Elisa Camiscioli, Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century
Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century by Elisa Camiscioli
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used in defense of print satire: how can the fun of discordant music be interpreted as politically subversive? Yet, as Forbes asserts, charivari was indeed politically significant, not only for recruiting farmers and artisans into the political process but also because a community’s targeting of a local leader for some rough music linked individual members to larger national issues and asserted the leader’s accountability to the people. In short, charivari was an exercise in representative, even democratic and republican, government.

Finally, Forbes ends the book by showing that satire not only pervaded the press, entertained theatergoers, and occupied the streets; satire also entered the academy in the form of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s essay, What Is Property? submitted to a contest sponsored by the Academy of Besançon in 1840. Forbes analyzes Proudhon’s book as a work of satire that called for social and political reform by ridiculing private property as an unjust and nonsensical foundation of the regime in power. Ultimately, the Academy’s condemnation of the book and Proudhon’s performance at a public trial for endangering national security launched his successful career as a writer and rebel.

From this often highly entertaining exposé of satire, its authors, and its opponents, Forbes concludes that “republicanism took shape as an aesthetic of satiric criticism—a critical habit of mind” (247). While Forbes makes a good case for satire’s undermining of the July Monarchy and cultivation of popular opposition, similar to Sheryl Kroen’s work on how theater challenged the legitimacy of the monarchy during the Restoration (1815–30), it is not always clear that participatory politics were necessarily republican. How can one prove that readers and viewers of satire in the early 1830s were republicans? Or that a habit of critical reading in the early 1830s was the foundation for the explosion of revolutionary republicanism in 1848? Forbes could give more credit to other sources of republican thinking and activism that worked in tandem with satire toward 1848, along the lines of Philip Nord’s study of the several institutions under the Second Empire (1852–70) that paved the way for a successful Third Republic starting in 1870, a work that Forbes clearly acknowledges. Not all historians view “France mired in stodgy inertia during the 1830s . . . unaware of republicanism” (xxviii) or the July Monarchy “as a political backwater” (250). Forbes surely has provided new insights into the workings of satire, and her book shows how satire, in combination with a lot of other factors, contributed to and redefined republicanism.

Whitney Walton

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Reproducing the French Race joins a growing body of recent scholarship that demonstrates the extent to which French citizenship, particularly during the Third Republic (1870–1940), was built on gendered understandings of the relationship between women, family, and the nation. Camiscioli’s originality lies in the sustained attention that she also gives to race as constitutive of French citizenship, particularly between the two world wars. The link between gender and race can be found in a discourse regarding the imperative of reproducing the French nation in an era of perceived demographic decline, a “man shortage” (140) occasioned by the devastating impact of the First World War, and unprecedented labor migration. Tracing arguments regarding
pronatalism, industrial production, métissage (race “mixing”), “white slavery” (prostitution), and the independent legal status of women as French nationals, Camiscioli shows that “race and reproduction were critical to the construction of French national identity” (2).

While the pronatalist movement had its roots in the nineteenth century, Camiscioli rightly insists on the renewed energy and influence it showed in the wake of the First World War, the impact of which raised new questions about the future of the French population. In her first two chapters on pronatalism and hybridity, she shows that we cannot understand the interwar immigration debate in isolation from the “panic” (22) over depopulation which was given new urgency by the consequences of the First World War. In this context, immigrants could not be viewed solely as laborers but, rather, were evaluated with regard to their reproductive potential or “assimilability”; that is, immigrants perceived to be biologically closer to the French “race” were preferred, according to Camiscioli, over those who were considered more distant. Camiscioli makes this argument by drawing on a wide array of what she calls “social commentators” or “social critics,” including doctors, geographers, and members of parliament. Given the presence of lawmakers in this debate, there is surprisingly little politics in this book. Camiscioli might have explored tensions between these various commentators, or how (and whether) ideals about immigrants’ desirability were carried through in practice. Nonetheless, her central insight—that the purely “civic” nature of French citizenship has been overstated—is compelling and important.

