

**In Search of the Citizen-Mother:
Using Locke to Unravel a Modern
Mystery**

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The literature of nations and nationalisms rarely addresses the question of gender, despite a general interest in the differential participation of various social groups in nationalist projects. Walby, 1997: 180

...nation-gender theories have considerable work to do if they are to provide a more comprehensive causal analysis of the ways in which the complex interrelations of gender and nation contribute to the formation of nations and the spread and intensity of nationalism. Smith, 1998: 210

[In Canada] Nationalist women of British descent were required to perform two functions – have children, because of the scarcity of the British population, and participate actively in nation building. Their public activism had to be consistent with their maternal role... maternal nationalism. Vickers, 2000: 135

In this paper, I will sketch a preliminary genealogy of a stage in women's experience, which I will call the *citizen-mother*. The paper is part of a larger project in which I am exploring the many diverse relationships between gender and nation in a number of countries; including nationalisms, nation-seeking and nation-building projects. I understand nationalism as involving both political and cultural aspects and projects. My key focus here, however, is on modern nation-states, and women's project of citizenship. This does not mean, however, that I will focus only or primarily on the public realm. Indeed, it is my thesis that nationalisms may involve both the domestic and public spheres. In particular, I will explore women's experiences of early modern, liberal citizenship in Britain and North America, because in these contexts citizen-mothers became most active as nation-makers as re/producers of good citizens and, in North America at least, as creators of key institutions in civil society.

“Social feminism: or “maternal feminism,” as it is diversely called, was the ideology which emerged based on the idea of mothering as women's key citizenly duty. However, most contemporary feminist scholars reject the idea that, by educating their children, women are acting as citizens; and that by performing these responsibilities, also were expanding their realm of freedom and political activism into the public sphere. I will focus on several feminist interpretations of Locke's ideas about mothering to show the anti-natalism, which now prevails in Western feminism, often leads to an interpretation of Locke in which women's roles are subordinate, confining and menial. I will then look at several dissenting texts and on Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) which reveals an understanding of mothering which supports the idea of citizen-mothers as active creators of new citizens. This was an understanding, moreover, on which social or maternal feminists could, and did, build a justification for activism in the public sphere, often using advocacy for their children and for other mothers' less fortunate children. Their contributions to nation-making, however, took place in both the domestic and the public spheres.

Finally, I will explore briefly the ideas about mothering of two remarkable citizen-mothers – Mary Wollstonecraft in 18th-century Britain and Abigail Adams in 18th-century America. For both, Doctor Locke played the role Doctor Spock played in my life.¹ Locke’s underlying theory that each of us is born a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which experience writes, required from mothers the performance of new roles in creating good citizens and in nurturing new nations. Far from seeing motherhood as a confining and menial role, Wollstonecraft and Adams saw it as the key to creating virtuous citizens and virtuous nations. The acceptance by Wollstonecraft and Adams of their maternal roles *as the core of their citizenship*, rather than as in tension with it, makes these early modern, liberal feminists strange to their anti-natal feminist granddaughters. However, it puts them in a direct lineage with the women who left their homes advocating religious, charitable and reform projects, welfare institutions, pacifism and good government – all in the name of citizen-mothers.

In North America, this potent tradition made white citizen-mothers of the dominant, Anglo-American culture allies of the men building new nations. Like Locke, they saw the task of turning blank slates into strong and virtuous citizens as important and political. They also expanded the task into the public sphere, creating new occupations for their daughters as nurses, teachers, social workers and missionaries. As they created new institutions to support their children and those of other citizen-mothers, moreover they impressed their values on the institutions, which the state often later appropriated, as the basis of welfare states. Citizen-mothers’ reform movements even worked to eliminate party patronage and corruption from local governments in the name of national values.

The political movement based on the idea of citizen-mothers was eventually becalmed, giving way to a feminism which rejected maternalism as the basis for women’s citizenship and demanded gender-neutral citizenship and equality with men in the public world of work and power. But exploring the basis in liberalism for its centuries-long influence is an important step in understanding how the “complex interrelationships of gender and nation contribute to the formation of nations and the spread and intensity of nationalism (Smith, 1993: 210). The life circumstances of most women have changed significantly in the 310 years since Locke wrote his treatise on education. Women’s average lifespans have more than doubled and their literacy rates have increased even more significantly. (It is illustrative to recall that Mary Wollstonecraft died in childbirth at age thirty-six.) Mothering as a social and political activity, therefore, now occupies less of women’s lives. Nonetheless, for many women it remains the most creative and humanizing activity in which they participate. Coming to terms with the political significance of the citizen-mother, therefore, is also a matter of the pro-natal and anti-natal tendencies within feminism confronting each other; and in turn confronting both tendencies within nationalisms.

¹ Not the Mister Spock of *Star Trek*, but the Doctor Spock whose guide to child-rearing was the bible for parents in the 1970s and 1980s. Locke’s

A. Who is the "Citizen-Mother?"

In most mainstream theories of nationalism, the nation is understood as “a great solidarity” created by sentiment, or the consent of the “the people” as Renan put it (1882). The implication is that nation-making involves processes which affect men and women equally, or at least, in similar ways. Yet as Glenda Sluga (1998) has shown, at least in the republican tradition of citizenship initiated by the French Revolution, women were not among those who could consent to the nation through the “daily plebiscite,” as they were explicitly denied the right to participate in the new public realm of citizenship. As Landes (1988); Sluga (1998); and others demonstrate, western-European nations and most nationalist ideologies were (and are) patriarchal in character. By 1793, claiming defence of public order, French revolutionaries had restricted women (who had been politically active in the public sphere earlier in the revolution) to the private sphere where they were to be patriotic wives and mothers educated as Rousseau demanded. The public sphere was to be constructed explicitly as masculine in nature and as normatively homogenous in conformance with the Greek political ideas favoured by so many continental Enlightenment thinkers. Therefore, women were not included among “the people” and popular sovereignty was deemed compatible with a for-men-only (“one man, one vote”) nation-state. Republican values required centralized state control of education²; moreover, whatever women were doing in their small, private domains, they could not subvert the patriotic sentiments of French children. As in Athens, women born of citizens were citizens but primarily to confer that status on their children. As Sluga insists, French revolutionary nationalists did not deny women citizenship; instead they created “a differentiation of masculine from feminine forms of national citizenship” (1998, 87). The feminine form was the *citizen-mother* and it is this form and a genealogy of its evolution which is the main subject of this paper.

I will address these questions. First, did this construct of the passive, privatized citizen-mother apply to women elsewhere in the Euro-American world? And how did such citizen-mothers emerge into the active women citizens of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? Second, what role did women as organized citizen-mothers, both passive and active, play in the making of nations?

Kaplan’s woman-centred analysis of feminism and nationalism in Europe (1997) reveals very few instances in which the relationships between the two movements were anything but hostile; not surprising since many nation-states in Europe followed the French republican tradition. As Sluga notes, “Mazzini, like Michelet and Fichte, drew on the image of the patriarchal family (with the father as the head) as the

Some Thoughts Concerning Education was still a popular child-rearing manual for two centuries after it was first published in 1693.

