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Gender, the Secular, and the Image of the Marianne in the French Revolution

In the summer of 2016, controversy arose in France over the wearing of “burkinis” on beaches by Muslim women, which resulted in municipal bans on wearing the clothing all along the Mediterranean coast. Arguments over the burkini’s compatibility with the French concept of *laïcité* and the policing of women’s dress pervaded political conversation in France and around the world.¹ At a Socialist party meeting at the end of August, Prime Minister Manuel Valls referred to the controversy by evoking the image of the female representation of the French Republic, known as Marianne, when he declared, “Marianne elle a le sein nu parce qu’elle nourrit le peuple, elle n’est pas voilée parce qu’elle est libre ! C’est ça la République !”² Valls’ use of the symbol of Marianne to defend his particular version of the republic, liberty, and secularism was taken to task by historian Mathilde Larerre in an educational tweetstorm later that afternoon. She began with, “Marianne a le sein nu parce que c’est une allégorie, crétin!” and went on to argue, over 17 more tweets, for the complexity of the Marianne and emphasized her often contradictory and complicated symbolic and allegorical uses.³

Though Larerre does an excellent job of contesting Valls’ interpretation in packets of 140 characters or less, his invocation of the Marianne to defend a policy of forcing women to reveal their bodies in order to use French beaches, and his equating of Marianne with his version of a secular republic is worth considering further. This examination is not intended to lend it validity, but rather to consider

¹ Iman Amrani, “France’s burkini ban exposes the hypocrisy of its secular state,” *The Guardian*, August 24, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/24/france-burkini-ban-secularist-equality-muslim> (accessed November 13, 2016).

² Le Monde, “Marianne, le voile et les droits des femmes: les propos de Valls agacent une historienne,” *Le Monde*, August 30, 2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/big-browser/article/2016/08/30/marianne-le-voile-et-les-droits-des-femmes-les-propos-de-manuel-valls-agacent-une-historienne_4989910_4832693.html (accessed November 13, 2016).

³ Mathilde Larerre Twitter post, August 29, 2016, https://twitter.com/LarrerMathilde/status/770352394752458752?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw (accessed November 13, 2016).

what it says both explicitly and implicitly about secularism and gender. Secularism, created here as the opposite of “religious,”⁴ is often supposed to define men and women as equal, and gender equality would be put forth by many as a key “liberal value.” The burkini controversy was certainly couched in this language, but is it really that straightforward? By looking at the complicated gender dynamics of the French revolutionary period, I hope to trace some of the conflicting interactions between gender, religion and the secular. Using images of Marianne from the early 1790s as a case study, I want to explore the tensions in France between gender and the secular, asking if gender equality is just as problematic for the secular as it is assumed to be for religion. Is Marianne a secular symbol, and one of women’s freedom and equality, as Valls seems to think? Or is the language of the revolutionary period, and specifically the representation of Marianne, more complicated?

The definition of “Marianne” used in this article is broad. I am interested in the allegorical representation of the republic, of liberty, of the revolution in the form of a woman, and of what is now generally known as “the Marianne.” As with many symbols and allegories, however, the genesis of the Marianne is not certain. According to *Robert’s French Dictionary of Proper Names*, “Marianne” is the “name given to the Republic in memory of a Republican secret society which toppled the Second Empire. This term, which was first coined by enemies of the Republic, has lost its pejorative sense.”⁵ Maurice Agulhon contests this assertion, arguing that use of the name is actually connected with societies from the end of the Second Republic, but was used as a “mocking nickname as early as the period of the French Revolution.”⁶

⁴ And in this case, of a specific religion, Islam. As Joan Scott points out, “these days, secularism comes up frequently in discussions of Islam, which is said to hold on to values and ways of being that are at odds with modernity.” Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 92. In France, in particular, the idea of a dichotomy between “religious” and “secular” where religion is at odds with fundamental values of the modern state, which were triumphant in the French Revolution, has salience in contemporary debates. Scott asserts that this opposition, and its relationship to gender and equality is more complicated; see the discussion below of Scott and Talal Assad.

⁵ Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 9.

⁶ Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*, 9.

The first official use of a female form in association with the Republic was in the first seal of the Republic, created in 1792. The seal depicts a female form wearing a Greek or Roman dress and a Phrygian cap, holding a pike and a sheaf of fasces, with an inscription which states “in the name of the French Republic.”⁷ Agulhon argues that this woman is a “double allegory”: she represents both liberty, and the new French republic.⁸ Further, he suggests, that in the Revolutionary period:

She was all over the place: in Paris and in the provinces, in open public places and in private ones, in fixed edifices and in transient settings; not to mention the paintings and engravings of popular appeal...to the ceramic works which reproduced themes taken from prints, or the imagery of public monuments.⁹

Hunt concurs, arguing that while there were initially other symbols used to represent the Republic, including Mercury and Minerva, “by the end of the decade... Liberty was indelibly associated with the memory of the Republic she had represented. In collective memory, *La République* was ‘Marianne.’”¹⁰

It is perhaps important to briefly consider the significance of the name itself. Marie-Anne was a very popular name, and its connection to Catholicism is significant. Calling it a “thinly documented but intriguing debate,” Agulhon suggests that “in principle nothing could be more Catholic than the combination of the name of the Holy Virgin and that of her mother.” Furthermore, the name was used by peasants who wanted to associate their children with the saints. As a result, “Marianne smacked of the people, and that was probably the crucial factor” in her acceptance by ordinary folk.¹¹ Between the relationship to Catholic saints, its popularity and recognisability as a proper name in the period, and its probable association with the bottom tier of the third estate, the name had widespread significance.

