

WOMEN AND THE IDEAL OF CITIZENSHIP IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE



TRAIT DE COURAGE HÉROÏQUE, 2

De l'empire de la Nature, vient rendre mœurs
 tous les vices de cet Empire, après beaucoup d'années
 Mages et tous se font, plant en de nombreux

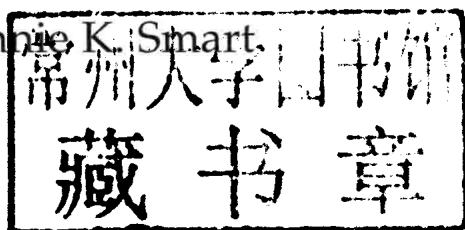
re-croiser les échelles. Le second couple de braves nous
vint à la main dans la forme ovalaire de plus en plus
marquée en profondeur, et son angle fut reporté ?

ANNIE K. SMART

Citoyennes

Women and the Ideal of Citizenship in Eighteenth-Century France

Annie K. Smart,



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Preface

This book started, as do so many studies on women in eighteenth-century France, with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's ideas on subjectivity, gender, and politics continue to provoke and to shape fields of study. Whether we agree with them or not, Rousseau's works force us to think through how sexual and political identities are interconnected and how ideologies about gender roles underpin our modern democratic societies.

From graduate school on, I loved reading Rousseau; and I loved even better reading feminist criticism on "l'ami Jean-Jacques." I admired the groundbreaking works of Joan Landes, Carole Pateman, and Lynn Hunt, works that examine the historical and structural divisions between public and private, male and female. Yet while I resonated with this modern vindication of the political rights of women, I found it increasingly hard to identify with the vision of the home portrayed in these critical studies: the home as the realm of domestic motherhood and the private life world.

I could not identify with this critical construct of the disarticulated home, devoted to domestic cares and private subjectivity, which seemed to exist not only separate from, but also in opposition to, the workplace and the political arena. This was not the sort of domestic sphere I grew up in. In my experience, home was filled with politics. Home was where, when I was in grade school, my brother, parents, and I stuffed "McGovern for President" envelopes, in a valiant but futile attempt to convince New Hampshire voters to back the senator from South Dakota. Home was where fellow McGovern supporters came to discuss political strategies over dinner. Later, home was where my school friends and I watched the Senate Watergate Committee hearings on the impeachment of Richard Nixon.

In short, I learned that home was where you formed a political identity—the place where you watched the spectacles of political debate and organizing. Home was thus an important site of civic action: it was where we first tested our political voice and also where we developed a civic practice. We learned about the importance of voting, but also about the importance of discussing issues together, becoming informed, and acting as a watchdog for the public good.

The more I read about the domestic intimate sphere as formulated by contemporary critics, the more I wondered what was really going on in the eighteenth-century home. What kinds of identities were being formed in the eighteenth-century domestic sphere? If eighteenth-century French writers and politicians stripped women of political rights, did they also deny women a civic identity? Or is it possible to glean from revolutionary and prerevolutionary French writings an alternative model—a model of the home as the site of both the family and civic practice? This book tries to answer those questions.

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Introduction

Can we speak of the *citoyenne* in eighteenth-century France? Citizenship—or, the reconceptualizing of man's rights and duties toward the state through reworking the social contract—was a favorite topic of debate in eighteenth-century France. But whether women had a civic identity was a vexed question. According to Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, the word *citoyenne* does not even exist. The article *Citoyen* draws on a paterfamilias model, according to which women, children, and servants are classified as "dependents" and are thus represented by the male head of household. Contemporary criticism reiterates this peculiar affirmation of female citizenship as absence, especially within the context of the French Revolution. William Sewell, for example, considers that the word *citoyenne* is an oxymoron.¹ Sewell points out that whereas the Constitution of 1791 classified women as "passive citizens," the 1792 universal term of address *citoyenne* "unintentionally interpellated women as active members of the sovereign."² To be a *citoyenne*, then, was to lack an active, civic identity.