² By contrast to the continental pattern influenced by French nationalism, British liberals didn’t favour centralized education, although Mary Wollstonecraft and others later advocated it. In the British nations in North America, local control of education was an important practice. Moreover, unlike Europe or Britain, the U.S. and the British colonies which would become Canada had female schoolteachers in public, locally-controlled schools from the early 19th century.

natural unit to shore up the legitimacy of the fraternal nation-state and determine its preference for the male citizen..." (1998: 9, 24). Consequently, there is a strong view among European feminists that nationalism and nations are essentially "bad for women." Indeed, Kaplan could only find two cases in Europe in which women could forge a positive relationship with a nationalist movement prior to the restructurings after the Second World War. In most European nations, therefore, citizen-mothers appear to have resisted engagement with nationalisms, when they were organized in feminist movements. But those who did not associate with feminism often supported nationalisms in various ways.

There was another tradition of citizenship, however, and another revolution; and it is on the experiences of citizen-mothers in the British, liberal tradition, especially in North America, that I focus. My research goal is to explain why and how the experiences of citizen-mothers differed in the British and North American liberal experience. It is my premise that the *citizen-mother* was not an essential form fixed through the centuries in the mode specified by Rousseau and the French republican tradition. Rather, the form of citizenship of the citizen-mother differed within the liberal tradition. It also differed over time, even before women won the right to vote, as women expanded its scope. It differed especially in the new nations in North America where the institutions of civil society were sparse and space existed for women's activism, especially in local communities. The modern mystery I hope to solve (with Locke's help) is what part women, seemingly confined to a passive, privatized citizen-mother role, could play in nation-making. Contemporary feminist scholars in fact often assume that women were excluded from citizenship altogether, not only because most were denied the right to vote. But also because British law denied married women property rights and excluded them from most rights and some duties of civil law, when civil rights might be considered the essence of true citizenship (Lister, 1997: 66-72; Vogel, 1988, 1994).

Women's long exclusion from civil and political rights is a story now well known and feminists fought its injustices for much of the three centuries since Locke wrote. Why then do I see women in Britain and British North America as *citizen-mothers* and not just as mothers? In fact, it is women's role in creating the nations which were joined with modern states, which makes the citizen-mother something more than a manipulative fiction. Although some women participated in the "imagining" of these nations as novelists, journalists and philosophers, many more women participated by creating and reproducing these nations in the minds of their children, one family at a time initially; but soon also through the thousands of groups, movements and institutions created by women in civil society. So, far from a conscious act of will or of imagining, as Renan and Anderson conceive nation-making for most citizens, modern nations are created through the teaching of women; as citizen-mothers and, in North America at least, as teachers.

My thesis then assumes that male dominance and female power can co-exist; that is, neither familial, nor social relationships are zero-sum games. Although most women initially lacked political and most civil rights, they were not confined to their homes. They organized, planned, built, petitioned, lobbied, raised money for hospitals, libraries and for ‘good works.’ In short, they expanded their role of rearing good citizens in every way they possibly could; but always based on their citizen-mother role. It is then important to examine in detail Locke’s classic account of mothering to show how and why it could be used to expand women’s citizenship, while Rousseau’s account was more restrictive and confining, envisioning a gender-segregated and enclosed domestic environment for the citizen-mother.

B. Locke’s Account of Mothering

Rousseau’s citizen-mother is constructed on the basis of a highly sexualized figure, who must be “curbed and limited” to a “woman’s sphere” if men are to be free and rational citizens (Eisenstein, 1981: 56). In his account, the virtuous citizen-mother is the middle-class wife, restricted in mobility by gender apartheid to her home, with national re/production firmly in the hands of (centralized) state educators. Romantic love and bourgeois domesticity are his ideal; women are to be *loving* wives and mothers, not educators. In Rousseau’s words “[w]oman was made especially to please man” (1964: 218).

Locke’s largely ignored account of mothering has a different basis. In this section, I will present both his psychological framing of how children learn and his “Thoughts” concerning education drawn respectively from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693); and his correspondence with Edmund Clarke and Mrs. Clarke, especially concerning the education of girls. In the next section, I explore the concept of “parental power” in the *Two Treatises on Government* (1690), which most (but not all) contemporary feminist scholars dismiss, rejecting as insincere Locke’s apparent support for companionate marriage and a genuine sharing of power within the liberal family. While I will not have space for a full exploration of the scholarship, I will outline the main arguments to explain why I am most persuaded by Ingrid Makus’ and Mary Lyndon Hanley’s conclusions that Locke’s commitment to some power-sharing between parents was not just a cynical device to refute Filmer’s patriarchalism. Indeed, I will argue that only if women have some autonomy in their mothering role could Locke’s model for education at home *without* recourse to schools be effective in leading children – male and female – to the rationality Locke sees as the desirable mature condition for both. Moreover, as Makus (1996) demonstrates, Locke’s scheme for educating rational citizens, and the role of mothers in it, is political in objective.

Although theorists who focus on the continental tradition see nationalism as a product of the French revolution, scholars like Colin Kidd (1999) and Liah Greenfeld (1992) see competing proto-nationalisms or ‘national sentiments’ in Britain in the early modern period. Greenfeld argues that in

Britain the fusion of “the nation” with “the people” occurs in the 16th century. John Milton’s “Nation chosen before any other,” gives evidence of this (*Areopagitica*, Vol. II, cited in Smith, 1998: 172) and firmly links “the nation” to Reformation and Protestantism. Kidd links one of the competing strands of Britishness to the mechanical philosophy of Bacon, Newton and Locke, seeing it as the underpinning of modern Britain’s character, marked by its predominance in science, industry, invention and commerce (1999: 72-3).

Locke’s family was Puritan and commercial, so he was familiar both with the Puritan concept of “callings” and, the Puritan view that children are born cursed with original sin and so must have their will broken (preferably by age two) to become virtuous. Locke may well have been disposed to view mothering as a calling in the Puritan sense, but he firmly rejected Puritan views on psychology and childrearing. He attended the prestigious Westminster School in London for five years with men like John Dryden who were creating the “new Britain,” but his real mentor was the pioneer chemist Robert Boyle at Christ Church, Oxford where he studied both the classical subjects and science, eventually qualifying as a physician. During his life, he also was a close friend of Isaac Newton.

Locke’s experiences, led to his development of a materialist psychology, and his own rejection of education in schools. His theory of education based on affection, habit, persuasion and rationality, rather than the extensive physical violence³ and punishments then common and sanctified by Puritan teaching was to occur at home. For Locke’s scheme for educating rational citizens at home, women would have to be recognized as rational and to some degree autonomous in their mothering role.

Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) is the bedrock of his materialist philosophy. Far from entering the world encumbered by original sin, Locke sees us entering the world as “white paper, void of characters” (II iz). Not only are infants not cursed with original sin or possessed of wills to be broken by paternal power, “we should have little reason, to think, that they bring many *ideas* into the world with them... some faint *ideas*, of hunger, and thirst, and warmth, and some pains, which they may *have* in the womb, there is *not* the least appearance of any settled *ideas* at all in them” (IV 2). This is the basis of the Enlightenment thesis that people everywhere are motivated in the same way by simple reactions to pleasure and pain, but profoundly differentiated by their experiences which variously write on the *tabula rasa* or “white paper, void of characters.” Indeed in IV 12, Locke compares *Hottentots*, the *Virginia King Apochancana* and *English-men* to demonstrate that education would make the farmer “as good a mathematician” as the latter (and vice versa).

