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Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006. xi + 277 pp. \$45.00 (hb). ISBN 0-8014-4464-0.

Review Essay by Judith F. Stone, Western Michigan University.

In revisiting questions of citizenship and the elaboration of republicanism during the early Third Republic, Judith Surkis offers an important new perspective on the republican experiment. Surkis reiterates that the relation between the autonomous individual and social responsibilities was the central dilemma of republican theory and governance. Late nineteenth-century politicians and republican reformers pondered this problem in many contexts. Following the observations of other commentators, Surkis notes that the republican citizen had always been conceived as male and that the tension between individual and society was highly gendered.[1] One of her most important contributions is to argue that conceptions of republican masculinity were in the process of being refashioned at the end of the nineteenth century. She explores several key debates in which essentials of appropriate masculinity were proposed. As significantly, Surkis persuasively demonstrates that the republican resolution of the tension between individual autonomy and social requirements was located in successful conjugal relations. Marriage was to serve as the answer to the ever-more-pressing need to regulate the social and sexual lives of men. This republican ideal of marriage rested on the simultaneously complementary and hierarchical positions of men and women. Reason and sentiment, reproduction, and sexual passion would be balanced, ensuring personal, social, and political health.

Surkis explores this republican effort to construct the ideal male citizen through a careful examination of the texts of leading republican academics, philosophers, reformers, and politicians--the men of the new republican elite. She also includes the works of a few prominent critics of the Republic. Journals, proceedings, scholarly studies, novels, and parliamentary reports and debates constitute her principal sources. She studies the themes of masculinity and marriage in four loosely connected areas: primary and secondary educational reform, the works of Emile Durkheim, and hygienists' efforts to control venereal disease.

Turning to educational reform, Surkis offers yet another perspective on the well studied Ferry Laws and their larger agenda. She focuses on the works of Ferdinand Buisson, a key actor in the formulation and implementation of these reforms. Buisson was a pivotal figure in the creation of a republican Republic--neo-Kantian philosopher, Director of Primary Education, Sorbonne professor of pedagogy, and by 1906 Radical deputy. Most urgently French children needed to be emancipated from the traditional, authoritarian teaching of the Church. The positive purpose of the primary school was to create self-regulating individuals and loyal, productive citizens. Adolescent boys in particular were most in need of a moral education, which promoted self-discipline. Reformers such as Buisson and Henri Marion viewed the success of the new "liberal education" as resting on the collaboration between mothers and schoolteachers. Mothers within conjugal families would provide their sons with appropriate affective experiences, preparing them for school. In the classroom the teacher gave lessons in the acquisition of self-discipline and served as a model of appropriate behavior. Of course girls also received education, but what they were to gain from this dynamic of maternal affect and instructional self-discipline was unclear.

Surkis further exposes the republican paradox that sought to establish equality within a context of hierarchy when she explores the implementation of educational reform in Algeria. In the colonial setting the disciplinary character of educational reform aiming to create citizens was sharply revealed. While

the European settlers opposed any education for indigenous children, republican reformers viewed the school as the ideal setting to correct what they identified as the influence of the “degraded Arab family.” While stressing the universal need to discipline adolescents through education, reformers conceded that curriculum and pedagogy would have to be adapted to the specific Algerian setting. The education of girls could only be conducted with great caution. The teaching of a secular morality, *laïcité*, was if anything more urgent in Algeria than in the metropole. Algerian boys were to be given an alternative to what the reformers considered an “immoral Islam.”

Examining the debates surrounding secondary education, Surkis finds considerable evidence for mounting anxiety about the formation of a republican elite and particularly the shaping of a healthy masculinity. The state-run *lycées*, which were to produce rigorously educated national leaders, increasingly were condemned as dangerous sites of deviance and insubordination. Republican and conservative critics feared that the boarding programs led adolescent boys to develop ambivalent attitudes toward heterosexuality. *Lycées* produced a surplus of graduates, creating an intellectual proletariat that had been trained to be both passive and rebellious. Nationalist critics, such as Maurice Barrès, decried this uprooted, amoral generation. In his view republican educators and their universalizing abstractions had promoted the current decadence. Republican educators themselves shared similar anxieties about the effects of a *lycée* education. Surkis points out that parliament debated and reformed the curriculum and organization of the *lycée* in the 1890s and then again in 1902. Of particular concern was the creation of a disciplinary system that would cultivate independent young men endowed with intellect, vitality, and a sense of social responsibilities.

