Feminism and Democracy:
Are there Women behind Women Representatives?

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The article examines demands for gender parity in political representation and the ways in which they respond to the frequent charges of essentialism implicit to such demands. The first part addresses arguments that have tried to avoid evoking the difference between men and women by simply appealing to justice between sexes. It will be argued that, besides the inability to stay within universalistic discourse, they have failed to account for the normative expectations of democratic process as well. The second part explores the ways in which different normative models of democracy – liberal, republican and deliberative – have shaped the arguments for gender parity and how these relate to the issue of women's difference. Although arguments made on the premises of each model assume the difference between men and women, they have, to the various degrees, proven to be successful in avoiding the trap of essentialism.

Keywords: gender parity, political representation, normative models of democracy, essentialism

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that women in certain countries gained the right to vote over a century ago, their under-representation in the elected bodies at both national and sub-national level persistently remains a dominant feature in almost all countries in the world. Suffragettes' struggle concentrated primarily on women's right to vote and to stand for election while little attention was paid to the issue of the actual number of women to be elected to political office. Relative avoidance of this issue was partly caused by their expectation that larger portion of the elected women will logically follow the extension of the full legal rights of citizenship to women. However, current statistics of women in politics clearly show that such expectations are yet to be fulfilled. As Phillips notes, although background changes in society - such as improved educational and labour market participation of women - do have effect, developments in most of the countries exposes that rapid improvement in the number of the elected women depends on deliberate choice, especially on the adoption of positive measures such as quotas (Phillips, 1995: 59). Thus, feminists currently need to tackle somewhat different set of issues than the suffragettes - in the context of women's formal equality to men; their actual inequality needs to be addressed. Descriptive or gender parity in representation is being proposed as one way of overcoming the inequality. Interestingly enough, both demands for vote and those for gender parity in representation seem to produce and to revolve around "sameness" vs. "difference" dilemma. The debate over the question whether women are and should be treated as same or different than men, thus proves to be the longest and arguably irresolvable in theory and practice of feminism.[1]

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[1] For an overview of the continuity of this dilemma and connections of contemporary debates with those of suffragettes see Scott, 1996 and Williams, 1998 for accounts of the French and American feminism respectively.

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In the following essay, I will argue that in providing the arguments for gender parity in representation, feminists did not and could not manage to escape from implying the difference between men and women. However, I will also try to show that by invoking the difference, some arguments seem to be more suitable for avoiding the essentialism implicit in the notion of women's difference.

The first part of the essay will examine those arguments that appeal to principles of justice between sexes, with special emphasis laid on the way they were called forth in the French *parité* movement. It will be suggested that despite the efforts to build the case for parity on universalistic grounds and avoid the invocation of difference, this was undermined by two factors: the very problematic of sex/gender distinction and the failure to fully connect these issues to a broader discussion related to the normative expectations of a democratic process and political representation.

In addressing these issues, the second part of the essay will briefly summarise a distinction between three normative models of democracy – liberal, republican and deliberative (Habermas, 1996) - and relate them to arguments for descriptive representation of women. I will try to demonstrate that the types of arguments put forward for gender parity in representation depend on, and are shaped by, the normative model of democracy that we have adopted. Although neither of these models allows argumentation which evades the invocation of difference between men and women, I will argue that deliberative model manages to move further away from essentializing the difference than the other two.

2. Gender Parity – The Justice Argument

Presumably the most effective and straightforward argument for gender parity in representation is one pleading to justice between the sexes. Arguing that political equality, of which an important part is parity in political representation, is necessary if justice is to be achieved, has almost the immediate appeal. Moreover, this argument tries to operate within the terms of universalistic and individualist discourse and avoids invocation of difference between the sexes by maintaining that women are same as men in their (in)abilities as well as in their political interests, beliefs and values. It is precisely because women are same as men, as well as considering that they make half of the human population, that

