and her “tour of France” is the mission of a solitary messiah. Although she does not explicitly call herself the “Woman-Messiah,” whose coming was preached by Prosper Enfantin in the early 1830s, she does frequently compare herself to Christ in her journal, where she writes, for instance: “Faith makes me perform wondrous things” (Tour, 27). But at this time, such a belief was in a sense her only alternative. If a woman refused to ally herself with existing groups, she could not then speak in her name alone. Who would listen to her? She would have to tell herself and make herself believe that she is sent by something that transcends groups and schools: a divinity, “Gods.”

Thus from April 12, 1844, until her death from “cerebral congestion” on November 14, 1844, at the age of 41, she will travel through almost twenty towns south of the Loire with a trunk full of Workers’ Unions. The diary of spontaneously recorded impressions, The Tour of France, recounts the harassing police investigations, landlord problems, and petty rivalries among the socialists, but also the exaltation of large meetings with enthusiastic workers, while it also offers a gripping and profound tableau of class struggle in France just before the Revolution of 1848. The diary records in detail Flora’s discouragement and anger, alternatively against selfish bourgeois and passive workers, as well as the mortal suffering that pushes her to her death.

In certain cities, such as Lyon, Toulon, and Marseille, she will stir up great enthusiasm and form committees. Even after her death, she has a lasting influence, for instance in Toulon in 1845, when striking arsenal workers according to Maurice Agulhon, cite her teachings. But by the time her grandson, Paul Gauguin, grows up, she will have been erased from history. He will know very little about his grandmother:

Proudhon said she had genius in her. . . . She invented a heap of socialist stories, Workers’ Union among others. . . . It is probable that she did not know how to cook. A socialist blue-stocking, an anarchist. . . . What I do know for sure, however, is that Flora Tristan was a very beautiful and noble lady. . . . I also know that she used her whole fortune for the workers’ cause, traveling nonstop.

In the past twenty years she has won a more deserved place in history. Flora Tristan, imbued with the principles of the Revolution of 1789 and aware of their inadequacies, was the most romantic and the most lucid of the “utopian
socialists." Among those men and women who had understood the necessity of bringing into the light of history those people who had been left underground, proletarians and women of every class, she was a messiah, that is to say a person ready to die for her message.

Notes


9. Flora Tristan, Union ouvrière, excerpts in Desanti, Oeuvres et vie mêlées, 344. Citations in this essay are taken from these excerpts and will be referred to in parentheses after the citation as "OW [Workers’ Union] in OVMe."

10. La Tribune des Femmes, journal of the Saint-Simonian feminists, founded and coedited by Désirée Veret-Gay and Marie-Reine Guindorf, and then edited by Suzanne Voilquin, Paris, 1832 to April 1834. Its first title was La Femme libre, its second title L'Apostolat des femmes, and its final title La Tribune des femmes. La Gazette des femmes, edited by Frédéric de Mauchamps, Paris, July 1836-April 1837; and December 1837-April 1838.


16. Victor Considerant, La Phalange, no. 6, 1 septembre 1836, 182-88, cited by Michaud in Tristan, Lettres, 64.

17. Puch, La vie et l'oeuvre, 93.


19. Le Droît, 1 and 2 février 1839; La Gazette des tribunaux, 1, 2, and 4 février 1839.


23. J. P. Allem, Enfantin: Le prophète aux sept visages (Paris: Pauvert, 1963). P. Enfantin appointed himself "Supreme Father of the School, College and Family of the Saint-Simonian Men and Women" to whom he pledged to search for the "Supreme Mother." He instituted the "Call to Woman" and predicted the future government of the "Supreme Couple." But he excluded women from the organization of the Saint-Simonian hierarchy. His relations with Flora were temporary and not very cordial.


Women and Militant Citizenship in Revolutionary Paris

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In revolutionary Paris, the political identity of women as *citoyennes* was made problematic not only by constitutional definitions but more generally by an exclusive, gendered political language. Notwithstanding legal, linguistic, and ideological limits and exclusions, women of the popular classes and smaller numbers of middle-class women claimed citizenship. Their practice of citizenship was shaped and limited by prevailing cultural values; but it also is true that their *citoyenneté* challenged and episodically recast or subverted these values.

The problem of women and citizenship—not only in revolutionary France but throughout the western world in an age of democratic revolutions—is the subject of a large and growing literature. In the conclusion of her *Citoyennes Tricoteuses*, Dominique Godineau formulates that problem as a paradox: "When one studies the women's revolutionary movement, isn't one asking . . . How is it possible to be a *citoyenne*? How is it possible to participate in political life without possessing citizenship in its entirety? How is it possible to be part of the Sovereign without enjoying any of the attributes of sovereignty?"

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen held out the promise of a political coming of age for all humanity. However, the Declaration left indeterminate the question of whether universal rights of man were rights of woman and whether, or in what sense, woman was a *citoyenne*. The constitutions of 1791 and 1793 and the debates surrounding their acceptance presumably resolved the issue. Women were denied political rights of "active citizenship" (1791) and democratic citizenship (1793).

This constitutional exclusion can be related to neo-classical and Rousseauian formulations and representations of citizenship and civic virtue that pervaded revolutionary political culture—for example, the *langage mâle de la vertu* recently analyzed by Dorinda Outram. In this language of virtue, the citizen was defined as a public man imbued with "un vertu mâle et répub-

This paper forms part of our collaborative research toward a book on gender and citizenship in Revolutionary Paris. An earlier version from which it is adapted was authored by Darline Gay Levy and presented as a Florence Gould Distinguished Lecture at New York University in March 1989.
licaitin," which prepared him for a life of service to the patrie. Women, the wives, sisters, mothers of citizens were depicted enclosed in domestic spheres and at best confined to roles as educators of future citizens. By the terms of these definitions, public man was a self-sacrificing hero, while women who assumed political roles in public arenas were "public women," courtisans and prostitutes.3

Neo-classical imagery is replete with these gendered representations of citizenship and civic virtue. In Jacques-Louis David's painting, "The Oath of the Horatii," two spaces are delineated. On one side of the canvas, we see a politicized space in which male citizens, three sons and their father, in an act of patriotic oaths-taking, demonstrate physical fortitude and moral and political resolve—civic virtue, in short. On the other side, a private space is depicted. Here, daughters and wives, with their children, collapse in grief; they conspicuously display their physical incapacity along with their moral limitations—their inability to extend their allegiances beyond the home, the sphere in which their characteristic virtue, a narrowly circumscribed, private virtue, is expressed exclusively in loyalty and devotion to family members.4

Revolutionary power struggles between 1789 and 1793 created and multiplied opportunities for eluding or challenging and reworking these gendered formulations of revolutionary citizenship and civic virtue. Much of the time, revolutionary authorities were uncertain about how to react. They hesitated, they veered between co-opting, directing, and exploiting women's claims to a political identity and political power; they ridiculed it, symbolically recast it in order to defuse it, and repressed it.

In the spaces opened up by ambivalence and vacillation, women assumed political identities as citoyennes. Clearly, under the old regime, complex combinations of needs, customs, and opportunities brought women of all classes into the public sphere and facilitated their interactions with authorities at all levels as they organized and presided over salons, functioned as intermediaries at court, plied their trades, participated in or witnessed royal, municipal, or neighborhood ceremonies, or became involved in acts of taxations populaires and riots and other collective protests. Official strategies for controlling women's presence and involvement in public and political events were immensely complex. What can be said with certainty is that the repertory of responses did not include general policies of clean repression. Such policies simply would have been unthinkable, given the number, breadth, and scope of roles that women already were playing out in the public and political arenas.

Beginning with the royal decision of May 1788 to convocate the Estates-General, new political questions about elections, representation, constitutional rights, and political legitimacy urgently engaged the attention of all residents of the capital, women as well as men—and not only men with the properties that entitled them to attend electoral assemblies, but also the unenfranchised "Fourth Estate." Elections in Paris in April 1789 opened a revolutionary period of rapid institutional and ideological change, including the dislocation, collapse, abolition, and reconstitution of systems of justice, lawmaking, and administration. The proliferation of revolutionary journals, the establishment of Paris districts, and later, sections, the formation of the National Guard, and the opening of political clubs and popular societies all created new opportunities for political involvement, for women as well as for men. Many women joined popular societies and clubs where they received a political education and established bases for political communication with local, municipal, and national authorities. They formed deputations to deliberative bodies to present petitions and demands for legislation, or intervened from the galleries, applying collective pressure upon constituted authorities. Women swore oaths of loyalty to nation, law, king, and later, the Republic, solemn declarations of patriotic allegiance, affirmations of the political responsibilities of citizenship, which later supported some of their most audacious claims to political rights. Women participated in this ceremonial dimension of citizenship in other ways, through roles in festivals and in patriotic gift giving. In revolutionary journées, women repeatedly applied insurrectionary force to test the legitimacy of executive and legislative power under successive regimes. In formally stated demands for equal political and civil rights, Étta Palm d'Aelders, Condorcet, and Olympe de Gouges in Les Droits de la Femme with its ringing declaration—"The law must be the expression of the general will; all female and male citizens must contribute either personally or through their representatives to its formation ..."—all forced radical expansions in the conceptualization of citizenship to realize the promise of universality encoded in the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

The de facto participation of women in the political life of the revolutionary nation through all these activities is what we are calling their practice of citizenship.4

We focus here on militant citizenship, practices of citizenship linked to the use of force. We are using the term to include women's claims to a right to bear arms, either in self-defense, or for purposes of offensive action against the nation's enemies—in its most radical formulation, a claim for membership in the sovereign nation. We also mean by militant citizenship women's threats to use force and their actual application of armed force in collective demonstrations of sovereign will and power.

Women's episodic empowerment through the use of armed force, their threats to use arms, and their claims to the right to bear arms, in conjunction with the confused, ambiguous reactions of revolutionary leaders, tended to blur or eclipse prevailing gendered definitions of citizenship and civic virtue, or to multiply competing and conflicting definitions and norms. By the fall of 1793, women's escalating claims and practices literally invited either a total reconceptualization of citizenship, or a radical repression of militant citoyennes as a threat to the political hegemony (and even the potency) of the Jacobin leadership and to the gendered vision of nature, society, polity, and ideology which that leadership finally fixed upon as the foundation of the new order.

Here, we present three instances of women's militant citizenship in revolutionary Paris: the women's march to Versailles in October 1789; women's participation in armed processions and their demands for the right to
bear arms during the spring and summer of 1792; and the organized insurgency of women in the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women between the spring and fall of 1793.

On October 5, 1789, 7,000 women from the districts and faubours of Paris—fishwives, housewives, shopkeepers, peddlars—the *menu peuple*—rose in insurrection against the municipal government, the king and the National Assembly. According to a newspaper account, trouble started when a young market woman began beating a drum in the streets and crying out about the scarcity of bread. According to Loustalot, an editor of the *Révolutions de Paris*, "Women of the people, principally merchants from the central markets and workers from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, took upon themselves the 'salut de la patrie.' They rounded up in the streets all the women they encountered there; they even went into houses to lead off all those who could add to the numbers in the procession; they went to the square in front of the Hôtel de Ville." An eyewitness recounted how the women invaded the Hôtel de Ville, denounced the Mayor, Bailly, and the Commander-General of the National Guard, Lafayette; snatched up papers and threatened to burn them; and mockingly, scornfully declared, as one observer put it, that "men didn't have enough strength to avenge themselves and that they [the women] would demonstrate that they were better than men." Having located and seized weapons, the women stated their intention of going directly to the National Assembly "to find out everything that had been done and decreed until this day, the fifth of October."

An extraordinarily acute observer, the Parisian bookseller Siméon-Prospér Hardy, noted in his entry to his journal for October 5 that the armed marchers, women and men, left for Versailles "allegedly with the design of . . . asking the king, whom they intended to bring back to Paris, as well as the National Assembly, for bread and for closure on the Constitution."

The women set off on the fourteen kilometer march to Versailles in a driving rain, armed with pikes, clubs, knives, swords, muskets, and other weapons; dragging cannon; led by one of the conquerors of the Bastille, and followed hours later by somewhere between eighteen and twenty-four thousand civilians in arms, and twenty thousand guardsmen with their Commander-General, Lafayette.

