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## POLITICS AND GENDER IN HUMOR AND SATIRE: THE CASES OF ELISABETH KOPP AND GERALDINE FERRARO

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### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Women's successful political participation is the result of an array of intertwined institutional and personal factors: the "opportunity structure" provided by political parties, women's personal and career choices, changing work and family roles in the 20th century, voter willingness of voters in particular districts to support women candidates, and so on. The study of such factors over the last ten years has provided considerable information about the external, objective factors which hinder the election of women.<sup>2</sup>

We have opted to examine a rather different body of material in an effort to understand the less quantifiable cultural concerns that may keep women from gaining equal political representation: jokes, satire and cartoons. "Where there is anxiety, there will be jokes to express that anxiety", states folklorist Alan Dundes (1987, vii). Psychoanalytic, sociological, and anthropological interpretations all point towards the ways in which humor offers insights into serious societal concerns and areas of societal unease (Bergson, 1936; Coser, 1959; Douglas, 1968). The entrance of women into the traditionally male-defined realm of politics is without doubt such a concern.

This article is based on a sample of orally circulating jokes, newspaper cartoons and satirical materials from the United States, Switzerland and several other nations. We contend that humor about women politicians points to considerable societal unease about changing gender domains. Jokes combining

1 A version of this paper was presented at the American Folklore Society Meetings in Philadelphia, 1989. For assistance in accumulating jokes and cartoons, we thank the Folklore Archives at the University of California, and in particular former archivist Sandra Cate, who continues to update our files. Thanks also go to Kirin Narayan and Mary Beth Stein for critical input. In Switzerland, we would like to thank the Forschungszentrum für schweizerische Politik at the Universität Bern and the Fasnachts Comité of Basel.

2 Among the more interesting works on American political women, see Kirkpatrick, 1974; Diamond, 1977; Mandel, 1981; Sapiro, 1983; Klein, 1984; Carroll, 1985; and Randall, 1987. For a comprehensive survey of the European situation, see Lovenduski, 1986. For Germany, see Hoecker, 1987; for Switzerland, see Ballmer-Cao, 1987 and 1989.

politics and sexuality are not new. Yet orally circulating jokes often express concerns infrequently mentioned in serious political analysis. Humor is, however, a sanctioned realm which permits the expression of stereotypes, hostility and anxiety.

The profound ambiguity toward the intersection of politics, gender and equality can best be illustrated in the humor about Geraldine Ferraro, the 1984 American vice-presidential candidate, and Elisabeth Kopp, the former member of the Swiss Federal Council. While the cases are different, the nature of the jokes circulating about them is remarkably similar.

Men are not, by virtue of their gender, any more qualified to make decisions about the community than women are – politics is concerned with decisions which affect everyone in a society. Given the traditional roles assigned to women – education, the welfare of children, care of the home – equally valid reasons for arguing that women are better qualified to deal with the social concerns of larger communities can be found. The appearance of women today in the historically male domain of politics forces a society to reorganize gender domains. Including women in positions of power gives them status equality with men, but that has not meant society has kept pace. Because this is a struggle over who will have the most important voice in the society, the issue of women's political participation gets mixed together with the basis upon which one can continue to make distinctions between men and women. The question "can a woman do well once in power?" becomes confused with the question "what continues to distinguish men from women?" Every woman in power is thus confronted with cultural and social questions which interfere with her political role.

We therefore contend that any woman who aspires to political office is judged on two levels:

1. as a woman, with all that implies about societal expectations of traditional sex role behavior, such as childbearing and motherhood;
2. as a potential politician on the basis of training, experience, and, particularly, ethical integrity.

The same criteria are not applied to aspiring male politicians: for a man, it is sufficient to stress that one is happily married and devoted to one's family. Humor about adultery and the like have not affected assessments of political capability among those in office, and it has only been recently that questions about family and sexual behavior have been applied to aspiring American male candidates. It has now become possible to elect divorced males as Presidents or consider unmarried men suitable, yet the same attitudinal change is coming

only slowly to women politicians, as they are still strongly defined by their matrimonial and family status.<sup>3</sup>

Today there is a class of younger, educated women whose training is in no way inferior to that of men, and it is to this group that both Ferraro and Kopp belong. Public opinion polls indicate that women are perceived as more honest than men. The contemporary concern about the ethics of all politicians indicates that anyone entering the public arena must be willing to undergo prolonged scrutiny by the press, however, and many – including many women – may not be willing to pay this price. Claims of unethical conduct made about public women are that much more damaging because the good reputation of women as an alternative to men in politics becomes tarnished (Diamond, 1977).

In the evaluation process, political women tacitly serve as a measure of where society is relative to gender boundaries. The humorous materials we have collected demonstrate the societal ambiguity about these boundaries very clearly. Gender classifies and dichotomizes, but changes in social and family patterns deemphasize difference and the law formally treats all as equal. Thus as people scrutinize the woman contender, they fall back on issues of sexuality and ethics, even as they try to judge the future competence of the politician.