This radical departure from previous accounts of how children learn has important implications for our understanding of Locke’s political thought, but here I limit my analysis to the implications he

draws about how best to educate children and the role of mothers in that process. First, Locke nowhere says, or implies, that girl children are excluded from his theories. Second, Locke's rejection of nativism, the belief that certain innate ideas exist in the mind before experience, lead him to place enormous importance on what children should be allowed to experience, since he believes the difference between primitive savages (Hottentots) and civilized men able to do philosophy or mathematics – and to manage their own property and run their own government – depends on it. Locke's objections to schools as environments for experience, and his rejection of "the careless, and confused use and application of words" (III 16), which – because of the close connection between words and ideas – he believes triggers disorganized thinking, and is likely the result of leaving children to the supervision of servants, point to the importance of both mother and father in the education process. If a nation cannot depend on schools and unsupervised nursery maids to *shape* children's experiences, it must ensure that fathers *and mothers* undertake their parenting duties.

Locke's empiricism underwrites the possibility of equal rationality in human beings, but it doesn't necessarily imply equal capacity. As James Wisner concludes: "...for Locke, the rational person was the autonomous individual. Equipped with the power of sensation and reflection, each individual was capable of that experience which is the source of all knowledge" (Wisner, 1983: 212). Consequently, autonomy becomes the key to the capacity to become fully rational through experience and reflection. In *Two Treatises on Government*, we learn that some women (queens, aristocrats and heiresses) can achieve such autonomy, but most women cannot because they are disadvantaged by the circumstances of childbearing and because normally men control property⁴, which is important to autonomy. So, while women, and so mothers, are capable of "that experience which is the source of all knowledge," in Locke's time few enjoyed the degree of autonomy needed to become as fully rational as those men whose experiences of autonomous property-holding, etc. fostered full rationality. Nonetheless, Locke does not disqualify women from an education similar to their brothers' or from supervising the education of their children and managing their household, and their property.

Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* is an especially interesting text because it was Dr. Locke's advice to parents based on his philosophy and his experiences as a child, as a tutor of young children and as a physician. The text was written while Locke was in exile in Holland, published in 1693 and republished in a considerably expanded version in 1695.⁵ It stayed in print as a parents guide; indeed it was based on a series of letters to Locke's friend Edward Clarke on how to educate his children. When

³ Makus notes that Locke describes favourably a mother whipping her daughter for non-compliance with authority (1996, Ch.2). Overall, however, his theory used force in a minimal way, as Abigail Adams observed (Withey, 2002).

⁴ Makus argues that it is the fact that women lack full ownership of their bodies (and reproductive powers) which is key – see below.

⁵ The edition I am relying on is edited and with an introduction by Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov and bound with *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, published by Hachett Publishing, Indianapolis, 1996.

raising future President John Quincy Adams, Abigail Adams used Locke's childrearing theories as outlined in this text (Withey, 1981: 29). Indeed Locke's ideas on childrearing are reported to have been very popular in New England around the time of the revolution among mothers who rejected the harsher Puritan theory of "spare the rod, and spoil the child," although they likely disregarded Dr. Locke's advice concerning cold baths for tiny babies.

One question to consider is why this text is commonly ignored by feminist scholars (Makus and Shanley excepted). The detail in Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* makes it clear that this is a practical manual for raising rational, virtuous children, able to be self-governing and to consent in a political system based on consent. In a letter to Mrs. Clarke (January 7, 1684) he stated that he didn't think gender made a difference to education in essentials, although different subjects might be taught girls and boys as they play different roles in adult life. The overall approach was to be the same, however, although concerning exercise he was "willing to make concessions to beauty 'as much as health will permit' and have them exercise in the shade, indoors, or before sunrise" (Grant and Tarcov, 1996: xi). The general approach, however, was to be the same and was dictated by his philosophical assumptions. Although Section III (*Parts of Education*) is intended as a guide for tutors, as Locke strenuously opposed sending children away to school, Section I (*Health*) and Section II (*General Methods of Education*) are guides for parents covering subjects as diverse as the importance of, rest, the avoidance of laced corsets, toilet training, manners, the rational approach to crying jags, temper tantrums, timorousness and lying. These sections assume an intelligent, active mother partnering with the father, for boys until a tutor was hired; for girls likely longer (II A, §40-2). In *Early Establishment of Parental Authority* Locke advises beginning while children are "very little" to establish parental authority based on their understanding of "whose power" they are in. But the strategy is to use force and punishment very rarely, indeed he considers establishing authority "by chastisement and the rod" a lazy way, "most unfit of any [way] to be used in education" (IIA, §47). The development of a habit of obeying legitimate authorities out of reason is key, and the goal for both boys and girls.

Although Doctor Locke favoured cold baths, hard beds, early rising and simple food, to toughen these raw rational citizens, his advice is often tender as in his horror of the Chinese practice of binding women's feet and his opposition to any but the gentlest approach to toilet-training and discipline. In II A §83, he states: "For I would have a *father seldom strike his child* but upon very urgent necessity and as the last remedy." Although he clearly saw mothers playing a more active role in the upbringing of daughters than of sons, and more with younger than older boys, Locke's condemnation of corporal punishment and his concern to create citizens good by habit, independent, and self-governing *as far as they are able* clearly requires the involvement of both mothers and fathers in direct parenting and in strict supervision of tutors and nursery nurses. His belief that public schools could not produce self-governing

citizens, free of vice, in particular made parenting politically important, and in particular raised the significance of mothering.

Scholarship on Locke has been greatly influenced by C.B. Macpherson's theory of "possessive individualism" in which Locke's autonomous, self-governing citizens are unfrocked as self-interested men of property. As Grant and Tarcov conclude, however, neither *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* nor *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* "lends much support to the view that a society of self-interested individuals pressing partisan demands is sufficient to sustain Lockean liberal politics" (1996: viii). On the contrary, Locke urges that children be taught to be concerned for others, to repress greed, and "to submit their desires to rational control." His goal is individual self-government, to the extent to which experiences and autonomy permit the rational capacity for self-government to emerge in each person. Locke sees no role for the state in shaping its citizen's characters; indeed, he would limit the intrusion of public authorities within the family sphere. By being against schools and favouring domestic education, Locke believed that "the wealth and prosperity of the nation" (Dedicatory letter, cited *ibid*: ix) depended on parents accepting it as a duty and proper concern to educate their children. This grounds the role of citizen-mothers in sharing this duty and concern. Locke's thesis that parenting is a civic responsibility to be shared by mothers and fathers, albeit with fathers in the dominant position in the education of boys, suggests that he saw mothering as having explicitly political values and function. This then brings me to the concept of *parental power*, which is so much an issue of dispute in feminist scholarship on Locke because another part of the modern mystery which I want to solve is why most feminist scholars ignore, or reject, Locke's apparent belief in women's equal capability for reason and his support both for education and participation in their children's education.

C. Parental Power - Is it All About Refuting Filmer?

To show that Locke's account of parenting gives women sufficient authority to exercise their reason in mothering, we must unpack his concept of "parental power" as developed in *Two Treatises on Government*. The problem lies in assessing what kind of power, if any, Locke intended mothers to exercise. If they are to be mere conduits of the father's rule, it is harder to see how generations of women could expand the citizen-mother role into the public sphere, as I have hypothesized they did. Most feminist scholars have concluded that Locke invented the idea of "parental power" purely to refute Filmer's patriarchalism, the belief that biblically-sanctioned, male domestic power is the origin and model of political power in the state. The common feminist thesis is that Locke did not really mean to give mothers a share of "parental power," and so did not intend to provide women with a potential basis for developing rationality and claiming citizenship. They see "parental power" as a fiction; a device invented only to be marshalled against Filmer. At best, they see it as a temporary grant, quickly taken back by

Locke; or made inoperative by women's presumed lack of economic independence; and/or lack of power in the conjugal relationship.