Sewell is not alone in viewing *women* and *citizens* as mutually exclusive terms in eighteenth-century France. In her preface to *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, Joan Wallach Scott comments that "from the French Revolution of 1789 until 1944, citizens were men."³ While men, exercising their public reason, were able and indeed had the obligation to participate fully in the sovereign, women lacked man's rational capacities and were thus unable to enter into the social contract. Many scholars, following Carole Pateman's theory that the modern republic was constructed against women, assert that both eighteenth-century thinkers (such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau) and French revolutionaries defined women's identity as essentially negative, in terms of "nots"—not male, not active, not rational.⁴ According to Pateman's interpretations of modern and

earlymodern contract theorists, many of the political writings that we view as foundational to liberal democracy exclude women from the practice and the very idea of citizenship.⁵ She posits in *The Disorder of Women* that in these works “womanhood and women’s bodies represent the private; they represent all that is excluded from the public sphere. In the patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity, women lack the capacities necessary for political life.”⁶ Women thus represent “disorder,” or a threat to the order of the state. Whereas men possess civic qualities—they are able to “to use their reason to sublimate their passions” and “develop a sense of justice”—women cannot “transcend their bodily natures” and thus “cannot develop such a political morality.”⁷ For Pateman, a man’s civic identity is framed by his contribution to the state and the public sphere; women’s contribution is deemed private and has “nothing to do with citizenship.”⁸

Pateman’s work showcases a polarization that exists in Western political theory: contract theorists have constructed, on the one hand, women’s nature as private and man’s nature as civic, and on the other, a private sphere that is devoted to domestic concerns and a public sphere that is devoted to issues concerning the common good. Joan Landes’s ground-breaking study *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, published in the same year as Pateman’s *Sexual Contract* (1988), also contends that the modern democratic public sphere is predicated on the exclusion of women, but uses a different critical framework.⁹ Landes refers to Jürgen Habermas’s *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*¹⁰ to argue that as France shifted from an absolutist to a bourgeois public sphere, women were increasingly excluded from public life and limited to the role of republican mother in an apolitical domestic sphere.¹¹ As Landes states: “I claim that the bourgeois public sphere is essentially, not contingently, masculinist, and that this characteristic serves to determine both its self-representation and its subsequent ‘structural transformation.’”¹² If eighteenth-century *citoyens* debated matters affecting the public, or discussed market regulations, *citoyennes* stayed at home, breastfeeding and nurturing their children.

This book gives an alternative interpretation of women’s civic identity. If many studies define women’s civic identity in terms of lack or in terms of nonidentity, I advance a new paradigm for eighteenth-century women, namely, the *citoyenne*. A more inclusive definition of citizenship informs this paradigm: I define citizenship as including all members of a nation who actively participate in civic life and who play a role in maintaining the life, morals, and values of the public and political arenas. I argue that many eighteenth-century French writers interpellated women as *citoyennes*, that is, as moral individuals devoted to the public good, with a vital role to play in ushering in the good society. This study brings together prerevolutionary and

revolutionary texts to show that by creating the bonds that attach all citizens to the state, the *citoyenne* acts as the linchpin for the ideal state grounded in the principles of social contract and equality.

Reconsidering women's civic identity also means reconsidering the role of the home, or the intimate sphere. Whereas both proponents and critics of Habermas's model assert that the home was the site of private subjectivity, I argue that in eighteenth-century France the home is often represented as a realm for civic experience and values. The work of the *citoyenne* may be located in the physical confines of the home. It does not follow, however, that the *citoyenne*'s actions are thus necessarily apolitical, or that they "have nothing to do with citizenship." In that civic mothers nurture and rear children, the home is indeed the site of private, family values. But the home also generates civic ideals: it is where *citoyennes* promote the values and principles that underpin the good society. This study thus proposes that the eighteenth-century home is the site of both domestic and civic virtues.

My work joins with recent scholarship on domesticity, such as historian Jennifer Popiel's *Rousseau's Daughters* and Lesley Walker's cultural critique, *A Mother's Love*. Although the critical methodologies of these two works are very different, they both call for a reevaluation of the work done in the home-space. Popiel's study, like mine, views the home as the site of civic ideals, although her emphasis on the value of self-control differs from my focus.¹³ In *A Mother's Love*, Walker develops the notions of enlightened domesticity and maternal discourse to postulate that the domestic sphere was represented not as a purely private space, marginalized from society, but rather as the birthplace of virtue. Walker examines Enlightenment novels and art to highlight how maternal discourse inspired social reform.¹⁴ However, *A Mother's Love* does not examine women as civic individuals. Walker's analysis places value on the private virtues taught and learned in the home-space; but it does not link private virtues to the polity, and it does not locate civic identity in the home.

