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Brittany Murray and Diane Perpich, eds. and trans. *Taking French Feminism to the Streets: Fadela Amara and the Rise of Ni Putes Ni Soumises*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011. 184 pp. Index. \$55.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-252-03548-7.

Review by Katherine A. R. Opello, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY.

Studies of women's movements by gender and politics scholars have challenged commonly accepted notions of social movements, namely the idea that they exist exclusively outside formal state structures and rely on contentious strategies when making their demands. Instead, scholars of women's movements have shown that the personnel of these movements often achieve insider status (or positions within official institutions) and employ a variety of non-contentious strategies.[1] The focus of many of these studies has been American women's movements, but their conclusions seem to hold true for the contemporary French women's movement [2] and are particularly true of the women's group, *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (Neither Whores, Nor Submissives), the subject of the book under review. Initially, this group operated outside French political institutions and utilized a variety of potentially contentious strategies to gain attention. However, it achieved ultimate insider status following the 2007 French legislative elections when its leader, Fadela Amara, was appointed to the government. Fadela's acceptance by the political establishment is particularly striking given the history of the women's movement in France.

Initially, the second wave of the French women's movement, which emerged in 1970s, was defined by revolutionary feminists, who preferred outsider status and rejected collaboration with the political establishment. These feminists were divided into three main camps. The first argued that a misogynistic, masculine world denied women the full expression of their femininity. These female activists wanted to create a women's utopia where women did politics autonomously in single-sex groups and thus fully realized what it meant to be feminine. Members of this group published widely and staged protests and marches, but they refused to engage with formal political institutions. Women in the second camp claimed that sexual difference was socially constructed. These feminists theorized that women were oppressed by a social class of men and that this oppression could be eliminated through the creation of collective non-hierarchical structures (i.e. conscious-raising groups, publishing collectives and neighborhood-based self-help groups) which would identify the social mechanisms that constructed women as the inferiors of men. A final group of women claimed that their oppression was subordinate to class oppression. In their view, women's liberation could not happen until the establishment of socialism, which required political revolution.[3]

By the early 1980s, revolutionary feminism went into decline due to internal quarrels and fragmentation but also because of its inability to adapt to the new political scene. When the Left obtained power in 1981 (after almost twenty-five years of right-wing rule), revolutionary feminists stuck to their position of non-participation and refused to work with the Socialist government. As a result, another group came to dominate the women's movement. Known as egalitarian feminists, they argued that women were not defined by their sexual function but by their multiplicity of social roles (i.e., mothers, citizens and workers). Thus, unlike their revolutionary counterparts, egalitarian feminists insisted that women did not form a coherent category and that their various inequalities were best overcome through

institutional and legal reforms (rather than revolution). Egalitarian feminists also departed from their revolutionary counterparts in their willingness to participate in politics, especially after the Left won power in 1981.[4] In fact, it was this branch of the women's movement that moved inside the state with the creation of the Ministry for Woman's Rights during the early 1980s. However, its insider status diminished over time with the election of several conservative governments, which downgraded the Ministry and marginalized any office concerned with women's rights (through budget cuts and the exclusion of their personnel from important cabinet meetings). By the mid-1990s, the women's movement's position inside the state was almost entirely symbolic.[5]

At the same time, French women's groups remained active outside formal political institutions and this activity resurged at the beginning of the 1990s around the issue of gender parity, which called for equal numbers of men and women in elected assemblies. Proponents claimed that the underrepresentation of women in national office was a problem created by various social, historical and institutional factors in conjunction with a masculine construct of the abstract individual. In their view, imposing gender parity in elected assemblies was the only way to improve women's political under-representation. By the time the measure was amended to the Constitution in 1999, and a law detailing its implementation was passed by both houses of parliament in 2000, most parity groups had disappeared from the political scene.[6] However, during the 2000s, other French women's groups remained active, mobilizing over a range of issues such as improving the gender parity law, maintaining reproductive freedoms, protesting right-wing administrations' cuts in public expenditures, fighting domestic violence and prostitution, ending sexism in the media, defending the rights of immigrant women, and outlawing female genital mutilation.[7]