we should expect their equal presence in the representative body. The fact that it is not so is then immediately regarded as evidence of men's unfair monopolization of political representation. The stance was most strongly upheld by advocates of *parité* movement in France. In France an earlier attempt in 1982 to introduce the law which would allow the maximum of 75% of either sex in municipal elections was blocked by the Constitutional Council. The Council argued that quotas divide the French citizens into categories and are thereby contrary to the indivisibility and universality of citizenship as major pillars of French democracy. Introducing quotas was widely regarded as seriously undermining the notion of citizenry as united and homogeneous body. In such context it is clear why in the nineties parity movement in France, rather than adhering to the language of difference as feminist movements elsewhere, adopted the language of universality and equality. Haase-Dubosc (2000: 3855) points to this contrast while comparing France and India, noticing that "India (is) being involved in the politics of diversity and peripheries and France in the politics of sameness and centers". Parity advocates thus argued that women are not and cannot be treated as category since they constitute the half of world population and, as such, encompass all categories. For this reason requests for full equality in representation replaced the previous ones for quotas. Women were not to be seen as special group whose interests need to be taken into account through mechanisms of quotas but as half of humanity whose underrepresentation compromises the value of French universalism. Such framing of the issue made the principle of equality between sexes central to the wider democratic project and, in Geneviève Fraisse's words, enabled parity to operate as Trojan horse for quotas (see Baudino, 2003). Parity advocates thus argued for the law which will guarantee the equal number of women in representative body as a way of eliminating the present discrimination and achieving a true universalism.[2] As Françoise Collin points: "It is paradoxical, but interesting to argue that it was universalism that best maintained the sexualisation of power, and that parity attempts, by contrast, to desexualize power by extending it to both sexes. Parity would thus be the true universalism" (Collin, cited in Scott, 1997: 11).

Although appealing, *parité* argument faces two challenges. The first comes from gender theory and revolves around sex/gender distinction.

2   For a detailed account of *parité* movement, see Scott, 2005.

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Scott claims that *parité* argument was not about nature/culture or sex/gender distinction that has been used and deconstructed in American feminism because "no inherent meaning was attributed to anatomical duality" (Scott, 2004: 42) and biology was also considered as cultural. But, it is by no way clear how this argument escapes, for instance, Butler's charge „that one way the internal stability and binary frame for sex is effectively secured is by casting the duality of sex in a prediscursive domain" (1998: 280). It becomes then by no means accidental or surprising that the *parité* arguments were soon appropriated in a way that brought up the heteronormative framework of complementaries of the sexes (see especially Agacinski, 2001). Moreover, Lépinard (2007) claims that this made *parité* advocates entrapped in the equality/difference dilemma in a way that does not allow thinking about multiple differences – such as race, ethnicity or sexuality. Scott also admits that although advocates of parity disagreed with Irigaray's assertion of women's sexual singularity there is much similarity in their arguments. The statement that since all humans come in two sexes and that anatomical duality of individuals - regardless of whatever other distinctions they may have - is universal fact correlates with Irigaray's claim that "sexual difference is doubtless the most adequate content of the universal…The entire human species is composed of women and men and is composed of nothing else. The racial problem is in fact a secondary problem" (Irigaray, cited in Scott, 1997: 11-12). However, if we remain strictly in the arena of anatomical difference, race can become relevant factor for representation on the same premises. The fact that nobody even wants to argue for special representation of black people based on their different anatomy, and that nobody is worried about equal representation of, for example, blue-eyed and brown-eyed men, speaks for itself.[3] What is more at issue here is, of course, that the demand for parity appealing to principle of justice

depends, as Phillips (1995: 64) notes, on "…feminist analysis of the sexual division of labour as 'unnatural' and unjust...Justice requires us to eliminate discrimination (this is already implied in the notion of justice), but the argument for women's equal representation in politics depends on that further ingredient which establishes structural discrimination". If we acknowledge the reasoning, *les paritaires* were not able to bypass the problem of evoking the structural difference between men and women. In this light, the failure to equally problematize the structural disadvantage of other groups leads to prioritization of gender over any other difference and becomes more susceptible to charges of "differentialism".