The literature on humor and politics has begun to grow (Banc & Dundes, 1987; Bronner, 1988; Cochran, 1989; Dundes, 1989; Speier, 1975). Women in caricature were of academic interest already early this century (Fuchs, 1906), and the negative portrayal of women in jokes even led to a United Nations Decision urging joke tellers worldwide to mend their ways (Moser-Rath, 1978, 40).<sup>4</sup> But the whole question of gender and politics as addressed in jokes remains to be examined, and the following is intended as an effort in this direction.

## 2. Men and Women in Political Humor

In a sample of two hundred political jokes collected since 1964, examples about male politicians such as the following can be found:

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- 3 One should not be too categorical here: some homosexual politicians have also been successful. Yet since the vast majority of elected politicians are older, married males, alternatives to this model have their difficulties. It is worth noting that sexual scandals among politicians have until now been entirely among males, though the recent revelations of Brazilian ex-Economics Minister Zelia Cardoso de Mello indicates that this may soon change.
- 4 The most comprehensive study of sexual humor is found in Legman, 1973. For a more polemical study of negative images of women in jokes, see Huffzky, 1979.



Q: What do you get when you cross James Dean and Ronald Reagan?

A: Rebel Without a Clue.

Q: Did you hear that George Wallace's entire library was destroyed in a fire?

A: He was deeply upset because he hadn't finished coloring the second book.

Q: What is the difference between LSD and LBJ?

A: LSD is a drug and LBJ is a dope.<sup>5</sup>

Such jokes denigrate the competence of these politicians, and there are a few jokes of this type about women as well. Consider the following gestural example, used by Marcos followers in the 1986 campaign in the Philippines:

Corazon si (putting hand on heart, nodding the head)

Aqui no (putting finger to temple, shaking the head).<sup>6</sup>

Yet most jokes, cartoons and satire about women politicians link issues of competence with issues of gender and sexuality.

Jokes about males also periodically focus on sexuality as connected to electoral or other political success. They often involve tarnishing the reputation of women they are linked to:

Q: Why did Lady Bird want to divorce President Johnson?

A: Because he wouldn't do to her what he was doing to the country.<sup>7</sup>

Another example which uses the double meaning of slang expressions for intercourse was part of the vast cycle of Gary Hart jokes in 1988:

5 All jokes are from the student collections at the University of California Folklore Archives at Berkeley (UCB). The first joke, deposited by Stuart Piteski, 1987, refers to Reagan's seeming inability to understand what he was being told (without a clue) as well as to James Dean's film *Rebel Without a Cause*. The second, collected by Dave Jouris, 1969, has variants which were applied to Nixon's Vice-President Spiro Agnew, to Ronald Reagan and to Dan Quayle. The third joke, collected by Diana Laris, 1969, refers to the hallucinogen lysergic acid (LSD) and to President Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ). A "dope" is a person who is not intelligent enough to grasp what is occurring, but it also is a slang term for marijuana, hence to be seen in connection with the drug LSD.

6 Collected by Sandy Cate, 1989 (UCB).

7 Collected by Jean Nishita, 1968 (UCB). Other versions involve every President's wife from Lady Bird Johnson to Nancy Reagan. The allusion here is to the double meaning of "screwing"; it was both a contemporary slang term for sexual intercourse and it was used in the sense the LBJ was doing terrible things – "screwing the country" – by continuing the war in Vietnam, a source of considerable anxiety among college students who might be called up to fight there.

Q: What do Christa McAuliffe and Donna Rice have in common?

A: They both went down on the Challenger.<sup>8</sup>

More importantly, male sexuality as reflected in humor does not imply male political incompetence. Rather, when in political roles males are judged primarily as politicians and only secondarily as males or in terms of the gender expectations associated with being males.

With women politicians, by contrast, their gender roles, particularly in connection to their reproductive duties, are seen as severely impairing their ability to run or be competent in office. Women, we argue, are judged first as women, with all that implies, and only secondarily as politicians. Consider the following joke told about Benazir Bhutto, the ousted Pakistani Prime Minister and leader of the PPP, the Pakistani People's Party:

Q: Do you know what PPP stands for?

A: Permanently Pregnant Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup>

The joke is but one indication of the larger web of procreation and family that threatens women's political success.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Women and Politics in Cartoons

Eduard Fuchs's 1906 work *Die Frau in der Karikatur* opens with the remarkable statement: "The temptation to clown around with the topic [of women] is very big indeed, ... for there is hardly a theme that entices one to laugh and to make faces more; the mere thought makes ones fingers itch [with the desire to draw caricatures oneself]" (Fuchs, 1906, 1). Nonetheless Fuchs did consider "the question of women" – presumably he meant the question of equal rights for women – the most important issue of his day. The themes that emerge from his collection are women's obsession with their hair and fashions, and their sexual desires within marriage and without.

