

Revisiting the Equality/Difference Debate: Redefining Citizenship for the New Millennium

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The argument for parity ignores the fact that 'politics' and 'citizenship' are not neutral terms, and thus to include women without redefining and challenge those terms might not produce any change to the masculine norms that support the system. In fact, politics can be reshaped to fit women rather than the other way around. The best antidote to a masculinist culture seems to be the stripping of political authority of its masculinist connotations in the name of a woman-friendly polity. Women's movements must therefore propose a new definition of citizenship—as evidenced by the mobilization of several groups of women at the margins of the traditional political universe. In other words, we need to present a new image of citizenship that both includes political, economic, and social aspects, which responds to the needs and demands of women, and which takes into account gender, class, and ethnic differences in a pluralistic framework. A better approach implies calling into question the reductive common definition of several concepts such as politics, universalism, equality, and difference. At a time of growing disenchantment with conventional politics in many countries, there is the need to overcome traditional modes of political organization both within and beyond the nation-state. Women, working within the spaces where public and private worlds collide, operating at the interstices of the public and the private, are providing new role models for active political citizenship.

As a woman I have no country. (Virginia Woolf)

Gender research on citizenship has shown that an accurate analysis of citizenship cannot begin from the premise of gender-neutrality. Ungendered citizens do not exist. Rather, one must take account of the very real gender differences in productive and reproductive labor and access to civil and political rights and how these differences influence the ways in which men and women struggle for and claim benefits from the state as citizens.

If feminists do not call for a recognition of differences, how can equality policies which assume the possibility of gender-neutrality in politics and at work

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ever improve the lives of women who, by and large, are not in the same situation as men with respect to family obligations, the labor market and sexual expression? On the other hand, do feminists who argue that gender differences concerning moral reasoning and citizenship should be recognized run the risk of justifying the case of those who are against women's liberation?

The implication of the often-asked question—do women want 'equal' or 'different' treatment?—is that women should not want and cannot have both. I contend that the 'choice' between equality and difference is a false choice. It is a construct that has served to divert attention from the substantive issues, limiting the transformative potential of any analysis and thus needed social change. Consequently, feminists should try to avoid this dichotomy. Feminists need to intervene at the conceptual level to highlight the way in which a restricted notion of equality allows 'difference' to be set against it and sets restrictions on the possibility of genuine reform.

One characteristic that distinguishes the Italian feminist movement is the discourse on sexual difference.¹ Citizenship—understood as a question of formal rights and equal opportunities—is not central to Italian feminism. Italian feminists insist on the separateness of women, and also try to reconcile a feminist emphasis on gender difference with a gender-neutral view of the equality of all workers. Women's needs should define the path toward social change. For example, special attention is paid to the dimension of time as a crucial variable of change. The reorganization of the work schedule, of social services, of the relationship between 'time to care' and time for the market within the life cycles of women and men are the subjects of passionate discussions.

The most obvious risk inherent in the idea of difference has been the simple reinforcing of traditional sex roles. This risk has been practically ignored in part because Italy did not experience the sort of neo-conservative reaction that affected other industrialized societies. Given the absence of neo-conservatism and the historic connection of feminism with modernization, this risk has not been felt as a real danger.

The accent played on 'difference' evokes the aspiration to effect a social change more radical than that arising from the ideology of equal opportunity prevailing in most capitalist countries in the last decade. A range of possible changes has thus been opened up, from questioning the sexual division of labor to questioning the most fundamental structures of society.

In liberalism, the first priority is the removal of barriers to equality, particularly direct impediments; once that is done, there is no further proper duty upon the state to provide 'special' treatment. However, despite the removal of barriers, women are still not at an equal starting point. In addition, equalizing the starting points can legitimize a system that deliberately differentiates, even if on grounds of fairness or merit instead of ascriptive status. In fact, there cannot be equal opportunity to engage in an unequal competition, and there is neither equality nor opportunity for the person who knows that to enter the competition is to reproduce the hierarchy.

The concept of equality, defined in the procedural terms of equal treatment and linked to concepts of fairness and just deserts, can thus lead to degrees of inequality. The legitimacy of such arrangements rests upon what is often

regarded as a fiction of universalism in liberal theory. This, in turn, stems from a notion of the individual which is apparently gender-neutral but which, in many respects, can be argued to conform to a male standard or male perspective. This implies that women cannot be easily included in a contractual mode of reasoning.