This book also joins with recent scholarship on the French Revolution, such as Suzanne Desan's *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* and Jennifer Ngaiire Heuer's *The Family and the Nation*, which both argue for a broader definition of revolutionary citizenship. In *The Family on Trial*, Desan demonstrates that the home was as ideologically charged as the revolutionary public sphere, and that while women may have been deprived of active political rights, they were considered rights-bearing legal individuals on a par with men. Revolutionary women benefited from changes to the marriage contract and to inheritance laws, for example.¹⁵ Heuer also posits that revolutionary citizenship was not defined exclusively by political rights. Her work *The Family and the Nation* focuses on the "legal, territorial, and civil aspects of national belonging," primarily in émigrés' petitions.¹⁶ Heuer points out that in

limiting citizenship to political rights, historians have neglected many areas in which civic identity was being played out.

Citoyennes continues these investigations and adds to them in several ways. First, while historical studies underscore the practice of citizenship by real women, I consider the question of women's civic identity through the lens of representation. I use the word *representation* in its most basic meaning—depicting or portraying—and also to mean how signs are brought together to create a paradigm or a normative discourse.¹⁷ Through bringing methodologies of literary analysis, inspired by theories of feminism and deconstruction, to bear on various eighteenth-century texts, I tease out a structure of female civic identity; by this, I mean a model according to which women are portrayed as having a duty to promote the ideals of the public sphere or to help found the moral society. Although I analyze some of the same writings studied by feminist historians, I do not use historical methodologies. This project is not a social history that examines the actions of “real” women. Indeed, this book challenges the assumption that there is a rupture between what women did and how they were represented. The divide between the practices of “real” women and the ideology of domestic republican motherhood is particularly evident in studies on the French Revolution. In *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*, for example, Dominique Godineau demonstrates that French revolutionary women were active in public life, but she contrasts “active” *citoyennes* with the “passive” role that French revolutionaries supposedly prescribed for them, namely, the ideal of “Rousseauian” domestic motherhood.¹⁸ Instead of showing that “real” women resisted the normative discourse imposed upon them, I propose that the norm often encouraged female civic action and represented women as playing a pivotal role in maintaining the polity. I thus posit that women were represented as civic individuals, and not necessarily as “disorderly” or incapable of civic virtue, as proponents of Pateman's theory would have it.

Second, whereas Walker focuses primarily on the Enlightenment, Popiel on the early nineteenth century, and Heuer and Desan on the French Revolution, I examine the representation of female civic virtue in prerevolutionary (roughly, 1760–1789) as well as revolutionary texts (in particular, 1789–1794). I contend that women were portrayed as civic individuals both before and during the French Revolution. The prerevolutionary period is generally seen as a sort of black hole of female civic identity, but opinion is divided on the reason why. One tendency is to consider the years before the Revolution as dominated by the aristocratic ideal of sociability and the *salonnière*: this trend presents the prerevolutionary and revolutionary periods as opposed, as a clash between the ideals of the fiery, politically active revolutionary women and the powerful but apolitical *salonnières*, the cultural queens of the

salon.¹⁹ The other trend is to view the prerevolutionary period as generating the ideal of domestic motherhood, typified by Rousseau's Julie de Wolmar in his epistolary novel, *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761).²⁰ This interpretation stresses the continuity between the two time periods but emphasizes the foreclosure on women's civic identity in eighteenth-century France: the ideal of Rousseauian domestic motherhood would begin in the prerevolutionary era and become a political fact and social norm when women's political clubs were banned in the fall of 1793.