At Versailles, one detachment of this women's armed force, backed by men with heavy artillery, including cannon, headed toward the chateau. There, the women threatened to open fire on royal troops; they insulted the king, and made scathing references to his failure to sign the Declaration of Rights; they demanded an interview. After a delegation of women was received and brought the king's verbal promises of wheat supplies for Paris, the women waiting at the gate demanded the king's commitment in writing—a clear indication that, for them, the image of the king as protector and provider was dissolving into the picture of an unreliable executive agent whose authority was limited at best, and who must be pinned down to signed contractual agreements.
A second prong of marchers took over the national legislature, demanded a guaranteed supply of affordable bread, passed mock legislation, and also pressed the deputies into issuing decrees on subsistence. The following day, the marchers invaded the château; tens of thousands, women and men, military and civilians—many of them armed—crowded into the palace courtyard and forced the king to return with them to Paris, a captive monarch (see Figure 5.1). Eyewitness accounts and visual documentation of the procession depict women seated astride cannon—the world turned upside down, a *tableau vivant* of feminine empowerment; women marching with swords in hand, women waving the branches of trees, women threatening the captured royal bodyguards and fraternizing with the National Guardsmen who carried loaves of bread on the tips of their pikes; women shouting and chanting as they marched: “Courage my friends, we won't lack bread any longer, we are bringing you the baker, the baker's wife, and the baker's boy”11—dramatic demonstrations of the crowd's demotion of the king from sacrosanct absolute authority, a patriarchal provider and protector, to a mere provisioner, a fundamentally untrustworthy baker who, like other suspected hoarders and profiteers, must be subjected to continual popular surveillance, backed by armed force.12

We narrow our focus to one episode of the October days, the women’s invasion of the National Assembly on the evening of the fifth. Initially, only a deputation was admitted to the bar; shortly afterward, crowds of women rushed in; some were armed with hunting knives or half-swords that hung from their skirts.13 They took over the hall of the legislature, milled about the floor, filled all the galleries, interrupted debate, pressured and intimidated the deputies, and demanded that they discuss subsistence problems in Paris.14 One journalist reported that two or three thousand women voted with the deputies on motions and amendments relating to legislation on the circulation and distribution of grains. “Thus, on this incomparable day, they exercised the functions of legislative and executive powers.”15

Observers noted the carnivalesque behavior of the “legislators” of the night of October 5: like role reversals—sitting in the president’s chair, voting on motions; impromptu farce—shouting, singing, declaiming; and personifications of the objects of their ridicule—chiding the deputy Mounier for his support of Monsieur le Véto, ce vilain vétard.16 However, on this rainy Monday, which clearly was not a carnival day, and in the middle of the National Assembly, this burlesque behavior merged into revolutionary dramaturgy—the marchers’ collective exploitation of a subsistence crisis inextricably bound up with a crisis of political legitimacy, a crisis over the locus of sovereign authority in the new political order.

“Do what you are asked,” an insurgent ordered a deputy who had referred the Parisians back to their city government for decrees relating to price ceilings on meat and bread: “don’t fancy we are children you can play with; we have our arms raised.” Later, a group of women seized this deputy by the coat when he tried to leave the meeting hall. He repeated that the Assembly did not have the authority to grant their demands; at precisely that moment, a woman was occupying the president’s chair.17 Such role reversals can be read as the women’s symbolic seizure of power from deputies whom they perceived to be either incapable of representing them, or unwilling to do so.

The women who marched to Versailles from their neighborhood bases in the districts and faubourgs of Paris did not formally state concepts of revolutionary sovereignty, entailing the people’s right to express and impose its will through collective applications of armed force. Rather, in deeds, they shattered the traditional authority and sovereignty of absolute kingship. They demonstrated how the people itself functioned as sovereign legislator. They enacted what the deputies and the radical publicists were calling popular sovereignty. They placed an armed force behind these acts. They forged links between the traditional priorities and values of their communities—especially guaranteed subsistence and the expectation of paternal benevolence from the king—and the revolutionary nation—its emblems, symbols, military force, and nascent ideology. In the context of revolutionary developments between the spring and fall of 1789, these acts mark a transitional moment in the transformation of subjects into a militant citizenry identifying itself as the sovereign nation.

For the *mene people* of Paris, especially for women, militant citizenship would continue to mean at least a politics of intimidation, unrelenting surveillance and control, practiced sometimes through legal means (like petitioning or forming delegations within popular societies), but also in insurrection. The power of insurrection is necessarily episodic and ephemeral, but it also is real. Perhaps most important, from the beginning of the revolution, radical publicists and polemists appropriated and reworked this traditional popular politics of subsistence and surveillance, with its underlying assumption that the application of force is justified where it enforces the collective moral will of the community. They recast it in a Rousseauian language, legitimating insurrection as the arm of the sovereign nation, the most authentic embodiment and expression of the general will. In calculating the power of that general will, the revolutionary leadership continued, reluctantly, episodically, to include women; and women persisted in including themselves.

Some contemporaries who lived through the October days gave accounts of the events that carried radical, even feminist messages. One middle-class woman, a writer for the *Étrennes nationales des Dames*, cited women’s courage and enterprise during the *journées d’octobre* to support her case for women’s complete liberation from a state of “inferiority” and “slavery” to men.18 The author of a provocative brochure, *Requête des dames à l’Assemblée nationale*, appealed both to universal rights embodied in the Declaration of August 1789 and to the example of women’s militancy, their “martial courage” during the insurrectionary events of the summer and fall of 1789, to support demands for absolutely equal rights and an equal share of power for women as legislators, magistrates, ecclesiastic officers, and military officers.19 Under the old regime, such texts might have been passed off as deprecatory parody; in the context of the great hopes of 1789, the message could be read as ambiguous, at least, and positively radical, at most. In both documents, strong links were forged between women’s militancy on October 5 and 6 and remarkably broad demands for the political and military status and rights of female citizenship.
The meanings and impacts of women's militant citizenship emerge most clearly during the critically important period of revolutionary radicalization between the bloody repression of petitioners by National Guardsmen on the Champ de Mars in July 1791 and the legal exclusion of women from organized political activity in October 1793.

During these two years, women publicists, petitioners, demonstrators, and insurrectionaries claimed rights of militant citizenship and enacted them. When it suited their purposes, male revolutionary leaders enlisted or co-opted women for demonstrations of popular power. At the same time, they struggled to rein in behavior that threatened to blur definitions of appropriate gender roles. They invoked a political lexicon—nature, virtue, civic virtue—derived largely from Rousseauian and classical philosophy and gendered to define public and political roles for male citizens and exclusively domestic roles for women. As we noted at the outset, a body of recent scholarship interprets revolutionary political opportunities and outcomes for women as largely predetermined by this gendered political discourse and by the male-dominated hegemonies it supported and reflected. Our documentation of women's involvement in ceremonial, institutional, and insurrectionary politics suggests the need for a more complexly nuanced reading than these cultural determinisms encourage. Our interpretation of women's practice of militant citizenship cautions against reading back into the ever-shifting ideological constellations and power struggles in which women were caught up between 1789 and 1793 a repressive linguistic-political-military hegemony that the Jacobins established only in the fall of 1793, and even then, only incompletely.

The period between the autumn of 1791 and the overthrow of the monarchy on August 10, 1792, saw the radicalization of politics in Paris, that is, the accelerated mobilization of the "passive citizenry" in the sections and faubourgs and the intensification of constitutional crises pitting the king against the legislature and both against the organized masses. Radicalization accelerated a temporary but critically important empowerment of women and that power in turn contributed to the paralysis of repressive armed force and the triumph of republicanism.20

On July 17, 1791, less than a month after the king's aborted attempt to flee France, National Guardsmen under the command of Lafayette fired on a crowd of thousands of men and women with their families, principally "passive" citizens who had gathered on the Champ de Mars in Paris to sign a petition asking for a national referendum on the future of the monarchy. The massacre of some fifty petitioners led not only to a general repression of pro-republican individuals and organizations but also to calls on the left for revenge and eventually to a reconstruction of the broken alliance between the people and the armed forces, particularly the National Guard.

Radical journalists reacted to the massacre with expressions of horror and sympathy for the victims that were calculated to provoke a powerful political response. Jean-Paul Marat, in his Ami du peuple, described the events on the Champ de Mars as a slaughter of innocents, a massacre of helpless victims, "poor old men, pregnant women, with infants at their breast."21 "The blood of old men, women, children, massacred around the altar of the patrie, is still warm, it cries out for vengeance."22 This radical rhetoric became part of a political campaign developed by members of the Jacobin Club and other radicals to reunify a fragmented National Guard, rally the populace behind the Guard and other segments of the armed forces, and thereby reconsolidate the shattered alliance between the military and the people.

The campaign began toward the end of 1791 with plans to rehabilitate forty soldiers from the Swiss regiment of Châteauvieux who had been condemned to the galleys off Brest as punishment for a rebellion against their commanding officer and then amnestied by the Legislative Assembly in December. In the spring of 1792, these soldiers were honored as revolutionary heroes in armed processions and fêtes organized to celebrate their release. Women played principal roles in these dramatic demonstrations of liberty, unity, and strength.

On April 9, 1792, women, children, and men from the sections and faubourgs of Paris—a "passive" citizenry—accompanied by battalions of National Guardsmen, participated in an armed march through the national legislature to escort and honor the forty soldiers from the Châteauvieux regiment. These marchers, bearing arms and displaying a liberty cap on a pike and other revolutionary emblems and symbols, were arranged to give the appearance of a united family, which was at the same time a reunited militant citizenry, ready and able to resist oppression. The effect of the whole was to replace the publicists' calculated, provocative characterization of the people as victum with a moving picture of the people as the nation in arms. This demonstration suspended and, momentarily at least, superseded all other business. As they took over the Assembly, filling it with their shouts, their drumbeat to martial rhythms, their symbols, their weapon, and the strength of their numbers, the marchers practiced popular sovereignty as a direct unmediated intervention in the legislative process.23 Their acts forged links between popular sovereignty and militant citizenship which accelerated the consolidation of a section-based, democratically controlled armed force—a critically important phase of revolutionary radicalization.

On the fifteenth, in a Festival of Liberty organized by commissioners from the Jacobin Club and paid for by the Paris municipal government, the sections celebrated the liberation of the Châteauvieux soldiers. Observers noted that the breach between the National Guard and the people, which had been opened in July 1791 when the Guard fired on the Champ de Mars petitioners, was closed by the formation of the 1792 march, in which citizens and citoyennes were interspersed among the Guardsmen. "... the field of the massacre has become the field of fraternity and the scaffold of patriots has been renamed the altar of the patrie."24 The helpless victims depicted by Marat nine months earlier were avenged here by a mighty populace embodying the nation, with the National Guard as its army.

Citoyennes were central to the organizers' work of reclaiming the National Guard for the people; observers noted their placement in the line of march and their prominent roles in symbolic representations of liberty.25 A published plan described the first group of marchers as "citizens and citoyennes marching eight in a row; in their midst the Declaration of the Rights of Man will be carried."26
In these two ceremonies, women bearing arms as they marched with the national armed forces, but also carrying their children (April 9), or unarmed, dressed in white, and marching arm-in-arm with national guardsmen and Châteauvieux soldiers (April 15) created a picture of the sovereign people as a national family whose rights and liberty were linked inextricably to its armed force and whose strength was further augmented by the ceremonial transformations of rebel soldiers into victims of tyranny, champions of liberty, the people's kin, their protectors and defenders, their comrades in arms.

Clearly, revolutionary leaders responsible for the events deliberately programmed or included women in roles as pike-bearing citoyennes, patriot mothers, daughters, and wives. However, in so doing, and with or without full awareness of the subversive implications, they transposed the family into the political arena and imparted new symbolic and political significance and legitimacy to women as political actors, family members in arms, emblems of civic virtue, national unity, and sovereign power. Women armed with pikes, carrying “tricolor flags and other emblems of liberty,” and marching through the Legislative Assembly, or parading arm in arm with the national armed forces, obliterated the gendered divide between the private virtue of women and the civic virtue of men. At least in ceremony, these women and men empowered a “powerless” and “passive” citizenry, publicly dramatized their militant citizenship—their sovereignty. These acts were symbolically charged. No matter how the organizers might struggle to control and direct them, they retained their subversive potential to blur or invert gender roles and beyond that, to link women’s political identities as militant citizens to the life and fate of the sovereign nation.

Not all women who participated in these ceremonies were content to limit themselves to enacting roles officially prescribed for them as militant citoyennes. On March 6, 1792, Pauline Léon, an outspoken revolutionary activi-
st, led a delegation of women to the Legislative Assembly and presented a petition with more than three hundred signatures demanding women’s right to bear arms. Léon claimed for women the universal natural rights to self-protection and resistance to oppression guaranteed in the Declaration of Rights of 1789. “We want only to defend ourselves as you do,” she told the legislators. “You cannot refuse, and society cannot deny, the right nature gives us, unless you pretend that the Declaration of Rights does not apply to women and that they should let their throats be cut, without the right to defend themselves.” Léon also claimed for women the political and moral attributes of revolutionary citizenship, including civic virtue, and she based that claim partly on the evidence of recent revolutionary history. She represented the women’s march to Versailles and their return with a king in tow as an event that fixed women’s political identity, not least of all in the minds of the enemy. “For can you believe the tyrants would spare us? No! No!—they remember October fifth and sixth”—all the more reason to provide women with the means of self-defense. “We are citoyennes,” Léon proclaimed; women’s citizenship, their capacity for practicing civic virtue, now made it impossible for them to remain “indifferent to the fate of the patrie.”