Pateman exemplifies this position, and her work makes clear that many of the concepts and frameworks of the contractarian tradition should be deconstructed with respect to their 'gender-loadedness'. The association of women with naturalness and the private sphere not only leads to a practical exclusion of women from political life but also constructs conceptions of politics, rationality and justice in such a way that faculties associated with femininity are excluded, by definition, from these realms. In other words, the meanings of sexual difference are inscribed in the way rationality and autonomy tend to be constructed.

So long as the demand for equality follows along the lines of John Stuart Mill's argument that women are, if social arrangements allow them to be, similar to men—instead of the possibility of men being similar to women—women are forced to adopt the strategy of convincing people that they require the same treatment. As long as women are compared to men, but not men to women, the commensurateness of the two terms seems to be hierarchical in the sense that one part of the equation (the position of men) is more highly valued than the other (the position of women). Equality in this sense takes the life of men as its standard. It leaves women no other possibility than to try to participate in a world shaped by men, without changing it. In other words, as long as equality takes the life of men as reference, it means the expectation of sameness through integration on male terms. That would be an assimilationist society in the normative sense. An alternative approach would circumvent the question about whether women want to be treated the same or differently, and argue instead that comparable capacities to behave autonomously sometimes require one, sometimes the other. This means that we always have to question when and where and under what conditions differences between women and men are important, in what sense and in which context, and where they are not. Equality cannot be formulated as the ultimate goal; this would lead to an equality of sameness instead of an equality based on the recognition of sexual difference. Equality between women and men cannot be a goal in itself, but it may, in a specific situation and context, be a strategy to reach more autonomy. Since I see autonomy more as a process than as a static condition, it is necessary to be flexible in thinking about rights. Thus, autonomy can also mean striving for special rights in specific circumstances, on the grounds of dissimilarities.² As Joan Scott has stated, with regard to motherhood: 'There are moments when it makes sense for mothers to demand consideration for their social role, and contexts within which motherhood is irrelevant to women's behavior' (Scott, 1988, p. 47).

'From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs': the Marxist definition of communism needs to be applied in a context which is not only strictly economic but that includes the organization of society. The centrality of paid work, the excessive determination of our lives by the rigidity

and inflexibility of the organization of work are called into question by a new definition of citizenship and of social rights which includes our rights in our daily lives and our 'time to care'.³ We need 'time for reproduction' and flexibility for all the duration of our working lives, both in the structure and organization of work and in the social institutions. This would reflect the complexity of society and of the daily lives of millions of people who might have the same rights but have different needs at different times in their lives.

Difference-blind equality assumes that so long as no attention is paid to social difference, it will have no effect. In fact, as long as we pay no attention to difference, we will never overcome the inequalities that difference has been used to justify. Inequality that follows the lines of social difference means, perhaps paradoxically, that difference can only stop mattering when we have effectively addressed the deep and subtle ways in which it does matter.

The project of addressing the ways in which difference matters is one that depends crucially on institutions of political representation. It is only through institutions of representation that members of marginalized groups may offer their distinctive perspectives on public matters in a manner that does not regularly reaffirm and recreate the option of members of privileged groups to allow them a voice or not. Once groups' claims to representation are established on grounds of equality, the question as to whether they shall be heard becomes a matter not of choice but of right.

Women's difference has been used to incorporate women as subordinates into a male political order. Now, however, changing circumstances offer the possibility of rethinking the cross-cutting divides between public and private and of creating a genuinely democratic kind of citizenship in which both sexes are full citizens and their citizenship is of equal worth to them as women and men.

This approach to equality forces us to rethink the basic conceptions of government policy, and also to think more precisely about what we want when we talk about equality.

The framing of gender equality as equal treatment in law excludes all forms of discrimination of individuals as members of social groups that are disadvantaged. Equal treatment assumes that alike people are treated the same. Inequality exists when those similarly situated are treated differently. This principle, however, fails to recognize the patterns of discrimination against women as a group who have been historically devalued (for example, the low wages accorded to occupations that are dominated by women).

To accept the principle of preferential treatment in policy and law is thus to recognize that there are mechanisms of exclusion that are rooted in categorical inequality. Laws and policies to remedy categorical inequality assume that compensatory measures are needed to correct previous histories of discrimination. However, in an equal treatment framework in which gender-neutrality is the governing principle, preferential treatment policy is subject to challenges of reverse discrimination by the dominant group. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has become a battleground for such cases.