8 Cited in Dundes, 1989, 45. Christa McAuliffe was one of the astronauts killed in the explosion of the Challenger space shuttle, "went down" in this case meaning "was killed." But to "go down" on *someone* means to perform fellatio; Gary Hart was the primary challenger for the Presidency, and was accused of having had an adulterous affair with the model Donna Rice.

9 Collected by Sandy Cate, 1990 (personal communication). A Pakistani in the audience at our conference presentation in 1989 confirmed that there were many Benazir Bhutto jokes circulating in Pakistan – but would not share them for fear of incriminating himself.

10 Bhutto's fall from political office amidst accusations about her husband's financial dealings parallels the Kopp and Ferraro cases; there may be something of an international pattern here. See Bueller, 1992, for a recent Swiss case *à la* Kopp.

Women were barely active in politics before the French Revolution, and hence there are few cartoons in Fuchs's work about political themes. The issue is hinted at in cartoons about mistresses of a variety of kings, dukes and other noblemen, mistresses who, through their sexual favors, exerted undue influence on their powerful companions. Most common is the image of the woman wearing men's trousers. Women who were politically or socially powerful, such as Queen Victoria or Catherine the Great, were drawn to look fat, unattractive or male; women attempting to gain power through scholarship or law experienced the same fate, or else were shown to exploit their figures rather than their brains to make their case.

Women cartoonists since the early 20th century have redressed this imagery to some extent, but they remain a minority (Bruère & Beard, 1934; Walker, 1988). The increasing participation of women in the workforce – thus outside the private sphere – made certain caricatures no longer in good taste, even though sexist and motherhood imagery remained important for political purposes.<sup>11</sup> But as women have reached increasingly for public power, the mixture of sexuality, gender role and political competence clearly continues to trouble many citizens who express their unease in jokes and satires.

#### 4. Political Failure and Gender in Humor

##### 4.1 *Geraldine Ferraro's Vice-Presidential Campaign*

When the Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale chose Geraldine Ferraro as the first woman ever to be a vice-presidential running mate (a technical political term already containing sexual double meanings), versions of the following joke instantly began to circulate:

Q: What's the slogan for Mondale and Ferraro?

A: Fritz and tits.<sup>12</sup>

This joke pokes fun at Mondale's nickname and it ridicules the practice of political campaigns to come up with catchy slogans. The message seems clear: Mondale chose Ferraro because and only because she is a woman, which, given the American practice of choosing vice-presidential candidates for the

11 Political posters from unsuccessful Swiss women's suffrage campaigns (1912–1959) depict abandoned children, dirty baby utensils and images of women fulfilled by their roles as mothers. See Meylan et al., 1979. Visual propaganda of this kind from other nations could shed light on the static or changing gender divide in society; for a strikingly effective illustration of the continuity of visual propaganda, see Cheles, 1991.

12 Several collectors (UCB).

region or political wing of the party they represent, is a logical connection. Mostly, however, the joke denigrates Geraldine Ferraro's political capabilities. She figures neither by name nor nickname, but is reduced to a woman's most visible sexual attribute, her breasts.

In 1984, Ferraro had been married to John Zaccaro for 24 years. One year after her marriage she was admitted to the New York State Bar. For the next fourteen years she worked as a part-time lawyer, forfeiting full time employment to raise three children. Then she worked as a district attorney and in 1978 was elected to the House of Representatives.<sup>13</sup> She was the first woman to represent Queens, was reelected three times and rapidly established herself in the Democratic party.

Despite such demonstrated political competence, the process of selecting Ferraro as vice-presidential candidate led the satirist Russell Baker to title an editorial "Backward Reels the Gender". In it, Mondale is portrayed as an important man, not a lovesick youngster in a second rate melodrama. He must propose to her, but will not go on his knees to do so, and he must assert his superiority because she will have to accept her low station with a smile. In Baker's view, Ferraro smiles a false smile, and says "But I love funerals, positively love them", because going to state funerals is one of the few political activities that vice-presidents engage in (Baker, 1984). The real Geraldine Ferraro parodied herself by telling a group about Mondale's juvenile telephone invitation and asking "My God, can you imagine if he had ever gotten a busy signal?" (Clines, 1984, 10). The Ferraro/Mondale ticket thus provoked the metaphor of couple rather than political team right from the outset. The metaphor stretched across the expressive spectrum from blatantly sexual jokes (Did you hear Mondale got a speeding ticket? Doing 69 on a Ferraro.) and editorial cartoons to satire such as Russell's.<sup>14</sup>

13 Her 1978 success in a conservative district was attributed variously to her politically active cousin and his help, to her husband's financial backing and to her ethnic heritage – anything but to herself. On the other hand, Cannon and Marusich-Smith (1987, 61) have noted that for name recognition purposes, many women politicians make use of their husband's position and status in the community.