Though the use of the name “Marianne” referred to by Valls, then, does not have the same ubiquity in the Revolutionary period as it would later, this female

⁷ Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*, 18.

⁸ Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*, 18.

⁹ Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*, 22.

¹⁰ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 62.

¹¹ Agulhon *Marianne into Battle*, 33.

image, sharing similar features to the image in that first republican seal, including her dress, the Phrygian cap, and types of martial imagery, was frequently used and can be recognized easily, whether called Liberty, Equality, the Republic, France, or not labelled at all. She was thought to represent, in abstract, “the virtues so desired by the new order: the transcendence of localism, superstition, and particularly in the name of a more disciplined and universalistic worship. Liberty was an abstract quality based on reason. She belonged to no group, to no particular place.”¹² Images used in this study, then, share these features, and are recognizably “Mariannes,” who were circulated among the people during the Revolutionary period.

The complicated relationship between gender and the secular, as drawn out in the discussion of Marianne by Valls’ and Larrere’s contrasting interpretations of Marianne, is approached by historian Joan Scott and anthropologist Tala Asad. Scott, herself building on Asad’s work, argues that there is no “necessary connection” between secularism and gender, though one is often claimed, and usually linked to the evolution of modernity and progress of liberalism and liberal values.¹³ Instead, “the equality that secularism promises has always been troubled by sexual difference, by the difficult...task of assigning ultimate meaning to bodily differences between men and women.”¹⁴ Secularism, rather than “remov[ing] transcendence as the foundation for social norms” and understanding “people as autonomous individuals,” has functioned in a different way, and “served to intensify rather than relieve the dilemmas that attend sexual difference.”¹⁵ Asad echoes this observation, arguing in his book *Formations of the Secular* that the “liberal project of redemption in a world of injustice and suffering” is in part an attempt to reclaim “the language of prophecy for politics in a place of moral relativism.”¹⁶ This “redemption” project is at work in the belief that gender equality can be (or even has been) achieved by liberal secularism. In other words, I choose to use the “idea” of the Marianne in Valls’ and Lararre’s discussion to examine the use of women as

¹² Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 62.

¹³ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 95.

¹⁴ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 95.

¹⁵ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 91, 100.

¹⁶ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 59.

allegorical representations of various qualities of the new French state, a supposedly non-religious and secular one, to think about and question these assertions of what she represents, and to examine the idea of gender equality in relation to these concepts. These images allow me to question, as Scott does, the “sharpness of the distinction” between religious and secular approaches to gender, and to shed light on “the idea of the relationship between equality and difference.”¹⁷

The French Revolution has been seen as a “founding moment of modernity,” which displaced the Catholic Church and replaced it with “allegorical embodiments of secular concepts in idealized classical forms.”¹⁸ As Lynn Hunt suggests, “the revolutionaries pushed forward a desacralization of the world” where “monarchy, aristocracy and religion all came under relentless attack.”¹⁹ It was part of a larger process whereby, as Daniel Barber argues, “it suddenly appeared that Christianity could be at odds with the rest of what it means to be European, rather than its defining characteristic.”²⁰

This “desacralization” is complicated by Talal Asad, however. Asad traces the use of the word *sacré* in this period, and its meaning within the changing state. While *sacré* was used in the early modern period by the learned as a noun, to refer to things or persons, it was not used to refer to an experience, nor was it used in ordinary Christian practice. During the Revolution, “it becomes salient” and “acquires intimidating resonances of secular power.”²¹ Used in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* in 1789 to refer to the nature of “natural” and “property” rights, the meaning shifts, referring to an experience, and it becomes “part of the discourse integral to functions and aspirations of the modern, secular state, in which the sacralisation of individual citizen and collective people expresses a form of naturalized power.”²² Rather than a religious concept, then, the sacred is created by the state as part of the new structures of power in the Revolution. At the same time,

¹⁷ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 115.

¹⁸ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 93.

¹⁹ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 194.

²⁰ Daniel Colucciello Barber, *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion and the Secular* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 106.

²¹ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 32.

²² Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 32.

“profanation” as a “kind of forcible emancipation from error,” associated with reason and implemented in contrast, and in conjunction with, the sacred. According to Asad:

Reason requires that false things be either proscribed and eliminated, or transcribed and re-sited as objects to be seen, heard, and touched by the properly educated sense. By successfully unmasking pretended power (profaning it) universal reason displays its own status as legitimate power. By empowering new things, this status is further confirmed. So the “sacred right to property” was made universal after church estates and common lands were freed. [...] At the very moment of becoming secular, these claims were transcendentalized, and they set in motion legal and moral disciplines to protect themselves (with violence where necessary) as universal. Although it appears to shift the gaze from the transcendental to the mundane, what it does is rearrange barriers between the illusory and the actual.²³

The role of women in the Revolution and their lives in the Revolutionary period have been extensively studied. Historians have explored women, gender and the Revolution from various perspectives, considering women’s role in activism and cultural politics,²⁴ legislation and law, in the family and the discourse of the public and private spheres,²⁵ in religion,²⁶ and the roles of specific women like Olympe de Gouges,²⁷ and Marie Antoinette.²⁸ In addition, the construction of gender in the Revolution, the evolution of the Marianne as a symbol and emblem of the Republic and liberty²⁹ and the discourse of gender in images, publications and ephemera of the Revolution³⁰ have all been explored. The relationship between these images, the liberal secular state, religion, and notions of gender equality have not been considered directly, however. In light of the recent work by Scott on the French

²³ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 35-36.