The most well-known case was brought by Eckhard Kalanke, a male candidate who was passed over for a job promotion because of a law for preferential treatment in Bremen which sought to recruit members of the underrepresented

group, in other words, women. The Court ruled in his favor and against gender quotas, stating that giving priority to equally qualified women violated the principle of equal treatment. The opinion of the Advocate General stated explicitly the reasons for the rejection of the Bremen law: 'A national rule which guarantees women absolute and unconditional priority for appointment or promotion ... goes beyond promoting equal opportunities and substitutes for it the result of "equality of representation" which is only to be arrived at by providing such equality'.⁴ Within this interpretation of equal treatment, positive action (preferential treatment) to alter patterns of exclusion was viewed as reverse discrimination against men. The Court, therefore, supported the view of formal equality between men and women and prohibited any measure which would 'favor' directly women.

The conception of formal equality means that forms of direct discrimination such as unequal pay for the same job or formal restrictions on women entering the labor market must be eliminated. A distinction on the basis of sex should not be allowed. This policy starts from the assumption that formal equality will lead to material equality in the long run. The problems that have arisen with regard to the consequences of measures for men and women—that they do not increase the economic independence of women—have not been defined in terms of indirect discrimination, but are seen as temporary difficulties. To grant women the same formal rights than men already have is not a sufficient condition for material equality. The way rights are conceptualized seems to maintain, to affirm and sometimes even to increase the relative power relations between the sexes. This problem is hardly recognized in government policies, because they start from the assumption of identical individuals. For both sexes the same rights and duties must be granted. Here the problem starts because the biological, social and material conditions are not the same for both sexes. For example, by treating men as abstracted individuals without family commitments, women are left responsible for the 'personal' side of life, which then causes them to be disadvantaged. The issue at stake is the general working and living conditions of women and men, not whether women are the same as or different from men. In fact it does not really matter whether legislation is based on strategies of 'equality' or 'difference', since these ideologies obscure the realities that if capitalist concerns dominate the policy process, then it is capitalist needs that will be served.

The most recent case on preferential treatment, however, modifies *Kalanke*. In that case, a tenured male teacher, Helmut Marschall, challenged a regional German law that gave preference to an equally qualified female candidate in order to create a gender balance in promotions. More important than the acceptance of preferential treatment in the case, the rationale for the decision represents a departure from earlier rulings since it directly addresses mechanisms of exclusion in employment, in other words, that 'men tend to be chosen in preference to women where they have equal qualifications, since they benefit from deep-rooted prejudices and stereotypes as the role and capacities of women'.⁵ The judgment highlights the ways in which categorical inequality is perpetuated. Women are excluded from jobs and promotion not only because they do care work in the family but because it is assumed that they will interrupt

careers more frequently, owing to household or family duties, or that they will be absent from work more frequently because of pregnancy, childbirth, and breast feeding. In contrast to its ruling on *Kalanke* in 1995, the ECJ did not reject the notion of equality of outcomes.

Preferential treatment in itself, however, does not change pervasive discriminatory patterns. Increasing the number of women without altering the institutional arrangements and gendered organizational hierarchy does not substantially alter the rules of the game by developing inclusionary strategies which would influence basic institutional structures for combining work and family responsibilities, the discourse and practices that define what work is, what a working day is, what the responsibilities of individuals as citizens, workers, and family members are. "The fox can safely invite the stork to share its gruel forever: for the stork the gruel is inedible."⁶

The demand for parity fails to address the embedded structural problems in the public sphere and to encourage equality in the private sphere. In other words, it accepts accommodation rather than transformation as the model. Accommodation may be a temporary first step, but it is not the ultimate goal. The focus on parity in political representation merely accepts the existing structure and ensures that women have the same opportunities within it.

The political arena has been structurally defined by men for men in male terms. Thus it does not seem surprising that women's hard-won access to the vote has not brought about change in the organization of power. If we stop at gender, we will reconstruct gender: we will only reallocate roles, or integrate existing roles, rather than question the content of the roles and the structure within which they operate as well as their assignment along gender lines. For even if the 'will of all men' becomes the 'will of all men and women', the 'general will' continues to be defined in the same way and in the same terms. Thus I wonder whether parity in political representation, as it is demanded now in France, will be any more effective in bringing about changes in the definition of the 'general interest'. However, it raises important issues and injects new life in the debate between the idea of the One and the idea of the Two: it calls into question the monism of democratic universalism.