14 Collected by Jennifer Elstad, 1984. The joke is a wordplay on driving a fast car (Ferrari) and the standard speed limit of 65 miles per hour in America, as well as on the sexual position, supposed to resemble the number 69, in which fellatio and cunnilingus are performed simultaneously. Elaine Miller delivered a paper at the American Folklore Society Meetings in Baltimore in 1986, entitled "Geraldine Ferraro and the Editorial Cartoonists", in which she presented evidence from eight major newspapers. Editorial cartoonists consistently portrayed Ferraro and Mondale as a couple in either domestic or sexualized settings, often displaying power or role reversals.

For the couple scenario, Ferraro's political competence was irrelevant. Indeed, once selected she was exchangeable with other females in the news, a notion on which the following joke builds:

Did you hear? Mondale's going to fire Gerry Ferraro as his running mate and hire Vanessa Williams, 'cause he knows Vanessa can lick bush!<sup>15</sup>

Another variant eliminates Williams:

Q: How are Reagan and Mondale alike?

A: They both want to put a Bush in the White House.<sup>16</sup>

Women candidates are thereby reduced to their genitals or their ability to provide sexual satisfaction. Another aspect of women's physiology appears in jokes as well:

Do you know why Mondale/Ferraro will never get elected? ... Because if Mondale died Ferraro would be president and we'd have a war every twenty-eight days.<sup>17</sup>

The popular imagination has always construed menstruation to be a debilitating, polluting if not evil process, prohibiting women from access to social and political power, and in some cultures to all public appearance. What was told as a joke must have appeared to some people as a latent argument against Ferraro's candidacy.

Aside from dwelling on sexuality, jokes provide evaluations of Ferraro's – women's – suitability for the second highest political office:

When Ferraro was asked, "What do you think about Red China?" she answered, "I think it would go well with the blue tablecloth".<sup>18</sup>

One could hardly get a clearer articulation of the public-private dichotomy that women politicians are subjected to. As a woman, Ferraro is first associated with matters of the private realm of the home, such as taste in furnishings.

15 Collected by Alison Linck, 1984 (UCB). Here the wordplay is "to lick someone" in the sense of winning a fight – the implication is that Ferraro would not be able to defeat Bush in the contest to become vice-president – and in the slang use of "bush" to refer to a woman's pubic area, with the "lick" sense this time meant literally. Vanessa Williams, the first black to be elected Miss America, was stripped of her title after it became known that she had posed for a Playboy centerfold.

16 Collected by Jill Surdzial, 1984 (UCB). Here the reference is both to George Bush and to Ferraro, referred to only by her pubic area.

17 Collected by Laurence Brown, 1984 (UCB).

18 Collected by Jennifer Elstad, 1984 (UCB).



Knowledge of other nations and major political powers is consequently not part of her repertoire. This joke also alludes to Nancy Reagan and the criticism of her purchase of new china (dishes, etc.) when the Reagans moved into the White House. Thus the joke equates Ferraro with a woman who stayed in the proper domain of spouse rather than political candidate.

While the issue of femininity in politics confronted Ferraro daily, it also undermined her own efforts to conduct a gender neutral campaign. In her campaign memoirs, she portrayed herself as so stage-managed that she had to fight major battles just to be able to select which clothes she wanted to wear for major public appearances. While the public in its humor emphasized sexuality, the campaign did its best to desexualize the candidate. As bouquet upon bouquet of flowers came her way during official campaign stops, thanking for them with or without a kiss implicitly turned into a question of sexualized versus genderless politics. After her defeat, on election night, Ferraro said "At least when I see Mondale now, I can give him a kiss and thank this wonderful man. We can finally forget all this stuff about how the first male-female team has to behave in public" (Barber & Kellerman, 1986, 393).

Ferraro ultimately was brought down neither by her appearance nor her lack of foreign policy experience. Once her husband's refusal to reveal his tax returns hit Republican headquarters, a seemingly "genderless issue" had been found to discredit her (Raines, 1984). An attack on Ferraro directly, *Time* magazine claimed at the time, would sound partisan and sexist so, instead, Republicans used a patronizing, "poor Gerry" tone of high-minded regret about her husband.<sup>19</sup>

Ferraro's husband was reluctant to meet the press, and the caustic statements he made in the rare interviews did not help. He quipped, for instance, "I think I would insist on being [at Cabinet meetings] just as long as they don't throw me out".<sup>20</sup> But just how genderless is it to make the ethical behavior of a political candidate's *spouse* the target of a campaign? Examining the female spouse ordinarily would mean scrutinizing her for her gender behavior in fulfilling her role as wife and mother (with the implied roles as homemaker and political helpmate). Yet examining Ferraro's spouse turned first on his professional ethics rather than raising issues about his gender behavior in

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19 George Bush's press secretary Peter Teeley claimed Zaccaro was "a very selfish man. He must have something to hide". And Ferraro's quip that the reason her husband didn't disclose his tax returns was to be found in his Italian heritage was regarded with some satisfaction by the Republicans for "it implies that Italian men are unreasonable, stubborn and refuse to play by ethical rules". See Raines, 1984; *Time*, 27 August, 1984.