On behalf of the petitioners, Léon asked permission for women to arm themselves with pikes, pistols, sabres, and rifles; to assemble periodically on the Champ de la Fédération, or in other places; and to drill under the command of the former French Guards.27

The response of the Legislative Assembly was ambiguous. The president invited the delegation to attend the session. One deputy voiced his concern that if the petition were honored, “the order of nature would be inverted.” The delicate hands of women “were not made for manipulating iron or brandishing homicidal pikes.” As serious motions crossed with parody—the petition should be sent to the Military Committee, not to the Committee of Liquidation—the Assembly decreed a printing of the petition and honorable mention in its procès-verbal and promptly passed to the order of the day.28

One conservative journalist, Montjoie, was uneasy about the inconclusive-ness of the Assembly’s action and the precedents it might establish: “Perhaps in interpreting this decree, women will arm themselves nonetheless”; to avoid a dangerous confusion, he observed, the Assembly ought to have declared that there was no cause to deliberate on the matter in the first place.29

Pauline Léon’s address is a remarkably bold attempt to capture the discourse on militant citizenship and redefine and expand its parameters to include the military and political rights and responsibilities of women. Immediately, that discourse was challenged with a counter-definition of feminine nature in terms of women’s fateful difference, an innate weakness and incapacity that made it unnecessary, and more, impossible, for revolutionary leaders to recognize their claims to universal rights of self-defense and a share of civic responsibility. The delicate hands of women “were not made for manipulating iron or brandishing homicidal pikes.” The remark would seem to reflect a vision of a political culture structured by clear gender divides and narrowly defined roles for women. How-
ever, what is most telling is the Assembly’s indecisiveness at this juncture, and more generally, the unwillingness of leaders either to sanction officially or deny categorically the claims of women to the right to bear arms, a right of militant citizenship. In the interstice that opened up in the midst of confusion and public debate over how to encourage the political, indeed, military mobilization of women without provoking their emergence as autonomous political actors, women persisted in discourses and deeds of militancy that proved progressively more unsettling and threatening to male revolutionaries.

Women’s repeated demands for the right to bear arms through the spring and summer of 1792 strongly suggest that at a critical juncture in the revolution, as the nation mobilized for war, an emerging concept and practice of female citizenship was dissolving distinctions between active/passive citizens, male/female citizens, and public/private roles—without however, provoking the legal and constitutional revisions that would fix and guarantee their real, if precarious, de facto political standing. Arguments for women’s natural and constitutional rights of self-defense buttressed the claim that political-moral imperatives, their civic virtue, an aspect of their identity, impelled them to protect and defend the patrie. In at least one image dating from this period, an anonymous engraving (see Figure 5.2), the artist inscribes the emblem and acts...
of Liberty onto the costume of his female subject; imprints her weapon with the watchword of a militant, virtuous citizenry; “Liberté ou La Mort”; and by means of the title “Francoises devenues Libres” links female militancy to women’s revolutionary emancipation. In the light of these radical formulations, the women, armed and unarmed, who marched on April 9 and 15, not only symbolized a united national family in arms; they also dramatized principles of women’s militant citizenship. This massive mobilization of a “passive” citizenry, strengthened by myths of a united and mighty national family, inverted Marat’s images of families martyred on the Champ de Mars and contributed to consolidating the popular force that brought down the monarchy.

Women enacted principles of militant citizenship once again on June 20, 1792, two months after the declaration of war against Austria and during a constitutional crisis, which erupted when the king dismissed his Girondin ministry and vetoed decrees that radical deputies considered vital for the safety of the nation.

During the journée of June 20, impressive numbers of armed women marched in a procession involving tens of thousands of people, most of them from the working class faubourgs of Saint-Antoine and Saint-Marcel (see Figure 5.3). This armed force passed through the halls of the Legislative Assembly, into the Tuileries Gardens, and then through the king’s residence in the Tuileries palace, symbolically reclaiming and resecuring these spaces for the work of executing what their spokesmen were calling the general will of the sovereign people.

In earlier work, we closely documented women’s involvement in the insurrectionary dramanurgy of this journée. Here, we limit ourselves to brief comments on the failure of authorities to repress a frontal challenge to executive and legislative powers, which presaged and prepared the collapse of the constitutional monarchy and the proclamation of a republic. Our documentation suggests that the massive involvement of women in some measure was responsible for the paralysis on the twentieth of authorities of all sympathies who had been charged with controlling or preventing insurrections. Their hesitation, and in the end, their failure to fire on crowds filled with armed women and children, especially after events on the Champ de Mars in July 1791 and the campaign by radicals to represent those events as a massacre of innocent families, fueled the myth that the sovereign people was irrespressible and gave further impetus to radicalization. During a summer of intense political power struggles, the insurrectionary involvement of women in arms made a historically significant difference for the outcome of events.

Furthermore, the enlistment of women by revolutionary leaders, coinciding with women’s escalating claims to the rights of militant, democratic citizenship, especially the right to bear arms, tended at least at that juncture, to blur and even subvert classical and Rousseauian models of appropriate gender roles and to superimpose a language of women’s rights and responsibilities upon the langage mâle de la vertu, enlarging fields of political discourse and multiplying available repertoires of political-military action.

Eventually, a victorious republican leadership encoded legal and constitu-
The militant citizenship we have traced through women's acts and words in revolutionary Paris between 1789 and 1792 was institutionalized most fully and practiced in its most radical form in the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, a political club exclusively for women. The society was founded by Pauline Léon and Claire Lacombe in May 1793, at a time when the nation was wracked by internal war, international war, economic dislocation and crisis, and intense factional division between Jacobin and Girondin deputies and other rival political groups. No complete memberships lists survive, but several members of the society whom we have been able to identify were socially marginal, actresses and workers in the luxury trades, for example, rather than market women.

On May 12, two days after registering with the Municipality of Paris, several members of the new society appeared at the Jacobin Club where they stated that their principal intention was to form an armed body of women to combat “internal enemies.” “We have resolved to guard the interior while our brothers guard the frontiers.” The women embedded in this language a determination to expand the scope of their activities beyond the domestic sphere of their homes to embrace “the interior” of the nation, its welfare and its safety.

Principles of militant citizenship were encoded in the society's printed regulations of July 9, 1793. The preface stated that the recognition of “one’s social duties” was the necessary condition for “fulfilling one’s domestic duties adequately”; and that the society had been formed to provide citoyennes with every opportunity to master and practice their civic responsibilities. Article I reads: “The Society’s purpose is to be armed to rush to the defense of the patrie: citoyennes are free nonetheless to arm themselves or not.” And Article XV stipulated that all “newly received citoyennes” swear an oath to defend the patrie: “I swear to live for the Republic or die for it.” The society’s regulations emphatically formulated the members' rights and responsibilities as citizens of a republic. Women's right to bear arms and their civic responsibility “to live for the Republic or to die for it” were inseparably linked in this understanding of militant citizenship and placed at the center of women’s political self-definition. This reconstitution of political identities carried the Revolutionary Republican Women far beyond certain earlier revolutionary behaviors (for example, marching and petitioning—acts that, although transformed by revolutionary circumstances and ideology, nonetheless may have been more readily tolerated by revolutionary leaders because they replayed roles deeply rooted in the popular culture of the ancien régime). By the summer of 1793, the Revolutionary Republican Women were laying full claim to wartime rights and responsibilities of citizenship; in fact, they proclaimed that the performance of a patriotic duty was a precondition for fulfilling one’s domestic duty as wife and mother.

In the aftermath of the insurrection of May 31 to June 2, 1793, (the ouster of Girondin moderates from the National Convention, which the républicaines révolutionnaires had done so much to engineer), Jacobin leaders as well as sans-culotte section officials lauded the members of the society—for the proofs they had given of “the purest civic mindedness”; for their propagation of good principles,” which had contributed to “the holy insurrection of the thirty-first of May and the second of June”; for their powers of patriotic persuasion and their effectiveness as keepers of law and order and agents of an unremitting surveillance. At this point, it was not the Jacobins, but Girondin leaders, the deputy and journalist A.-J. Gersans, for example, who experienced the armed militancy of the society as an overwhelming threat: “Some women meet, undoubtedly excited by the furies; they are armed with pistols and daggers; they make public declarations and rush to all the public places of the city, bearing before them the
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standard of license. . . These drunken bacchanalians . . . what do they want? What do they demand? They want to 'put an end to it'; they want to purge the Convention, to make heads roll, and to get themselves drunk with blood.36

By the end of the summer, another tone and a real ambivalence toward militant women permeated Jacobin speech. At the Festival of Reunion on August 10, marking the first anniversary of the downfall of the monarchy, Jacobin organizers acknowledged, celebrated, but also conspicuously reworked and defused the revolutionary antecedents of women's militant citizenship under the republic. In this fête, imagery, dramaticurgy, and discourse functioned to integrate militant women into the united ranks of the sovereign. At the same time, the organizers subsumed, if they did not quite bury, women's militant acts under a rigid conceptualization of appropriate gender roles in a republic.

At the second of five stages in the procession, Hérelaut de Séchelles, President of the National Convention, addressed a group of women selected to represent the "heroines of the fifth and sixth of October 1789." As programmed by Jacques-Louis David, the architect of this fête, these "heroines" were seated on their cannons, under a commemorative triumphal arch, which bore the inscription "they chased the tyrant before them, like a vile prey." The orator began by mythologizing an historical event, the march to Versailles and the women's return with a captive king. "Quel spectacle! La faiblesse du sexe et l'héroïsme du courage." He attributed to the miraculous interventions of an abstract "Liberty" the deeds of seven thousand women backed by thousands of National Guardsmen and armed civilians. Liberty had ignited "in the heart of several women this courage which caused the satellites of tyrants to flee or fall before them." Making use of the "delicate hands" of women, Liberty had caused the cannons to roll—these "mouths of fire" whose "thunder" forced the king to capitulate to the people. Only after this rhetorical reconstruction, complete with a dea ex machina, "Liberty," were the "heroines of October" authorized to "reunited themselves with the sovereign"—but not before having been instructed by Hérelaut to play their true part in an ongoing revolutionary drama, the people's conquest of tyrants. They should confine themselves to giving birth to "a people of heroes" and nourishing them with breast milk to develop their martial virtue.37

In the late summer and fall of 1793, in alliance with the enrages, a group of radical democrats, the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women began calling for systematic terror against aristocrats, maximum prices for subsistence commodities, and taxation—what Albert Soboul called a "popular program of public safety."38 The républicaines révolutionnaires moved among political institutions at all levels—popular societies, section assemblies, the Cordeliers Club, the Jacobin Club, the city government, the National Convention—practicing a politics of confrontation, intimidation, and abuse, which Jacobin leaders experienced as an intolerable political, social, psychological, and physical threat to the new revolutionary republican order.

The final defeat of the society was provoked in September and October by clashes between Society women and hostile market women over women's obligation to war the tricolor cockade and the liberty cap—emblems of republican citizenship. On 8 Brumaire, the market women brought the dispute before the National Convention. They were concerned, for one thing, about the society's policing of markets to enforce price ceilings on foodstuffs; the surveillance was destroying their trade. But they had a more basic concern. They demanded a decree abolishing the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women. Their spokeswoman, referring directly to a point made in their petition, stated that a woman had caused the misfortunes of France and had just atoned for her heinous crimes. The market women's thinly veiled reference to Marie-Antoinette linked a treasonous queen to a treacherously radical women's political club and hinted at the appropriateness of an identical fate for both. The deputies, after further discussion, decided to postpone a vote on the future of the society until after they had heard the report of an investigation conducted by the Committee of General Security. The market women, however, would brook no delay. Their spokeswoman returned to the bar to demand once again the abolition of all "sociétés particulières de femmes."39

The Jacobins, now firmly in control of the National Convention, seized the opportunity created by this clash between market women, concerned for the stability of their trade, and the Revolutionary Republican Women, determined to escalate surveillance and enforce the terror. Taking up the attack on the society, the Jacobin deputy Fabre d'Eglantine focused attention on links between society members' early demands for the right to wear cockades, their recent demands for the right to wear the liberty cap, and their predictable escalation of demands to display emblems of citizenship into calls for laws authorizing them to wear military accoutrements: "... soon they will demand belts, complete with pistols . . .; soon you would see armed women marching in military formation to get bread "the way one marches to the trenches." Fabre found this image so intolerably explosive that he had to defuse it with the unintentionally revealing observation that men probably were behind women's demands for arms; men would use the arms in which women decked themselves out; women did not even know how to fire them! Fabre proceeded to instate models of public and private spheres and rigidly defined gender roles directly at the center of the Jacobin vision of the revolutionary order—a vision that finally had become perfectly clear. Fabre characterized members of women's societies as "species of adventurous women, errant cavaliers, emancipated girls, female grenadiers." He distinguished them from mothers of families, young girls at home, sisters caring for younger siblings. He relegated militant citoyennes—precisely the républicaines révolutionnaires whose acts the Jacobins had just recently validated and exploited—to the rank of aberrant political, moral, and sexual beings.40

The following day, 9 Brumaire, André Amar, speaking for the Committee of General Security of the Convention, reported on his committee's investigation of the market brawls. He also raised two more general questions: "(1) Can women exercise political rights and take an active part in the affairs of government? (2) Can they deliberate together in political associations or popular societies?" Amar's answers were negative in both cases.