In the nineteenth century not only were women excluded from the public space, but also the social roles that were assigned to them were an effective condition of the political capacity of men, taken collectively. This is the reason women's access to citizenship cannot simply present itself as an enlargement in the field of application of a given concept or as a granting of an immutable right. The 'private' relations which have been developed in the framework of the non-citizenship of women must also be modified, deconstructed, and, in a certain way, incorporated into the public domain (for example, the collusion between the division of labor and the sexual distribution of power). The citizenship of women is thus more of a challenge, a source of change, than a *fait accompli*.

Inclusion does not mean adding women to existing standards, but reformulating standards with women as active participants in the process. Mere assimilation to the prevailing norms is to be rejected as a goal. What is demanded is not to be accepted at the game table once the game has begun, but rather to participate in the setting of the rules of the game.

What is meant by woman's equality is usually her right to share in the exercise of power within society, once it is accepted that she possesses the same abilities as man. However, existing as a woman does not imply participation in male power, but calls into question the very concept of power. Do we really wish for inclusion in a world planned by others?

Woman's difference is her millennial absence from history. Let us profit from this difference. We need to effect a radical change in the culture that kept us prisoners. We need to reject both levels of equality and difference as a dilemma artificially imposed by male power. No human being or group should be defined in terms of another human being or group.

The conceptual opposite of difference is not equality, but the notion of equality as it has been inscribed in the paradigms of Western philosophical and political thought. The obliteration of women through the assumption of a natural equality of all human beings can take two forms. Either the universal subject of the social contract, the equal human being, is theoretically asexual and practically male-sexed (in other words, sexual difference is cancelled along with all other accidental differences); or, alternatively, sexual difference is used to identify women with reproduction, and excludes them as women from the polis. The polis is open only to women who agree to neuter themselves. Outside the polis, sexual difference is recognized, but only in the form of a sexual role which implies inferiority. Becoming equal thus means becoming like a man. But 'being like' is never going to be as good as 'being'; and, on the other hand, being different is unacceptable if it means being inferior. Thus sexual difference must become a component of the struggle for social equality. Seeing women and men as equal in some abstract sense can easily result in identifying equality with sameness, where the model would be either the universal 'male' or a 'neutral' human being born of the combination of historically (male) created male and female characteristics. In place of the philosophy of the One that has characterized Western thought, we need to rethink sexual difference with a dual conceptualization of being. The world must accommodate two subjects. We want to enter and change the polis with our being-woman, reclaiming our difference and stating man's difference.

The baffling character of an equality that both excludes and includes women was identified by Hannah Arendt:

From the beginning the paradox involved in the declaration of inalienable human rights was that it reckoned with an 'abstract' human being who seemed to exist nowhere ... This right seemed to contradict nature itself since we in fact know 'human beings' only in the shape of women and men; and the concept of human being, if conceived in a politically useful way, must necessarily include the plurality of human beings. (Arendt, 1958, pp. 7-8)

An emphasis on difference should not be interpreted as a demand for special spheres of activity, which would soon risk ghettoization. Difference means duality; it means man's difference, not only woman's. It has to do with the full acceptance of the partiality of both the female and the male subjects. This

perspective implies a more difficult political struggle than the simple request for equality.

The male has conventionally been seen as the only possible model: now we are asking for at least two models (one female), with many internal differences. Women are not an interest group, a minority or an identity group. Sexual difference is more fundamental. Women represent one of two sexes, hardly a minority: they are approximately half of humanity. We are, however, the half that has been excluded and made invisible and thus now we demand inclusion and visibility as women. The question then is: can 'being a woman' be represented in a new notion of citizenship?

Quotas for women seem to be the most common approach to compensate for women's scarce presence in political representative institutions in Western Europe. Quotas are seen as 'positive actions' to achieve parity for the sexes in political representation.

The lack of women's political participation and representation is judged as the incomplete emancipation of women, thus accepting an egalitarian view which overshadows sexual difference. Women then become a minority group among many others. However, there is no explicit questioning of the principles of representation in their expression of popular sovereignty as the will of all citizens conceived as asexual, neutral, and abstract subjects. The demand for political parity does not call into question the very concept of representation because it is based upon an idea of parity that does not demystify the abstract concept of equality. It addresses quantity not quality.

Either we change a society and a culture historically build upon male rules, codes and foundations and at the same time defined as universal, or women will be faced, once inside political institutions, with the same issues they face in the workplace: either they are co-opted and become like men, or they practice a separatist, but inevitably subaltern, politics.