In this section, I explore several versions of this argument that there is no substance to parental power sharing in Locke's thought. I will then outline two alternate views of authors who see more substance in his idea that fathers and mothers must share parental power, at least to some degree, for liberal education based in the family to work. I do not conclude that parent power-sharing, as Locke saw it, was equal. But it was sufficient for women to build a gender-differentiated form of citizenship used in both the family and the public sphere on it.

In Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, the wife of Admiral Croft – a woman with no children but considerable intelligence – admonishes her sea captain brother, who is famous in the navy because “he would never have a woman on his ship”: “We do not all want to be in calm seas all our life... *women are rational creatures too*” (my emphasis). Despite Austen's brave declaration, few second-wave feminist scholars reading Locke conclude that he saw women as “rational creatures too.” One of the earliest texts to examine the meaning of “parental power” is Lorenne Clark's “Women and Locke: Who owns the apples in the Garden of Eden?” (1979). Clark begins by noting that Locke explicitly excludes the family from being a *political* institution. So, although there are power relationships in the family, Clarke does not believe they involve *political* power. She asserts that Locke believes “there is a ‘natural’ inequality of the sexes and a ‘natural’ superiority of the male” (16). She also asserts that to Locke “reproduction is not a central feature of political life and is of no value in creating a significant life for man” (17).⁶ Following C.B. Macpherson's arguments in *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (1962), Clark reaches these conclusions because she believes Locke's whole political philosophy was about justifying ownership and the secure inheritance of private property. So she believes male dominance in the family is sanctioned by Locke to ensure inheritance of a man's property by his legitimate heirs and, of course, government is also assumed to have as its main function the protection of property-holders in their enjoyment of their property.

How then does this relate to “parental power” and whether or not Locke believed women could be “rational creatures,” and so, citizen-mothers? Locke clearly distinguishes between political rule based on consent and both “paternal” and “parental” power as exercised in the family. To second-wave feminists, intent on establishing that “the personal *is* political,” excluding the family from the political sphere suggested that reproduction “is not a central feature of political life” and “of no value to creating a significant life for man.” While I do not contest Clark's conclusion that Locke considered the family as key to the transmission of property, I cannot accept her conclusions regarding the importance of

⁶ Ingrid Makus explicitly argues against her interpretation; see below.

reproduction to Locke; nor concerning the political significance of education and mothering. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke clearly considered the nurturance and education aspects of re/production crucial to the rearing of citizens capable of rational self-government. His conviction that limited government is best, and his rejection of government involvement in the education of children made the matter of how, and how well, children were educated at home, by both their parents, and by tutors supervised closely by their parents, of crucial political importance.

In the *First Treatise*, Clark notes, Locke seems to argue that men have power over wives “simply as a consequence of women’s natural disadvantage” (19), although he ultimately concludes that wives also have a duty to obey their husbands. She concludes that Locke rejects any “equal right to autonomy for men and women” (19). Hence whatever “parental power” means to Locke, Clark does not believe it is based on an *equal* right to autonomy. Clark also cannot understand why Locke believes women’s inferiority is a result of their “reproductive disadvantage,” as she believes their dependency is purely socially constructed to ensure male dominance and paternal control of property. But, the significantly shorter life span of women because of their frequent deaths in, and from, the complications of childbirth⁷ was a fact well understood by Doctor Locke. Clark claims women could compensate for any “normal disadvantage” by limiting the number of their pregnancies, which would require controlling men’s sexual access to them. Even a century later Mary Wollstonecraft, who certainly better than most women controlled when and how often she became pregnant, died in only her second childbirth, and her “soulmate” Fanny died from complications of her first.

“Parental power,” therefore, was intended to refute Filmer. But it also was grounded in the circumstances of women’s lives; circumstances which changed over time and place. To refute Filmer, Clark concludes, Locke argued “no support for patriarchal government can be derived from the existence of paternal power in the family, which consists in the exercise of parental authority equally over children, is equally shared between father and mother” (1979: 22; based on Ch. IV “Of Parental Power,” in the *Second Treatise*). To refute Filmer, it was important to show that the father did not have absolute

⁷ Although not all women in western, industrial countries now enjoy life-spans significantly longer than men’s on average (Aboriginal women are a tragic exception in North America), for the overwhelming majority this is the case. Comparative research by UNIFEM and other UN agencies show in many parts of the world, high maternal mortality makes women less long-lived than men and that shorter life-spans are often associated with lower literacy rates. If we “read” western history from the 17th century to today within a development framework, we can theorize that industrialization, urbanization and science contributed to changing this crucial parameter in women’s lives. Without the medical progress Locke’s scientific revolution eventually produced, women’s life spans were far less on average than men’s and the mother rearing children was often a man’s second or third wife; often younger and almost always less well educated than he was.

It is difficult to determine literacy rates prior to the 20th century. This is especially so for early modernity prior to the development of government censuses and statistics. Merry Wiesner (2000: 2nd ed.) concludes that “even basic literacy was never achieved by the vast majority of women in Europe in the early modern period” (145). Literacy was promoted by Protestant reformers. A study of illiteracy in England found that 95% of women in Norfolk and Suffolk between 1580 and 1640 could not sign their names; a proportion which dropped to 82% between 1660 and 1700 (Wiesner: 150). By contrast in British Upper Canada, between 1824 and 1840, historian J.K. Johnson calculates that 76.5% of the 292 women who petitioned for land could sign (calculated from primary sources for a book in progress). This reflects both the rapid increases in literacy among women in Britain, but also especially the higher rates in North America.

authority over his children. But why does Clark dismiss the theme of *joint authority of parents* as only an argument for debate, rather than an explanation of one possible parenting relationship in the family? Certainly Locke is abundantly clear: “But in this power the mother, too, has her share with the father.” What is it in the formulation of “paternal power” which makes Clark disbelieve Locke’s sincerity? Locke’s insistence that power in the family is not political, his privatization of families; his distinction between the power of a husband over his wife and “parental power” all play a role. Clark further concludes that mothers’ purported share in “parental power” is merely a blind for re/naturalizing male dominance. This is evident in her skepticism that Locke really means what he writes about marriage being a relationship based on contract: “Conjugal society is made by a voluntary compact between men and women.” Yet raised a Puritan, Locke likely did accept divorce; and his correspondence to the Clarkes and to his close friend Damaris, wife of Sir Francis Masham, in whose household he lived in the 1680s, and daughter of the Platonist philosopher Ralph Cudworth⁸, also show his support for companionate marriage, although he did not choose marriage. But three centuries later, Clark considers the use of *contract* and *consent* deceptive because she believes that few women had any real alternative to a marriage based on unequal power, and hence could not exercise true consent.

