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Anne Verjus, *Le cens de la famille: Les femmes et le vote, 1789-1848*. Collection Socio-histoires. Paris: Belin, 2002. 255 pp. Notes. 22.00 € (pb). ISBN 2-7011-3261-4.

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In this densely researched, elaborately argued, and myopically French study, Anne Verjus posits that the now obvious (to us) exclusion of women from the right to vote in the French revolutionary period (and thereafter for a hundred fifty years) was not so obvious prior to 1848 because "everyone" thought of "individuals" in terms of male-headed families and in terms of a particular form of "independence" from which women were "naturally" excluded because of their dependency as wives or daughters.

Against Joan Scott's notion of "paradox," Verjus argues that women's political situation was by no means paradoxical. Seen in context, she affirms, it brings to light a political argument "that traverses the entire construction of citizenship, whose effects are felt by all the members of the nation from the Revolution of 1789 through that of 1848." (p. 12) She documents this political argument by looking not only at discourse but also at its effects in electoral law.

The book consists of an introduction, three substantial and substantive chapters, the first two of which cover the 1789-1848 period ("La Société civile et politique des individus" and "Un Suffrage familialiste") and the third concerning 1848 ("La communauté naturelle des hommes"). These are followed by a conclusion which evaluates the political situation of women in light of the evolving definition of the political individual. The bibliographical notes (pp. 203-253) are extensive and valuable, but, what is more, the full bibliography (ordered chronologically) and detailed references to archival sources (including texts of thirty-four supporting documents) are archived as PDF files on the publisher's website www.editions-belin.com (to access these, go to the website, bring up "verjus," and click on "compléments en ligne"). Regrettably, the printed book itself has no index.

The first long chapter (over fifty pages) explores the "discourse" elements of the constructions of citizenship from the 1780s into the Restoration. The author has carefully studied all the electoral laws of the period (and the debates that led to them), beginning with the regulations of 24 January 1789 that set the pattern for elections to the Estates General. *Pace* François Furet, who argued that the birth of the individual and modern society began with the August 4th and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, Verjus argues that underneath this 1789 individual there lay a highly hierarchized foundation; the issue was consultation, not representative government. She insists that the real revolution was Necker's decision to double the representation of the Third Estate, which opened the way to the notion of sovereignty vested in the nation. She claims that, with voting criteria resting on *domicile* (which is more than mere residence), legal majority, non-servant status, and tax payments at a certain level, masculinity was only an implicit, not an explicit criterion. This was not a notion of a vote based on parcels of national territory, as the Physiocrats advocated, Verjus claims, but something quite different. Property of a certain level became a signifier of the independence of the individual. Verjus has read widely in the

interpretative literature and offers correctives to virtually everyone based on her return to the texts of the period.

During the Restoration, property holding effectively became the basis for the electorate, and Verjus argues that it was during this period, not before, that the innovative idea of direct election of deputies by the electorate took hold. What is particularly important about the election laws of this period, though, is that the mode of calculating the *cens électoral* (the level of tax that had to be paid by a prospective elector) was changed to include the combined contributions of family members, including wives and widows. There were various formulas for how this would work, and particularly for the order (or not) in which widows could allocate their contributions to male family members (sons, sons-in-law). These formulas became more flexible during the July Monarchy, but the point was that the so-called voting "individual" was in fact a male householder who thus openly represented, through his tax payment and his vote, an entire family—including the women. Ultra-royalists and Doctrinaires were of one mind about this point. This was in no way a solution with democratic implications.