20 *New York Times*, October 8, 1984 (Campaign Notes).



fulfilling his role as husband and father. Ferraro's decision-making is then questioned: how could she have married a guy like this? And what does her marital choice say about her future choices?

#### 4.2 *Elisabeth Kopp's Forced Resignation*

Our second case illustrates such problems even more plainly. Elisabeth Kopp, like Geraldine Ferraro, first became a lawyer, and then devoted herself to her family. When she took up public life in 1970, her career path involved a slow rise through the ranks of party, local and cantonal political offices. Elected in 1979 into the National Council, she was made President of a party commission on environment the following year, and became widely known for her work here. In 1984 she was selected into the Federal Council by a slim majority. Her election was greeted as a triumph for all women in the country, not only because national suffrage was only thirteen years old at that point, but also because of the parliamentary opposition to electing Lilian Uchtenhagen into the Federal Council the previous year.<sup>21</sup> Kopp headed the Justice Department and was forced to abdicate from office in December 1988.

Two months before her abdication, it became known that Kopp had called her husband from her office to recommend that he resign the vice-presidency of a currency trading company which was under federal investigation for money laundering. The warning constituted using privileged information to protect a family member. An official investigation began, and it was argued that Kopp had put marital above national duties. Kopp's political decision making suddenly appeared in a new light: if she was this committed to her husband, to what extent did he, a private businessman and lawyer, influence her decisions?

Hans Kopp's reputation was tarnished long before his wife's election. In 1972, he was barred for half a year from appearing in court because of his treatment of employees in his firm – "spanking willing secretaries with a bamboo stick when they made mistakes" was how one foreign paper put it (Studer, 1984).<sup>22</sup> As knowledge of the affair reached higher army and academic circles,

21 In a radio interview, Uchtenhagen blamed her defeat in part on the conservative parties' unwillingness to let the first woman be a Social Democrat and in part on the unease about electing a woman. She felt she challenged men by being a finance expert – a "stolid, union lady" would have suited them better – and she had to find an answer as well to her husband's question: "Lilian, do you really want power?" Interview broadcast on October 18, 1991 in DRS 2, "Kontext".

22 In the Swiss press, this was known as the "Füdlitätsch-Affäre". See Duttweiler, 1990, 112–117.

Kopp was forced to withdraw from command duties, and he was also discouraged from an attempt to become a university docent.

In the course of Elisabeth Kopp's candidacy, Mr. Kopp's past came to light and questions were raised as to whether "such a man could be so close to the seat of power" (Studer, 1984). Close scrutiny of Mr. Kopp's past, Kopp's family background, and the potential conflicts of interest between Mr. Kopp's activities as lawyer and financier and Kopp's federal duties were all part of what Elisabeth Kopp, early on in her campaign, considered extensive mud-slinging (Hersch, 1991, 20). Accusations that Mr. Kopp owed 2.5 million Francs in back taxes surfaced in the fall of 1988. Throughout her campaign, her office and her fall from office, Elisabeth Kopp stood steadfastly by her husband, a fidelity that more than one journalist found puzzling and ultimately troubling.<sup>23</sup> To this date, she has maintained her innocence: "I am guilty neither legally nor morally", she stated when she resigned (Müller, 1989, 227).

A satirical novel portrayed Kopp's rise to power as a clever game on the part of the rich who could bend all the rules (Strehle, 1985).<sup>24</sup> Even before her resignation, a mock-tragic play damning Kopp's policies and her family life as symbolic of the failure of Swiss democracy was published (Ammann, 1989). And less than a year after Kopp resigned, a psychologically suffused portrait of the affaire was produced which argued that the downfall was essentially predestined by the socialization and personality of the two individuals involved (Duttweiler, 1990). A defense of Elisabeth Kopp was produced a year later (Hersch, 1991). Even now that official judgements are in, published opinions on the case remain divided. But while journalists, legal scholars and politicians discuss everything from personal psychology to the principles of the *Rechtsstaat*, humor and satire on Elisabeth Kopp's case dwell explicitly on the issue of gender.

Like any major politician, Kopp was the subject of cartoons before her downfall. But it was only after the "Affaire Kopp" began that cartoons invoked the spectrum of issues raised by political women with prominent spouses.<sup>25</sup>

23 Duttweiler, 1990, 162–163, writes about how Kopp apparently repeatedly exclaimed that the person who suffered most was "her Hans", and, even more surprising, proclaimed her own guilt at reducing her husband's volume of business.

24 A rather prophetic satirical novel about the first woman Federal Councillor was written already in 1979. See Weber, 1989.

25 The Swiss cartoons originally used for this study in 1989 were kindly provided by Stephane Hofmann, a research assistant at the Forschungszentrum für schweizerische Politik, Universität Bern. In the meantime, a comprehensive survey of Kopp cartoons and their (mostly French-Swiss) creators has been compiled by Bumbacher, Künzi and Rauch (1990). Where their and our examples coincide, we have indicated where in their study the relevant cartoon appears.