To Clark, *parental power* would only be meaningful if based on an *equal relationship*, in which women had options other than marriage and childrearing, full control of their sexuality and reproduction, and equal access to the market and property rights. Even Locke’s willingness to protect by marriage contract propertied women’s economic rights (not achieved in British law until the 1930s)⁹, and his argument that some women have the material basis for independence, and so can insist on a marriage contract which gives them more equal power in their family, do not persuade Clark. “[H]e gives ultimate rule to husband over wife” (28) and while Clark recognizes that this does not give him dominion over what “by contract is her peculiar right,” she concludes that “parental power” has no substance despite what she describes as the “marvellously egalitarian” ‘sound’ of Locke’s words. Clark’s conclusion is that “the husband certainly had the real power” (29) and, indeed, regarding property and location of the family home, etc., she is undoubtedly right. Locke was retooling patriarchy to be compatible with liberal government and a market economy. But does this mean that his idea that “parental power” could involve mothers in decisions concerning the rearing of their children in a meaningful way must be dismissed as a ruse or something negated entirely by male domination?

⁸ The sources I have relied on for understanding how Locke’s life experiences may have affected his ideas include: Maurice Cranston, *John Locke: A Biography* (London: Macmillan), 1957; Peter Laslett, “Introduction” to *Locke’s Two Treatises on Government* (Cambridge University Press), 1963; and Nathan Tarcov, *Locke’s Education for Liberty* (University of Chicago Press), 1984.

⁹ Primogeniture was abolished in North America long before in Britain; Britain had no salic law and so had queens who rules and not just kings. Women who controlled their own property (as Locke envisioned in *Two Treatises in Government*) voted in Virginia and in Quebec until legislation was passed in the 1830s at the behest of the patriots who feared women voters who were independent property-holders would resist change.

Clark also persists in arguing that, for Locke, “no value is attached to reproduction... [a]t best it is regarded as a natural inevitability which creates natural obligations for men, with respect to support of their offspring and continued cohabitation with their wives” (33). Here I think is where the error of interpretation begins. Locke certainly dismisses any *right* resulting from the simple fact of men’s paternity. But when we unpack *reproduction* into the material acts of fathering and bearing, and the social acts of rearing and education, we see that Locke considered the latter to be of the utmost importance in creating citizens capable of being self-governing and so capable of political self-government. And in the “parental power” involved in these activities, mothers had a share, even if it was not often an equal share. But Clark believes that only *equal* power counts. Liberal society is hierarchical and a “second-in-command” had less power than the final decision-maker, nonetheless s/he shared power, had a say and could exercise delegated authority in an independent manner. Again, it is important to insist that *male dominance and female power can co-exist*; they are not always elements in a zero-sum game. Locke certainly never assumed that all families would involve mothers in autonomous (hence rational) exercises of “parental power.” But his letters to Mrs. Clarke and Damaris Masham suggest he supported their participation and encouraged the similar education of girls to make it possible in their families.

Ironically, few feminist scholars exploring the “parental power” puzzle even consider Doctor Locke’s advice about the education of girls. But I will now turn to the text of one who does. Zillah Eisenstein, in her 1981 text *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*, independently from Canadian Loreen Clark, reached very similar conclusions. The “subjugation of women” is “the foundation of capitalism” (35), so Locke’s thought is declared to be “patriarchal anti-patriarchalism” (33). Her argument is very similar to Clark’s, although more historically grounded. Women’s “subjection” (especially married women’s) is seen as being “rearticulated... within the (unequal) partnership of bourgeois marriage” (37). Eisenstein concludes that Locke’s distinction between paternal and political power means that “[women] will still be restricted from the public world of citizenship and rationality” (37). Yet it is also possible that there is a basis for both rationality and some aspects of citizenship *within the family*, and in civil society, on behalf of the family, in which women can participate. Nor is it as clear as Eisenstein concludes that women are excluded from activity in the public sphere.

Eisenstein’s greater historical grounding allows her to see that Locke is writing just at the point when the market, the domestic sphere and civil society were being differentiated. She recognizes the importance of “the Puritan conception of free choice and marriage for love” and “Cromwell’s establishment of marriage as a civil institution in 1653” (36). What she doesn’t recognize is that Locke’s ‘interesting’ “inclusion of women in his theories of education” (48) needs to be brought to bear on how we interpret the potential for power sharing in the family in the concept of “parental power,” as related to

the rearing of children, as opposed to the conjugal relationship. Like Clark, she sees parental power only as intended to refute Filmer, not to explain how mothers and fathers could jointly exercise parental powers in rearing rational boys, and explicitly also girls, although with mothers subordinate in most, but not all, families. Eisenstein claims that Locke “retains paternal power *within the family* with respect to mothering, property, and inheritance” (40). I would argue that he explicitly replaces paternal with shared “parental power” concerning parenting and, therefore, mothering. If, as Locke declares, mother and father are jointly responsible for procreation, why does Eisenstein not accept he also means that they may also jointly share in the parental powers of rearing the children born? Eisenstein rejects this possibility mainly because Locke fails to “take his argument to its explicit and logical conclusion: that at the base of political power is parental power” (41). In “parental power,” she sees Locke using the “equality between men and women in parenting to debunk only the despotic absolutist nature of paternal power between husband and wife” (41). But Locke doesn’t say that there is strict equality in parenting power; now does he deny that the power of father and husband still applies within families. He states what may be possible in some families, presumably where women are more educated, that in the parenting relationship (as distinct from the conjugal relationship) power may be shared between men and women.

Eisenstein’s view that mothering had no value to Locke, because childrearing “has no status within the new market values” also needs reassessment. She sees women’s mothering activities as “relegated” to the newly emerging “private sphere” by liberal patriarchal ideology and so sees all married women as “excluded from the market” and *compelled* to mother as their only option. This assumes that Locke devalued mothering, which his other texts make me question; and it assumes all women were confined as “angels of the house,” which was not the case in Locke’s time. Women sold their labour in domestic service or as prostitutes, if nothing else; but also as spinners and weavers, and soon in mines and factories. It is true that in the emerging market they were exploited and dependent, so most did not meet Locke’s criteria for full citizenship. But it is not true that all aspects of reproductive dimensions of women’s lives were “relegated” to “the private sphere” (43), as Eisenstein claimed. Women also sold their services as wet nurses, nannies and teachers; moreover, they acted politically in their own interests, organizing and petitioning those in authority.

“Parental power” is also suspect to Eisenstein because, following Macpherson, she concludes that women cannot reach full rationality: “[t]o the degree that the right to private property excludes the working classes and women, they are excluded from the realm of free and rational activity” (44). Perhaps the problem lies in Macpherson’s analysis, which does not focus explicitly on women. Locke knew that some women possessed property; indeed he provided a contractual way for women to keep that property after divorce and acknowledges that they may also have the ability to vary the normal terms of the

marriage contract which gives the final say to the husband.¹⁰ Eisenstein does briefly consider Locke's texts on education, but she is not persuaded that Locke saw some women as fully capable of rationality. Accepting Macpherson's thesis, she believes that "[t]he ideology of liberal individualism and personal freedom applied only to men in the market" (47). Yet she also acknowledges that Locke's "basic assault against the rule of arbitrary power is clearest in his discussions of the cultivation of the rational individual" (47); in his texts and letters on education. What then does she make of the fact that "according to Locke, there should be no significant differences in the education of boys and girls" (47)? She finds his inclusion of girls "interesting" and writes that "the ideology of rationality and individuality appears to be extended to women by Locke" (48). But, ultimately, because she believes "woman has no political life" and because "[h]er life in the home is her life," Eisenstein concludes that the potential in liberal ideology for rationality and individualism from women involves a false promise, largely because of liberalism's parallel commitments to property and reinstating male dominance.