Women lacked the requisite moral qualities and physical strength to partici-
pite in politics—that is, to govern, debate, legislate in the public interest, and resist oppression. Nor could there be any question of women's meeting in political associations, like clubs, the purpose of which was to unveil enemy maneuvers, to exercise surveillance over authorities, to provide examples of republican virtue, and to enlighten through "in-depth discussion." Women were "destined by their very nature," in all its expressions—biological, psychological, intellectual, moral—to engage in "private functions" (like caring for their households, supervising their children's education, counseling their husbands). "Each sex," Amar explained, "is called to the kind of occupation which is fitting for it; its action is circumscribed within this circle which it cannot break through because nature, which has imposed these limits on mankind, commands imperiously and receives no law." In a detailed comparison of the two sexes, Amar depicted the strength, energy, audacity, robust constitution, and courage of man, and above all, his aptitude for "profound and serious thinking which calls for great intellectual effort and long studies." In contrast, he brought into relief "women's softness and moderation." And he exposed their overall fragility, "Women are disposed by their constitution to an over-excitation which would be deadly in public affairs"; women "are ill-suited for elevated thoughts and serious meditations."

On the basis of Amar's report, the Convention decreed the prohibition of clubs and popular societies of women. This prohibition was followed on 27 Brumaire by legislation prohibiting deputations of women to the Paris Commune.41

The Jacobin repression of 9 Brumaire is an extreme political response to the militant citizenship that women had been practicing since 1789. The Jacobins rationalized this repression with a full-blown gendered interpretation of nature and its laws that read women out of the polity: women's "nature" and revolutionary citizenship were defined as mutually exclusive. Strength, reason, endurance, and an aptitude for civic virtue—the qualities of man's nature, prepared him for citizenship. Timidity, modesty, weakness, susceptibility to over-excitation, ineptitude for elevated thoughts and serious meditations, determined women's natural incapacity for political life.

The repression of October 1793 is overdetermined. Here we expose three strands of thinking that fed into it. First, the Jacobins, compelled to rein in a popular, grass-roots regulationist économie politique as they struggled to mediate among conflicting economic interests in a period of an international war, had come to perceive the républicaines révolutionnaires as absolutely ungovernable—Fabre's "adventurous women, errant cavaliers, emancipated girls, female grenadiers"—ungovernable perhaps in part because their organized and relentless practice of a politics of subsistence and surveillance, unlike the politics of sans-culotte men, could not be regulated through the usual mechanisms of political coercion, co-optations, and controls. Women were not part of the political system—they did not hold office, they did not vote, they did not sit in assemblies or on committees. Second, the Jacobin leadership perceived the society's institutionalized practice of militant citizenship as threatening to the stability of the family, and above all, to the formative roles within the family of mothers—producers and reproducers of values and virtues capable of softening and moderating the necessarily hard, cold, and inflexible civic virtue of male citizens.42 Third, women exercising politico-military powers and grounding their claims to these powers in declarations of natural rights were women who, in point of fact, had broken through both classical and Rousseauian definitions of femininity as weakness, lack, and incapacity. In the most fundamental sense, the threat the républicaines révolutionnaires posed to the Jacobins may have been a threat of castration or impotence—hence the fixation of Fabre d'Eglantine on women with pistols and hence the obsession of the Jacobin deputy Chaumette with getting male and female physiology absolutely straight once and for all. Chaumette's sorting out of anatomies and political destinies in the body politic took place at a meeting of the Paris Commune on 27 Brumaire Year II at which a deputation of women wearing red caps of liberty—presumably the prohibited républicaines révolutionnaires—made an appearance. "It is horrible, it is contrary to all the laws of nature for a woman to want to make herself a man... Well! Since when is it permitted to give up one's sex?... Is it to men that nature confided domestic cares? Has she given us breasts to breast-feed our children?" [A crying question remained unasked by the speaker: Has nature given women penises?] "No," Chaumette exclaimed, "she has said to man: Be a man: hunting, farming, political concerns... that is your appanage. She has said to woman: Be a woman. The tender cares owing to infancy... the sweet anxieties of maternity, these are your labors..." 43

Most interpretations of women's citizenship in revolutionary Paris have centered on the historical significance of the repression of the fall of 1793. As the Jacobins wrested political power from their antagonists and tightened their control over revolutionary discourse, they also consolidated a republican regime based upon deeply gendered definitions of revolutionary principles like civic virtue, liberty, equality, and citizenship. These definitions were perpetuated in the patriarchal institutions, laws, and language of later regimes.

However, we also see that in a relatively fluid and malleable situation between 1789 and 1793, even where gendered definitions of citizenship were encoded in constitutional law and in cultural representations, women nonetheless practiced militant citizenship as they integrated themselves into the political nation, participated in grass-roots democratic institutions, marched armed in ceremonies as members of a united military force, a national family in arms, led or participated in revolutionary journées, and in the case of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, policed markets, mobilized support among radicals within section organizations, and exercised surveillance over the National Convention. Through all these activities, they identified themselves as members of the sovereign body politic—citoyennes notwithstanding their exclusion from codified political rights of citizenship. In strident discourse, spokeswomen like Pauline Léon self-consciously linked women's practices of militant citizenship to principles. As they demanded the right to bear arms, they invoked universal laws of human nature (like the capacity for rational
thought) and universal rights of nature codified in the Declaration of the Rights of Man (the right of self-preservation and self-defense, the right to resist oppression). They also insisted on women's innate capacity for acting on moral/political imperatives—for practicing civic virtue—and, in short, for assuming precisely the full responsibilities and the rights of citizenship that the Jacobins were recasting as "universal" political prerogatives—of male citizens exclusively. During this period, gender roles became one focus of political power struggles, including struggles for control of the revolutionary vocabulary, with its definitions of virtue, vice, and the parameters of citizenship. As part of that struggle, women repeatedly challenged, resisted, or subverted cultural constructs that dictated rigidly defined gender roles and limits (including those based on a presumption of women's innate or socially determined incapacity for assuming political identities). In discourse and act, they forced real, if short-lived and incomplete, transformations and expansions of the meaning and practice of citizenship and sovereignty.

Notes


4. For one analysis in this vein, see Joan Landes, Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution (Ithaca, 1988), esp. chap. 5.


6. Rémispression de l'Ancien Monteur 2, no. 70 (October 10, 1789):25.
7. Révolutions de Paris 1, no. 13 (October 3-10, 1789):9.
9. Simon-Prosper Hardy, "Mes Lettres," October 5, 1789, in Bibliothèque nationale, MSS fr., no. 6687, fol. 502. Unquestionably, the idea of returning the king to Paris was in the air. Only a fortnight before the march to Versailles, an individual who had made that very suggestion had been indicted for treason. See J. M. Thompson, The French Revolution (New York, 1956), 101.
10. This discussion of the October days is drawn from our unpublished paper, "Gender and the Politicization of Space in Revolutionary Paris: Beyond the Public/Private Dichotomy," Seventh Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, Wellesley College, June 1987. Testimony by the king's bodyguards concerning confrontations with armed women marchers in front of the chateau at Versailles can be found in Archives Nationales, C.222, 160°3. For instances of testimony on demands for an interview with the king, see letter of M. d'Albignac, lieutenant of the king's bodyguard, January 10, 1790, ibid.; De Maladen, Par Qui, comment, et pourquoi les gardes du corps ont été assassinés à Versailles le 5 octobre 1789 (n.p., n.d.), ibid. Re the women's demands for written commitments from the king concerning his promises of bread supplies for Paris, see report of M. de Huiller, Lodge Marshall, Scottish Company, n.d., ibid.; letter from the Colonel de l'Artigue, March 7, 1780, ibid.
11. For descriptions of the procession from Versailles to Paris on October 6, see, for example, testimony of Noël-Joseph Madier de Montjau, in "Extraits de la Procédure criminelle," in Réimpression de l'Ancien Monteur, no. 170:556-69; Chronique de Paris no. 45 (October 7, 1789):178, Révolutions de Paris, no. 13 (October 3-10, 1789), p. 22. For the quote, "Courage my friends, we won't lack bread any longer. . . ," see Réimpression de l'Ancien Monteur 2, no. 72 (October 12, 1789):44.
12. This interpretation owes much to Steven Kaplan's pioneering study, "The Famine Plot Persuasion in Eighteenth Century France," Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 72, part 3 (Philadelphia, 1982). Kaplan, however, does not argue, as we do here, that the crowd's designation of the king as a baker is indicative in itself of a shattering of popular trust in his ability to function as royal father-provider. See ibid., 65-67.
15. Révolutions de Versailles et de Paris, Dédiées aux dames françaises, no. 1 "du samedi: 3 octobre au 7" (Paris, 1789), 1.
18. Etrennes nationales des Dames, no. 1 (November 3, 1789), 1.
20. For our detailed analysis of women's participation in ceremonial and insurrectionary politics during the period between July 1791 and August 1792, see Darline G. Levy, Harriet B. Applewhite, "Women, Radicalization and the Fall of the French Monarchy," in Applewhite and Levy, eds., Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution (Ann Arbor, 1990). See also Levy and Applewhite, "Women and Politics in Revolutionary Paris," Becoming Visible, 293–98. We wish to thank the University of Michigan Press and Houghton Mifflin Company for permission to cite and paraphrase material from these chapters.


23. For a complete description of the armed march of April 9, see Levy and Applewhite, "Women, Radicalization and the Fall of the French Monarchy," in Applewhite and Levy, Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution. See also Archives parlementaires, First Series, vol. 41, April 9, 1792, 387–91.


25. See for example, Mme. Julienne, Journal d'une bourgeoise pendant la Révolution, 65.

26. Courier français, no. 97, April 6, 1792.


28. Ibid.

29. Montjoie, Ami du Roi, no. 58, Thursday, March 8, 1792, 270, reporting on a session of the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday evening, March 6, 1792.

30. Levy and Applewhite, "Women, Radicalization, and the Fall of the French Monarchy."

31. For the position of the mayor of Paris, who was sympathetic to the marchers and their leaders, see Jérôme Pétion, "Conduite tenue par M. le maire de Paris à l'occasion des événements du 20 juin," in Revue retrospective, 2me série, i, 221–34. For discussion by hostile officials in the Department of Paris, see Extrait des registres des délibérations du Conseil du Département de Paris, 6 juillet 1792 (Paris, 1792).


34. For further discussion, see Marie Ceralet, Le Club des citoyennes républicaines révolutionnaires (Paris, 1966), chap. VII.


"Equality" and "Difference" in Historical Perspective: A Comparative Examination of the Feminisms of French Revolutionaries and Utopian Socialists

CLAIRED GOLDBERG MOSES

It has become common practice among today's feminists to speak of two opposing tendencies within the movement. One tendency—that of a so-called equality group—emphasizes the similarities between women and men, affirms androgy, and argues that an equal rights, gender blind strategy is the sensible way to achieve women's freedom and equality. A second tendency—that of a so-called difference group—emphasizes the differences between women and men, affirms the female, and argues that sex-differentiated policies may be necessary to achieve gender justice. Although most feminists have aligned themselves clearly with one or the other of the two tendencies, some others are now suggesting that we must accept contradiction and argue from one or the other position as circumstances warrant. Few, however, recognize that the positioning of these two tendencies in opposition, one to the other, is a construct that we might—and, I urge, that we should—challenge.

