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CAROLE PATEMAN

Race and Gender

Interview by Aaron Thomas

*In 1997 Charles Mills published *The Racial Contract*, a book that was directly inspired by your earlier work *The Sexual Contract*.¹ How did your collaboration with Mills come about?*

We first met in 1999 when we were both on a panel at the APSA conference and Charles subsequently suggested that we might write a book together. Our books are now often taught alongside each other so, if for no other reason, it seemed like a good idea. I also remarked at the end of *The Sexual Contract* that I had exaggerated in calling the sexual contract half the story of the original contract; the parties to the contract were white men. So a joint book provided me with a good opportunity to make a contribution to the racial contract.

*Is the book *Contract and Domination* co-authored or does it consist of individually composed essays that can be taken as discreet viewpoints on a variety of themes?*

The book begins with a dialogue in which we discuss our differences about contract theory. Charles is much more favorably disposed towards it than I am. Because we differ, we have written the other chapters individually. We have each written about the “other” contract, on the intersection of the racial and sexual contracts, and have replied to our respective critics. Writing the book in this way means that readers can then see for themselves exactly how we differ and what implications that difference has for our analyses.

¹ C.W. MILLS, *The Racial Contract*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1997; C. PATEMAN, *The Sexual Contract*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1988.

In *The Racial Contract* Mills quotes and distances himself from your assertion, made in *The Sexual Contract*, that «Contract always generates political right in the form of relations of domination and subordination.»² Rather, Mills suggests, «domination within contract theory is more contingent» and «contract theory can be put to positive use» once the biases informing it have been acknowledged. Although he does not develop such a line of critique, he points to Susan Moller Okin's *Justice, Gender and the Family* (1989) as one example of such a critical use of contract theory.³ In *Contract and Domination*, did you and Mills arrive at any consensus on this issue? Can you describe how the notion of contract is understood and employed in *Contract and Domination*?

Let me say first that in *The Sexual Contract*, in addition to the early modern theories of an original contract, I was concerned with a specific, and rather peculiar, form of contract; namely, contracts about property in the person. I focused particularly on the marriage contract and the employment contract. Property in the person is a political fiction, but a necessary fiction if institutions such as employment are to be presented as constituted by free relations. The contracts in which I was interested create relationships – and I showed how even voluntary entry into a contract about property in the person creates a relationship of subordination, such as that between “worker” and “employer.” Thus my argument was that democratization requires that the fiction of property in the person be abandoned and that new forms of agreement replace contract.

But apart from the problems I discussed in my analysis of contracts about property in the person, I have more general problems with contract theory. This is connected to the different ways in which Charles and I approach and use “contract.” My work has been in the tradition of the early modern theorist of an original contract. That is, I have taken the original contract as a story about the creation of a new form of (modern) society, the modern state (“civil society” in the early modern idiom), and its central power structures and institutions. My argument was that specifically modern forms of power and domination – what I called civil subordination – were created in both the private and public spheres. The original contract “creates” both spheres; modern contractual marriage is the central institution in the private sphere, and the institutions of employment (the “economy”) and citizenship are central in the public

² C. PATEMAN, *The Sexual Contract*, p. 8.

³ C.W. MILLS, *The Racial Contract*, pp. 136–37, n. 9.

sphere. In my earlier book on political obligation I was concerned with the latter, that is, the relationship between the citizen and the state. It is this dimension of the original contract – the social contract – that is usually assumed to be the whole story, but in *The Sexual Contract* I focused on the second dimension, the sexual contract. I now see the original contract as three-dimensional. The third dimension is the racial contract that justifies the government of whites over nonwhites.

Theories of an original contract rest on the premise of individual freedom and equality, and it follows that, if freedom and equality are to be maintained, all government must be based on agreement (consent, contract). So how are power hierarchies to be created in a new situation of juridical equality and freedom? The answer, I argued, is that they are constituted and reproduced through contract (about property in the person). Contract is the specifically modern vehicle for creating and maintaining relationships of domination. So I analyzed both the classic texts to uncover the neglected story of the sexual contract and examples of actual contracts (marriage, employment, prostitution) that people enter into every day.