Parity in politics is thus a necessary but not sufficient condition of gender representation. It is necessary to make clear the fact that popular sovereignty includes two genders and has therefore an important symbolic value. It is not sufficient, however, to affirm sexual difference. The risk is that through a process of co-optation women accept, *de facto*, the reduction of their representation to the generic asexual universal.

The entrance of women into representative institutions in critical mass is a prerequisite for women like the access to education and to paid employment. However, neither the numerical balance nor formal visibility is sufficient unless they are the result of relations and communication among women.

Sexual difference, women's fundamental difference from men and from the 'neutral' citizen, forces us to reconsider modes and subjectivities that are different from what we have become accustomed to, to envision a new concept of politics and citizenship.

Just as the independent male householder serves as the ideal-typical citizen in classical liberal and democratic theory, the male worker serves as the ideal-typical citizen in the literature on social rights. Indeed, 'in the "democratic" welfare state ... employment rather than military service is the key to citizenship' because it bestows the independence that is the 'central

criterion for citizenship' and is associated with men (Pateman, 1988, pp. 238–239).

The existing norms that govern not only the workplace but also other aspects of our life nowadays are geared to the traditional situation of a male breadwinner supported by a wife who stays at home, at least for a period of a few years, and takes care of the children. Under such circumstances the application of existing standards to women will only result in a double burden for the women concerned, if the latter succeed in combining their occupational activities and home responsibilities at all.

The extent to which the nature of European citizenship based on employment status disadvantages women depends both on development in national welfare systems and how the Community interprets its role. A narrow interpretation of employment status which fails to take into account the complex nature of women's relationship with paid work and the structured nature of domestic obligations is ultimately set to damage women's interests. Despite the broad interpretation of the concept of 'worker' to include certain categories of unpaid work of marginal economic value, entitlement to social rights nevertheless remains based on the 'male breadwinner' conceptualization of the family and excludes many areas of work traditionally designated to women. The European Court stated that the essential characteristic of the worker was that "he" [*sic*] performs services for and under the direction of another in return for remuneration for a certain period of time. This concept of economic activity seems to exclude forms of voluntary work and informal care. Such forms of unpaid work have real economic implications for the persons concerned, especially in terms of the opportunity costs involved for 'carers' and also the economic contribution made to the household's living standards. As such the work of the typically female carer effectively supplements the male wage and facilitates the man's capacity as 'worker' for, without this contribution, the wage-earner would have to buy expensive domestic labor.

There have also been recent radical shifts within European welfare regimes. Faced with pressures to reduce public expenditure and discourage 'welfare dependency', there has been a tendency, Community-wide, to increase reliance on informal care and women's unpaid work in the provision of social policy. Women are increasingly relied upon to take responsibility for society's dependents. This increased expectation placed upon women is not easily reconciled with the development of a form of European citizenship based on a narrow interpretation of employment status. The Community needs a broader and more realistic interpretation of the concept of 'worker', recognizing that women's relationship with the labor market is more complex than that of many men.

With the tightening of welfare benefits, and as household income declines, women's unpaid work increases as they try to stretch their resources to meet their families' needs. Women care for the sick and elderly in the home and volunteer to work in hospitals and schools when public health care is cut. Thus women are not only differently affected by changes in the welfare state, they also underwrite current policies with their low-paid and unpaid labor. Services no longer provided by the state are now provided within the community or household by unpaid women workers, adding to their workload. It is crucial that

policy-makers recognize these linkages between the private and the public spheres and the gender relations within them.

Women, whatever else they are to do, traditionally have been given the essential duties of the preservation and repair of human relations in general. Women's work, according to Adrienne Rich, has been the work of 'world-protection, world-preservation, and world-repair', which includes 'the invisible weaving of frayed and threadbare family life' (Rich, 1977, p. 205). Women's distinctive labor consists largely in caring for others either inside the home or outside the home in service jobs (Abel, 1988, p. 12). It is understood by both men and women that women's responsibilities include the activity of caring. Men are not obliged to care, because they are not bound by an ethic of care. However, for a decent society to be maintained in the face of one segment of society solely on the basis of the ethic of rights, another segment of society must act in accordance with the ethic of care. Solely following the ethic of rights would result in a place where none of us could thrive, endure, or perhaps even survive. With individual autonomy at the center of the ethic of rights, the problem becomes who cares for those who are powerless, who are not recognized as being autonomous, or who are incapable of autonomy. Thus women's moral labor is essential to the operation of the system as a whole. All Western welfare states depend on this care to a great extent (Land, 1983; Land and Rose, 1985; Taylor-Gooby, 1991).