This essay is intended to shed light on the two tendencies in feminist thought and open up the possibility of an alternative understanding of their seeming opposition. I begin by briefly chronicling the construction of this opposition in contemporary feminist theory and politics, for it is within our movement that the questions we ponder have been constructed. I then examine the two tendencies in early French feminism—the "equality" tendency among feminists of the 1789 Revolution and the "difference" tendency among utopian socialist feminists of the next generation. By looking at these two moments in the history of the development of feminist thought we can explore the tendencies in the context of their initial articulation and reflect on the circum-

I would like to thank the General Research Board, Office of Graduate Studies and Research, of the University of Maryland and the National Endowment for the Humanities Travel to Collections Fund for their support for the research for this paper.

Several people read and commented on an earlier version of this article. I would like especially to thank Gay Gullickson, Joan Scott, and the anonymous readers for their suggestions.
stances that explain the emergence of divergent discourses and on their significance and political consequences both for earlier feminists and for us. Finally, by comparing these two feminisms, this essay will make clear that the construction of “equality” and “difference” in opposition is mistaken.

**Equality versus Difference in “Second Wave” Feminism**

The ideas of theorists of the “equality” tendency, like Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet, and Elizabeth Janeway, dominated feminist debate in the early 1970s. Drawing for their inspiration from Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, they examined the social and historical construction of gender-distinct “roles” and upheld a universalistic, or androgynous, ideal in its stead. Historians writing at the same moment confirmed—or reflected—their stance. Following the lead of Barbara Welter, whose germinal article had identified a nineteenth-century “Cult of True Womanhood,” they came to link the failure of nineteenth-century feminists to challenge notions that women were innately different from men—for example, that they were more moral or more nurturing—to their failure to complete the revolution of women’s liberation.

The “difference” tendency emerged as a second stage in the recent history of feminism, beginning in the late-1970s, but especially in the 1980s. Theorists like Adrienne Rich, Mary Daly, Carol Gilligan, and Jean Bethke Elshtain affirmed gender differentiation and celebrated qualities considered traditionally feminine, particularly those associated with nurturance and mothering. The “difference” tendency also had its counterpart among historians. Nancy Cott and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, who examined the psychologically sustaining relationships developed among nineteenth-century middle-class women in their separate culture, reconceptualized the view of separate spheres and women’s culture, identifying it as a source of women’s power rather than an explanation for their powerlessness.

The emergence of the “difference” perspective made many feminists uneasy. Not only was the “equality” tendency the one with which we were most familiar, but the historical record that had been created seemed to “prove” the wisdom of this stance. The “difference” tendency was regarded as either a departure from the ideological tradition or a step backward; it puzzled us and called for explanation. *Feminist Studies* published a special symposium that examined the significance of the work of women’s culture historians like Smith-Rosenberg; *Signs* published an interdisciplinary forum examining the significance of Gilligan’s work.

But time and reflection did not resolve the disagreements within feminism. On the contrary, tensions have recently become more charged as feminists aligned with one or the other of the two tendencies have taken opposing sides on issues like pregnancy benefits, maternity leave, and custody and divorce law reforms; argued on different sides in the recent *EEOC v. Sears, Roebuck* case; and fashioned quite different justifications for affirmative action and comparable worth policies. Clearly, our scholarship has had political ramifications.

The tensions in the American movement may explain the discomfort that many Americans have experienced with recent feminist theory that comes to us from France. Because early translations into English of French feminist writings emphasized writings from the “difference” tendency, Americans quickly came to the conclusion that “difference” and “French feminism” were one and the same. But actually both tendencies exist in France, where theorists like Christine Delphy, Colette Guillaumin, and others associated with the periodical *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, the group that wrote for *La Revue d’en face* before its demise, and the group that is associated with APEF (Association pour les Etudes Féministes) have continued the tradition associated with de Beauvoir; the “difference” tendency is most evident in the writings of Annie Leclerc, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and the group Psychanalyse et politique (familiarly called “psych et po”). And in France, as in the United States, it is actually the “equality” group that is the more visible and the one whose ideas are most likely to underpin struggles in the political arena (e.g., abortion rights, anti-rape, and anti-battering struggles and government initiatives for equal pay and affirmative action). Also in France—sadly, much more so than in the United States—the tensions between the groups (and especially between the “equality” group and the theorists now or once associated with psych et po) is bitter, perhaps because it is fueled not only by ideological differences (which certainly play a role) but also by struggles for power.

Just as it is now clear that the two tendencies are not simply “American” and “French,” it is also now clear that both tendencies, not just the “equality” one, have a history. Already in 1964, Aileen Kradiot, in *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920*, examined the “two major types of suffragist arguments”—one that she labeled the justice argument, based on “the ways women were the same as men and therefore had the right to vote,” and a second, the expediency argument, based on “the ways [women] differed from men, and therefore had the duty to contribute their special skills and experience to government.” Karen Offen, in her recent article “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” seemed to concur with Kradiot in identifying “two distinct modes of argumentation or discourse”—which she terms “individualist” and “relational”—but she differed from Kradiot in suggesting that not only their modes of arguments but also their goals diverged. (“Instead of seeking unqualified admission to male-dominated society, [relational feminists] mounted a wide-ranging critique of the society and its institutions.”) But neither of these two studies are adequate to resolve our disagreements today. Kradiot’s focus was on suffrage only; she made no attempt to reflect on the many other issues feminists have addressed. And Offen, by identifying the “relational” tendency as “couple-centered”—one that endorses traditional family structures and accepts the sexual division of labor—offered little to challenge the view that “difference” is indeed opposed to “equality.”
An examination that compares and contrasts feminist discourse during the French Revolution to that of the next generation of feminists—utopian socialist feminists active in the 1830s and 1840s—opens up the possibility of deconstructing the "equality/difference" dichotomous pair. Feminists of the revolutionary era were Enlightenment rationalists. They argued that individuals of both sexes were born similar in capacity and character and ascribed male/female differences to socialization. Feminists of the next generation were utopian socialists. They argued that women and men were innately different, but they actually prized the feminine nature over the masculine. Revolutionary feminists grounded their arguments for sexual equality in their claims that women and men were alike. They thus equated identity and equality and opposed this particular definition of equality to inequality (equated with difference). Utopian socialists, however, challenged this equating of identity with equality and challenged the opposition of equality to difference. They, too, championed equality but argued that only through the association of differentiated sexes and classes would women (and workers, as well) be able to attain full equality. Although some aspects of their discourse were adopted by some quite timid feminists in a later period, utopian socialist feminists in the 1830s actually offered a far-reaching vision of liberation that is more akin to the feminism we today call radical. It is in this respect that the French historical record is different from the American. Although both tendencies can be identified in both historical traditions, the French historical experience includes a tradition of radical "difference" that challenged the separate spheres doctrine and the traditional family and permitted us to challenge the construction of equality and difference in opposition.

Revolutionary Feminism

Already during the years immediately preceding the storming of the Bastille, a number of pamphlets and brochures on the woman question were circulated throughout France.¹⁴ In 1787, Madame de Coicy published Les Femmes comme il convient de les voir, and Madame Gaçon-Dufour issued her Mémoire pour le sexe féminin contre le sexe masculin. In 1788, La Très Humble Remontrance des femmes françaises, La Requête des femmes à Messieurs composant l'Assemblée des Notables pour leur adhésion aux États-Généraux, and Olympe de Gouges's Lettre au peuple appeared. A document of January 1, 1789, addressed to the king—Pétition des femmes du Tiens État au roi—demanded improved educational opportunities for women. The Cahiers des doléances et réclamations des femmes, signed Madame B... B, went further, to demand political rights for those who had fiscal responsibilities: "Since [women] are required, like men, to pay royal taxes and commercial fees, we believe that it is only justice to collect their grievances, at the foot of the throne, and to collect their votes as well." The author demanded not only a better education ("do not raise us as if we were destined for the pleasures of the harem") but also that the Estates General recognize women's right to marry according to their individual desires.¹⁵

The cahiers de doléances, prepared in 1789 by the primary electoral assemblies to inform their representatives to the Estates General of their concerns, reveal the demand for improved female education was widespread. According to one study of the several hundred edited cahiers, thirty-three recommended schooling for girls.¹⁶ The third estate of Chatelleraut went so far as to argue for equality of the sexes.¹⁷

Women's active participation in the revolution furthered the emergence of a collective female consciousness. In early October 1789, a crowd of 4,000 women—mostly from the Paris market districts, but evidently others joined them along the way—marched off to Versailles to demand that the royal family, the court, and the National Assembly be moved to Paris and that the king assure a steady supply of bread to the city.¹⁸ Months later, the feminist newspaper, Extrêmes nationales des dames, calling for representation of women in the National Assembly, would remind readers that "last October 5, Parisian women proved that they were as brave and enterprising as men."¹⁹

The predominately male political clubs that proliferated throughout France after 1789 excluded women,²⁰ but women did take part in politics through the "mixed fraternal societies" created to inform and instruct "passive" citizens. In the provinces, clubs of entirely female membership became quite popular. For the most part, the women in these provincial clubs seemed to understand their role to be that of auxiliary supporters of the male makers of the revolution. But some women in the clubs demanded the right to fight with the armies, and according to Pauline-Marie Dubet about thirty women actually did so before this was expressly forbidden in 1793.²¹ The Société des Républicaines-Révolutionnaires, a Parisian women's club founded in the spring of 1793 by Pauline Léon and Claire Lacombe, was distinctly feminist, although it saw its role mostly as defending the revolution. On June 2, 1793, Le Moniteur reported that a deputation from this group demanded the right to deliberate with the Revolutionary Committee, and after the Constitution of 1793 granted universal male suffrage, they protested the exclusion of women.²²

These revolutionary years were too a time for organizing and activity than for reflective writing, analysis, and theorizing, but writings of three important feminist publicists, Condorcet (Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet), Olympe de Gouges, and Etta Palm d'Ailer, illustrate the "equality" tendency embedded in revolutionary discourse. Condorcet's "Essai sur l'admission des femmes au droit de cité," which appeared in 1790, called for "equality of rights" for both sexes. "Either no individual of the human race has genuine rights, or else all have the same." In this short document (about the length of a speech), he specifies the right to assist "in the making of laws," the "right of citizenship," and "the franchise" for women as well as men, and states also that the "tyranny of the civil law," which subjected wives to their husbands, "should be destroyed."²³
Condorcet based his argument on the claim that women have the same natural rights as men. These so-called natural rights, or “rights of man,” derive from our human capacity to reason and to acquire moral ideas. Women have “these same qualities,” but people have become so accustomed to women’s oppression that “nobody thinks to reclaim [their rights].” Sexual inequality, then, is the triumph of the “power of habit” over reason.24 To those who would deny that women have the same capacity to reason as men, Condorcet countered that educational disabilities and legal discrimination alone explain the seemingly different reasoning of women and men.

It is not nature, it is education . . . which is the cause of this difference . . . . Banished from affairs, from everything that is settled according to rigorous justice and positive laws, the matters with which they occupy themselves are precisely those which are ruled by natural amiability and feeling. It is hardly fair, therefore, to allege as a ground for continuing to deny women the enjoyment of their natural rights, reasons which only possess a certain amount of substance because women do not enjoy these rights.25

The differences are not natural, then; indeed, they are more apparent than real, for both sexes are using their reasoning capacities to secure happiness. Women may, perhaps, “aim at a different end,” but “it is not more unreasonable for a woman to take pains about her personal appearance than it was for Demosthenes to take pains with his voice and his gesticulation.”26

Olympe de Gouges constructed similar arguments to achieve similar goals. Her Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne was based on the Declaration of the Rights of Man, to which she demanded the inclusion of the word “woman.”

All women are born free and equal to men in rights . . . All female citizens, like all male citizens, must participate personally or through their representatives in the formulation [of laws]. . . . All female citizens and all male citizens, being equal in the law, must be equally eligible for all dignities, positions, and public offices, according to their abilities, and without any other distinction than that of their virtue and their talents.

Woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum.

Property belongs to both sexes . . . ; for each it is an inviolable and sacred right.27

Gouges was, of course, specifying just those gains that the revolution had conveyed to men: equal rights of citizenship, equal access to political offices and public employment, liberty to speak out publicly, equal property rights. In a postscript, she added to these demands the access to public education, which was at that moment being debated in the National Assembly, and legal equality between wife and husband (a “social contract between man and woman”).