In two absorbing chapters Surkis demonstrates that Emile Durkheim placed these issues of individuality, social commitment, and masculinity at the center of his work. Her reading of the foundational texts *Suicide* and *The Division of Labor* provides persuasive evidence of the key role which masculinity played in Durkheim’s consideration of socially productive individuals. Surkis describes how his substantive and methodological elaboration of the new discipline of sociology endorsed republican progress and modernity. However, such a positive view was only possible when male individuals could be both liberated and regulated in the context of modern companionate marriage. Surkis finds marriage at the very heart of Durkheim’s vision of healthy modern society and implicitly a successful republic. Marriage was the supreme expression of the modern division of labor. Its complementarity empowered men and protected them from the threatening anomie of a modern, complex environment. Surkis stresses that while Durkheim was very clear on the multiple benefits of marriage for men, he refused to examine his own empirical evidence, which revealed that marriage had few advantages for women. She notes further that while this tension was never addressed or resolved, Durkheim continued to insist on the urgent need for modern men to marry in order for society to be healthy.

The final chapters are devoted to another group of reformers committed to protecting the well being of society, its physical as well as moral and social health. Hygienists and physicians addressed what was viewed as the dangerously increasing rate of venereal disease among men. This issue raised questions of male sexuality, individual autonomy, and the extent of state regulation. Throughout the nineteenth century the French state had regulated prostitution, thus in effect legalizing it. Prostitutes were required to undergo regular examinations and were incarcerated if infected with venereal disease. In the 1890s regulation and its implications came under criticism. Surkis examines the major professional association of hygienists that staunchly defended regulation and their debates on the extension of regulation to men in the army and navy, to colonial subjects, and to civilian naval arsenal workers in France. She also considers very briefly the more interventionist regulatory hygiene practiced by the state during the First World War.

Surkis views these actual and proposed programs as part of a larger project, also found in the educational reforms and Durkheim’s vision of a productive social order. Republicans in the early twentieth century sought to elaborate a new conception of masculinity, one that would encompass both

individual rights and the individual's responsibility to society. Only companionate marriage could ensure that men would exercise their rights *and* accept their wider social obligations. Women played a central role in this resolution of the tensions between individual and society. However, the reformers avoided any consideration of women as individual beings.

In an interesting epilogue Surkis argues that these efforts to construct a productive male citizen and the centrality of marriage in that task remain important concerns in twenty-first-century France. Recent conflicts surrounding Muslim girls wearing headscarves when attending *lycée* and subsequent legislation barring the display of religious symbols in the classroom bring together the elements that Surkis has identified as critical in her analysis of the citizen: What constitutes an appropriate republican education? How can adolescents be integrated into republican society? What are suitable gender norms? How to best construct and defend *laïcité*? These parallels suggest that the question of how to form citizens is an inevitable and persistent dilemma of modern republican states. However, the developments of an intervening century have significantly altered the meanings of *laïcité* and citizenship. Surkis does not consider what might be the most critical transformations of these meanings. To raise only one question, does the establishment of complete universal suffrage in the mid-twentieth century in any way affect how citizenship is constructed in the early twenty-first century?