Understanding the sexual division of labor in the home helps explain women's employment patterns. Many women work part-time because this arrangement 'allows' them to do their domestic work (Beechey and Perkins, 1987). Indeed, women carry out a disproportionate share of welfare work, whether it is provided by the state, private organizations, corporations, or the family. To the extent that this work is undervalued in terms of benefits and political respect, women suffer disproportionately.⁷ The power imbalance between the genders in families is important politically. The failure to recognize gender relations and power within the family and outside the family has effects on social policy.

Comprehensive policies are necessary to enable women and, in particular, women with children, to participate in the labor market and to do so without disadvantage. Introduction of parental leave schemes, involvement of fathers in parenting, and strong extension of diverse forms of childcare facilities are essential conditions. It seems inevitable to question the existing life patterns and values, especially those of the workplace. As long as it is assumed that competitiveness and focus on work to the exclusion of the employee's family responsibilities (implying commitment to sometimes long or irregular working hours to suit the needs of the employer, employee's mobility and continuity of employment) is necessary to the productive functioning of the workplace, women will be unable to compete equally with men and for the latter it will be impossible to get involved in the care of children. We should discuss also the assumption that it would cost too much, in terms of money and productivity, for an employer to make it possible for workers of both sexes to better integrate family responsibilities with job commitments. After all, the workplace accommodates other basic human needs, like holidays, and several social measures introduced through the years to humanize the workplace equally implied costs

for the employer when considered from a strictly economic point of view. It may even be argued that in the long run both the employees and the employers and society as a whole may benefit from working conditions which take into account the employee's home commitments.

Women have entered typically male fields and occupied typically male roles; however, the sexual division of labor in society and in the family continues, and the female sex still lacks a symbolic referent since it is thought through male categories and thus seen as inferior to the 'universal' (male) model. The exclusion of women from political institutions is hardly an accident of history.

Substantive equality, or equality of outcomes, is a model of equality which is focused on the achievement of a given set of circumstances for a particular group or category. Equality of outcomes as an end result would aim at changing the current gendered social reality. This approach requires policy-makers to look at the ends and means of government policies, demanding that they include a substantial commitment to gender equality. The main question to ask is how best to achieve a society in which sexual identity does not correlate with social inequalities. This framework would explicitly tackle women's structural inequality.

The prohibition on indirect discrimination has also a limited redistributive effect, since it does not demand a resolution of the underlying structural problems which disadvantage women in the workplace, such as why women congregate in part-time work, nor does it demand different childcare responsibilities or better nursery provisions. Indirect discrimination does not represent a 'positive action' type of measure aiming to equalize starting points between men and women. Therefore, the concept of indirect discrimination has a limited reach toward remedying structural discrimination, since it cannot ask the 'big questions' about why structures are designed in particular ways. Inequalities do not arise from barriers in the structure but rather from inadequacies within the structure. In Nancy Dowd's words, 'the problem is not so much what is there as what is not there' (Dowd, 1989, p. 139).

The market-family dichotomy (or paid work-unpaid work dichotomy) ignores the role played by the interrelationship between these two spheres in structuring women's relationships to social benefits such as pensions and social security. For example, women's entry into, and exit from, the labor market is affected by a range of childcare commitments. In fact the time organization of employment, combined with the lack of childcare facilities, infrastructures and public assistance to bring up children, effectively limits parents' choices and may force mothers to temporarily give up work. Again this calls into question the commitment to equality in substance as opposed to equality in form.

The sameness-difference model allows women to have the same benefits as men when they are in the same situation as men (that is, in paid work), while allowing women to be treated differently from men in relation to benefits given to carers and dependants. Opening access to masculine risks is beneficial for women with particular employment patterns who are already suffering labor-market related risks. Most women are not, however, similarly situated to men in relation to employment, and nor therefore in relation to social insurance.

Substantive equality cannot be achieved by a sameness–difference model. This model of equality cannot contribute to imaginative recastings of the (gendered) social reality in ways that would substantially modify outcomes for women. Both a sameness and a difference approach have significant limitations. A sameness approach ignores the deeply unequal gendered social reality, and a difference approach may trap women further into their gender roles, without attacking the reasons for that disadvantage. A sameness–difference approach is also limited in that it does not challenge the existing gendered social reality; it merely replicates the status quo. It seems that substantive equality could be better achieved by gender-sensitive rights, which are sex-neutral but not gender-blind, and are constructed so as to advantage women. The advantage of these rights is that they do not trap women in their gender roles to the extent that women-specific rights might do. Further, gender-sensitive rights are grounded in a perspective encompassing the existing inequality and are explicitly aimed at having a significant impact on changing outcomes for women.