Thus, the male-headed household model for the *cens électoral* seemed to be normative (rather than a position actually reinforced by counter-revolutionary thinking—precisely in response to earlier claims made on behalf of enfranchising women). Yet the claim to normativity is subsequently undermined by another aspect of Verjus's argument, which concerns the separation of the "public" and the "private," a separation that she dates from the post-revolutionary period. It was then that citizenship was effectively split into two parts: civil and political, and this split lasted until 1848. Both the Civil Code and the laws on nationality (and here she draws on the findings of Jennifer Heuer, with whom she has worked closely) consolidated this split by effectively reinventing the family as a political unit.[1] In fact, the revolutionary laws, she argues, had served to undermine the indissolubility of the family—through promoting the liberty of adult children and by institutionalizing marriage as a civil contract which could be interrupted by divorce. Indeed, she suggests that for a few years in the 1790s, and particularly with respect to marriage and divorce, adult women really were treated as *de facto* individuals, but that changed rather quickly from around 1796 on when wives were legally disempowered as marital property co-administrators. "Nature" was increasingly invoked to substantiate the reimposition of inequities in marital civil law.[2] The bottom line was this: that individual rights and the equality of "abstract" individuals came to a screeching halt at the threshold of the family, partly in order to dignify and maintain the authority of the *chef de famille*. Verjus makes a vital distinction: the idea of the individual held during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in France had precious little to do with our current notions of the ungendered, abstract individual, which are in fact of more recent birth. Her entire historiographically-based argument, which demands the reader to carefully follow every word and to constantly check the endnotes, is about establishing a deep context for understanding the issues about woman suffrage, but in fact it provides a rich understanding of arguments about the family and its relationship to political life more generally. What the author might have underscored more fervently is the process of erasure whereby, in the 1820s and 1830s, this social reconstruction had become normative, naturalized, and hegemonic; though once asserted, it was now conveniently assumed.

The second short chapter, "Un suffrage familialiste" (pp. 83-111), looks at the effects of this thoroughly normative male-headed family-based thinking on the electoral laws of the subsequent period, and particularly on the calculation of the *cens électoral*, which, Verjus argues, becomes the "strongest argument for explaining the political situation of women" (p. 84). She asserts that none of the earlier studies have paid attention to this particular feature of the electoral laws and their practice. The question of interest is whether the *cens* had to be personal, i.e. individual. And the answer is mostly "no," until the July Monarchy. Her point is that the property of women, and their financial contributions to the *cens* of a male family member, could be counted. From Year VIII on the *cens* could be paid by a cumulative family contribution. During the Restoration, in 1817, the Doctrinaires tried to narrow the broader family contribution to a nuclear family contribution, which could also include a contribution from the property held by wives, but they were unsuccessful. Thus women, or at least certain wives, did

(according to Verjus) have a form of family-based political representation during the Restoration and into the July Monarchy.

The utter masculinity of the vote, Verjus argues in chapter three ("La communauté naturelle des hommes," pp. 103-189), only became apparent in 1848 when all men, including the formerly excluded male domestic servants, gained the franchise, all qualifications (including the *cens*) having been removed. This was seen by contemporaries (mostly male political figures, it seems), Verjus argues, as "universal suffrage" without specifying "manhood," as we have now come to do. It was for "everyone."

Yet was it? Who was this "everyone?" On this critical point, Verjus does not go deep enough in her ostensibly exhaustive search for sources. Several earlier women's documents are included in the author's web-site list, but significantly there are no texts included from the *Voix des femmes* in 1848, which is precisely where many of the feminist objections to the all-male vote were published. It is perhaps not surprising that the male political figures, even the progressive ones, would lean toward an exclusively male vote, yet this exclusivity had been publicly contested since the 1780s. Certainly Condorcet is not as isolated a figure as Verjus makes him out to be. Moreover, his collected works were published in the late 1840s. I am not suggesting that there were hordes of people advocating full citizenship for women, but I am prepared to insist that the project of women's full citizenship, acknowledged by the vote, was eminently thinkable in 1848 and had been thinkable since the early days of 1789, if not before. Indeed, there is one published petition from 1789 that insists not only that women must vote but that they must also have their own representatives, that men could not represent their interests.^[3] This was well before Olympe de Gouges penned her *Declaration of the Rights of Women* in 1791. It seems likely that such publications may have stimulated thinking by men who opposed women's inclusion in "active" citizenship about how to head it off. The sudden rush back to the male-headed family from 1796 on, the insisting more loudly than before on the consolidated family as the appropriate political category, and the appeal to nature to support this claim can be read (though Verjus does not) as a counter-revolutionary, indeed, explicitly antifeminist move.