One wishes that Surkis had probed the issue of secularism more thoroughly in the epilogue and, even more importantly, in her earlier chapters on education. *Laïcité* was a powerful commitment for such "*pur et dur*" republicans as Ferdinand Buisson, who play so important a role in her analysis. In her discussion of the educational debates, one gets little sense of the intense battle being waged between secular republicans and powerful conservative, clerical forces. Some of this republican crusading spirit does emerge when Surkis examines the implementation of educational reform in Algeria. It might have been interesting to pursue the parallels between republican disdain for Muslim morality and their equally intense repudiation of Catholic values. What were the different implications of *laïcité* in the metropole and in the colonies? Surkis relies heavily for her examination of primary education reform in the colonies on an 1892 Senate report on education in Algeria whose author was Emile Combes. The senator had already gained the reputation of being the quintessential anticlerical Radical. How did his fervent secularism color the report? Here parallels between the late nineteenth century and the early twenty-first century republican attitudes toward Islam might have been illuminating. More broadly, to what degree did the secular/clerical conflict shape the changing constructions of masculinity that republicans were offering? An exploration of this highly charged context of conflict and its impact on the construction of masculinity would have enriched Surkis' study.

Similarly, she fails to note an adjacent arena of conflict when examining hygienists' proposals to extend obligatory physical examinations to civilian naval arsenal workers in the effort to control venereal disease. Such proposals marked a significant departure from the traditional republican rhetoric of the inviolability of individual male citizens. The state did have obligations to regulate (as in the case of female prostitutes) or to protect (as in the case of women and children), but only for the good of society as a whole. In the early twentieth century hygienists were proposing that in order to combat the syphilis epidemic adult male workers would have to be regulated in a fashion similar to prostitutes. These 1902 debates occurred at the very time that naval arsenal workers were most militant and had one of the highest rates of unionization in France. They succeeded in gaining an eight-hour day from the Radical Minister of the Navy. The many syndicalists among them were promoting strike actions. Is there any evidence that these workers knew of the hygienist debates or what their reactions were to proposals that threatened traditional republican conceptions of masculinity? We have no hint of their response, if any.

Surkis entitles her final chapter "The Hygienic Citizen," and it contains some of her most important insights. She implies that the hygienists' model of health was reshaping republican morality, masculinity, and citizenship. To create "hygienic citizens" not all men could be viewed as equal;

distinctions based on inspection and regulation had to be made. Republican universalism was slipping toward hierarchy, open to eugenicist appropriation. Republicans were aware of these transformations in their own rhetoric. One wishes that Surkis had commented on the strains and distinctions among republicans as they searched for the resolution of the tensions between individual and society. Ferdinand Buisson's strategy was not identical to that of the hygienist reformers. Emile Combes was never entirely comfortably with Léon Bourgeois' solidarism. Surkis offers strong evidence of republicans' urgent search for an appropriate masculinity. This evidence would be even more persuasive had she linked this search more specifically to those late-nineteenth-century issues that impinged on it—the secular/clerical conflict, growing working class activism, republican disagreements, and increasing feminist demands.

Judith Surkis has made an important contribution in identifying the pervasive effort to construct or reconstruct the republican citizen in the decades prior to the First World War. Most importantly she has clearly demonstrated the centrality of gender in this effort. Masculinity was essential to the concept of citizen, but this masculinity was not stable. It contained aspects potentially dangerous to the individual, the republic, and society. Politicians, academics, and reformers identified marriage as the necessary complement to the autonomous individual, joining him to productive and reproductive social relations. Surkis makes clear that women played an indispensable role in this construction of the citizen but that their actual situations as women and individuals were rarely addressed. Judith Surkis has added significantly to our understanding of republicanism, how gender structures central modern political concepts, and how masculinity is a constructed identity.

NOTES

[1] These other commentators include: Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: Feminism and the "Rights of Man" in France, 1789-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); Elinor A. Accampo, Rachel G. Fuchs, and Mary Lynn Stewart, eds. *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-siècle France," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 252-86; Michelle Perrot, "The New Eve and the Old Adam: Changes in French Women's Condition at the Turn of the Century," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, eds. Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson and Sonya Michel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); and Carol E. Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth Century France: Gender, Sociability and the Uses of Emulation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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See also the Review Essays on this book by Florence Tamagne, Karen Offen, and Robert A. Nye, as well as Judith Surkis's response to all four Review Essays.

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