It is my thesis that the contradiction in liberal ideology between women's capacity for reason and the exclusion of most from the market provided the ground in which women expanded the role of citizen-mothers. Women went to church, engaged in charitable works, built institutions and then took jobs in those institutions. That is, eventually they built a *gender-differentiated* form of citizenship by expanding the rationality embodied in even an unequal share of "parental power" and taking it into civil society and the market. Locke's underlying philosophy led him to conclude that girls and boys are born blank slates capable of full rationality via education and independence. Full equality for women certainly wasn't his goal, but in order to realize his goal of a schema of education for *virtue* not for selfishness, girls had to be educated to rationality so they could mother rationally, albeit under their husband's ultimate supervision. By dividing "parental power" and the parenting relationships from power in the conjugal relationship for purposes of analysis, this becomes more apparent.

The third feminist theorist whose analysis of Locke's use of the "parental power" concept I will explore is Carol Pateman. Pateman's work is too extensive to explore here in any detail. The main thesis of her argument about liberalism is that contract thinkers retooled ideas supporting male dominance into a fraternal sexual contract in which men contracted to guarantee and respect each man's dominance over "his" women. Political right is understood "as *patriarchal right* or sex-right, the power that men exercise over women" (1988: 1). Hence, the conjugal relationship is seen as foundational, not "parental power."

To Pateman, "the constructing of sexual difference as political difference, is central to civil society" (16). Women as women are in essence excluded, so only a *gender neutral* mode of citizenship would seem, at first blush, to solve the problem of women's exclusion. But Pateman concludes

¹⁰ In British North America - Virginia and Quebec are two examples - propertied women in control of their property also voted until explicitly

otherwise: “the story of the sexual contract is about (hetero)sexual relations and women as embodied sexual beings” (17). Despite current emphasis in feminism on the differences among women, she asserts that the key difference is that women are embodied *women* because the sexual contract is about men gaining sexual (and reproductive) access to “their” women.

Here the interests of nationalists are also involved; for nations to be secure, the women of the nation must reproduce for/with the men of the nation, limiting their sexual and reproductive autonomy. Pateman calls attention to the 1789 French revolutionary slogan – ‘*liberté, égalité, fraternité*’ – concluding: “[m]odern patriarchy is fraternal in form, and the original contract is a fraternal pact” (77). Fraternity, she insists, is the brotherhood of *men* (as embodied males) not of people (78). In this context, she follows other feminist scholars in viewing women as “mere auxiliaries” to the nationalist comrades (78). Fraternity is the powerful communal bond of solidarity which nationalism seeks to create. Fraternity with liberty she sees as the *cri de coeur* of modernity (79). Moreover, it is essentially a masculine bond, made stronger because women are excluded from it. Civil fraternity may not always have been universal among men, but Pateman believes liberal citizenship always involves it; so *even when women are allowed to vote they are forced to leave behind their womanliness* and political life remains essentially masculine.

In discussing “parental power,” Pateman dismisses any positive implications from Locke’s “championing of the mother’s familial authority” (85). This is because she believes that, theoretically, “to focus on parents and children suggests that patriarchy is familial and that father-right is the problem” (83). To her, fraternal power is now vested in social institutions and the state. (That is, women have exchanged familial power for public patriarchy as Helga Hernes has suggested.) Consequently, Pateman actually pays little attention to the meaning of “parental power” and no attention to Locke’s empiricist philosophy or his educational theories. Mothers are subject to their husbands, but more important, women qua *women* are subject to men qua *men*. Pateman is very conscious of the changes in the material parameters of women’s lives, however, concluding that “in practice, men continue to uphold their patriarchal right over women through ‘strength,’ that is, through force and violence” (95). Oddly, while noting that “[s]ince the seventeenth century, feminists have argued that it is lack of education that makes women appear less able” (95), she does not explore Locke’s inclusion of girls and women in his education texts. To her, “[w]omen must be subject to men because they are naturally subversive of men’s political order” (96).

Pateman’s unrelentingly radical feminist account is informed by the French revolutionaries’ distrust of women as a source of disorder and Rousseau’s belief that “[w]omen’s bodies are... opposed to

and subversive of political life” (98). The advice of *Doctor* Locke about child rearing and his practical support for everyone’s potential for rationality have no place; that is, the contradictions of British liberalism have no place here. Each mother is rendered a “*housewife*” – “the sole servant in the family” (127). There is no possibility for rational development and exercise of delegated authority, no challenge in educating children, in Pateman’s portrayal of the “housewife.” She is an unpaid servant, nearly a slave, doing “shitwork.” Given her dark vision of “housewives,” Pateman concludes: “[w]omen can attain the formal standing of civil individuals, but as embodied feminine beings we can never be ‘individuals’ in the same sense as men” (224). We are still expected to do “the shitwork” because we are embodied feminine beings; control over our bodies remains tenuous. The fraternal bond means men never having to clean the toilet, change the diapers, or have a headache.

Pateman’s analysis makes my case that the gender-differentiated citizenship of citizen-mothers grew out of “parental power” plus equal capacity for rationality plus same education for girls and boys seem implausible. Yet real historical citizen-mothers did use the contradictions within British liberalism to develop gender-differentiated civic and political activism and hence to shape the emerging nation states, especially in North America.

The survey of feminist scholarship on Locke that Diane Coole offers in *Women in Political Theory* (1993) actually shows disagreement on many of the points Clark, Eisenstein and Pateman assume, especially on the issue of Locke’s views of women’s capacity for rationality. Coole cites Melissa Butler, for example, who finds women in Locke’s work “capable of rational thought” (75), basing her findings on *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and Locke’s works on education. Coole concludes that on balance, Locke displayed a radicalism for his time about women but combined it with elitism; a combination which also marks later British liberalism. On balance, she concludes that most feminist scholars agree that Locke excluded women from political power, but differed on the issue of their rationality. The meaning of “parental power,” however, remains unclear, although most agree that Locke’s theory of property weakened most women’s capacity for independent action. In the remainder of this section, I will explore the work of two feminist scholars who focus explicitly on the family in contract theory to provide fresh insights into the meaning and potential of “parental power.”

Mary Lyndon Shanley in “Marriage Contract and Social Contract in Seventeenth-Century English Political Thought” (1982) characterizes the historical literature: “[t]he theoretical arguments that emerged from the debates over political sovereignty eventually – although very slowly – became the bases for liberal arguments about female equality and marriage” (81). She notes that Puritans were divided between those who would permit remarriage after divorce and those who would not and it was also in this context that Locke (and others) set out to refute Filmer. Milton, himself anxious to be released from an unhappy marriage, argued for divorce “for and incompatibility that made the marriage

partners unsuitable to be true companions and unable to be true helpmeets” (87). Although the main agenda was the analogy between the political and marital bonds, “the political debate therefore generated a secondary debate on the nature of the marriage bond itself” (87). Did the same thing occur in the debate about “parental power”? Most of the debate focused on the conjugal relationship, with questions such as whether husbands’ power over their wives could be revoked if abused (Shanley: 89). Locke, however, also focused on the relationships between parents and children both as an analogy to the political bond *and* to learn how rational, self-governing individuals could best be reared. Locke explicitly rejected the idea that marriage requires the absolute sovereignty of the husband, but does he explicitly assign authority in parenting to the wife? Shanley believes so: “[i]t is the exigencies of the care of children, not any particular attribute of either sex, that set the only natural or prima facie terms to the marital relationship” (92). Locke concluded, therefore, that many of the conditions which then *seemed* natural or intrinsic to marriage need not be so. “Beginning from the premises that the end of marriage is the procreation and nurture of children and that marriage is a contractual relationship, Locke concluded that husband and wife might set whatever terms they wished to their relationship as long as those were conducive to the care of their young” (Shanley: 93).