Anne Verjus has taken on a huge task in this book and, for the most part, she does her work well. She has snuffed out the construction of the male householder and the *cens*, but she has not seen why it was so important to place him there. This author, who initially says she takes women's history seriously, in fact seems to have something of a dismissive attitude towards (even scorn for) its contributions, including those of Michèle Riot-Sarcey, who has insisted most effectively on pressing home the point that the vote accorded in 1848 was "*suffrage universel masculin*." Can this be a reflection of Mona Ozouf's views (Ozouf wrote the book's preface, in which she insists, mistakenly, on the "unthinkability" of woman suffrage in 1848 France), or simply a bow to French academic antifeminism? In any event Verjus repeatedly distances herself from ostensible practitioners of women's history (as on p. 115, for example), though most of the scholars whose work she cites—Elisabeth Badinter, Joan Landes, Carole Pateman—are not in fact practicing historians of women but, more accurately, political theorists who work with historical materials in order to make arguments in the present tense. Surprisingly, there are no references to the work of Christine Fauré, who has effectively discussed the roots of "democracy without women" in the French context, or to the several Anglophone historians (apart from Joan Scott) who have published on feminist demands in 1848.^[4]

Yet women's history and its companion—gender analysis by feminist historians—has much to bring to this subject. Verjus analyzes male-authored texts in which the gender issues are not as explicitly laid out as they might be, and although she occasionally credits women's history with having importance for general history (cf. the introduction and again, p. 114), she does not really see the gender dynamics at work. She could have taken this analysis further by looking at what the women's rights advocates were saying and, thus, reestablishing the debate that was in fact taking place. Though she offers us many astute observations and new facts based on her careful sleuthing, her interpretation is marred by an absence of familiarity with feminist writings of the period and with the subsequent feminist scholarship.

Tixerant's 1908 study, though useful, is hardly the last word on the question. For example, to read the women's documents of the earlier revolutionary period is to know that masculinity is not "implicit" but already "asserted." Why is there no citation, for example, to the two volumes of reprinted texts, *Les Femmes dans la Révolution française* (Paris: EDHIS, 1978), or to their originals, by a scholar who has otherwise been so careful about recovering and making available primary sources? Why is there only allusive familiarity with the substantial feminist scholarship that has been published on the period, including comparative works?

Even with reference to the male-authored texts and the men's political debates, Verjus might have interpreted them differently. It seems significant, for example, that Louis Blanc actually brought up the exclusion of women (and children) in 1839. Why, if the status of *chef de famille* was so much a part of the working assumptions of his audience, did he even mention it? By placing women and children together Blanc deliberately emphasized their common dependency, obscuring the point that in French law (if not in practice) single adult women were legally fully emancipated adults. Significantly, Blanc invoked social utility as grounds for excluding women from political rights (just as Talleyrand had done in 1791, in a move that provoked Mary Wollstonecraft to dedicate her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* to him). But Verjus does not acknowledge this (or any other) important precedent, though surely they should have been familiar to Blanc, who was, after all, a historian of the French Revolution. Why should Blanc have even mentioned women if their exclusion was not already being critiqued? One could pose similar questions concerning the pamphlets of Claude Tillier, which Verjus also cites.

Given the vagaries of the French language with regard to the term "femme" (which in English translates both as "woman" and "wife") it is not always clear when Verjus refers to "femmes" whether she is speaking of all women, or more precisely, of "wives," which to be sure, it was assumed (by some) that all women would become. Her argument could have been enhanced had she made the distinction between her own usage of "femmes" as wives and "femmes" as single adult women clearer. The distinction "épouse" is increasingly invoked toward the end of the book, but always as part of the formula "épouses et mères."