Like Condorcet, Gouges based her arguments on natural rights theory. Equality was not something to be granted, like a gift; equality was “natural” and had only to be recognized (“Woman, wake up; . . . discover your rights”). And the law “must be the same for all” because natural rights are the same for all: “What is there in common between [women] and [men]? Everything.” Only “prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies” and perhaps also some “non equitur in contradiction to principles” have denied women their “inalienable” rights.28

The same claims were put forth by Etta Palm. She wrote that “justice . . . calls all individuals to the equality of rights, without discrimination of sex; the laws of a free people must be equal for all beings. . . . The powers of husband and wife must be equal. . . . Girls [must have] a moral education equal to that of their brothers; for education is for the soul what watering is for plants.”29 According to the reporter for the Archives parlementaires, when Palm addressed the Legislative Assembly in 1792, she asked “that women be admitted to civilian and military positions and that the education of young people of the feminine sex be set up on the same foundation as that of men.”30 And always she, too, based her claims on a “natural” equality: “Nature formed us to be your equals.” Equality is “a natural right of which [women] have been deprived by a protected oppression.”31

The language of these revolutionary feminists—two hundred years old now—sounds familiar to us, still, today. This is because it emphasizes values that we think of as traditionally American, reminding us that equality and freedom and faith and property rights and education and independence, for bureaucrats, diplomats, and merchants required those attributes in ways that those who exercised power in feudal times did not. Equal rights of “citizenship,” as defined in the new Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and equal access to newly promised national educational programs were important, then, to revolutionary feminists because the intense political debate of that historic moment had made these goals important to all the French.

That revolutionary feminists borrowed their goals from the dominant culture is evident. What is less evident is that the very stand upon which they based their claims—the “essential” or “natural” equality of all humans—was borrowed as well. Revolutionaries, not just revolutionary feminists, argued for equality on this basis. It was on this basis that the feudal “orders” were destroyed and that political outsider groups like peasants, Blacks, and Jews made their case for equality. Not surprisingly, feminists did so as well.

In doing so, they borrowed from a discourse of equality that had even included women. That such a discourse existed has now been shown in the works of Erna Hellerstein, Londa Schiebinger, and Thomas Laqueur—each of
whom has examined the medical literature on this question and made clear
that a view stressing the essential similarities of women's and men's bodies was
widespread still at this time.33 In fact, from the time of the ancient Greeks,
scientists had held the view that women's and men's bodies, skeletal frames,
and reproductive organs were essentially the same "under the skin."34 True,
most scientists in the eighteenth century probably had no trouble reconciling
their "knowledge" that the sexes were physiologically rather similar with the
view that women were inferior to men (even physiologically, since their re-
productive organs, although identical, were interior and therefore cooler).35 But
seventeenth- and eighteenth-century feminists—Erna Hellerstein identifies
Chevalier de Jaucourt, Claude Adrien Helvétius, and Antoine Leonard Tho-
mas, as well as Condorcet;36 Londa Schiebinger identifies Poullain de la
Barre37—cited "scientific" evidence to support their claims for women's rights.
Just as there was no basis in nature for inequalities among men, there was no
basis in nature for the inequality of man and woman. Thus, by appealing to the
professed beliefs of the dominant culture in "natural" equality and "natural"
rights, feminists made their case as had other political outsider groups and
hoped, not unreasonably, for the same successful outcome. Perhaps not sur-
prisingly, "science" will shift at about this time to a new view of the sexes—one
that Thomas Laqueur has labeled "the biology of incommensurability"—to
justify better the exclusion of women from citizenship.38 Interestingly, femi-
nists will also shift their view—although with a different end in mind.

Utopian Socialist Feminism

The next generation of feminists challenge the binary oppositions—sameness/difference, equality/inequality—and especially the equating of sameness with
equality, and difference with inequality, that was implicit in revolutionary ideolo-
gy. As we shall see, they too argued for the equality of the sexes—no less
fiercely than had revolutionary feminists. But they charted a sharply divergent
path from their revolutionary predecessors. Indeed, they inveighed against revolu-
tion, which they associated with violence and terror. They were romanti-
cies rather than Enlightenment rationalists. They challenged the universalizing
of human experience in revolutionary discourse—but not to limit, rather to
further, equality. The groups with which these feminists identified had in-
vented the word "socialist" for themselves as a way of emphasizing that their
concern was the "social"—that is, the way humans related to each other—
rather than the individual. Their focus shifted away from the individual rights
of citizenship, including political rights, to new ways of organizing enduring
social networks, intimacy, sexuality, and reproduction,39 as well as production.
Their social change strategy was to create a New World Order of alternative
communities intended not only to collectivize households and production but
also to provide a peaceful means for change in contrast to revolutionary
means. The New World would be constructed alongside the Old, and people—
merely by observing the far preferable utopian life—would be won over to join
with them and create more of these alternative communities.

The most visible and active of these feminists were Saint-Simonnians. Begin-
ing in the late 1820s, these Saint-Simonnians organized themselves into a
community somewhat on the model of a religious community. Prosper Enfan-
tin and Saint-Amand Bazard were the Fathers of the Church. Then, after a
schism, Enfantin alone bore the title of pope; an empty seat alongside him
signified the awaited Female Messiah who would rule one day as "poppesse." The
inner circle of Saint-Simonnians lived collectively in several maisons de
famille (at rue Taitbout and at rue Monsigny) and pooled their financial
resources. Their work was for the movement—lecturing and other propaganda
efforts and organizing among workers in their neighborhoods and at their
workplaces. Income needs were covered by contributions. Meals were collec-
tively prepared and served for an even larger group of adherents.

Among these Saint-Simonnians were significant numbers of women. In my
earlier examinations of the Saint-Simonnians I have identified many ways in
which the feminism developed by the male Saint-Simonnian leadership, espe-
cially Prosper Enfantin, differed from the feminism of a particularly interesting
group of women among these Saint-Simonnians—working-class women who, in
1832, created a separatist feminist movement and began to publish their own
newspapers and other pamphlets.39 But both the women and the men were in
full agreement in grounding their feminism in a view of women that stressed
their difference from men.

Throughout Saint-Simonnian writings one finds the recurrent image of the
male who represents "reflection" and the female who represents "sentiment."
Women and men were, by nature, different. Men were rational—the time of
their leadership in the Saint-Simonnian movement is likened to "the phase of
the doctors"; it is they, for example, who have "made theory."40 But men are
"somer like the solitude, . . . heavy and cold like the marble of a tomb, . . .
harsh like a cross."41 In contrast, "nature [emphasis in original] provided
[women] a soul that is tender, sensitive, exalted; . . ."42 Women have "emo-
tions that are gentle and poetic, a warm imagination, and fire in their hearts—
they announce the reign of peace and love,"43 the "phase of sentiment."44

Like revolutionary feminists before them, these feminists also were agree-
ing with and appealing to the widely held beliefs of the dominant culture,
although—again like revolutionary feminists before them—they came to con-
clusions that most found unwarranted. By the 1830s, the view that the sexes
were essentially or "naturally" similar had been fully superseded in science by
the view that stressed sexual difference. Erna Hellerstein has studied the
medical texts of Pierre Roussel and Antoine Camus; Thomas Laqueur has
discussed the work of F. A. Pouchet and Achille Chereau, as well as several
German researchers, on spontaneous ovulation; Londa Schiebinger has exam-
ined the drawings of the French anatomist Marie-Genevieve-Charlotte Thirous
d'Arconville and the German anatomist Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring.
All of these nineteenth-century scientists advanced the view that women were
different from men—not just inferior, “an incomplete man,” as had been taught since the time of Aristotle, but different in the sense of “a being apart,” organized around their reproductive systems, which were no longer viewed as identical to men.

It is interesting to remember here that the scientific view emphasizing difference had existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries alongside the contradictory view emphasizing the inherent similarity of the sexes. But that the “difference” view came to predominate only in the nineteenth century. Hellerstein, Laqueur, and Schiebinger conclude from this that science was not transformed simply by the force of its own “objective” research. The shift in knowledge happened in the context of a political need to construct a new justification for sexual hierarchy. It was as if “science” agreed with equal rights feminists that the logical conclusion to the view stressing the inherent similarity of women and men in nature was sexual equality; but rather than argue for equal rights, science opted instead for a new view of nature.

Hellerstein, Laqueur, and Schiebinger are convincing in locating in politics the explanation for a new construction of scientific meaning. The new view of woman served well to “prove” that women and men were governed by different natural laws and that women’s natural role was in childrearing and not in intellectual work or in the exercise of public rights. It was this view of women that was expressed in the 1793 order that women be excluded from political clubs because they would be required to sacrifice to them [the clubs] the more important cares to which Nature calls them. Private functions to which women are destined by Nature are necessary to the general order of society; social order results from the difference between men and women.

It was this view of women that was expressed in the Napoleonic Code’s treatment of women, for by recognizing the equal rights of all citizens, but excluding women from the definition of citizenship, the code enshrined not only the subordination of women to men but also the rigid differentiation of women from men. And it was this view of women—self-sacrificing, subordinating themselves to men’s interests—that was expressed in romantic literature.

But if the dominant discourse of sexual difference served to justify sexual inequality, what possible appeal could it have had for feminists? To answer this perplexing question requires a reexamination of that discourse in the context of a historically specific moment, for the feminist potential of the discourse of difference related to its particular meaning in the romantic era and to its explanatory power for an historically specific social reality.

The influence of Romanticism was especially important. Unlike rationalists, romantics valued difference above sameness, the particular and the unique above the uniform or the universal. That Romanticism may be conservative—especially, but not only, in its view of women—is widely understood. There is, after all, a reactionary strain within Romanticism that longed for the old feudal order, the old religious order, and, of course, the old sexual order. But Romanticism was also exploited for its emancipatory potential. For example, socialists of this period, borrowing from Romanticism its valorizing of difference, held that the French Revolution’s exposure of universal rights had actually masked a policy of entrenched inequality. It was necessary, they believed, to recognize the differences between classes. This, rather than some false sense of shared universal interest, would emancipate workers from employers. As one Saint-Simonian warned: beware “a unity that will merge (confondre) the worker and the master; we must recognize that both have their particular interest.” Understandably, it was feminists associated with these socialists who developed the new kind of sex analysis based on “difference.” The example of socialist class analysis held out the promise of a more effective challenge to inequality than the universalizing now associated with the dominating classes.

The Saint-Simonian archives include a record of a debate over “sameness” and “difference” that illustrates the feminist potential of the discourse of “difference.” The occasion was the creation of the ruling hierarchy for the new French Church. The Church was to be headed by a woman and a man—a “couple-pope.” Philippe-Joseph-Benjamin Buchez argued against the proposal, from the “sameness” position: “I know of no being who has deep feelings, [whose feelings are] not accompanied and served by the greatest rational strength. . . . Then, why have two individuals compete in order to obtain an integration of that which each possesses integrally?” His feminism—and his words do seem incontrovertibly feminist—is within the familiar Rationalist trichotomy: “Truly great revelations . . . are neither male nor female. . . . It matters little if [the pope] is . . . male or female. . . .” But when viewed in the specific circumstances of this particular debate, his argument takes on a meaning by no means so incontrovertibly feminist. Buchez was in fact arguing for one head of the Church—it is unnecessary that the sexes share in [the papacy]—to be chosen from among the current leadership, which at that moment (1829) was entirely male. It was Enfantin, therefore, who was actually arguing for women’s participation in the governance of the Saint-Simonian movement. He carried the day: The New World Order would be ruled by a couple-pope, who together incarnated the attributes of God—“HE” who “is not only good like a FATHER, but also SHE [who] is . . . tender like a MOTHER; for HE is and SHE is the FATHER and the MOTHER of all [men] and all [women].” Each of the institutional structures of the new Church would be directed by a female and male couple—the maisons de famille by a “sister” and a “brother” and the workers’ associations by a “directress” and a “director.”

Saint-Simonian women welcomed this politics and theology of “difference”:

[woman] is no longer drawn from a rib of man; she no longer is confounded with his glory; she descends, like him, directly from her God, father and mother of all [tous et toutes] . . . . In the future, she will find her own place; she will have her own life . . . ; she will no longer, like in the past, be merged into another’s existence.
They clearly thought of the theory of difference as a recuperation of the feminine and found it inspiring. "Woman, discovering her model and guide in her God [emphasis in original], can now develop active virtues; no longer will she be reduced to a passive role as was the ideal of Christian perfection."51

Moreover, Romanticism not only valorized difference, it valorized women. True, romantics valorized—even idealized—women only in certain settings and in certain roles. But with all its evident limitations, women—feminists included—responded positively to the ideal woman depicted in romantic literature. Likely they recognized in the romantic idealization of women a means to challenge eighteenth-century negative views of women. As Joan Landes has so skillfully described, revolutionary discourse was not simply patriarchal, it was also strongly misogynist. The aristocratic state was associated with women: Power, it was claimed, was exercised in private settings where women had undue influence and where "men were unmanned."54 Thus, the revolutionaries' aim to make power more "public," less "private" and therefore less elitist, took on, by force of the logic of their own misogynist discourse, the complementary aim of "empty[ing] out the feminine connotations (and ultimately, the women as well) of absolutist public life."55 Although revolutionary feminists protested the revolution's exclusion of women from public life, they did not seem to understand and certainly did not challenge the misogyny embedded in the new discourse of public rights. They, too, associated the aristocratic state with some illegitimate, manipulative "empire" of women. Condorcet, for example, was bowing to this misogyny in holding out the promise that "this empire would diminish if women had less interest in preserving it; if it ceased to be their sole means of defense and of escape from persecution."56

Saint-Simonians used the romantic idealization of women to allay the fear of women's power. After all, the power of women who are "loving," "conciliatory," and "inspiring"57 could be neither threatening nor illegitimate. In fact, the future direction of the new age could be entrusted only to those who were especially endowed with the particular quality of women—sentiment—for only sentiment and not reason could provide a strong and solid bond for a peaceful society. "In a religion that is about love, the most loving becomes the most capable."58 This is not, of course, what romantics intended. Their ideal woman was a disempowered, domesticated woman—literally confined to the domestic sphere. But Saint-Simonians empowered women and called for their full participation in public life. This runs like a leitmotif through their writings: women should recognize "the power that is in them,"59 "they should sense their force,"60 "We must understand our power"61 "we have a powerful act to accomplish."62

But the appeal of "difference" to utopian feminists was not only in its particular meaning in the Age of Romanticism; "difference" also had an explanatory power that was especially useful for addressing the issues that most concerned 1830s' feminists. Most important was their focus on sexuality.