The second challenge to *parité* argument is more concerned with lack of theorization of public sphere and democratic political process that comes with relying solely on the appeal to justice. Phillips (1995: 62) quite rightly points out that this argument then becomes parallel to those aimed at establishing parity in education and employment "with little sense of what makes political representation different from either of these". Even though *parité* movement was specific in being firmly rooted in the values of French republicanism and its corresponding normative model of democracy, little time was spent on true engagement with these issues. The problem was rather "to make women plausible representatives of the nation" and "claiming the equal right of women to represent humanity" (Scott, 2004: 42). The argument to a certain extent, especially if combined with the parity advocates' reasoning that the law has the power to alter the symbolic structures that underline the organization of the society, resembles the "role model" argument. Let us consider, for instance, Mansbridge's (1999) statement: "I agree that social relations among and between groups can have major effects on individual identity…Yet I consider of even greater importance the effect of the social meaning on the perceptions and actions of members of the more advantaged groups". However, this argument, even to a lesser extent, attempts to provide the account of what makes the political sphere distinctive in relation to education or employment. Apart from the abstract humanity, what should women, as well as men actually represent: interest, values, identities, perspectives? To *parité* advocates the purpose of political representation and the nature of processes it demands has been a secondary question.

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3 However, if we would prefer to continue with the reasoning, we can say that, in contrast to women (if we put aside the issue of transsexuals), it is more difficult for the purposes of political representation to clearly demarcate who is black due to the large number of people who are of multiracial descent. Equally can be said, though, that if it is a matter of justice to represent equally anatomical differences, we should not retreat just because of the practical difficulties. Absurdity of this position is not just related to the unwillingness to consider anatomy as a relevant ground for representation, but also to the awareness that race is, above all, a cultural category. Failure to apply the same standard to category of sex testifies to probably more deeply rooted essentialist assumptions surrounding sexual differences.

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3. Gender Parity and Normative Models of Democracy

In order to address this issue, the following part of the essay will argue that questions such as those about the purpose of politics and how we envision political process are the ones that need to be dealt with in order to make claims for representation of women plausible. I will use the distinction between liberal, republican and deliberative models of democracy as a way of approaching these questions and argue that each has a significant bearing on the type of arguments we put forward for the case of gender parity as well as on our understanding of differences between men and women.

3.1. Liberal Democracy

According to the liberal view, there are two sources of a social integration: on the one hand, decentralized regulation of the market, and on the other, the hierarchical regulation of the state. Society is thus understood as a field of interactions among individuals oriented towards the pursuit of their private interests while the state is imagined as a government apparatus whose purpose is the use of administrative power. In such a structure, purpose of politics as citizens' will-formation is to aggregate private interests in order to direct the government action to the achievement of the society's common goals. The nature of the democratic process similarly resembles the logic of the market. Citizens' preferences, as expressed by the act of voting, follow the structure of their choices in the market, while political parties are strategically oriented to accommodate their programs and candidates to win the majority of votes and thus acquire the positions of power (Habermas, 1996).

The liberal view on democracy bears on the argument for gender parity in representation in two specific ways. First, by laying emphasis on politics as representation of private interests, it requires us that we establish the existence of specific women's interests that could, in turn, be accordingly represented. Nevertheless, the notion of a distinctively women's interest has been seriously contested in feminist theory. Gender intersects with other categories, such as class, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexuality and each of them can equally weight on the formation of interests and preferences of women. This divergence is present even in preferences related to issues of reproduction and child care, for which it should be relatively safe to assume that