One cartoon shows Kopp as a prostitute, lounging on the floor with telephone in hand, while male members of the PUK (*Parlamentarische Untersuchungskommission*) scrutinize her through the peep holes (Bumbacher et al., 1990, 73). Other cartoons further suggest that Kopp is being investigated for her sex, not her politics. "Do you know the underside of the Affaire Kopp" reads the caption of a picture showing an investigator examining Kopp, whose skirt is billowing because she's standing on a heating vent – a visual allusion to sex symbol Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch* (Bumbacher et al., 1990, 69). Another cartoon shows Kopp wrapped in nothing but a Swiss flag, and she is requested to bare everything. The nudity under the flag points to sexuality, the notion of "wrapping oneself in the flag" questions Kopp's ethics.

The conjugal pair is another target. One picture shows the pair peacefully sleeping in bed while investigators crawl underneath them – the implication being that here is a couple whose private domain has been unduly exposed. Another cartoon shows Kopp to be the victim of her husband: He is shown sitting in an armchair and reading his paper while saying "I will henceforth not mingle in my wife's affairs"; meanwhile she is doing the dishes and washing clothes, and has thus returned to the wifely position she held before her political career. By returning to the place where an individual of her sex traditionally "belongs", Kopp's abdication affirms traditional gender domains. The cartoon criticizes her spouse and society at large for pushing her and other women back to where they "belong".

Yet another perspective has her as a willing accomplice. One cartoon shows Mr. Kopp as a magician, pulling bars of gold out of a top hat while Kopp portrays the sexy showgirl in the swimsuit, carrying the Justice Department's dove on her arm and thus mocking the seriousness and obligations of her office. Finally, there are those who attribute the guilt to her alone: Kopp is shown locked into a telephone dial which, here, represents the modern equivalent of the stocks; her nose is as long as Pinocchio's and her guilt thus plain and evident (Bumbacher et al., 1990, 60).

Political cartoons most likely do not greatly affect political opinion, at least according to Bumbacher et al.'s small survey on this question, but they do provide visual imagery for latent conflicts. Cartoonists must draw from images that are easily graspable to a large and not necessarily highly literate readership, and in Kopp's case, gender attributes belong into this category. This includes everything from typifying Kopp as always wearing earrings or necklaces to playing with her loss of garments. Revelations of her potential wrong-doings are simultaneously revelations of her (female) nakedness, her ethical shame is, visually, often also a gendered shame.

One of the most fertile sources of Swiss satirical political commentary is found in the rhymes performed orally during spring carnival (*Fasnacht*) in Basel.<sup>26</sup> In 1989, only two months after Kopp's downfall, they illustrated how complex and unresolved the attitudes were on how a woman politician should behave.<sup>27</sup> None of the big carnival cliques chose to target Kopp directly, and among the 240 entries listed for the Monday *Cortège*, there were just four small groups and one single costumed person using the name Kopp within their carnival topic (*Sujet*), indicating just how delicate the affair was.<sup>28</sup> Among the *Sujets* were: "Märtfraue mit Kop(p)f", and "Gäll Kopp, d Styyre sin s Dyyre!"<sup>29</sup>

However, 50 groups, as well as most of the independently operating *Schnitzelbängg* (masked individuals or groups who perform rhymed, satirical verses) did incorporate references to the Koppes. Of those, 23 raised the issue of money laundering, but often also brought up the question of which gender was actually laundering. Thus the *Crème Waggis* wrote:

S Kopp Lisbeth het demissioniert,	Lisbeth Kopp has resigned
das het uns schuurig imponiert.	we were very impressed.
Dr Hans mit syner Sauerei	Hans with his mess
kauft syner Frau e Weschere.	buys his wife a laundry.

An even more pronounced statement on gender division in household chores came from the *Gasladärne*:

D Frau Kopp het's Handtuech	Kopp has thrown in the towel
gworfe – dasch e dummi Däsche.	– what a dumb lady.
So kunnts halt usse, wenn	That's what comes from letting
me ihn deheim lost wäsche.	him do the wash at home.
Well si kai Zyt gha het,	Because she didn't have the
haig är au miesse bette.	time, he had to make the beds.
Jetzt hänn si Zyt, zem alles	Now they both have time to
gmainsam wider z'glette.	iron it all out together.

Twenty eight rhymes reflected on the couple, Kopp's integrity as woman and spouse, and which Kopp was more to blame. *D Broleete* reflected the sentiment that the wrong Kopp left the wrong place:

26 See Meier, 1986, for information on the organization of the Basel carnival.

27 The Fasnachts Comité, which acts as an informal archive for Basel's rather complex carnival, kindly made its set of 1989 carnival rhymes available to us.

28 The information was gleaned from the *rädäbäng*, the annual carnival publication put out by the Basel Fasnachts Comité.

29 The first means "market women with head" and plays with the verbal similarity between Kopp and Kopf, the noun for 'head'. The second rhymes: "Isn't it true, Kopp, taxes are expensive".