²⁴ For example, Olwen Hufton, *Women and Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). Works referred to in this paragraph are not the only such on the topic, but are offered as representative of their fields.

²⁵ Hunt, *The Family Romance*; Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

²⁶ Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and popular politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

²⁷ Mary Josephine Diamond, “Olympe de Gouges and the French Revolution: The Construction of Gender as Critique,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 15, no. 2/3 (1990): 95-105; Joan Wallach Scott, “French Feminists and the Rights of ‘Man’: Olympe de Gouge’s Declarations,” *History Workshop* 28 (Autumn 1989), 1-21.

²⁸ Lynn Hunt, ed., *Eroticism and the Body Politic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

²⁹ Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*.

³⁰ Joan Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Rolf Reichardt and Hubertus Kohle, *Visualizing the Revolution: Politics and the Pictorial Arts in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008); and Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

secular state and gender equality, and her consideration of the work of Asad on the foundations of secularism, the connections between continuing debates over the meaning and practical realities of gender equality and these debates in the Revolutionary period have current relevance.

The conflict between the Church and the Revolution has often been understood as inevitable, another facet of the “religious-secular distinction” set up as “part of the legitimating apparatus of the modern Western nation-state.”³¹ The relationship between the revolution and religion was not, however, a straightforward one, nor was there an immediate or consistent transformation from a state where the Church played an influential and prominent role to a “secularized” state where religion was rejected. When the Revolution first began and a constitutional monarchy replaced the absolute monarchy, the new government did not immediately conflict with the Church. Rather, they “sought... to tap the church’s wealth for the nation’s benefit” and to “assure the political subservience of the Catholic Church as an institution.”³² In late 1789 and early 1790, Church land was nationalized and religious orders were no longer recognized, though former members were offered a state pension if they returned to a secular life. The National Assembly also moved to recreate the Catholic Church as a state church, passing the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in July of 1790. Later rejected by the Pope and the source of controversy in many parts of the country, the Constitution was intended to reorganize the Church physically, by changing the boundaries of dioceses and parishes, and administratively, with church officials recreated as civil servants who would stand for election.³³ The Deputies and the clergy alike attempted to work together where possible, and the old and new orders were not immediately seen as mutually exclusive. For example, symbols from both the revolutionary movement and the church were used in conjunction, including babies being baptised under the sign of the cross and the cockade.³⁴

³¹ William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 120.

³² Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred*, 5.

³³ Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred*, 5-6.

³⁴ Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred*, 7.

In this, the new government was implementing a vision along the lines of Rousseau's "religion of man" which was based not on churches and institutions, but on inward worship and "eternal obligations of morality."³⁵ By not eliminating religion *per se*, but limiting the "political ambitions of the church," one could "supplement the purely inward religion of man with a civil religion intended to bind the citizens to the state." No dissent from the religion of the state was to be permitted. As Rousseau argued, this was "the greatest of all crimes: he has lied in the presence of the laws." The punishment should be death.³⁶

According to Suzanne Desan, when the constitutional monarchy fell in 1792, however, Republicans "no longer viewed the Church as a potential ally or a viable institution in need of economic and structural reform." Instead, it was seen as a source of counterrevolution, and as a "rival cultural system," which might prevent or limit citizen connection to the new Republican state.³⁷ The most ardent revolutionaries believed that the Church, and its associations with the Old Regime, hierarchy and superstition, needed to be replaced with Enlightenment ideals of reason and the secular. As a result, in 1793-94, there was a campaign to eliminate Christian practices. Churches were closed, and priests fled, abdicated or went into hiding by the spring of 1794. In this and other manifestations of violence, made clear in the language and actions of the "Terror" of 1793 and 1794, religion could be connected with violence.³⁸ Rather than a religiously-inspired movement, however, it was the state threatened by the power of the Catholic Church which led to violence, and the perceived "religious-secular divide thus facilitated the transfer in the modern era of the public loyalty of the citizen from Christendom to the emergent nation-state."³⁹ The revolutionaries seem to be struggling, as Asad argues, with "cases of deprivatized religion," which are "intolerable to secularists primarily because of the motives imputed to their opponents rather than to anything the latter

³⁵ Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 128.

³⁶ Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 129.

³⁷ Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred*, 7.

³⁸ Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 121.