One group active at this time was *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (NPNS), the subject of an interesting new book edited and translated by Brittany Murphy and Diane Perpich. Founded in 2003 by Fadela Amara, NPNS sought equal rights for three generations of immigrant women, a majority of whom were of North African origin and residing in the *quartiers* (or ghettos) of France. Amara consistently distanced herself from the gender parity movement, arguing that while it was an essential demand, it did not capture or resolve all women's problems, especially those of immigrant women living in the *quartiers*. As Amara put it, "[P]arity for me, is like going to a sale at Hermès" (p. 90). Instead, NPNS demands included government policies that reinforced the values of the French republic and promoted social peace (through educational programs and better protections for victims of sexual violence); programs to train women for leadership positions in local organizations; urban policies that considered the problems of women in the *quartiers*; family policies that reduced women's burdens (such as expanded access to childcare); employment policies that promoted gender equality in the workplace and eliminated discrimination; and educational policies that encouraged girls to pursue career-paths normally reserved for boys (pp. 58-60). Initially, Amara and NPNS operated outside of politics and organized a range of public activities to raise awareness of the problems facing immigrant women in the *quartiers*. These included a series of local seminars and assemblies, the circulation of questionnaires in the *quartiers* (which resulted in a book of policy prescriptions known as the *White Book*), and the March of Women against the Ghetto and for Equality. However, following the victory of the conservatives in the 2007 elections, NPNS moved inside the political establishment when Amara was named Secretary of State of Urban Policy, a post she kept until a cabinet reshuffle in 2010 (pp. 15-17).

In their new book, Murray and Perpich tell the story of NPNS through a well-chosen combination of primary and secondary texts published between 2002 and 2007. The first section reproduces four documents distributed at the Special Assembly of Women of the *Quartiers*, which was convened by Amara in 2002. These documents include "A Call to Action," the aforementioned *White Book*, and "The Manifesto of Women in the *Quartiers*." The second section contains excerpts from *Scum of the Republic*, a book by Fadela Amara and the then secretary-general of NPNS, Mohammed Abdi, which was published in 2006. It consists of first-person accounts of their origins, as well as short chapters detailing their

opinions on topics such as immigration, integration, discrimination, equality, the laws of the ghettos, and social violence. The final section of the book is the transcript of an interview Murray and Perpich conducted with Amara in 2007, shortly after she joined the government.

Through this interesting combination of primary and secondary sources, the reader gains a fundamental understanding of NPNS goals and strategies as well as insight into the complex set of values and beliefs held by the group's founders. This combination of official documents and personal commentary effectively introduce the reader into the world of NPNS and, upon completing the book, the reader feels as if she actually knows this group and its founders, as if she herself was once a member. In addition, this book provides a treasure trove of material for students of social movements in general, and women's movements in particular, especially those examining where such movements occur. For example, in her interview with the authors, Amara discusses the change in her status from political outsider (or her role as social activist) to ultimate government insider (as a newly appointed public official).

At the same time, this book suffers from a few weaknesses. First, readers should be aware that this is not a work of scholarly analysis. The authors simply edit and translate a set of primary and secondary source documents. While the (all too brief) introduction places these documents in the larger context of French colonialism and immigration as well as Amara's personal trajectory, the authors do not present any new theories or conduct any empirical analysis pertaining to these topics. In all fairness, the authors probably did not intend to engage in such analysis, but it would have been helpful if Murray and Perpich had established an overarching framework for connecting and interpreting the texts. In other words, the book could use separate section introductions linking its three sections together with a common argument or theme. Second, additional explanatory footnotes would have been helpful, especially when Amara discusses the "leftist intellectuals" who were critical of her group and its goals (pp. 129-130, 157). It is unclear who these intellectuals were and why they found her positions debatable. Finally, given the publication date of 2011, four years after the authors conducted their interview with Amara, it is curious that there is no afterword or conclusion assessing her time in office.

In the interview, Amara refers to numerous ideas for reform, but were any of these reforms realized? And if so, what impact did they have? It also would have been interesting to learn what happened to NPNS after Amara's departure. Did its goals, strategies and ideas remain the same or did they change, perhaps in response to the 2008 economic crisis? While answers to such questions would have brought an additional dimension to the text, their absence should not deter readers from pursuing this otherwise compelling book.

NOTES

[1] Lee Ann Banaszak, *The Women's Movement Inside and Outside the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[2] Katherine A. R. Opello, "Locating the Women's Movement: Lessons from French Regional Politics," paper prepared for the Second European Conference on Politics and Gender, Budapest, Hungary, 13-15 January 2010.

[3] Katherine A. R. Opello, *Gender Quotas, Parity Reform and Political Parties in France* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2006).

[4] Jane Jenson, "The Representations of Differences: The Varieties of French Feminism," *The New Left Review* 189(1990): 127-160.

[5] Amy G. Mazur, *Gender Bias and the State: Symbolic Reform at Work in Fifth Republic France* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).

[6] Amy G. Mazur, "Drawing Lessons from the French Parity Movement," *Contemporary French Civilization* 25(2001): 201-220.

[7] Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia, "French Feminism: National and International Perspectives," *Modern and Contemporary France* 10(2002): 211-223.

Katherine A. R. Opello
Kingsborough Community College, CUNY
Katerine.Opello@kbcc.cuny.edu

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