are stemming from experiences and conditions shared by and specific to women as a group. If we look, for instance, at the *par excellence* feminist issue, that of reproductive rights and right to abortion in particular, we can see that women are frequently at the front of both pro life and pro choice advocacy groups. Here, often religion intersects with gender in a way that does not allow us to talk about unified women interest. Similarly, class can have a significant bearing on another important feminist issue, that of a paid parental leave. Here, policies aimed to reduce the inequality between man and women may reinforce the inequality among women. By both maintaining their standard of living and reducing their inequality to women with higher earnings, entitlement fixed at or even above the national minimum wage can be more preferable option for women with low incomes. Women with higher salaries, by contrast, are more likely to opt for the entitlement related to their previous earnings. The problem can be partially resolved by trying to define women's interests negatively, that is in relation to men's interest. Phillips (1995: 68) thus argues that: "…the variety of women's interests does not refute the claim that interests are gendered…The argument from interest does not depend on establishing a unified interest of all women: it depends, rather, on establishing a difference between the interests of women and men."[4] Looking from this perspective, the fact that women do not have the same position on abortion or parental leave does not mean that the policy regulating it will not affect women's and men's interests differently. While such understanding of gender interest allows us to invoke a concept of difference between men and women that is still capable of treating the latter as heterogeneous category, the question whether gender parity is necessary or would it actually ensure representation of such divergent interests still remains unsolved.

This question requires us to consider the second problem that liberal view of politics poses for the gender parity argument - its treatment of interests as an unproblematic and clear category. If we accept that there are specific gender interests, liberal model of politics requires these interests to be translated into voting and policy preferences. In that case, there is no reason why should only women politicians be capable of responding to interests expressed in such way and it is of no concern to us who is actually working on their pursuit. As Phillips notes (1996:

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4   For a similar account on the difference between women's and gender interests, see Molyneux, 1985.

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140): "Even the notion of interests, which seems most thoroughly grounded in differential material conditions, lends itself to at least semidetachment…The interests of pensioners or the long-term unemployed can then be championed by those who are neither retired nor out of work; the interests of geographical localities can be represented by people who no longer live in the area; the interests of mothers with young children can be represented by childless men." Arguments for gender parity within the liberal model of democracy thus have to allow for certain ambiguity in defining interests and assume that expressed preferences often diverge from the real ones either because they are based on adaptive choices (Nussbaum, 2001) or because the certain issues have been absent from political agenda. This is what impelled Mansbridge (1999: 644) to argue for descriptive representation in the contexts of uncrystallized interests: "When interests are uncrystallized, the best way to have one's most substantive interests represented is often to choose a representative whose descriptive characteristic match one's own on the issues one expect to emerge". Mansbridge also wants to keep "some distinction between surface preferences (or prereflective understanding) and understandings that are more considered" (1996: 61) while avoiding conceptions of interests that connote some objective, given state which can be revealed and discovered. This is why she defines interest as "deliberatively considered conclusion on a policy preference", a conclusion that may equally be self-interested or public-spirited (Mansbridge, 1996: 61). This deliberative characteristic allows us to treat interests as not fixed or stable but open to contest and change, a change which is often played out in political struggle. Ensuring gender parity in representation would thus mean ensuring that women's voice will be heard when interests are (re)defined in political process.

Apart from conceptual difficulties in differentiating interests from values or liberal from deliberative view on preferences, the argumentation can be disputable for several other interconnected reasons. First, unless we are ready to assume that women's representatives are some kind of avant-garde of women, there are no mechanisms to discern and establish legitimacy of representatives elected on such premises. Ramsay (2003: 77), for instance, explores Le Doeuff's accusation of gender parity cause as non-feminist and her warning against "placing confidence in patrician women" based on the fact that the "largest women's group in France, *Action Catholique*

Général Féminine with its 35,000 members, followed the Pope on the issues of contraception." Are we going to blame this group for not adequately crystallizing women's interests? This, among many, example provokes more general question: how can we be sure what the women representatives will stand for and on what account can we hold them responsible for failing to represent or betraying women's interests? Second, the idea of existence of adaptive preferences and uncrystallized interests, even if we do not understand interests as some objectively given reality, when combined with the absence of accountability, can hardly avoid the resemblance to the notions of "false consciousness". Third, closely related, and for the purpose of this essay most important reason for the problematic nature of the argument, is that it assumes that women are, rather than men, capable of "crystallizing" these interests when issues emerge on political agenda. But as Phillips (1995: 71) puts it: "If the interests of women are varied, or not yet fully formed, how do the women elected know what the women who elected them want?". To claim that they actually will know, and moreover, know it better than men, presumes the difference between men and women that comes much closer to essentialism than merely assuming that women can share some interest based on their gender. In this regard, Lépinard (2007: 378) is right to claim that "…the implementation of gender quotas always holds the risk of essentialisation".