The recognition of sexual difference in our way of thinking calls into question the universality of the traditional conceptual scheme. The political system, the world of work and the theory behind them are based on a universal concept that continues to pretend to be abstract and general. The pretence of blind, neutral universality has contributed to the subordination and historical marginalization of women and has legitimized the historical hegemony of men. The isolation of the concrete, of the specific and of the other to an inferior status in modern philosophy was part of the attempt to contain, systematize and control the confusing complexity of reality through the creation of universal and general categories.

The inadequacy of the universal model becomes also evident if we focus on another aspect, in other words, the fact that in the world there are two genders, not one. Our identities have been formed by social sexual relations that have affected institutions and practices. Thus we must direct our energies to the creation of a woman-friendly world in which women can feel comfortable, a world made for both men and women with their differences and similarities. This will add a level of complexity to our definition of political, economic, and social citizenship that better reflects the complex reality of our lives. This complexity and the recognition of sexual difference are necessary to allow women to act in the public sphere as women instead of acting as man's surrogates.

It is necessary to treat differences and different needs in their specificity and peculiarity, to recognize that the universal can be as misleading as the specific. We need to rethink the meaning of democratic process and democratic institutions and reformulate our definition of individual and of citizenship.

Anne Phillips's work on women's representation has focused on the strategy pursued within Nordic systems of party quotas for women candidates.⁸ This strategy has clear advantages as far as getting women elected to office, as the record of these countries makes clear, but it has disadvantages as well. First, it does not provide any direct mechanisms of accountability to the constituency that women candidates purportedly represent, in other words, women. If the initiative to run women candidates comes from the party leadership, then women so elected will owe their first allegiance to their parties and will necessarily

pursue the agenda of women's distinct concerns or interests only where it coincides with or complements the party's stated agenda. The issue of dual loyalty became the focus of debate in the Italian women's movement in the 1970s. This took the form of a debate on feminist strategy: whether or not the movement should be independent of, or closely aligned with, left-wing politics. The debate was spurred by women who were active in both New Left groups and autonomous women's organizations. Should feminists be interested in electoral politics, and if so, should they actively support the organizations to which they belonged, or rather try to reach a common position as feminists? More generally, how do the politics and goals of the broader class struggle—with which the New Left feminists strongly identified for some years—relate to the struggle for women's liberation?

The prospects of this strategy, in other words, intraparty quotas, are much greater in a parliamentary system based on proportional representation than in an electoral system with single-member districts. Moreover, only in a party system is there likely to be sufficiently party cohesion to discipline members to accept quotas.⁹ Within a system of party government and strict party discipline, legislators are accountable directly to their party leadership and only indirectly to constituents. In such circumstances, women representatives' ability to represent women's distinctive interests and perspectives would seem to depend on the openness of party leadership and their power within the party caucus.

A different strategy, perhaps, would be the representation of women *as a social group*. This demand hinges on the perception that even when some women are present as individuals they do not always speak as and for women. There is also no reason why they should be required to do so. We have no assurance that parity would guarantee the adoption of policies different groups of women need. Thus women should not be elected as individuals, and not simply as members of a gender category, but specifically to speak for the members of a disadvantaged social group: women. The Women's Committee of the European Parliament may be seen in this light.

This argument is supported by the work of Iris Marion Young, who notes the paradox of democracy: arrangements meant to produce equality invariably result in some groups of citizens 'being more equal than others'. She argues that this weakness in representative systems derives from structural inequalities in society and can only be remedied by providing institutionalized means for the explicit recognition and representation of oppressed groups.

In Young's analysis, a social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices or way of life. A group's members have an affinity with one another because of their similar life experience or positioning in society, which prompts them to associate with one another more than with those not identified with the group, or to do so in a different way. Women are a social group in this sense.

Not all feminist political theorists, however, agree on emphasizing social group difference. Anne Phillips mentions 'the worrying problem of group narrowness and group closure' (Phillips, 1993, p. 96). Do we want to escalate a 'battle of the sexes'? Phillips asks. She agrees the case for sex-categorized quotas in representative systems could help establish sex proportionality. But she

believes we should detach those arguments from arguments for representing women as a group (1993, p. 101). 'I do not want a world in which women have to speak continuously as women, or men are left to speak as men' (Phillips, 1991, p. 7).

