

## Parité!: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism (Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning)

Joan Wallach Scott

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France today is in the throes of a crisis about whether to represent social differences within its political system and, if so, how. It is a crisis defined by the rhetoric of a universalism that takes the abstract individual to be the representative not only of citizens but also of the nation. In *Parité!* Joan Wallach Scott shows how the requirement for abstraction has led to the exclusion of women from French politics.

During the 1990s, *le mouvement pour la parité* successfully campaigned for women's inclusion in elective office with an argument that is unprecedented in the annals of feminism. The *paritaristes* insisted that if the abstract individual were thought of as sexed, then sexual difference would no longer be a relevant consideration in politics. Scott insists that this argument was neither essentialist nor separatist; it was not about women's special qualities or interests. Instead, *parité* was rigorously universalist—and for that reason was both misunderstood and a source of heated debate.



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