3.2. Republican Democracy

According to the republican view, besides market and the state, there is solidarity as the third and even most important source of social integration. Citizens are understood as members of ethical community who are aware of their mutual dependence and strive to further develop their relations of reciprocal recognition. Within such constellation, purpose of politics is much more than mere mediation between private interests and government apparatus. Rather, since democratic will-formation has the function of constituting a society as political community, politics becomes constitutive of the society as a whole. Citizens' political rights, through communicative practice of self-legislation, enable them to become authors of such community. Legitimacy of the state then depends not on its "protection of equal private rights, but in the guarantee of an inclusive opinion" (Habermas, 1996: 22). Correspondingly, nature of the political process

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does not follow the logic of the market – will-formation does not result from simple expressions, aggregation and bargaining of interests. Rather it follows from public communication whose goal is the achievement of mutual understanding. For these reasons, "this dialogic conception imagines politics as a contestations over question of value, and not simple questions of preference" (Habermas, 1996: 23).

Arguing for gender parity in political representation within republican model of democracy usually requires us to evoke gender difference in two ways. Since in the republican vision of politics strong importance is being placed on the achievement of mutual understanding through dialogue, first argument lays emphasis on what can be denoted as political style. Women are said to be more cooperative, oriented to avoidance of conflict and devoted to reaching an agreement. Second argument deals with the republican concern with ethical content of the political and stresses the significance of substantive values that women are supposed to carry. The argument is probably as long as the history of feminism. Williams (1998: 125), for instance, claims that "A particularly common justification for women suffrage was that women constituted distinct moral force in society. The argument rested on the claim that women had higher moral standards than men". The more contemporary version of the argument, rather than asserting women superiority in relation to the common moral standards, rests on the notion that women tend to develop different type of moral reasoning. The claim mostly draws on Gilligan (1997), who argued that women have different moral voice and that traditional "ethics of justice" is biased in favoring male subjects and male concerns. Whereas "ethics of justice" gives prominence to talk of rights, rules and abstract principles, women cultivate "ethics of care" which is preoccupied with the care, responsibility, and the concrete. Although Gilligan's work is related to moral psychology, it was taken up by some feminists in political theory, usually named maternal feminists, in their effort to delineate distinctively feminist vision of politics (see Elshtain, 1998; Ruddick, 1989). According to maternal feminists, female morality and ethics of care represent equally valid or even superior forms of ethical way of being, and they insist that conceptions of power, politics and citizenship should be informed by virtues of mothering – that is, by love, compassion and empathy.

There are two major challenges to these propositions. The first challenge is that it is aiming to introduce into political arena values and relationships that are not appropriate for the public sphere (see Dietz, 1998). However, ethics of care does not have to be seen as the exclusive product and extension of mothering and private sphere - it resonates with the communitarian sense of "encumbered self" (Sandel, 1998) and with contextual moral theories more broadly (see Tronto, 1987: 656-663). Feminists have also pointed that the distinction between the ethics of justice and ethics of care, as well as between universalistic and contextual moral theories, has often been overstated. Consequently, appropriateness of each for exclusively private or public sphere may also be called into question. Okin (1989), for example, reconstructs Rawls' theory of justice by placing care, responsibility and concern for others in its centre, rather than viewing it as overtly rationalistic, abstract and individualistic. She argues that those in original position "cannot think from the position of nobody…, they must think from the position of everybody, in the sense of each in turn." (Okin, 1989: 244) To do that they require strong empathy and benevolence, capacity to listen, relate to and care for others. These arguments are important because they soften the divide between public/male and private/female moral reasoning. In that way, they move us further away from differentialism implied by too close connection between ethics of care and family or motherhood.