Wääge däre beese Präss  
 muess d Frau Kopp halt go,  
 den allermäischte Schwyyzere  
 sinn fasch d Träne ko.  
 Mir maine drum: Elisabeth,  
 bhalte sottscht dä Job,  
 das wo wirgglig uffgäh  
 muesch, isch dr Hans W. Kopp.

Because of the nasty press  
 Kopp has to leave;  
 Most Swiss women  
 almost started to cry.  
 We think therefore: Elisabeth,  
 you should keep this job,  
 and what you really need to  
 give up is Hans W. Kopp.

Ethics, sex, and gender roles, as in Ferraro's case, were once again the primary issues. Only a few of these rhymed verses contained blanket statements on how unsuitable Kopp and women in general are as politicians, and only two dwelled on the fall of Elisabeth Kopp as a setback for reorganizing politics and society in terms of gender domains. Significantly both of these were authored by women carnival clubs. The carnival hoax paper of the *Basler Zeitung*, finally, metaphorically summarized Kopp's rise and fall with a satire entitled "Im Bethli syni letschte Arabi".<sup>30</sup> This particular Bethli, a form of the name Elisabeth, succeeds in joining a previously all-male carnival clique, but her initiative, and her profoundly female attempts to do everything right for everybody ultimately lead to her exclusion from the club.

In their very lack of unanimity as to how a married female politician should best balance her affairs, jokes, cartoons, satire and popular political rhymes illustrate the cultural ambiguity toward women's entrance in national politics. As with Geraldine Ferraro, Kopp's political demise is the result not only of her gender, but also of her connection to a husband of questionable integrity and her apparent willingness to put marital loyalty above matters of state.<sup>31</sup> To put it in terms of our initial categories, in cartoons and carnivalesque humor, her in-office performance was judged on the basis of traditional gender roles, sexuality and ethics.

30 The translation would be "Beth's last Arabi", where Arabi is both a particular tune played by the carnival piccolos during *Fasnacht* and an allusion to the Middle East connections of the currency trading firm with which Hans Kopp was connected. A copy of this hoax paper can be found in the Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt.

31 Indeed, one of the conclusions of the official investigation was that "the political fate of every politician stands in close relation to the occupational activities of his or her marital partner. ... Kopp herself emphasized that she could separate her official duties from her husband's business affairs. At a crucial moment, however, this proved to be impossible. A considerable share of the responsibility falls thus on Hans W. Kopp, who hardly took his wife's official duties into account". See the Bericht der parlamentarischen Untersuchungskommission vom 22. November 1989. 89.006. Vorkommnisse im EJPD. Bern.



## 5. Conclusions

There have been successful contemporary women in politics (Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir, Edith Cresson, Gro Brundtland) who have been forced from office for reasons which go beyond their gender and political competence.<sup>32</sup> There have also been women in politics as well who have inherited a mantle of legitimacy from dead husbands or fathers (Indira Ghandi, Cory Aquino, Benazir Bhutto), and who have had to contend, like Kopp and Ferraro, with being the first women to occupy such high political office in their countries.

But we have confined ourselves to considering Ferraro and Kopp, because they represent one new path a woman aspiring to politics is likely to take.

Both women were highly trained professionals, entering politics on their own merits after raising a family. Investigating their "failure" and its reflection in humor is important, because women politicians like Kopp and Ferraro are much more like their male counterparts in terms of age, education and qualifications than earlier female candidates have been. In other words, the potentially debilitating factors which would cause these women to be judged as less competent than their male challengers are not present. Instead, these women fail due to financial scandals which involve their husbands.

The humor about women politicians provides a measure of where society has arrived at in reformulating gender domains. People are willing to entertain in the *abstract* the idea of the competent woman politician: by 1982, 83% of the respondents of a national American survey answered "yes" to the question "if your party nominated a woman for President, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job?" (Mansbridge, 1986, 24). Yet there is clearly cultural unwillingness to abandon traditional gender roles, and a persistence in seeing women politicians defined by family, husband and sexuality. Even when women reach political office, the traditional view of women as private, feminine, wifely, mothering and tied to the home often shunts them into "women's policy concerns" such as health, education and welfare. Their "political activities and orientations are interpreted as functions of their private roles" (Sapiro, 1983, 31; Epstein, 1981, 5).

In part this is a function of the gulf between the support for abstract principles and a personal unwillingness of individuals to act in accordance with such

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32 The Ferraro/Kopp pattern of attacking the men that female politicians are associated with seems to have set a pattern, and it may indeed, as National Councillor Cecile Bühlmann argues, represent a new form of misogyny to argue that women are incapable of action, whether fiscal or political, that is autonomous from the men they are associated with. See Bueller, 1992.



principles. Jane Mansbridge calls this the “tension between rights and substance”, and cites a telling 1980 survey which found that

*62% of American men said they favored “an equal marriage of shared responsibility in which the husband and wife cooperate on work, homemaking and childrearing”. But in the same year, 69% of American men said they disapproved of the changes in women’s traditional roles that they had observed, primarily because “the husband has to spend more time on household chores he doesn’t like” (Mansbridge, 1986, 23).*

Such split attitudes help explain how one can both promote and reject political women: it is always possible to fall back on earlier gender role concepts if one seeks reasons to reject women for or in office.