In an extremely brief (and derivative) discussion of the feminist demands for women's suffrage in 1848 (p. 146), Verjus does make an important point, insisting that the fact that women were arguing for what she calls a "sexualist concept of citizenship" proves that in 1848 the thought of a sexually neutral concept of citizenship is "foreign to the dominant political thought of that epoch." Quite so. This is an extremely important point, and the fact is that feminists in Europe throughout the nineteenth century continued to do precisely that. But this is not news. What Verjus does not see is that it is less the "exhaustion" of the family model of politics (as she suggests) than a reordering of a family model that the feminists are advocating: by invoking women's situation as *mothers*, they are calling for an end to the hierarchical model of *chef de famille* with dependents and the elaboration of a familial model based on the parallel and complementary roles of mothers and fathers. Distinctive bodies, distinctive tasks, both in need of political representation. In other words, they were asking for "equality-in-difference," as I have been showing since the early 1980s in my work on the history of feminism (the notion of "relational feminism" refers precisely to this embodied and complementary form of thinking about women's rights). *Pace* Verjus (p. 145), I would argue that a "*cité par nature masculin*" is by no means "natural." Even in 1793 (the model invoked by the most radical 1848ers, especially Louis Blanc), it was a social construction designed to exclude women. When Verjus sets the feminists up for failure by referring to them and their efforts as "*minoritaire*," "*ridiculisée*," "*dédaigné*," (p. 147) she encourages her readers to underestimate, even ignore, the subversive importance of their arguments. And when she argues that it was based on the differentializing that "forged the idea that women constitute a political category," she does not see that this is not "tearing them from the family," but rather fundamentally reconstituting the family itself. Indeed, such ideas were far from new in 1848. Was it not the Saint-Simonians themselves who postulated the individual as a couple, male and female, and put a premium on the power of the mother? Earlier on (pp. 128-29), Verjus underscores what she perceives as the real threat from the

men's perspective: democracy in the family and the destruction of the power of the *chef de famille*, but she does not see how a careful reading of these (and many other) French feminist texts themselves might in fact lend weight to her speculation.

Verjus is "puzzled" by this point because she has not read those published writings. She does not see that a dialogue was going on--indeed a debate--half of which is being effectively obscured. Why, I ask, did she not take the opportunity to read the women's/feminist documents of 1848 and before with the same care that she devoted to reading the men's documents or those of George Sand whose opposition to women's suffrage she elaborately details? Certainly these texts are no less difficult to get hold of than those she has used. What is more, there is no excuse for citing small portions of these texts from secondary works or for drawing primarily on the older Francophone scholarship.[5] The *Voix des femmes* has been available on microfilm for years. The pamphlet literature consulted by many of us, not only by Michèle Riot-Sarcey, is available at the Bibliothèque Nationale or in the archives. And the pertinent Anglophone scholarship is all on deposit, along with the Francophone scholarship, at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, the feminist municipal library in central Paris.

My point is that it is not just Riot-Sarcey (whom Verjus criticizes) who insists on referring to the new "universal" suffrage as "masculine." The 1848 feminists themselves quickly recognized it as masculine. This is eminently apparent from the publication *Les Femmes au Gouvernement provisoire et au peuple français*, dated 16 March 1848 and signed by Antonine André de Saint-Gieles and a number of "women artists, workers, writers, teachers and others." [6] Written in response to the provisional government's announcement of "universal" suffrage, this petition insisted on the complementarity of the sexes, and the fact that if the "revolution had been made for all" (as the provisional government insisted), women were assuredly "half of everyone," that "there could not be two liberties, two equalities, two fraternities," that "the people" is "composed of two sexes..." Or consider the text of the pamphlet *Les Femmes Électeurs et Éligibles* (from *La Voix des femmes*, 26 March 1848), which recounts with commentary the account of the women's delegation to the *mairie* of Paris on March 22. [7] This recognition and contestation of an all-male electorate is also evident from the various commentaries through the next few months in *La Voix des femmes*, and not only by Jeanne Deroin. There is far more evidence for this than space permits me to detail here. These women were inventing political arguments based on their understanding of how things should be in a new society, how the family should operate, and how political life should be organized, where not everything was to be decided by the rule of [male] force. Their "individual" was female, embodied, not abstract. That French women were already launched into a reconfiguration of republican political thinking and a serious critique of masculine domination during the July Monarchy has been ably demonstrated by others. [8] The arguments produced here by Anne Verjus could be made even more strongly, but with different emphases, and certainly with more of a feminist twist, had she read these other primary and secondary sources. And, despite Verjus, we should continue to insist that scholars and readers today refer to this suffrage of 1848 as "*suffrage universel masculin*," a term which underscores its true character. Historians of nineteenth-century France should no longer be allowed to get away with restricting their examination of sources to an exclusively masculine discourse. Political thought in France is a deeply gendered enterprise, and so too should be its history.