My study differs from these approaches. I, too, stress continuity—but I bring to the fore the continuity in how women were represented as civic individuals and how the home was construed as both a civic and a domestic sphere. Moreover, my interpretation of Rousseau differs from much of the previous scholarship in that I question the tendency to interpret the Rousseauian ideal of motherhood as apolitical and purely domestic, and the tendency to refer to this ideal as a monolithic discourse. Even in recent studies on revolutionary femininity, Rousseau retains his role as the ideologue-in-chief of depoliticized republican motherhood.²¹ I want to show that the Rousseauian feminine ideal might have encouraged women to play a role in securing both the public good and private happiness. I argue that we can find a model of civic motherhood in Rousseau: the “good mother who knows how to think” in his 1762 educational novel *Emile* demonstrates the role women play in generating the bonds of love that underpin the virtuous state grounded in the principles of liberty and social contract.

Finally, this book brings together a variety of genres and crosses disciplines to develop a robust notion of how female civic identity was represented. Why throw in the same pot educational novels, political writings and speeches, vaudeville plays, a utopian novel, and a few works of art? While I certainly do not deny the importance of respecting disciplinary boundaries, I believe an interdisciplinary “bricolage” approach can be productive. In order to flesh out the concept of female civic identity, we need to open areas of research. Some of the works I examine do not fit easily into a given discipline and are thus neglected by genre approaches. Louis-Sébastien Mercier's utopian *L'an 2440*, for example, is a novel; but its nuts-and-bolts portrayal of the future Paris lacks many of the qualities valued by literary scholars. Although the works studied in this book represent different genres and have different views on female civic virtue and on the nature of the good society, they all interpellate women as civic individuals. In all the texts and images, we see that women foster bonds of attachment and promote the values (such as liberty and equality) that underpin the virtuous public sphere—and we see that these duties are framed as being both civic and private. As I hope to demonstrate, *citoyennes* don't just exist as real women in revolutionary

archives. By bringing together political philosophy and speeches, plays and novels, high art and revolutionary caricatures, we can develop a compelling vision of female civic identity.

To affirm the *citoyenne* as presence and not absence, we must refocus our interpretive framework, and in particular reexamine certain terms that are central to that debate but that are often elided. When we declare that *citoyennes* do not exist or that women are excluded from civic identity, we make two assumptions: first, that political right is a necessary—and almost sufficient—condition for citizenship, and second, that only actions in the public sphere can be considered civic. Before we can talk about the *citoyenne*, then, we need to clarify what we mean by citizenship and where we think citizenship takes place. It is my contention that if we expand our definition of citizenship, and if we rearticulate the links between public and intimate spheres, we will find that in eighteenth-century France female civic identity was not necessarily defined in such exclusive terms.

WHAT IS CITIZENSHIP?

When Joan Scott states that “from the French Revolution of 1789 until 1944, citizens were men,” she predicates citizenship on possessing political rights—the rights laid out in the 1791 Constitution, for example. The Constitution of 1791 defined *citizenship* as essentially exclusive: only men could possess full political rights (although being a man was a necessary but not sufficient condition for revolutionary citizenship). Contemporary research has brought to the fore revolutionary primary sources on citizenship and political action. For example, Lynn Hunt’s collection of documents in *The French Revolution and Human Rights* provides a fascinating glimpse into the many debates over whether Jews, non-Catholics, people of color, women, actors, and executioners could be considered “citizens” possessing full political rights.²² The ground-breaking collection of primary sources *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795* targets the specific question of women’s role in the revolutionary public sphere. The documents in this study trace the arc of revolutionary women’s fight for inclusion, from the zenith of women’s political clubs, to the nadir of women’s political disenfranchisement.²³

What interests me here, however, is less the historical debate over who had full political rights than the modern tendency to predicate citizenship on possessing the rights to vote and to hold office. The primacy we accord especially to the right to vote might be our own critical blind spot and might inform the narrative that in eighteenth-century France only men were citizens and women were relegated to an apolitical role in the domestic sphere.²⁴ In

her enquiry into the effect of slavery on American citizenship, Judith Shklar posits that citizenship is not just about agency, but also about status, or how the individual is viewed by society: "The significance of the two great emblems of public standing, the vote and the opportunity to earn, seems clearest to these excluded men and women. They have regarded voting and earning not just as the ability to promote their interests and to make money but as the attributes of an American citizen."²⁵ For Shklar, our American definition of citizenship is focused on status equality, on the right to vote (and hold public office) and the opportunity to earn. Thus, Scott's assertion that in revolutionary France, only citizens were men is certainly correct—but only when viewed from a perspective that defines citizenship as status-driven. I am in no way denying the importance of the right to vote and the opportunity to earn. The struggle for civil rights has been marked by violence and sacrifice, in France as in America, and is not to be put aside lightly. Yet, although women did not possess full political rights in eighteenth-century France, are we justified in asserting that only men were citizens and women were represented as disorderly, or as non-citizens?