If the public versus private boundaries become increasingly obscure in the modern welfare state, and if, as some feminists have argued, the personal is political, it should come as no surprise that political controversy can become very personal for women. In recent years, political controversy has turned far more personal for men as well. Yet a tremendous difference remains between a male politician who violates sexual norms, and a female politician who “violates” traditional gender role norms. A woman who pursues an independent political career and speaks out about issues remains unusual, as she pursues a path still not regarded as “normal”. The humor reflects this.

Violations of norms are also characteristic of political scandal. Interestingly, the scandalous aspect usually seems to be the unwillingness on the part of a politician to disclose wrong-doing immediately, and by comparison the actual offense seems less bad. Procedural violation is particularly problematic for Western nation-states which put great store by the law and the idea that no one is above it. Procedural issues were at stake in both the cases we have examined here, for Ferraro in terms of John Zaccaro’s desire to attend Cabinet meetings and not reveal his tax returns – the latter now *de rigueur* for American presidential candidates – and for Kopp in her delay in revealing her phone call to her husband. Where the private ended and the political began was clearly hard to discern for all concerned, including the press.<sup>33</sup>

33 For the literature on scandal, see Markovits and Silverstein, 1988, a portion of which is translated in Ebbinghausen und Neckel, 1989. Hersch (1991, 58) discusses some of the aspects of the violation of procedural norms in the Kopp case; even after her resignation, Kopp seemed to still have difficulties in understanding what had been so problematic about her behavior. See Rolf Wespe’s “Fall Kopp, Fall Schweiz” in the 7th March, 1989 *Tages-Anzeiger* (Fernaussgabe). Shortly after John Zaccaro announced that he wanted to attend Cabinet meetings, Judy Mann wrote “Who’s going to be Vice-President here: John or Gerry? Of course, Zaccaro... won’t be available for Cabinet consultations most of the time since he’ll be in New York on weekdays. Let us all breathe a sigh of relief. He and his wife the Vice-

The connection between scandal and public/private issues has more general features as well:

*Under modern conditions at least, the public mode does not tolerate any admixture of the private; probably because it is always under the suspicion of being really self-serving, the appearance of any explicit private objective in addition to the public one will serve to annihilate the credibility of the latter.* (Hirschmann, 1982, 127)

The ethical scrutiny of prospective women politicians is particularly difficult, for it has a disproportionate effect. Women are perceived as more ethical, and therefore a fall from grace hurts not only the individual woman politician but also the overall image of women as suited to wield power. The issue is not only whether the particular woman can do the job, it is whether women more generally can or should be in such roles. But the issue is also whether women themselves are willing to pay the price of the high degree of scrutiny public life demands today, as Jeanne Kirkpatrick observed with some dismay during the Ferraro campaign.

People in modern industrialized societies, we contend, are slow to modernize their ideas about giving women a place as decision-makers. Publicly, men continue to be judged first as politicians, second as men, though perhaps a little less so than in the past. Women in public, however, are seen first as women, second as politicians, making it doubly hard for them to be effective politicians. The witty slogan “a woman’s place is in the house – and in the Senate” neatly captures where society places women as opposed to where political women would like to place themselves.<sup>34</sup> Even the many new occupational opportunities for women in what used to be exclusively male professions have not changed the unease with which society views women as potential holders of political power.

Both Ferraro and Kopp were quite aware of their historical importance and status as role models. Their respective demise, and the humor surrounding them, reflects a cultural resistance toward new gender roles. People are comfortable maintaining the status quo and making jokes about the feminine attributes and qualities of such politicians. It allows the unease at the prospect of being ruled by a woman to remain hidden.

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President can chat up the nation’s business on the phone and avoid an awkward situation”. See her “Blame it on the Media” in the *Washington Post* of October 10th, 1984.

34 After having been a slogan on bumper stickers and T-shirts in America for years, it was finally introduced in Switzerland by Josi Meier as “Die Frau gehört ins Haus. Ins Gemeindehaus, ins Bundeshaus”. See Stocker und Bachmann, 1991, 39.

“The political joke is of high cultural and historical interest, because it poignantly illustrates in a short narrative the problems of a given era” (Röhrich, 1980, 215). The problem of our and – we are afraid – of eras to come is that while we formally or legally wish to achieve equality, we have not found a way to culturally implement it. We cannot make up our minds whether we want genuine, genderless equality, or whether we want to maintain gender domains beyond the unalterable confines of sexual reproduction. The humor presented would indicate that politics, for the time being, continue to be male, and that women who enter politics are expected to act like males and to suffer criticism for every part of their lives and personalities that represents their gender.

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