Shanley also believed that other aspects of Locke’s theory “seriously mitigated the idea of the husband’s superiority over his wife” (94), especially concerning “parental power”. He rejects the idea that their greater strength gives men the right to rule and he believed “the marriage contract was revocable, and its terms were negotiable” (94). Far from being an unpaid “housewife”, servant or near-slave, as Pateman imagines, Shanley sees “parental power” as involving many mothers in the challenging task of rearing rational, self-governing citizens, a task which would necessarily engage their reason too. She also notes that Locke’s “deep voluntaristic convictions and his sensitivity to more affectionate and egalitarian human relationships,” as revealed in his correspondence, makes his sincerity more persuasive. These values are also evident in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* which Shanley concludes “lends a new perspective to the dominant contemporary view of Locke as the apologist for the acquisitive ethic and material inequality of modern society” (316). To terms with the meaning of “parental power” for women’s potential for citizenship in Locke’s work, and in British liberalism, it will be necessary to rework our views on the *Two Treatises on Government* by restoring their basis in his empiricist texts, especially *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and his works on education.

In *Women, Politics and Reproduction: The Liberal Legacy* (1996) Ingrid Makus concludes that the dominant feminist account of why women are excluded from liberal political life – remaining seriously under-represented in contemporary liberal states long after gaining the vote – is seriously flawed (5ff). Focusing on “political citizenship,” she rejects the common view that liberal theorists, including Locke, portrayed women as naturally inferior or unequal. She concludes that Locke sees in women the

same capacity for reason as men and so the same *capacity* for political life. Indeed, Makus believes that “[d]ifficulties arise not because women are perceived as lacking the rational capacity to exercise (reproductive) rights, as some analysts have suggested, but precisely because they are perceived as having such a faculty” (7). That is, the problem arises from the fact that Locke *et al* saw women as essentially equal in capacity for reason and both capable of, and justified in, governing their own bodies (7).

Makus believes that most feminist interpretations have “missed the mark” because they focus on the “importance of relations (adversarial ones) between adult women and men.” She would have us refocus on parent-child relations as at least as important as conjugal relationships. In particular, Makus disagrees “with Pateman’s insistence that the sexual contract necessarily precedes the parental one” (56). That is, she rejects Pateman’s belief that “parental power” is not significant because it “suggests that patriarchy is familial and that father-right is the problem.” It is Makus’ view that women’s role and power in the parental relationship can “tell us something about women’s place in the conjugal relationship and in the political sphere, both in Locke’s theory and in liberal practice” (56). With this I fully agree, since it was the expansion of citizen-mother’s gender-differentiated activities from the family and into civil society and “big P politics” which ultimately was the basis for women’s claims to full citizenship in British and North American liberal practice. Moreover, as I will illustrate below, liberal feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and Abigail Adams found in Locke’s thought evidence for their claims to equal capacity for reason, and moreover, lodged the capacity in their “parental power”, not in the conjugal relationship. Women’s capacity for reason may be trumped in the conjugal context, especially by men’s need/desire for certainty about their paternity. But once children are conceptualized as Locke’s blank slates, capable of reason only if their experiences are carefully monitored, women’s role in parenting becomes the key to their potential autonomous exercise of authority.

In her text, Makus reaches conclusions concerning Locke’s views on educating daughters similar to those above. She notes that he also revealed his belief that “women are capable of acting in the outside world” (61). Far from disparaging “the world of women in the home,” however, he portrayed it as a better environment for, and women as better guides, to the “formation of reasonable, prudent, virtuous, capable citizens” (61). In fact women’s qualities seem to make them capable of being good citizens, although as Makus (and Melissa Butler) note, “Locke is never explicit about women’s role in civil society” (55).

Of interest to me, attempting to solve the puzzle of what women were doing while men (according to mainstream theory) were creating nations, is the fact that Makus portrays caring for children, not as a matter of “natural necessity” as in physical reproduction, but rather as the result of “some degree of rational deliberation” (69) involving both parents. So, the household is a realm of reason – to the extent that it involves the rearing and educating of children, which are rational acts in which

women participate. So, the *reproduction* of “the nation” (already forming in Britain, according to Kidd and Greenfeld) takes place first within the household and women play a central role. As Makus concludes “[e]ducation is important in Locke’s design as a means for producing an ongoing commitment to civil society and an ongoing allegiance to government” (76). Although the liberal contract theorists are usually thought of as writing universal texts, we also need to note that they were in fact writing in (and for) a specific context. In British, capitalist environments – especially in North America – this also meant reproducing an ongoing commitment to national values, whether established by civil war and revolution, or not. Women’s role in re/producing the national values of “Britishness” within their families was clearly part of their growing claims to citizenship, especially in terms of civil rights. Moreover, as Kidd (199) demonstrates, these values of “free Englishmen” were also inculcated in their children by British women in the Americas in their construction of new, “maternal nationalisms” (Wilton, 2000).

D. Expanding the Role of the Citizen-Mother: Gender- Differentiated Citizenship and “Parental Power”

In this final section, I briefly outline how two distinguished maternal feminists built on women’s role in mothering as prescribed by Locke. I also link the tasks of citizen-mothers, as theorized by Mary Wollstonecraft and Abigail Adams, to women’s development of a gender-differentiated citizenship which bridged the domestic sphere and civil society; a citizenship through which they could shape their nations as modern nation-states were being formed and consolidated.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) with its portrait of “meek wives and foolish mothers” hardly seems to support my thesis of rational citizen-mothers, soberly educating their children as *Doctor* Locke prescribed; thereby expanding their share of “parental power” into the market and civil society. But Wollstonecraft explicitly adopted Locke’s rationalist philosophy (155ff) and followed closely his ideas about education. Her analysis made two additional themes explicit: that to be good mothers, women must share political citizenship and that the re-invigoration of the British nation required a state-supported “national” system of schools.

Wollstonecraft profoundly believed that the nature of reason is the same in all. Women’s “foolishness,” which she observed in embarrassing detail, is the result of the existing forms of female education which neglected understanding in favour of encouraging exaggerated feeling and attention to dress. She asserts: “Let an enlightened nation¹¹ then try, what effect reason would have to bring women back to nature [which is rationality], and their duty; and allowing them to share the advantages of education *and government* with man, see whether they will become better as they grow wiser and become free” (167, my emphasis). Wollstonecraft believes that without rational education and a share in political power, “the weakness of the mother,” will continue to be “visited on the children” (177). She decries the fact that “children are destroyed by the lasciviousness of men” (176) and neglected so men may be flattered. The “national education of women is of utmost consequence” (176) to redirect women’s attentions to their children, the rearing of whom should be their primary task. She envisions women being educated in every field, including philosophy and medicine to fulfil the task and she also believed some women would want to undertake occupations outside their homes.