Sexual liberation became central to Saint-Simonism in the early 1830s. According to Enfantin, the New World Order of sexual equality necessitated a new sexual morality. Building on the principle that woman's nature was defined by "love," Enfantin argued that the emancipation of women required the "rehabilitation of the flesh." He proposed that morality be regulated by a complicated system based on three different but equally valid codes: that of the "constants," that of the "mobiles," and that of the synthesizing love of the couple-priest who were charged with harmonizing all social relations by "rekindling the numbed feelings of the first and moderating the 'unruly appetites' of the second."63

These sexual issues were very controversial within the movement. Many found Enfantin's proposal immoral, but many others—women as well as men—chose to "put the words of the Father into practice."64 Saint-Simonian women who would proclaim their adherence to the new morality by engaging in nonmarital sexual relationships agreed to wear a flame-colored ribbon "as a sign of communion among us."65 Clarinde Rogé asked her husband for "all her liberty" in order to be able "to act without lies or remorse." She wrote: "I threw myself onto the new path of the female apostle . . . putting no barrier in the way of my heart or my acts. Never did any woman search with such zeal for the secret of liberty of women!"66 Claire Démarche criticized Enfantin's proposed system for regulating morals as too restrictive.67 Eugénie Soudet was of like mind: "There are no laws in the heart," she wrote.68 Joséphine Félicité and Isabelle also attacked the timidity of some Saint-Simonian men who had apparently called the sexual radicals immoral.69 And even Suzanne Voilquin, who never considered herself a sex radical, "divorced" her husband in a Saint-Simonian ceremony (divorce was not then legal in France) explaining that their marriage was false because love no longer existed between them.70

Saint-Simonians understood that a liberated sexuality required new structures of intimacy to replace the traditional family. Some, like Marie-Reine Guindorf, borrowed from Charles Fourier and argued that isolated households and indissoluble marriages enslaved both women and men. If the work of the home, including the socialization of children and housekeeping tasks, were collectivized, love alone would bind couples. Their union need last only so long as their attraction joined them. Sexual liberation would be possible.

Several other Saint-Simoniennes, like Claire Démarche and Pauline Roland, called for a new kind of family defined by the mother—"woman alone is the family"71—and especially an end to a definition of legitimacy based on paternal recognition: "Be gone, man! . . . and with you the principle of paternity!"72 "The monstrous power—paternity—must be destroyed. No more paternity, always in doubt and impossible to prove."73

The concern with family structure and sexual issues that characterized French feminism in the 1830s contrasts with the concerns of revolutionary feminists and relates to changes in women's daily lives that were unsettling, sudden, indeed revolutionary. First was the increased importance given to property in the initiation of marriages. William Sewell has shown how a conception of property, born with the French Revolution, "gave rise to a new set of social conflicts that culminated in an attempt to abolish private property in the Revolution of 1848."74 The feminist attempt to abolish the family is a similar challenge to the institution of private property. Because property mat-
ters had become the basis for forming marital unions among the urban middle and upper classes and among the peasantry, 1830s’ feminists, generally from the unpropertied classes, contested this role for property by proclaiming that love alone should be the basis for forming personal unions.

And just as changing theories about how to initiate marriages were being resisted, so too were changing theories about the appropriate role for married women. It was just at this moment, the 1830s, when the so-called cult of domesticity became popularized in the burgeoning women’s press and in the works of Pauline Guizot, Claire de Remusat, Albertine Necker de Saussure, and Nathalie Lalolais. The 1830s’ feminists—generally young, unmarried, and self-supporting—saw little to recommend in a life of economic dependency. They compared their own financial insecurity—subject as their jobs were to the vagaries of the market—to that of rich women who could just as easily find themselves, Saint-Simonian women warned, on the streets, following a stock-market reversal. Only collectivized production and housekeeping offered real security.

But most importantly, the ideology of 1830s’ feminists reflected the breaking of the link between sexuality and reproduction—a revolution in human experience that came earlier to France than elsewhere. Traditionally, a married woman had expected to spend the major portion of her adult life bearing or nursing children. Children were born at regular intervals of from twenty-five to thirty months, and the only processes holding down the average number of births per family to about four or five were late marriages and the fact that one or the other partner commonly died before menopause. In France, beginning early in the nineteenth century, however, in the space of merely one generation, this traditional pattern changed suddenly and completely. By the mid-nineteenth century, the two-child household was commonplace throughout France.

Family limitation—the possibility that childbearing could be chosen or not—resulted in a new consciousness about sexuality. In sorting out sexuality from reproduction, a context in which sexual pleasure may be pursued as an end in itself came into being. The 1830s’ feminists reflected this new consciousness by promoting their right to have nonmarital sexual relationships and to have children without being married.

A developing consciousness of women’s sexuality led also to a developing consciousness of women’s bodily specificity. This was reflected not only in the issues that 1830s’ feminists discussed, but also in the kind of analysis and the very language they employed to express their feminism—that of “difference.” Attention has shifted to that which is indeed innately different between women and men, our bodies. It is interesting to note that sexual, reproductive, and other issues related to women’s bodies are central to those feminists in contemporary France and the United States who are generally called “radical”—the Psychanalyse et politique group, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Adrienne Rich, Mary Daly, to name only the best known of this group—and that these radical feminists are in the “difference” camp as well. The discourse of “difference,” apparent in the feminism of the 1830s and again in more recent times, relates to the focus on sexuality. Indeed, it not only reflects sexual and/or bodily difference, it is perhaps even necessary for allowing a consciousness of women’s sexuality to develop.

For Americans, whose revolutionary tradition is almost completely in the one strain of politics that is radical individualism, the use of a rhetoric valorizing difference appears quite conservative. Moreover, the history of U.S. feminism seems to confirm this judgment, for in the nineteenth century, feminists who affirmed rather than challenged sexual difference were often timid feminists who feared to challenge men and men’s power directly. In affirming women’s culture and women’s domestic activities, they failed to recognize the power of men in defining women’s sphere.

In France, however, among socialists who had already rejected revolutionary individualism and developed in its stead class analysis, a rhetoric valorizing difference coexisted with radical views. For example, 1830s’ feminists did not argue that essentially different natures of women and men should dictate different roles or separate spheres for them. Nor did these feminists fear to challenge men and male power. On the contrary, among these Saint-Simonia a developing consciousness of the political significance of sex led, not to the hoped-for harmonious association of the sexes, but, rather, to increased tensions among women and men Saint-Simonia. In what was likely the first politically self-conscious separatist venture in feminist history, women Saint-Simonia, in early 1832, responded to continuing sexism within their own movement, by founding a newspaper “that would publish articles only by women.” They held weekly meetings, for all of the Saint-Simonian femmes prolétaires, at which theoretical issues were first presented and developed. They organized also a Société d’Instruction Populaire to teach poor women, explaining their purpose thus: “that which men have not done it is up to us to do.”

Freed to write, think, and act, “each according to her own inspiration,” the women of this collective actually transformed Saint-Simonian feminism. First—as suggested above—they transformed feminist politics by organizing, not the universal association called for by Saint-Simonia earlier, but rather sororal association, a self-consciously political women’s culture. They recognized not only that women’s experience and nature differed from men’s but also that their interests differed from and were in conflict with men’s and that political and social change required that women join together across male-constructed barriers to emancipate themselves, by themselves (“women alone shall say what kind of liberty they want”).

Their next theoretical innovation was in the way they blended sex analysis with class analysis. Whereas Saint-Simonia’s earliest experimentation with class analysis and sex analysis had the two coexisting in such a way that suggested that all workers were male and all women were bourgeois, the editors, who themselves were workers, brought the two together, proclaiming: “The woman question is fundamentally connected to that of women workers.” In their writings, the Saint-Simonia explored the differing realities of women of different classes and sought to work out a politics to achieve unity across a reality of division.
Finally, these women changed the priorities of feminism. They spoke less and less about sexual radicalism, focusing instead on expanding women's educational and work opportunities and reforming marriage laws that prohibited divorce and subjugated wives to husbands. The demise of the more radical sexual program related to changes in daily existence that working-class women in general, and these women in particular, were living through in these years: skyrocketing illegitimacy rates, coupled with increasing unemployment among women of their class and declining wage rates. Birth control was still too unreliable, the possibility for women's sexual pleasure was still too commonly limited by bodily injury incurred in childbirth or by venereal disease, and women's ability to support themselves on their own was still too fragile to sustain their sexual radicalism. In fact, the appropriateness of the terms "radical" and "conservative" to define the earlier and the later sexual politics is questionable. Seemingly more conservative than Enfantin's "rehabilitation of the flesh," the new politics of the femmes proléteres was actually more radical, for by linking sexual emancipation to economic, intellectual, and legal emancipation, they had placed the sexual question into the larger context of the political relationship of the sexes.

Were there, then, no dangers to this ideology of "difference"? Certainly there were. First, the closeness of this kind of analysis to traditional patriarchalism led easily to co-optation, particularly in later decades when "difference" was used to extol maternity and usually a separate role and place for women as mothers. Second, this kind of theory, which in its essentialism would serve to unify women, actually divided women when it denied the very real differences of women's lived experience. This was not so among the class-conscious Saint-Simonian feminists. But painful and counterproductive splits along class lines and religious lines did occur among later nineteenth-century feminists, and among feminists today, similar splits along lines of race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation have erupted. The biological unity of women has not been sufficient to construct a true sisterhood; feminists need to understand the diversity of women's social situations and work to coordinate multiple struggles.

Deconstructing the "Equality-versus-Difference" Debate

In recent years, it has become commonplace to view the two different tendencies within feminism that I have been discussing here as a debate and to label the opposing sides "equality" and "difference." I suggest, though, that this is unhelpful on two counts: first, because this wrongly suggests that only one side argued for equality and that only one side recognized that there are biological differences between the sexes; second, because it wrongly suggests that there is one right way to explain the social and political relationship of the sexes and only one right way to articulate our claims for change. In a debate, two sides oppose each other; one side will win. The two tendencies I have discussed here, however, are not mutually exclusive, although their emphases are divergent.

Nor should they be viewed as opponents; both have proved useful in addressing quite different issues.

It is important to recognize that feminism varies across time and place, and that feminist ideology is shaped by historically specific phenomena—some social, some economic, some conceptual. It is this historical specificity of feminism that explains that there is not one unified feminist discourse. At various moments, under one or another set of circumstances, feminists' preoccupations have shifted. And when feminists have reordered their priorities, their view of the causes of the status quo and their strategies for change, including their rhetorical strategies, have also shifted.

At the time of the revolution, it was the universality of rights that preoccupied feminists. Revolutionary ideologues had stressed the universality of rights in challenging the ancien régime system of particular rights. Indeed, it was this challenge to the old order that shaped feminist and nonfeminist ideology alike. Gone were the ancien régime's caste-like "estates." Instead, the revolution proclaimed that one's belonging to the human race determined one's rights. What mattered was that which all humans had in common and that separated humans from the animal species—not humans' reproductive organs but their brains, not their different procreative roles but their shared capacity to reason. Differences between human beings were never denied, only their relevance to the exercise of citizenship.