³⁹ Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 120.

have actually done. The motives signal the potential entry of religion into space already occupied by the secular.”⁴⁰

The new regime, however, did not just eradicate the Church, but replaced it with new, nonreligious, patriotic institutions, what Martin Wessel and Daniel Schönplüg call “new political religions,” including the Cult of Reason and the Cult of the Supreme Being.⁴¹ Centered around activities including planting liberty trees and holding processions in which young women represented Liberty or Reason, these new ceremonies were intended to support the revolution through engaging feelings of patriotism and unity.⁴² Not simply (though certainly) “banning religion from direct access to the public square,” this was not a straightforward “separation of religion from politics but rather the substitution of the religion of the state for the religion of the church”—an extension, perhaps, of what Rousseau was suggesting.⁴³

This substitution is evident in one of the most famous examples of the new ceremonies. On 10 November, 1793, the Paris city government held a “Triumph of Reason” festival. The festival was originally for the Palais Royale, but was move to the Cathedral of Notre Dame, “to make the attack on Catholicism more explicit.” The ceremony included “two rows of young girls dressed in white and crowned with laurel wreaths” walking up and down a mountain constructed in the corner of the church, until “Liberty, ‘represented by a beautiful woman’ came out of [a temple] and sat on a throne of greenery.” The use of a living woman as Liberty was also taken up in the provinces outside of Paris.⁴⁴ A newspaper betrayed the intentions of the ceremony, commenting:

⁴⁰ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 199.

⁴¹ Martin Schulze Wessel and Daniel Schönplüg, “Introduction,” in *Redefining the Sacred: Religion in the French and Russian Revolutions*, eds. Daniel Schönplüg and Martin Schulze Wessel (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012), 7.

⁴² Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred*, 9–10.

⁴³ Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 177.

⁴⁴ Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 63–64. These Festivals and the live “Mariannes” are also discussed by Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*, 27–30. He suggests the “live goddesses” were particular potent symbols: “the Revolution celebrated the Republic as an allegory of Liberty; the allegory took the twofold form of plastic representation and live theatre; and the live representations are among the most enduring memories that the allegory left behind... allegories of flesh and blood might well number among the surviving witnesses of the period who were subsequently sought out and sometimes listened to.” This is borne out rather strangely, including legends about former Mariannes in the mid-nineteenth century who expose children, “half naked, to the eyes of libertines who smile,

One wanted from the first moment to break the habit of every species of idolatry... and this living woman, despite all the charms that embellished her, could not be deified by the ignorant, as would a statue of stone. Something which we must never tire of saying to the people is that liberty, reason, truth are only abstract beings.

These are not gods, for properly speaking, they are parts of ourselves.⁴⁵

By using a real woman and not a statue or other representation of a woman, it was intended that interpretations of Liberty might reflect an average woman, rather than an icon like Mary, associated with religion and superstition.⁴⁶ In this way, “revolutionaries intended this new political culture to take over the didactic, ceremonial and spiritual functions of Christianity and to become, in essence, a new form of the sacred, albeit an essentially secular form of sacrality.”⁴⁷ The religious becomes the profane, and the new order, the supposed secular, the *sacré*. In other words, the secular can be viewed as a transformation of the Christian worldview for Revolutionary purposes rather than a replacement of it with something completely new or different.

However, choosing women for these festivals became akin to a beauty pageant, where the prettiest women in the community were engaged to act as Liberty. Hunt argues this shows the appropriation of political symbols, like Liberty and the Marianne, for popular purposes, “the radical didactic impulse was... inverted by popular rituals of festivity.”⁴⁸ In addition, one can see in this the gender order reconfirmed within the secular space. Rather than seeing Liberty as a symbol of the secular state, she becomes another confirmation of gender inequality, with women chosen and even glorified for their beauty. Though she was to be an ordinary woman, she became the most beautiful one, and in this, perhaps a secular form of icon.

After the fall of Robespierre, there was a return to limited freedom of worship, and then another, even more thorough, dechristianisation following another coup d'état in September of 1797.⁴⁹ Interestingly, one of the important

to those who...groan in the thrall of the terror” and a popular song celebrating the live representations in festivals. Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*, 29-30.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 64-65.

⁴⁶ Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 65.

⁴⁷ Desan, *Reclaiming the Scared*, 10.

⁴⁸ Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 64-65.

⁴⁹ Desan, *Reclaiming the Scared*, 11.

efforts made by the government in this period was the attempt to force religion into private spaces, with small private ceremonies in homes being legalized initially, and by 1795, public practice again allowed including reclamation of certain churches. After 1797, however, public religious practice was repressed, including the imposition of new oaths of allegiance to the nation for priests and the closing of churches.⁵⁰ This limiting of religion to the realm of the private has echoes in Asad's discussion of public and private space and different conceptions of belief and religious expression. By limiting practice to the private sphere, the corruption of the newly established secular space was to be limited.⁵¹

The fortunes of the church, then, were intimately connected to political "fluctuations."⁵² These interactions had implications for both religion and the revolution. As Desan describes:

While revolutionary political culture launched a massive attack on Catholic beliefs and practices, it also generated specific political techniques and an ideology of ambiguous and powerful concepts the Catholics could and did use to reclaim their religious rights and to justify their religious innovations.⁵³

There was not a straightforward and dichotomous relationship between religion and the Republic as a secular state. The clashes between the Church and the new secular state caused both action and reaction, and in a sense, created each other.