Like Locke however, Wollstonecraft was highly critical of the existing system of for-profit schools. She had run one, and details how the goals of true education were perverted by the profit motive, even in day-schools, where the worse problems of “vice” found in boarding-schools as Locke observed, are not at issue. Better than sending children to such schools, she would have women educate

¹¹ Although “the nation” in *A Vindication...* is France, Wollstonecraft’s discussion of education is much informed by her experience running a school in England.

them in their homes which “put into the hands of women some of the highest and most far-reaching duties, which the State can call upon its citizens to perform” (Rauschenbush-Clough, reprinted in Poston, ed., 1975: 215-16). Best, however, would be the development of a state-supported system of national not-for-profit schools which would educate children well, release women from years of maternal duties; and provide employment for educated women.

Wollstonecraft saw reason as a gift from God, that which sets human beings apart from animals. This axiom that she felt needed no proof, is one she shared with Locke. As Eleanor Flexner concludes: “Reason cannot, therefore, be the property of one sex alone, and by its very nature it cannot be different in one sex from the other” (1972: 159). Some contemporary feminist scholars decry Wollstonecraft’s acceptance of the centrality of mothering in most women’s lives, but in fact she firmly asserted that women’s first duty was to themselves: “[s]peaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next in point of importance, as citizens, is that which includes so many, of a mother” (145). Unlike many other modern feminists, she does not see the duties of motherhood, or even the tasks of housewives as menial. She believes “mothers should represent personality in themselves [and]... not to sink into the daily routine of caring for their children’s [material] wants only” (Rauschenbush-Clough: 215-16). Women’s household duties require the same rational qualities as other acts of citizenship and she believed the management of a household supervision of children’s education would equip women to be good legislative representatives. (Makus suggests that Locke may not have disagreed.)

Here is the program for the citizen-mothers’ claims to gender-differentiated citizenship fully expressed and firmly linked to the nationalist imperatives of raising the quality of Britain’s citizens, and issue of considerable concern in the late 18th and 19th centuries in Britain. Like Locke, she combines radicalism about women and elitism, since clearly some women will still have to be paid (poorly) to do the menial domestic tasks and men still will not be expected to share in them. She assumes many educated women would enter the professions, although she expects most will wish also to marry and rear families, especially if marriage is reformed along rational, companionate lines (as she would pioneer with Godwin). The citizen-mother to her is being a citizen within her family and so should also lay claim to citizenship in the public sphere as well.

The fact that Wollstonecraft witnessed the death of her soulmate Fanny in premature labour, and that all around her women often died in, or because of, childbirth (as would she) perhaps made mothering seem more of an heroic act of “reproducing the nation” than most majority-culture feminists today can accept. She shared this understanding, however, with Abigail Adams. Rather than write a treatise about citizen-mothers and the nation, Adams lived the role and our access to her ideas comes through her letters. As Lynne Withey reveals in *Dearest Friend: A Life of Abigail Adams* (1981), she wrote almost

daily to her husband who, given the great distances of North America, was almost always absent practicing law or politics. Like Wollstonecraft, Adams believed women were the intellectual equals of men and had a right to education. She wrote about men's "tyranny" comparing it to "bondage" (she opposed slavery actively), but she also thought women were different from men because of their potential for, and experience of, motherhood and so best suited to household management.¹² That they were citizens, she was certain and "hinted that they also had the right to vote" (Withey: xi). Nonetheless, she believed that "families were the cornerstone of society" (xi) and women's most valuable contribution to a new, more virtuous nation lay in their activities at home and in their local communities as citizen-mothers. For much of her married life, John Adams was away from home, in Boston or Washington (weeks of travel away in colonial and post-colonial America); and in London or Paris for years on end, months across the ocean. She ran her household largely alone with great competence and energy. "She admired women who achieved success in fields generally reserved for men" (xi) but saw most women's role as citizen-mother as more important.

Adams reared her children using Doctor Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Whitley: 30ff), and rejecting traditional New England ideas that "children were inherently sinful" so that correct rearing involved "breaking a child's will, preferably by age two, in order to instil habits of obedience" (30). She followed Locke's ideas of gradually and gently moulding children, with discipline used sparingly and "obedience for its own sake never demanded" (30). Although every town in colonial Massachusetts was required by law to maintain a school for boys, and there were a few "dame schools" for girls, following on Locke's advice, Abigail and John's children initially were educated at home by tutors. She also followed his advice concerning diet, rest and toilet-training. To her, children were "plants" to be "raised and cultivated" so they would spread "virtue and happiness throughout the human race" (31). To her, Withey concludes: "[w]omen... had a unique opportunity to influence the world by raising good citizens" (31). Revealing a familiar modern feminist bias, Withey further concludes: "[u]nfortunately, while such views elevated women to a position of greater importance, they also *saddled them* with the ultimate responsibility for their children's development" (31; my emphasis).

Because rationalist theories of childrearing emphasized nurture and minimized the impact of either heredity or chance, "blaming mother" for failure involved a weighty responsibility, especially if mothers had little "parental power". Adams assumed however, that women should enjoy "parental power" equal to, or greater than men within the household. This was both a practical matter in 18th-century America and because she believed that women were better-suited to the task in most cases. When after 1783, she finally joined John in Paris and then London (her sons young men at Harvard and her

¹² "Household management" for a middle-class woman in colonial America involved running a complex medium-sized business, as well as a

grown daughter Nabby with her), she observed with some scorn that Britain “once a great Nation” (153), had far less virtue than “the new nation” for which John was ambassador. This she attributed in part to British women’s evasion of their maternal responsibilities. Abigail’s nationalism focused on the greater virtue of American citizens; a virtue she proudly felt she had contributed to as a citizen-mother.¹³

E. Conclusion

U.S. feminist historian Ann Scott, writing in *Natural Allies* (1991), reports that by the 1790s there were women’s groups everywhere in the new nation. Moreover, Hewitt and Lebsack conclude: “There can be no doubt that voluntary associations were the major vehicles for expanding the rights and efficacy of American women” (1993: 2). And while some associations were composed of single and professional women, most members were overwhelmingly citizen-mothers. Scott believes that voluntary associations were the main vehicles for expanding the right and influence of women in the United States. Based on a gender-differentiated concept of citizenship, these women – white and black – built their nation, and challenged the whites-only conception of it, by linking maternal and public tasks. But Scott also claims that the activism of voluntary associations, with their large contingents of citizen-mothers had many expressly political effects. Hewitt and Lebsack report Scott’s conclusion:

Associated women helped shape the class structure. They democratized the political order. They built a whole range of community institutions... They largely invented progressivism... The welfare state was largely their creation, as agencies of government assumed responsibility for programs originally initiated by voluntary associations (1993: 2).

It may well be that the social soil of British North America allowed gender-differentiated citizenship to flourish and combine with political movements, especially nationalism, in a unique way. It will be the work of another paper to make that case. My conclusion here is that, despite Locke’s retooling of patriarchal ideas concerning the conjugal relationship, both his empiricist philosophy, and his theories of education based on it, laid the foundation for women to develop and expand the idea of the citizen-mother. Hence to understand “what women were doing when men were creating nation-states” we must first look at liberal thought with fresh eyes and a deeper understanding. In this way we will be able to understand how Locke’s *ideas* lead to the maternal nationalism which so profoundly shaped English-Canada and the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries – feminism’s “first wave” of citizen-mothers.

school, farm, furniture and clothing factories, etc.

¹³ Her views of the French were a combination of horror and fascination.

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