Camiscioli’s subsequent two chapters, on métissage, “white slavery,” and the legal impact of intermarriage, go further still in establishing the centrality of reproduction—and particularly reproduction of bourgeois family norms—to debates about prostitution and marriage alike. In a particularly innovative chapter, Camiscioli trains her eye on prostitutes and their clients to insist on the centrality of race to arguments both favoring and opposing prostitution. It was, for instance, fears of colonial troops’ and laborers’ fraternization with French women in the metropole that prompted the establishment of segregated brothels, including ones sponsored by the military itself. Since the troops traveled, so did these “bordels militaires de campagne” or tent-brothels. To her credit, Camiscioli also focuses on the prostitutes themselves, particularly those French prostitutes who traveled far and wide to places like Buenos Aires to sell their labor. The emerging discourse around these women likened their position to that of African slaves, hence the term “white slavery.” As Camiscioli shows, abolitionists opposing “white slavery” discounted the possibility of women choosing to do sex work and instead cast them as victims in need of protection from the French state.

The debate about the legal impact of French women’s marriages to foreigners was eerily similar to that regarding prostitution. Although feminists had long advocated abolishing the provisions of the French civil code that made women’s nationality derive from that of their husbands, it was, once again, the question of reproduction that actually drove changes in the law establishing women’s independent nationality as of 1927. One of the most interesting turns in this debate had to do with the status of French women who married colonial subjects. Absent independent nationality, these French women might lose the protection of the French state, which was unfortunate, it was argued, since many of them, upon taking up residence in their husbands’ communities, found themselves confronting polygamy or other “affront[s] to whiteness, womanliness and the racial integrity of the nation” (147). Camiscioli rightly points out that the invocation of polygamy “played on anxieties of racial defilement while simultaneously titillating the orientalist imagination” (148). Her contention that the push for reform of this situation placed the French state in the position of a
“meta-husband” (150) is also apt: the state was, like the husband of the Napoleonic Code, to offer woman protection, while the woman owed the state (as husband) her obedience. Married women and prostitutes—the French state claimed responsibility for both in defense of the “race.”

In her final chapter, Camiscioli concludes that the “destinies of French women and colonized subjects were linked, since both groups were described in terms of dependency” and that, “like French women, [colonized subjects] embodied the particularized difference necessary to Republican universalism” (156). Such definitive statements undersell the nuance of Camiscioli’s rich evidence, however. Elsewhere, Camiscioli suggests (however indirectly) that the “particularized difference” embodied by colonial men was different than that occupied by French women—indeed, the very perception that French women who married colonials needed to be protected by the French state from the consequences of their marriages underscores this. It’s unfortunate that Laura Frader’s *Breadwinners and Citizens: Gender in the Making of the French Social Model* (Durham, NC, 2008), appears to have been published too late for Camiscioli to take full account of Frader’s subtle analysis of the different kinds of domination experienced by women and immigrants within what she calls the French social model. Moreover, in drawing on a wide array of “social critics” and “social commentators” for her evidence, Camiscioli might have situated them more clearly within the fields of their own expertise as well as within French public opinion more broadly. Scholars such as Patrick Weil, for instance, have dismissed immigration “experts” such as René Martial and Georges Mauco, upon whose work Camiscioli draws extensively, as “pseudo-scientists” whose extreme ideas were sidelined by the republican process of policy making, while Benoît Larbiou has depicted Martial as a social climber who embraced race science as a way of making his mark as a “hygienist” vis-à-vis medical doctors who had a higher social standing. Larbiou’s position is in some ways the more surprising one: it raises the question of why race science could work as a mark of distinction among public intellectuals at this time. Camiscioli’s fascinating book offers an answer: her findings suggest that this era’s obsession with national reproduction has to be central to any such analysis.

**MARY DEWHURST LEWIS**

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Gregory Thomas’s book is a welcome contribution to the historiography of psychiatry, war neurosis, and trauma. While historical and theoretical studies of war trauma have proliferated since the mid-1990s, the case of France during World War I has been something of a black hole, covered only by occasional articles, short treatments in broader synthetic works, and an excellent but unpublished 1995 dissertation. At last, scholars have the basis for more thoroughgoing comparisons of the French case to the by now relatively familiar British, American, and German stories, and we can begin to develop a larger framework for assessing the impact of the First World War on psychiatric diagnosis and treatment and institutional and professional development.

To his credit, Thomas does more than fill in the blanks of how the French handled shell shock. Although he does devote significant attention to shell shock or war neurosis—covering diagnostic disputes, treatment methods, institutional facilities—