Revolutionary governments had a similarly ambiguous and fluctuating relationship with women's rights and equality. Prior to the revolution, theorists had connected the right of the king to rule absolutely to the absolute rule of the father over his family, justifying each with reference to the other. This order was designed by nature and by God, not implemented by contract, choice or consent.⁵⁴ As such, Revolutionaries, at least initially, had an interest in critiquing the patriarchal order of things and challenging the structures of the family, as it was concomitant with a challenge to both religion and the absolute monarchy. As such, changes were made at the beginning of the period to family law, which had effects on women. These included allowing divorce, transforming marriage into a civil contract,

⁵⁰ Desan, *Reclaiming the Scared*, 12.

⁵¹ Asad, *Marianne into Battle*, 181-87.

⁵² Desan, *Reclaiming the Scared*, 13.

⁵³ Desan, *Reclaiming the Scared*, 13.

⁵⁴ Desan, *The Family on Trial*, 2.

implementing egalitarian inheritance laws and the relaxation of paternal controls over the family, facilitating adoption, lowering of the age of majority, recognizing illegitimate offspring, and the state replacing the church in civil record keeping of life events like marriages, births and deaths, all of which served to support individual liberties and civil rights over collective family rights.⁵⁵ Revolutionary leaders thus made legal changes that had social impacts on individuals and families, in order to encourage the rebuilding of society and the development of the secular republic.⁵⁶

At the same time, however, a powerful discourse of citizenship of the fixity of gender according to nature, and of domesticity served to limit women's participation in society and gender equality. The Constitution of 1791 classed women, along with most men, as "passive citizens,"⁵⁷ a distinction based on economic considerations of property and wealth.⁵⁸ The 1793 Constitution eliminated the category of "passive citizenship," but women's status remained that of non-entity.⁵⁹ By late 1793, all women's clubs and societies had been banned, as, according to Deputy Amar, "women are disposed by their organization to an over-excitation which would be deadly to public affairs and that interests of state would soon be sacrificed to everything which ardor in passions can generate in the way of error and disorder."⁶⁰

In the same way that the Church and religion were enemies of the Republic, women, too, had the potential to damage the republic's project, and could be seen as a threat to the male, secular power structure. Similar action and reaction, in the realms of religion and gender mark the French Revolutionary period. Women were conceived of as irrational and "outside of politics" and religion was attacked as

⁵⁵ Desan, *The Family on Trial*, 4

⁵⁶ Desan, *The Family on Trial*, 6. Desan argues in *The Family of Trial*, and in her chapter, "War Between Brothers and Sisters," that family reform contributed to a "backlash" which helps shed light on the changes brought in under the Napoleonic Code. Suzanne Desan, "War Between Brothers and Sisters: Inheritance Law and Gender Politics in Revolutionary France," in *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and Controversies*, Second Edition, ed. Gary Kates (New York: Routledge, 2006), 242-43.

⁵⁷ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 4

⁵⁸ Scott, "French Feminists," 2.

⁵⁹ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 4.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 4-5.

lacking reason and antagonistic to the secular goals of the Republic.⁶¹ As Richard Cobb points out, revolutionary actors during the de-Christianization campaign associated women and priests directly, including one commissioner who “thundered against fanaticism and in particular against women, who were more easily seduced by it; he said that the Revolution had been made by men, and the women should not be allowed to make it backtrack.”⁶² Yet others thought that women, by their nature, were key to building a democratic and honorable society and therefore, women were given new rights in the same manner as the Church was given periods of freedom, while it was also being replaced by consciously created and consciously imitative secularized practices described above, such as the use of the figure of liberty, and the symbolism and practices of festivals.⁶³

This Rousseauian language of natural difference pervades the period: women are held to be “passive and weak” and can “fall easily into dissipation, frivolity, inconstancy, and all manner of corruption,” and men “ought to be active and strong.”⁶⁴ Rousseau held that women, “along with aristocrats and city dwellers,” were “among the worst examples, that corrupt, civilized existence had to offer.”⁶⁵ The notion of public and private also figures in this argument, where women are limited to the realm of the home and motherhood in the interest of the nation and men are public and political. As Landes argues, “female virtue was internalized, goodness was domesticated within the private sphere.”⁶⁶ The possibility of shifting gender roles was a cause for concern in the debate over women’s clubs, with

⁶¹ Hunt, *The Family Romance*, 202-03. Hunt is arguing that Joan Scott and Carol Pateman critique liberal political theory from this standpoint, though she sets herself away from this view, arguing that rather than excluding women, liberal political theory “made the exclusion of women an issue.”

⁶² Quoted in Richard Cobb, *The people's armies: the armées révolutionnaires, instrument of the Terror in the departments, April 1793 to Floréal year II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 450; quoted in Scott, *Fantasy*, 95.

⁶³ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 101.

⁶⁴ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 101.

⁶⁵ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 101.

⁶⁶ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 133. Dorinda Outram also explores these themes, and including the characterization of women as “furies of the guillotine” both in the period of the revolution and in the historiography, arguing that “for a long time” it served to do “little else but reproduce the prejudices of the Revolution itself. An image of women, as destructively propelled by physicality, passion and desire was adopted whole by the nineteenth century.” Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 127.

“nature” used as a justification for gender divisions.⁶⁷ By tying “nature” to gender difference, then, these distinctions are made “sacré” in a similar way to “rights” in the Declaration, and they then can be “transcendentalized,” made universal and protected by legal discipline, including barring women from the public sphere.