With this reluctance I think most people would sympathize. But against such danger has to be set another. History has shown that assimilationist politics is a recipe for hidden cultural imperialism. In the so-called 'melting pot' of multicultural society some groups continue to be trapped in poverty or excluded from power. They become dissatisfied and angry.

The question is: should we really be trying to 'melt away' all politically significant difference? Our tradition of class politics has led us to believe that difference, seen as class distinction, should be progressively reduced until we have a classless society. But differences differ. In some cases, as Young argues, it is more liberatory to allow for a positive self-definition of group difference than to suppress it (Young, 1990, p. 157).

How do we solve 'Wollstonecraft's dilemma' that 'either women become (like) men, and so full citizens; or they continue at women's work, which is of no value for citizenship' (Pateman, 1989, p. 197)? The way out of dilemmas, since there are no acceptable solutions, is to reject the premises from which they are deducted, or the terms on which the whole argument is based. Hence, we need to reconsider the patriarchal conception of citizenship. The concept of parity and thus quotas in political representation would endorse the first alternative of Wollstonecraft's dilemma, that of women being allowed to become like men, but it would not tackle the patriarchal structure of politics and change it.

This responds to what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe term 'radical and plural democracy'. The second half of this century has seen the emergence of new social movements that extend the democratic revolution to 'a whole new series of social relations' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 160). We can no longer feel adequately represented in politics through class identity alone. So the experience of democracy 'should consist of the recognition of the multiplicity of social logics along with the necessity of their articulation'. But the form of their expression should be 'constantly re-created and renegotiated', as groups mould and shape each other in the process of forming and reforming alliances (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 188).

Equality and parity remain important demands, but they have to be claimed in a way that preserves women's autonomy and avoids co-option and tokenism. The objective of equality is not to compete in a man's world but to transform the structures of patriarchal society. In Audre Lorde's words, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'; they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.

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Notes

1. Bono and Kemp claim that in Italian feminist theory sexual difference is seen as a general cognitive and interpretative category (Bono, P. and S. Kemp, eds. *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991). It is neither only biological 'sex', nor only 'gender' as it has been culturally created; it is the inscription of both of these in the symbolic dimension. Sexual difference is an essential difference, though it may change in its phenomenological manifestations. In the words of the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero:

By essential and original difference I mean that, for women, being engendered in a different sex is something not negotiable. For each one who is born female, it is always already so and not otherwise; the difference is rooted in her being not as something superfluous or something adjunctive, but as that which she necessarily is: female. (Cavarero, 1987, pp. 180–181)

Cavarero warns of the risk of egalitarian positioning. Seeing men and women as equal in some abstract sense can easily result in identifying equality with sameness, where the model would be either the universal 'male' or a 'neutral' human being born of the combination of historically (male) created male and female characteristics. In place of the philosophy of the One which has characterized Western thought, an 'absolute dual' is hypothesized, the rethinking of sexual difference within a dual conceptualization of being. The world must accommodate *two* subjects. And this means not only the world of ideas, but also the world of politics and economics and social relations. As Rosi Braidotti puts it, paraphrasing and interpreting Cavarero's proposal, the need to establish, here and now, a philosophy of sexual difference is for feminists 'a necessary political gesture' (Braidotti, 1987, p. 190).

2. On the dialectic of autonomy, see Grimshaw (1988).
3. Sweden has provided evidence of the implications of this view for social policies. See Marten Lagergren *et al.* (1984).
4. *Eckhard Kalanke v. Freie Hansestadt Bremen*, Case 450/93, Rep. 1995, p. I-3051.
5. *Marschall v. Land Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Case 409/95, Rep. 1997, p. I-6363. Deciding on *Marschall* the Court referred to the amendments of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty amendment to Article 119. Section 4 explicitly allows for measures providing specific advantages for the underrepresented sex, be it men or women.
6. Françoise Collin, "Parity and Universalism" in *Differences*, Special Edition: Parité in France, Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer 1997: 118.
7. In a revolutionary sentence of 12 January 1995, the Italian Constitutional Court recognized that unpaid household work has the same 'dignity' as paid work.
8. See Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy*, Chapter 3, and *Politics of Presence*, Chapter 3.
9. This limitation could be overcome by the direct legal requirement that parties run a certain percentage of women candidates. In 1993 Italy adopted a women's quota for the 25% of its seats that are elected from party lists.

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