It is important to keep in mind that revolutionary feminists did not deny the biological differences between women and men. This point is strongly argued in Joan Scott's reading of the works of Olympe de Gouges: "While [Gouges] maintained that equality, and not special privilege, was the only ground on which woman could stand, she nonetheless (unsuccessfully) sought special advantage by claiming that she was pregnant in order to avoid...the death sentence conferred on her..." Moreover, revolutionary feminists did not even challenge the sexual division of labor; on the contrary, in order to save jobs for women, they sometimes stressed women's particularity. But the differences between women and men were irrelevant to their claims to the rights of citizenship. Citizenship rights were based on the capacity to reason, and because there was no biological difference between women's and men's brains, there could be no difference between their capacities to reason.

To revolutionary feminists, women's exclusion from a new regime based on universally applicable laws was untenable once the rule of law replaced the rule of the arbitrary tyrant and once reason replaced superstition. Utopian socialists, in contrast, were little interested in the rule of law and placed little hope in the power of reason. But they never denied the importance of equality. Saint-Simonian women argued for an equal place in the direction of the New World Order and challenged Saint-Simonian men to practice what they preached in the construction of the New Order alongside the Old. Still, as part of a generalized challenge to Enlightenment values, they did challenge the universalizing of human experience in revolutionary discourse—not, however, to reinstate the feudal order of particular rights, but, rather, to extend the very notion of equality.
The priorities of 1830s' feminists had changed. Social relationships of intimacy, reproduction, and production mattered to them, not the formal rights of citizenship. Although the universalistic discourse of revolutionaries had been useful for arguing for the rule of law, it was inadequate to the task of reordering relationships of production between workers and capitalists or in reordering the sexual relationships between women and men. For this, it was necessary to pull apart the component parts of relationships and to identify the particularities of class and sex.

The argument that feminist discourses of "equality" and "difference" are neither right nor wrong but relate to historically specific concerns or opportunities is further strengthened by noting the instability of these categories. Just as Olympe de Gouges had to stress women's difference when arguing for matters that touched on women's maternity, Saint-Simonians stressed sameness when arguing for the revolutionary goal of educating women. Although education had not been their primary concern, an 1833 law establishing publicly funded compulsory schooling for boys (but ignored girls) piqued their rage. In arguing, however, for the development of girls' reasoning capacity—a "revolutionary" goal—they borrowed revolutionary rhetoric. Moreover, their borrowing even included the misogynist element in revolutionary discourse: women, due to the impoverishment of their education, are described as frivolous and untrustworthy.

Today, when feminists have found themselves locked into debates over the relevant merits of seemingly oppositional rhetorical strategies, it is useful to look back to earlier moments to examine these different strategies in historical contexts from which we have some distance. In so doing, it becomes clear that neither discourse was intrinsically the more radical or conservative; neither was the only right way to argue for sexual equality. Revolutionary feminists' claims to equal rights formalized in the laws determining citizenship are not today viewed as radical, and especially are not viewed as a challenge to the liberal state. Yet, in the late eighteenth century, this was not the case, and feminists were punished as subversives. Nor have we, two hundred years later, been fully successful in convincing others that women's claims to equal rights are in accordance with the values of the liberal state, as the recent failure to ratify an Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution attests. Feminists today also note that the revolution's universalizing view of human nature masked the many real differences between women and men resulting from biology and socially constructed roles and masked as well the many differences among women due to class and ethnicity. At that moment in history, however, revolutionary feminists in fact spoke for all women, for all women were excluded from that which had just been granted all men.

A rhetoric valorizing difference may also appear conservative, more likely to legitimate separate spheres for women and men than to challenge them. But in the 1830s this was not the case. Saint-Simonians used "difference" to give expression to new concerns—concerns like sexual liberation, which today we would label radical. And Saint-Simonians used "difference" to argue that women must be involved in all of the kinds of activities that were usually reserved for men. They even experimented, for a time, with a domestic role for men.

Further, their analysis of "difference" served to create the collective consciousness that we today call sisterhood. That all women—defined by the biological fact of being born women—share an experience of political significance is basic to this kind of feminist analysis. The language of "difference" identifies the unity that exists already among women; it also calls women to unity. In a frequently cited article, historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has linked the concept of sisterhood to liberal and revolutionary individualism, but this is not correct. Rather, it is when women's bodily specificity, either as sexual beings or as mothers, is foregrounded that sisterhood or woman-bonding—both in ideology and in the reality of separatist organizing—is most significant. The language and reality of sisterhood was important to 1830s' feminists—socialists not liberals—and their concept of sisterhood (again, this challenges Fox-Genovese) did not preclude class analysis.

This examination of two separate moments in feminism's history is intended to clarify the relationship between ideology and social reality. It is easier here to see this relationship because the two moments under consideration are limited to a few number of years. In the case of revolutionary feminism, government repression precluded the movement's development. Utopian socialist feminism, however, were active in Paris until the early 1850s. An examination of their discourse over a longer period of time would show changing priorities and changing forms of analysis. At some moments, as their program widened and shifted, they would even argue from both kinds of analysis at the same time. They had discovered that to articulate the very different needs of women sometimes required them to stress that which defines women's difference from men (and from other women), sometimes that which defines women's similarities with men. To argue for equality requires the capacity to accept this seeming contradiction.

Notes

1. At the "Women and the French Revolution" Conference, held at UCLA in October 1989, the so-called equality perspective was termed the "universalistic" perspective and "difference" was termed the "particular." In the field of women's history, the difference perspective is often referred to as the women's culture perspective. In this article, I use all of these terms.

2. Joan W. Scott's "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism" (Feminist Studies 14 (Spring 1988): 33-50) was most useful for my working through this deconstruction. She writes (44): "equality-versus-difference cannot structure choices for feminist politics; the oppositional pairing misrepresents the relationship of both terms."

"equality," envisioning that scientific advances in artificial reproduction would make possible the liberation of women even from childbearing—and that this was desirable.


13. Note especially that Offen's way of conceptualizing a feminism that acknowledges women's difference—as "relational" or "couple-centered" and accepting of the sexual division of labor—conceptualizes a difference perspective that would be unable to address some of today's most pressing issues. First, this "couple-centered" feminism would fail to challenge compulsory heterosexuality. Nor would it permit feminists to challenge racism, or at least to challenge the view that failure to adopt a particular family structure that accords with white, middle-class experience explains the status of poor people of color in the United States. Nor, finally, would it permit feminists to challenge the "Mommy track" or other work structures that justify women's economic inequality by blaming women rather than patriarchal capitalism.


15. Ibid., 37.


17. Edwin Randolph Hedman, "Early French Feminism from the Eighteenth Century to 1848" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1954), 47.


20. Only the Cordeliers permitted women a public role; but here, too, their participation was limited. When Théronigne de Méziérourt asked to be admitted with voting rights, she was refused. The other clubs, including the Jacobins, denied women even the freedom to speak.


22. Ibid., 130.


24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 100-101.

26. Ibid., 100.


28. The text here is from Levy, Applewhite, and Johnson, Women in Revolutionary Paris, 92, 89.

29. Translated and reproduced in Levy, Applewhite, and Johnson, 75-77.

30. Ibid., 123.

31. Ibid., 77.


Actually, the three historians examine containing scientific views—again, one that stressed the similarity of the sexes and another that stressed the difference. Although we are more familiar with scientific views that stressed difference, less aware of the view that stressed similarity, it was this latter view stressing similarity that predominated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The "difference" view was heard, of course—think of Rousseau; but feminists like Condorcet, Palm, and Gouges were as able to find scientific evidence to support their claims as were the patriarchalists.


34. Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation," 4. Laqueur explores these theories through the works of the second-century medical writer, Galen, still influential at this time.

35. Hellerstein, "Women, Social Order, and the City, 67."
37. Laqueur, Schiebinger, and Hellerstein. Both Hellerstein and Schiebinger are clear that the medical, biological, or anatomical view of women that stressed their difference from men did not predominate until the nineteenth century. Laqueur gives more weight to early views, which already in the mid-eighteenth century had articulated a biology of “difference.” He believes that the new biological views grounded both the anti-feminism of the evolution and the new feminism emerging with the revolution and continuing into the next century. I maintain, however, that he has conflated two quite different feminist tendencies, ignoring revolutionary feminists’ arguments from “sameness” and “misplacing”—in time—a feminism of difference.
38. Although we can see here the historical origins of “the personal is political,” it is interesting to note the conceptual difference between Saint-Simonian theory and that of the 1970s. Saint-Simonians, unlike 1970s’ radical and socialist feminists, accepted the binary oppositions of public versus private and political versus personal. They never defined their challenge to personal relations of inequality as “political”—even a new kind of politics—for they agreed that politics was about the same kind of public activities and rights that liberals thought the realm of politics. Accepting the public/private opposition, however, they reversed the usual hierarchy and accorded to the private sphere the higher value.
40. Tribune des femmes 1:106.
41. Ibid., 1:193.
42. Ibid., 1:131.
43. Ibid., 1:160.
44. Ibid., 1:106.
46. Ibid., p. 67.
47. Duhet, Les Femmes de la Revolution, 155.
48. Tribune des femmes 1:166.
50. Ibid., 508 verso.
51. These words are Enfantin’s, uttered at his trial and reprinted in the Tribune des femmes more than once (1:193, 194, 222).
52. Tribune des femmes 1:222.
53. Ibid., 1:223. The author continues: “Mary has influence but no power, and no action, in the government of heaven; her prayer is all powerful upon her divine son, but she prays, she intercedes; by herself she does not act.”
55. Ibid., 40.
56. Ibid., 116.
57. La Femme libre (Tribune des femmes, 1, no. 1), 1, 3, 6.
59. Ibid., 1:43.
60. Ibid., 1:156.
61. La Femme libre (Tribune des femmes, 1, no. 1), 1.
62. Ibid., 1:2-3.
64. Pauline Roland to Charles Lambert, January 1834, Fonds Enfantin 7777.
65. Tribune des femmes 165-66.
66. Clarinde Rogé to Prosper Enfantin, June 20, 1845, Fonds Enfantin 7776, no. 52.
68. Eugénie Soudet, “Une Parole de femme!” Fonds Enfantin 7627, no. 57.
70. Ibid., 2:169-79.
72. Ibid., 155.
73. Démard, “Ma loi d’avenir, 88.
75. Tribune des femmes 1:95.
78. Marie Reine, La Femme libre (Tribune des femmes 1, no. 1), 8; repeated in the second, third, and fourth issues.
79. Tribune des femmes 1:146.
82. Tribune des femmes 2:167.
84. The masthead of each issue of La Tribune des femmes: carried this slogan: “Equality among all in rights and duties.” See also, ibid., 1:62: “The Saint-Simonian religion declares that woman is free and the equal of man”; ibid., 1:132: “We preach the equality of man and woman”; ibid., 150: “We demand social equality between the two sexes.”
85. For example, Marie-Reine Guindorf (see La Tribune des femmes 1:114), in calling for “equal opportunity . . . in education” explains that women should not be excluded from a career in science just because of their “flightiness,” since they are “flighty” and (later) “frivolous” only because of their inferior education. Depicting women as flighty or frivolous is typical of revolutionary rhetoric—one is reminded here of Mary Wollstonecraft—but rare among the Saint-Simonienne. However, Marie-Reine could not express a “revolutionary” goal without using the revolution’s discourse; it was as if it was a package deal.
86. Olympe de Gouges was tried and found guilty of treason for publishing a pamphlet calling for a popular referendum on the form of government; she was
guillotined on November 1, 1793. On October 20, 1793, the Société des Républicaines-Révolutionnaires was shut down, along with all the other clubs of female membership. Other feminists, not discussed here, were also punished. Thérèse de Méricourt was publicly whipped, and her breakdown following this painful humiliation resulted in her incarceration in an insane asylum. Claire Lacombe and Pauline Léon were imprisoned in the spring of 1794.

87. The class of these feminists to whom I am granting this role of representing the interests of the totality of mankind (à la Georg Lukács)—or, at least, the interests of the totality of womankind—is noteworthy. The women were rather marginal, "Bohemian" types. Although Condorcet was aristocratic, Olympe de Gouges's and Etta Palm d'Aulder's titles of nobility were fabricated. Olympe de Gouges's father was a butcher, although she claimed to be the illegitimate daughter of the poet Le Franc de Pompignan. She married and was widowed at a quite young age and then moved to Paris where she wrote plays, one of which was performed at the Comédie Française in 1789. Esta Palm was from Holland; her life before coming to Paris is unknown, although assuredly not noble.

88. The occasion was the celibate, all-male, retreat to the Enfantin family home (Ménilmontant) on the outskirts of Paris. There, Saint-Simonian men attempted to create a new kind of community in which all men would do all of the different kinds of work, including the "domestic" work, required for daily life concerns.


90. Again, the class of the women speaking on behalf of all womankind is noteworthy. The particular standpoint of working-class women may explain their success in blending class analysis with a sex analysis that stressed the essential unity of all women.