These conflicting conceptions of gender difference and religion and their implications for gender equality can be traced further through examination of images of the Marianne. We cannot know exactly how these images were understood by all their viewers in the eighteenth century, as most left us no direct record of their thoughts, and those that have been left to us are infused with political and social purposes that must be further considered, such as pamphlets and news sources that had political agendas of their own. Furthermore, the interpretations of these images, referenced below, by present-day historians and thinkers are influenced at least in part by current understandings of art interpretation and Western feminism. However, they are also informed by the culture and history of the Revolutionary period. While allowances must be made for the ambiguity of allegory and how images might be interpreted by their viewers, then, consideration of these images in their context reveals both the consistencies and contradictions that have echoes in the broader gender politics and the complex interaction between religion and the secular state in the Revolutionary period.

Yet as Monica Juneja points out, “gender intervened in the creation of new forms of representation that were produced in abundant measure to... transmit the message of the revolution.”⁶⁸ Images were a potent way of communicating, both to the majority who couldn’t read, and to those who could. As discussed earlier, the use of a female figure to stand in for any number of metaphors associated with the Republic, including Liberty and Reason, proliferated during the Revolution. She was

⁶⁷ Robin Ikegami, “Femmes-Hommes, She-bishops, and Hyenas in Petticoats: Women Reformers and Gender Treason, 1789-1830,” *Women’s Studies* 26, no. 2 (1997): 224. Hunt, too, discusses the “feared loss of sexual differentiation.” Lynn Hunt, “The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution,” in *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies*, Second Edition, ed. Gary Kates (London: Routledge, 2006), 213.

⁶⁸ Monica Juneja, “Imagining the Revolution: Gender and Iconography in French Political Prints,” *Studies in History* 12, no. 1 (1996): 2.

everywhere. The potency and usefulness of the symbol of Marianne in the Revolutionary period is discussed by Lynne Hunt:

She represented the virtues so desired by the new order: the transcendence of localism, superstition, and particularity in the name of a more disciplined and universalistic worship. She belonged to no group, to no particular place. She was the antithesis of those “ridiculous usages, gothic formulas, absurd and puerile etiquette, and the right usurped by the clergy,” which radicals had already denounced in 1790.⁶⁹

There is, however, an obvious internal contradiction in the use of a female figure to represent a revolution and a republic that was specifically not including women as full citizens and denying them the right to vote. It is important, then, to remember, as Marina Warner points out, “Liberty is not represented as a woman... because women were or are free.”⁷⁰ Further, Hunt argues the very nature of women’s role in the state facilitated the use of the female allegory. Women could be used to represent any number of goals or ideals, as they were not able to participate in the real political process.⁷¹ It is in her lack of specificity, in that she represents not a real person as the image of the king had, but is simply a “form” for whom it was impossible to associate any direct agency, that the Marianne was useful.

Marianne, then, is an “other” to which any number of meanings can attach. As Simone de Beauvoir notes, “Woman... seems to be the inessential who never goes back to being essential, to be the absolute Other, without reciprocity.”⁷² The female allegory, as Madelyn Gutwirth points out, “thrives on a multiplicity of meanings men have attached to the female sex.” Further, “the ontological void woman represents to male culture apparently provides a perfect vehicle for the use of the female figure to represent virtually anything, even the ideal of car selling.”⁷³ However, woman is not so “so completely empty a category as allegory treats her as being;” though the female form may have no universally understood and stable meaning, “the overflow of ambiguity characteristic of allegory carries within it the contaminating impurities accruing to exemplary female figures in our misogynistic

⁶⁹ Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 62.

⁷⁰ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Pan Books, 1987), xix-xx.

⁷¹ Quoted in Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 74.

⁷² Quoted in Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 255.

⁷³ Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 255.

and idealizing cultural heritage.”⁷⁴ The female figure was used to represent liberty and the republic allowed ideas to be imposed on her, but she continued to be burdened with the baggage of sexual difference and gender inequality already present in the culture. Images of Marianne, then, can be read as allegories built on an empty category, but also as reflecting underlying gender dynamics, commenting on both the ideals of the revolution and the republic, and the cultural understandings of women and gender.

The four images of Marianne contained in the appendix below all contain a single female figure and were produced between 1792 and 1794, during the first Republic after the fall of Louis XVI, including the period of the Terror. All the images show a beautiful woman, confirming, as Landes points out, “the most striking feature of the countless allegories of the nation—and the other virtues—is the nation’s incorporation in the body of an exceptionally alluring woman.”⁷⁵ As Rolf Reichardt and Hubertus Kohle suggest, these depictions of beautiful women as Marianne, are “holy as well as beautiful, a cross between an ancient goddess and the Christian Mary, in which all longings for salvation could be united aesthetically.”⁷⁶ Valuing women for their beauty, then, whether real women posing as Liberty, or images representing liberty, was consistent. Further, one can again see the working of the “sacré” in the blurring of supposedly religious and secular symbols, where the Marianne becomes at the same time sacred and profane.

There are consistent symbols used in all the images, most especially the Phrygian cap, a symbol of freed slaves.⁷⁷ However, confusingly, the wearing of the cap by real women was a cause for concern, with a “radical spokesman (and city official) Chaumette” arguing that “these denatured women, the *viragos*, wandered through the markets with the red cap to sully that badge of liberty.... Since when is

⁷⁴ Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 255.