The second challenge points to potential danger of essentializing the women's difference that comes with invoking specific women's virtues or women' different moral voice. However, there are two ways of minimizing the risk. We do not have to accept that women's inclination for the "ethics of care" stems from their biological and natural role as mothers. It will be enough to establish that women and men in contemporary societies do share different responsibility for care work and that this fact can and does affect their values and priorities. Chodorow's psychoanalytic account (1978) suggests that children tend to develop relational sense of self and maintain close nurturing relationships because of their early attachment to the primary caretaker. Since children form stronger attachments to primary caretakers of the same sex, most of which are female, girls tend to develop these characteristic on a larger scale. Hartsock's (1998) historical materialist account emphasises the importance of systematic, structural differences between men's and women's lives. Sexual division of labor particularly influences the development of female construction of self in relation to others, their valuation of the concrete and connectedness to others and natu-

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ral world. Also, ethics of care does not have to be conceived as originating in women's position within the family. Rather than accepting essentially women's moral voice, Tronto (1987) places caring form of moral reasoning into the realm of social marginalization and experiences of subordination, evidence of which can be found in Gilligan's own work. Uncertainty and fear about the appropriateness of making moral judgments can impede women from taking moral stands. Such fears stem from their lack of power rather than mothering role. This questioning of the proposed link between care ethics and gender allows us to broaden its scope and connect it to experiences of other marginalized groups. If so, ethics of care can no longer be understood as exclusively female arena. Stacks (1986), indeed, in her critique of Gilligan, argues that African- Americans invoke similar model of moral development and that ethics of care can be equally considered as characteristically black. Collins (1989: 770) further argues that African-American women experience "a convergence of values from Afrocentric and female institutions" which forms the basis for development of specific black feminist thought. Such focus gives rise to identity politics that is able to include multitude of women's experiences and multiple axes of oppression.[5] While this makes the feminist claims about the oppression of women founded in a notion of shared experience and identity less viable it still does not deprive us of the possibility to evoke women as the group for the purpose of political representation. As Tronto (1987: 663) notes: "Whether the cause of the gender difference in morality is a psychological artefact of femininity, a cultural product of caretaking activity, or a positional result of social subordination, it is difficult to imagine how any of this causes, or some combination of them could affect all individuals equally." Recognizing multiple identities among women can only help us to dislodge the sameness/difference dilemma in a way that will allow us to acknowledge the difference while avoiding their positioning within some essential female attributes.

3.3. Deliberative Democracy

According to Habermas, deliberative democracy tries to combine liberal and republican tradition and to refigure them in a new way. In similarity with liberal model, deliberative democracy

keeps the boundaries between the society and the state. But, in contrast to it, civil society remains autonomous and distinct from both economy and the administration. In that regard, it moves beyond the liberal understanding of citizens as individual, self-interested actors and the corresponding, aggregative view of democratic will-formation. Deliberative democracy gains its distinctive form in that it works with the "higher-level intersubjectivity of communication processes that flow through both the parliamentary bodies and the informal networks of the public sphere" (Habermas, 1996: 28). Like the republican model, it keeps the understanding of democracy as the institutionalization of the public use of reason. But in contrast to "ethical overload" of republican theory which "requires the reference to a concrete, substantively integrated ethical community", it divorces politics from the notions of collectively acting citizenry, oriented towards "self-explication of a shared form of life or collective identity" (Habermas, 1996: 22-24). Rather, deliberative democracy depends on the institutionalization of procedures and conditions of communication while its normative content lies in the very structure of communication. It is not merely the number of people supporting decision nor the community's prior shared understanding that ensure its normative justification. As Benhabib (1996: 72) states, under deliberative model, agreement is thought to be fair and rational because decision agreed upon by the large number of people on following rational procedures of communication has a presumptive claim to be rational. Such a decision can then always be challenged through the same deliberative procedure.