A full discussion of political theories on citizenship is beyond the scope of this introduction. I pattern my notion on the more inclusive definition Uma Narayan lays out in "Towards a Feminist Vision of Citizenship." Narayan refers first to T. H. Marshall's proposal that citizenship has three parts: "In his 1949 essay, 'Citizenship and Social Class,' T. H. Marshall delineated three stages of citizenship that focused, respectively, on rights to individual freedom and justice, rights to the exercise of political power, and finally rights to basic forms of economic security and to share in the 'full social heritage.'"²⁶ Citizenship, Narayan argues, historically has had "a Janus-faced quality": the term is tied at once to the struggle to achieve rights and to the exclusion of other members of a national community.²⁷ Narayan then proposes that a feminist vision of citizenship might reflect more than just status equality. A feminist vision of citizenship would embrace all members of a nation who actively participate in civic and political life: "I take citizenship in its most general sense to refer to the relationships that those who inhabit a nation have to the state, and to the various aspects of collective national life."²⁸ According to Narayan, citizenship is about belonging: "Citizenship has always been about membership, participation and belonging as well as about respect, dignity, status-equality, and a variety of rights."²⁹ Citizenship is thus an active quality that demands participation in matters relating to the public good. In *Révolutions du sujet*, her analysis of subjectivity and citizenship in revolutionary political and legal documents, Elisabeth G. Sledziewski echoes the idea that participation and belonging inform the notion of citizenship: she comments that, in the *Déclarations des droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, man

is defined as possessing natural rights but that the *citizen* can be defined either in specific terms, as actively exercising political rights, or in broader terms, as acting to further the public good.³⁰

When we broaden the definition of citizenship to mean any member of the nation who actively participates in matters concerning the public good or who is involved in the “collective national life,” we are creating a normative definition. Can we apply Narayan’s feminist vision of citizenship to eighteenth-century France? As mentioned earlier, Heuer’s study of émigré petitions in *The Family and the Nation* also construes citizenship in terms of “national belonging”: Heuer foregrounds the civil and legal aspects of citizenship, and not the political aspects. Similarly, in *The French Revolution and Human Rights*, Hunt points to the eighteenth-century distinction between “political” and “civil” rights: “Political rights guaranteed equal participation in voting, officeholding, and other aspects of political participation; civil rights guaranteed equal treatment before the law in matters concerning marriage, property, and inheritance, that is, nonpolitical matters.”³¹ In her collection of documents, Hunt showcases the many debates over who had civil rights, who had political rights, and who had no rights. Yet Hunt seems to equivocate on the term *citizenship*. On the one hand, in her analysis she generally equates eighteenth-century citizenship with those who gained full political rights (namely, the right to vote and to hold office).³² On the other hand, she qualifies revolutionary women’s clubs as “political clubs,” even though she notes that the revolutionary women themselves were not always interested in gaining full political rights.³³

How do we understand women’s political clubs that show little interest in obtaining full political rights? In her essay on revolutionary men’s and women’s political practices, “Pratiques politiques féminines et masculines,” Dominique Godineau presents a middle term. Godineau comments that in both declaring the rights of man and excluding women from fundamental political rights, the French Revolution created a new political category: *citoyenneté incomplète*, or “incomplete citizenship.”³⁴ That is, although denied political representation, women were nonetheless encouraged to participate in “une pratique politique.” These political practices included attending meetings of local sections and political clubs, protesting in the streets, and denouncing their neighbors.³⁵ Godineau argues that revolutionary women intentionally acted as citizens—that is, as members of the sovereign concerned about political matters, and not as wives and mothers concerned about subsistence matters: “Il existait chez les femmes du peuple une indéniable conscience d’appartenir au Souverain, conscience qui se marque par l’affirmation, que l’on trouve dans de nombreux documents, de femmes qui assurent ‘Nous sommes le Souverain,’ que ce soit en temps d’insurrection ou