⁷⁵ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 139.

⁷⁶ Reichardt and Kohle, *Visualizing the Revolution*, 118.

⁷⁷ A particularly notable association to connect so consistently with a female figure. According to Scott, “the difference of sex was taken to be a legitimate ground for inequality.” Scott goes on to point out: “As Carole Pateman puts it succinctly: ‘Sexual difference is political difference; sexual difference is the difference between freedom and subjection.’” Women would not be given the right to vote in France until 1944. Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 99.

it permitted to give up one's sex?"⁷⁸ This confirms, perhaps, the allegorical understanding of the woman in these depictions as separate from the actual women of the Republic, but also alludes to some of the contentious gender dynamics of the period — just how women fit into the new order, how they could be represented and represent themselves, was in flux, as Kane Mullen notes in his essay in the present issue.

In *Liberty*, an engraving by Jean-Francois Janinet,⁷⁹ the female figure is sitting on a throne, with the defeated hydra of despotism below her bare feet. She wears a laurel wreath in her hair, “a sign of civic virtue,” and holds a Phrygian cap in one hand and a club in the other.⁸⁰ She is wearing a chiton gown, but her breasts are prominent nonetheless, revealed under what seems to be delicate material. Its diaphanous appearance is juxtaposed against the roughness of the club, both materially, and as a particularly blunt weapon. Her identification as “Liberty” on the platform below her throne “attempts to anchor the sliding signification to which all female allegories were susceptible.”⁸¹ The placement of a woman on a throne contradicts the “anxiety about queenship as the most extreme form of women invading the public sphere,” which came to the forefront in the context of the arrest and execution of Marie Antoinette.⁸² Landes argues that her body has “physical energy, represented by the posture of her legs and the folds of her garment.”⁸³ This engraving, then, makes the connection between Roman motifs and the language of the Revolution. It suggests the assertion of physical prowess, but in the body of a woman, whose delicate features and dress stand in contrast. She is both threatening and reassuring—perhaps demonstrating, as Hunt suggests, the ability for the female form and allegory to embody the virtues of the Republic that it wanted to present about itself.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Hunt, “The Many Bodies,” 213. Emphasis in Hunt’s text.

⁷⁹ Image may be accessed at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69503075.r=Jean-Francois%20JaninetLibert%C3%A9%20Libert%C3%A9?rk=21459;2> (accessed November 5, 2018). Held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁸⁰ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 39.

⁸¹ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 41.

⁸² Hunt, “The Many Bodies,” 212.

⁸³ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 41.

A second example, referred to as *Figure allégorique de la République*, a painting attributed to Antoine-Jean Gros,⁸⁴ also depicts a young woman, but in this case, she is a soldier, holding a pike and resting her hand on a sheaf of fasces, “which used to symbolize Unity until fascism... cancelled any possibility of the emblem’s sincerity.”⁸⁵ She wears a military helmet on her head, but there is still a Phrygian cap, on the top of her pike, covering the tip and presumably blunting its effectiveness as a weapon but referencing freedom nonetheless. Her short gown slips off her shoulder, revealing a breast. She is surrounded by light, a glow coming from the sky behind her. It is not quite an aureole, but alludes to one and thus to the religious imagery that uses them. The image makes the connection between Roman imagery, specifically military imagery and symbols of unity and freedom, all imposed on the female form. The juxtaposition of military imagery and the female figure is striking, as, of course, women would not serve in either in the Roman military or in the French one. However, she is clearly identifiable as a woman, a beautiful one, and with an exposed breast, “both sacred and polluting,”⁸⁶ and as Scott argues “there was no abstracting women from their sex.”⁸⁷

In a third example, entitled *Liberty—She Has Overthrown the Hydra of Tyranny and Broken the Yoke of Despotism*, by Pierre Paul Prud’hon and Jacques-Louis Copia, Liberty is also depicted with military, or at least violent, overtones.⁸⁸ She again tramples the hydra. She wears a short gown, a laurel wreath and sandals, but her militarism is of a different sort. She holds an axe, with which it seems she has decapitated the hydra below her feet, holding the chain of a broken yoke in her other hand. Rather than posing in a military-like stance, as the Marianne in Figure 2, she is resting, but “from her effective labours,” with the implication that she was recently active.⁸⁹ Madelyn Gutwirth comments on this depiction: “The sheer force

⁸⁴ Image may be accessed at: <http://collections.chateauversailles.fr/#00d7787d-6c02-4ae2-a589-78c851f093fe> (accessed November 5, 2018). Held by the Château de Versailles.

⁸⁵ Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, 270.

⁸⁶ Warner, quoted in Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 342.

⁸⁷ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 98.

⁸⁸ Image may be accessed at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10020292n.r=Jacques-Louis%20Copia%20liberte%20la%20liberte?rk=42918;4> (accessed November 5, 2018). Held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁸⁹ Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 263.

and relaxation of the gently muscled strong woman's body conveys a sense of easy athletic grace." Further, "gently moving ragged tatters neutralize any notion of prettification. Darkness hoods the glance of Liberty's strong features... this allegory of Liberty looks equal to her task."⁹⁰ The effectiveness of this Marianne, however, Gutwirth questions, as "for many men, and many women as well, the too-self-sufficient goddess—acting without, and seeming to need no, male protectors—would have appeared not as liberating, but as threatening to the male supremacist gender accommodation."⁹¹ This Marianne, then, is not a "passive citizen" at all. She is "active and strong" and seems to have had a direct role in the Revolution, as she has slain the despot and holds the broken chains and the yoke in her hands to prove it. This depiction has violence in it, even if we are not privy to it; we are aware it has happened, at the hands of a woman. Rather than induce fear of their fanaticism, though, and their counter-revolutionary potential in supporting priests and irrational religion, the female form here is Liberty, the victor in the battle over oppression.