Deliberative democracy bears on the issue of women's difference in somewhat contradictory way. On the one hand, since the process of deliberation would be rather futile among people who are basically the same, deliberative democracy implies the difference at its very core. Manin (1987: 352) thus argues that deliberative principle requires not only participation of all but the existence of multiple and conflicting points of view. Benhabib (1996: 71), following Manin, emphasises that one of the functions of deliberative processes is to impart information. This is crucial for the rationality of the process as no single individual can poses all the relevant information nor anticipate all the perspectives through which particular issues can be perceived by different individuals. Difference can, thus, truly be seen as a resource for democratic communication (Young, 1997). For these reasons, to argue for gender

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5   For the early statement of such identity politics see Combahee River Collective Statement, available at http://historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/combrivercoll.html (accessed 12 October 2011)

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parity in representation within deliberative model of democracy, we need to invoke difference between men and women that depends less on the divergence of interest and values (although we do not have to exclude those) and more on what Young appropriately terms perspective. Young (1997: 383-389) disagrees with critics such as Gitlin and Elshtain who reduce politics of difference to the interest-group politics. At the same time she is very careful to distance herself from the essentialist understandings of groups which ascribe them characteristics that determine and define the individual identities of their members. Nevertheless, in her dissociation of the politics of difference from the politics of identity, she is not prepared to dispense with the notion of groups altogether. In her opinion, social groups should be understood in relational terms – "what constitutes a social group is not internal to the attributes and self-understanding of its members. Rather, what makes the group a group is the relation in which it stands to others" (Young, 1997: 389). Young argues for group representation as a mode of overcoming the exclusion of certain perspectives from political process. According to Young (2000: 136) social perspective arises from a distinctive position in social field in a way that "agents who are "close" in the social field have a similar point of view on the field… Each social perspective is particular and partial with respect to the whole social field, and from each perspective some aspect of reality of social processes are more visible than others".[6] This does not imply that somebody who is not a member of a group cannot view social reality from a perspective of that group seeing that deliberative politics exactly aims at communicating views to others. Neither does it imply that members of a group will have the same interpretation of the issues or will advocate the same outcomes – it is more about "which particular social events and issues are interpreted" (Young, 2000: 139) and what are the starting points for discussion. Rather, argument for women representatives (as well as for the representation of other groups) comes from their ability to relate to and understand experiences of women with more immediacy then it would be possible to others.

However, "difference friendly" character of deliberative democracy needs to be taken with precaution. As Gould (1996: 172) notices: "Diversity may be the original condition of a polyvocal discourse but univocity is its normative principle…the telos of the discourse, what char-

acterises its aim and method, is agreement". For this reason we should not just look at the formal inclusion of particular groups in public arena, but also at the very processes of deliberative interaction within it. Fraser (1990: 63-65) argues that the idea of public sphere requires us to bracket social inequalities in a way in which participants in discussion proceed as if they were social and economic equals. However, the public sphere cannot in any way be separated from the larger societal context; it cannot be "a place of zero degree culture". If societal context is permeated with structural inequalities, these will be reflected in deliberative processes of the public sphere as well. Feminist research has pointed out that women's voices are often excluded even when women are present in deliberative forum - women speak less than men and are more often interrupted and ignored. The prospect of their perspective being taken into account is in this way seriously undermined. Fraser thus argues that, rather than bracketing social inequalities as if they did not matter, we should better strive at the public sphere where they will be explicitly thematized and eliminated. Sanders (1997) additionally points out that commitment to eliminate structural inequities alone may not be sufficient to eliminate patterns of inequality in deliberative process. Even if we equalize income, education and time – the recourses needed for deliberation – we may still be confronted with privileges and prejudices which are "too sneaky, invisible and pernicious for that reasonable process" and which, therefore, cannot be combated with the reasoned argument (Sanders, 1997: 353). Quite the opposite – restricting democratic discussion to an argument that is rational, moderate and capable of connecting particular to the general may even work to further exacerbate present hierarchies by universalizing the views of the dominant groups and silencing the oppressed. Young (1996) similarly notices that focusing on argument carries implicit cultural biases that privilege speaking styles of better-educated white middle-class men. It may then be necessary to expand the notion of democratic discussion to include other forms of speech.[7] While Sanders prefers testimony as a model which better allows for the expression of different perspectives, Young, beside storytelling, also includes greeting and rhetoric. These arguments emphasize different speech cultures of men and women. However, particular speech culture is not an inherent char-

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6 For a view of the impossibility of a clear distinction between perspectives and interests see Williams, 1998: 125.