In sum (and here I will repeat what I said in 1998 at the Paris colloquium on the Revolution of 1848 concerning the women's rights, press, and their arguments for the vote), "this [1848] evidence ... calls into question a set of recent assertions put forth by scholars of French history such as Pierre Rosenvallon [1992] and Joan Wallach Scott [1996], to the effect that the hegemony in France of the idea of 'universalism' acted as a pre-existing barrier to women's suffrage and citizenship and that, in consequence, feminism had 'only paradoxes to offer.' It also challenges the conclusions of Mona Ozouf [1995, 1997] concerning the pretended 'singularity' of feminism in France.... In 1848, the exchanges that took place between woman suffrage advocates and their opponents underscore a contrary argument, in effect that the appeal to the abstract 'universal subject' by opponents of women's political rights might better be seen as a **defense** repeatedly constructed against women's irrefutable arguments

for participation in politics and government, arguments based explicitly on womanly specificity as much as on appeals to common humanity." Anne Verjus argues, and my findings on this point support hers, that the barrier was by no means pre-existing, and she has demonstrated very well through her detailed survey of the male literature on the vote and the *cens* that the "abstract individual" simply did not exist before 1848.

Indeed, Verjus attributes the introduction of this abstract individual to Pierre Leroux in his treatise *De l'égalité*.^[9] But by not examining the women's sources with the same seriousness as the men's (or looking once again at the climate of debate embodied by Michelet and Proudhon's 1840s writings about women, not to mention those of Legouvé), Verjus does not see how even the arguments of Leroux and especially those of his son-in-law, Luc Desages, might be constructed in dialogue not only with those debating the vote but also with those of the feminists and, earlier, the Saint-Simonians. Does it not seem paradoxical in the extreme that Leroux, a father of socialism who was no fan of individualism, who argued for the complementarity of the sexes and idealized the maternal role, could be considered the father of our notion of an abstract, disembodied individual?^[10]

Finally, Verjus does not look at the comparative scholarship, which reveals the absolute masculinity of thinking about the vote in pre-1848 England and the US, as well as the ways in which women were eloquently contesting it. In fact, it shows that in the few places where women did have some sort of vote it was being legislated out of existence. It was not out of the clear blue sky that the English stipulated "male person" in the parliamentary Reform Act of 1832. Verjus gives no nod to contemporary debates in England concerning extensions of suffrage, not only to working class men (the Chartist movement is of particularly importance in this respect) but also to women. Looking at this question solely within a French framework is to ignore the transatlantic cultural debate about suffrage extension, of which France was very much a part. Thus, one of the presumed strengths of Verjus's detailed analysis--what I have called its myopic Frenchness--also presents a serious interpretative limitation.^[11]

The findings of women's history during the last few decades allow us to do better than that, and I hope that in the future Anne Verjus will take up the challenge of moving her work into a comparative, more internationalized mode. The European importance of the all-male vote in 1848, and the swirl of discourse surrounding it, should not be underestimated. Only then will she really come to appreciate the importance of the fact that, as feminists from 1789 and into the Third Republic insisted, the republicans had created a "male aristocracy."^[12] Anne Verjus has published an important book that is "good to think with" and that certainly does help us to date the emergence of the abstract individual as a post-1848 phenomenon for French electoral thinking; however, it does not take into account the impact of the early phases of feminist contestation, which explicitly and repeatedly contested as false any ostensibly universal claim on behalf of men. Nor does it acknowledge the real significance of the very concrete, embodied, indeed maternal character of French women's historical claims to political equality. Indeed, it seems that Leroux himself was acknowledging the possibilities of this position (and not that of the abstract individual) when, in 1851, he spoke in the Legislative Assembly on behalf of women's inclusion in municipal suffrage, insisting on the existence of "*deux personnes humaines*," and proposing the language "*Les Français et Françaises majeurs*"^[13] There is nothing abstract about that; these French political individuals are sexed, both grammatically and corporeally.