The engraving *Republican France offering her breasts to all Frenchmen* again depicts a beautiful young woman wearing a Phrygian cap and chiton robes.⁹² Her face is placid, in a kind of small smile, and her eyes look just to the side of the viewer. Her breasts are both exposed and central to the image, creating what Gutwirth calls "a democratic pinup." Gutwirth argues, "with her glazed expression and eloquent breasts she proclaims nothing so much as Frenchmen's equality of sexual opportunity. Her wearing of the emblems of freedom and equality is a joke on her: she is reduced to her breasts."⁹³ Rather than seeing this Marianne as a virtuous nursing mother, this interpretation suggests that this Marianne lacks virtue, like the women of the Old Regime, not least the sexualized Marie Antoinette.

Landes, while agreeing that the image has "obvious sexual content," suggests that the body is a metaphor for the nation, creating "longings for the state" as a

⁹⁰ Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 264.

⁹¹ Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 265

⁹² Image may be accessed at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6950331t.r=boizot%20Louis-Simonsfrance%20repubicaine%20france%20repubicaine?rk=21459:2> (accessed November 5, 2018). Held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁹³ Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 365.

“feminine object of men’s desire” and “more than a fatherland.” The “identities of modern sexually defined subjects are part of the process by which such subjects take the state as the primary object and the partner on whom their identity depends.”⁹⁴ This interpretation does not, however, dismiss the notion she is a “pinup;” rather, it seems to confirm it by connecting it to the male gaze even more directly, creating the nation, the Republic, as a sex object. The aureole surrounding her head confounds interpretation further, connecting her to religious images and even the virgin Mary, in direct contrast to her “pinup” appearance. Marina Warner’s interpretation of semi-naked female forms as allegory, in contrast, allows for the possibility of virtue. She argues “the allegorical female body... proclaims its virtues by abandoning protective coverings, to announce it has no need of them. By exposing vulnerable flesh as if it were not so... the semi-clad female figure expresses strength and freedom.”⁹⁵ The sweet visage and glowing background of this Marianne make it difficult to suggest that she is proclaiming “strength and freedom” in her nakedness, as the Marianne above in the third example, after killing the hydra, might if she was similarly disrobed. Her exposed breast carries these meanings more obviously in its lack of obviousness.

Antoine de Baecque contends that the “cliché of the naked and dishevelled allegory leading men into battle is a myth. The French Revolution prefers, on the contrary, to entrust its virtues to prudent goddesses.”⁹⁶ While this Marianne is not dishevelled, but rather carefully dressed and coifed, and she leads no one into battle, she challenges the notion that “prudent goddesses” are the norm. Instead, this image, while proclaiming the connection with the natural and the maternal for the new Republic of France, in its complete lack of subtlety, calls into question that meaning, and its meaning as an allegory at all. Though she wears the red cap and a rooster on her head, she has none of the martial imagery or active qualities of the other images; she is here, again, reduced to her breasts.

⁹⁴ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 153-154.

⁹⁵ Warner, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, 277.

⁹⁶ Antoine De Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 321.

These images, then, like the place of women in Revolutionary society itself, are difficult to sort out. The overlapping “religious” and “secular” meanings, like the use of symbols from Roman art, and associations with Virgin Mary, both common in the period, challenge the distinction between the categories themselves, suggesting a blurring of the division. As Warner points out, while a lack of women as symbols can be evidence of a devaluation of women in that society, the mere presence of symbols of women does not necessarily indicate social equality.⁹⁷ This is the case in the example of Marianne, where the preponderance of female representations had little to do with the realities of gender equality in society. Rather than allowing the secular state to claim “the gradual extension of liberalism’s incomplete project of universal emancipation,” including the equality of women, the French Revolutionary period and the secular Republics it created often served to, in Joan Scott’s words, “intensify, rather than relieve the dilemmas that attend sexual difference.”⁹⁸ Valls’ understanding of the Marianne demonstrates the continuing power of the “unconscious of patriarchal society,” where the images of women, both fictional women like Marianne, and the real women living in France today, are still placed in an “exhibitionist role... simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.”⁹⁹ By invoking the Marianne as a symbol of women’s equality in current debates over women’s rights to their bodies, continued gender inequality in the French Republic is both concealed and rejected as a social problem.¹⁰⁰ In this, the secular state and the liberal project more broadly is complicit in the continuation, or perhaps more accurately, the transformation, of gender inequality and the struggle to define what gender equality might actually look like—a problem made explicit in the burkini controversy.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Warner, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, xx.

⁹⁸ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 100, 115.

⁹⁹ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975), 11.

¹⁰⁰ Janet McCabe, *Feminist Film Studies: Writing Women into Cinema* (New York: Wallflower, 2004), 32.

¹⁰¹ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 100, 115.

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