7 For this reason Young (1996: 124-125) prefers the term communicative and Dryzek (2002) discursive democracy above the deliberative.

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acteristic of a group divorced from its relation to unequal social positions of men and women: "differences of speech privilege correlate with other differences of social privilege" (Young, 1996: 124).

Feminists have also questioned deliberative democracy's relation to difference since consensus and agreement are usually perceived as goals of democratic discussion (Young, 1996; Gould, 1996). If the public sphere is situated within the context marked by structural inequalities and the goal of deliberative discussion is reaching consensus or agreement, there is a clear danger that the perspectives of dominant groups will subsume those of the disadvantaged ones under the disguise of unity. For Fraser (1990) this problem is further exacerbated with the focus on the public arena in the singular. Rather, we should embrace the existence of the "subaltern counterpublics". She concludes that "in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does the single, comprehensive, overarching public" (Fraser, 1990: 66).[8] Such decentered, differentiated public sphere may work to soften the tension between the need to represent a group and the need to be bounded only by what is heard in deliberative process (Phillips, 1995: 151). In this way, we can keep the category of women open and plural while not dispensing with the legitimacy of democratic discussion.

Although women's perspective argument is based on establishing a difference between men and women, its appeal lies in its straightforward link to the women's social and structural position. Moreover, while it depends less on the articulation of specific outcomes or norms for which women representatives should stand for, when situated within (revised) deliberative democracy frame, it adequately deals with the issue of legitimacy. In this way, it moves further away from essentializing women's difference than the arguments of interests and values do.

4. Conclusion

The essay has examined different arguments put forward for gender parity in representation and the ways in which they relate to the issue of women difference. It has been argued that establishing the difference between men and women is necessary in order to make the case for parity - for, as Scott (2007: 154) asks: "if we are all the same, why has sexual difference been such an obstacle to real equality?" However, it is not necessary to present this difference in essentialist terms since each of the arguments introduced can be articulated in a way that does not depend on the assertion of some essential female attributes. Rather, how we understand the difference will more significantly depend on the normative model of democracy we are arguing for, as well as on our interpretation of the distinctiveness of women's current social position.

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8 Mansbridge (1996) picks up on Fraser's insistence on "subaltern counterpublics" but understands their relevance for any context since no democratic polity can dissolve the ongoing disagreements nor attain the full legitimacy. In that way she is closer to Honig's (1996) treatment of difference and Mouffe's (2000) understanding of radical democracy grounded in agonistic pluralism.

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Feminizam i demokracija:
Stoje li žene iza ženskih predstavnica?

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Ovaj članak proučava zahtjeve za rodnim paritetom u političkom predstavljanju te načine na koji oni odgovaraju na česte optužbe za esencijalizam koji je implicitan takvim zahtjevima. Prvi dio dotiče se argumenata koji su pokušali izbjeći evociranje razlike muškaraca i žena jednostavnim apeliranjem na pravdu među spolovima. Tvrdi se kako su ti argumenti, osim što nisu uspjeli ostati u okvirima univerzalističkog diskursa, također propustili odgovoriti na normativne zahtjeve demokratskog procesa. Drugi dio istražuje načine na koje su različiti normativni modeli demokracije – liberalni, republikanski i deliberativni – formulirali argumente za rodni paritet te na koji način su oni povezani s pitanjem ženske različitosti. Premda argumenti temeljeni na svakom od triju modela polaze od razlike muškaraca i žena, pokazali su se, do neke mjere, uspješni u izbjegavanju zamke esencijalizma.

Ključne riječi: rodni paritet, političko predstavljanje, normativni modeli demokracije, esencijalizam

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