NOTES

[1] See their joint article, "L'invention de la sphère domestique au sortir de la Révolution," *Annales Historique de la Révolution française* (2002): 1-28.

[2] See the articles and forthcoming book of Suzanne Desan for an important reinterpretation of this earlier period.

[3] Two of these 1789 feminist texts are available in English translation on the French Revolution website at George Mason University <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/>

[4] Notably S. Joan Moon, Claire Goldberg Moses, Laura Struminger Schor.

[5] See the French documents published in translation in *Women, the Family, and Freedom, 1750-1950: The Debate in Documents*, vol. 1, ed. Susan Groag Bell and Karen Offen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), and also the 1848 documents published in French and English in Karen Offen, "Women and the Question of 'Universal' Suffrage in 1848: A Transatlantic Comparison of Suffragist Rhetoric," *NWSA Journal*, 11:1 (Spring 1999): 150-177, and in French in "Femmes et suffrage 'universel': Une comparaison transatlantique," in *1848: Actes du colloque international du cent cinquantième, tenu à l'Assemblée nationale à Paris, les 23-25 février 1998*, ed. Jean-Luc Mayaud (Paris: Société d'histoire de la révolution de 1848 et des révolutions du XIXe siècle et CREAPHIS, 2002): 29-45. For an overview, see Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); the earlier scholarship on 1848 is cited in the endnotes.

[6] This document is published in French and English translation in "Women and the Question of 'Universal' Suffrage," cited above.

[7] The entire document is reprinted in both languages in the NWSA journal article, and in French in *1848: Actes*, cited above.

[8] See Whitney Walton, *Eve's Proud Descendants: Four Women Writers and Republican Politics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[9] Yet Leroux seems the most unlikely of candidates for this honor. See Naomi Andrews, "'La Mère Humanité': Femininity in the Romantic Socialism of Pierre Leroux and the Abbé A.-L. Constant," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63:4 (2002): 697-716.

[10] Andrews, "'La Mère Humanité,'" speaks of the "vehemence and prominence of their [the romantic socialists] critique of individualism," 699.

[11] For a clear picture of how the masculinity of the nineteenth-century English householder was revealed as an assertion, not an assumption, and that there was significant debate over this very question raised by champions of the single property-holding women's vote, see Anna Clark, "Gender, class, and the nation: franchise reform in England, 1832-1928," in *Re-reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. James Vernon (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996): 230-253. That male heads of family were unsuited to representing "their" women was a point British feminist campaigns sought to prove, partly by exposing instances of male violence against women and the extent and ethical horrors of urban prostitution. For an important analysis of the development of a "false," i.e. masculine universal, beginning in the seventeenth century, see Hilda L. Smith, *All Men and Both Sexes: Gender, Politics, and the False Universal in England, 1640-1832* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

[12] See Karen Offen, "Women, Citizenship, and Suffrage with a French Twist, 1789-1993," in *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Caroline Daley & Melanie Nolan (Auckland, NZ: Auckland University Press, 1994). In translation as "Les Femmes, la citoyenneté et le droit de vote en

France, 1789-1993," in *Le processus d'intégration des femmes au politique: Féminismes et cultures nationales*, ed. Yolande Cohen and Françoise Thébaud (Lyon: Centre Jacques Cartier, 1998).

[13] See *Le Moniteur universel*, 22 nov. 1851, 2917-18. Assemblée nationale législative, séance de 21 novembre.

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