One of my objections to contemporary contract theory is that the legacy of subordination in theories of an original contract and the role that contract about property in the person plays is neither knowledge nor confronted. It is not that the earlier theorists were “biased” but that the political order that they justified in their theories was structured by sexual and racial subordination. Most contemporary contract theorists merely nod towards their predecessors and take it for granted that the structural features of the theory, and the actual history of the consolidation of racial and sexual hierarchies, can be abstracted away so that a neutral “contract” is left.

Now, Charles is using contract theory in a very different manner than I am. Unlike me, he believes that contract theory can be used in a more radical manner than is the case at present and turned to emancipatory ends. He works within – a significantly modified – Rawlsian framework. Contemporary contract theorists, following Rawls, are concerned with an ideal contract; that is, the principles which would be agreed to behind the veil by parties who are concerned to maintain their freedom and equality. In contrast, both Charles and I are, as he says, analyzing non-ideal contracts. We are interested in the real world of domination and inequality. Charles is challenging contemporary contract theorists

on their own turf, whereas I am arguing that we would be better advised to abandon contract theory. I admire the manner in which he has taken Rawlsian theory and, as you put it in your question, turned it to positive ends. For example, in our book he has a very good argument about reparations for African Americans.

However, ironically, contemporary contract theory is not about contract at all, either hypothetical or actual – this is another problem that I have with it. Contemporary contract theory is about moral reasoning and contract does no real work. As its practitioners will admit, contract becomes merely a metaphor. All the arguments could be made without it. Indeed, I think that Susan Okin's book illustrates this. She could have made her case without using Rawlsian theory. For Charles, "contract" is largely a way of highlighting that social and political institutions are conventional, created by human beings. I agree that they are conventional but I do not think that the metaphor of contract is required to convey this. I prefer a more direct way of arguing about political problems – we are not behind the veil, we are right here, we are who we are in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, so why not confront the problems head-on rather than using the apparatus of an hypothetical original position?

Of course, as Charles argues, Rawlsian theory is extremely influential. I am glad that he is showing how a more progressive argument can be made within that framework. I hope that other contract theorists will use his work but I am not altogether optimistic that it will happen. After all, too many political theorists still ignore or pay only cursory attention to three decades of feminist scholarship.

Reflecting on the difficulties of merely incorporating women within the conventional framework of liberal democratic theory, you contend in The Problem of Political Obligation that «the enormous task facing anyone who wishes to develop a genuinely democratic theory of political obligation is to formulate a universal theory, including civil equality, that also embodies a social conception of individuality as feminine and masculine, that gives due weight to the unity and the differentiation of humankind.»⁴ In your essay Feminism and Democracy you write that «one of the most important consequences of the institutionaliza-

⁴ C. PATEMAN, *The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critique of Liberal Theory*, Stanford University Press, 1985², p. 193.

tion of liberal individualism and the establishment of universal suffrage has been to highlight the practical contradiction between the formal political equality of liberal democracy and the social subordination of women, including their subjection as wives within the patriarchal structure of the institution of marriage.» Further, you argue that feminism provides democracy «with its most important challenge and most comprehensive critique» and, you conclude, «neither the equal opportunity of liberalism nor the active, participatory democratic citizenship of all the people can be achieved without radical changes in personal and domestic life.»⁵ In light of your recent work with Mills, did you find that a consideration of gender and race together raised challenges to political theory or practice that you had not anticipated in your earlier works?

I published *The Problem of Political Obligation* right at the beginning of my thinking about the implications of feminism for political theory. In the “Afterword” to the second edition, from which you quote, I tried to say something about the problems that are raised by considering women as well as men as citizens. I was writing the book in the 1970s – it was originally published in 1979 – the same year that I published, with Teresa Brennan, my first essay in feminist political theory. The late 1960s and 1970s were exciting times for academic political theory; feminist arguments opened up a whole new way of looking at familiar questions, highlighted many questions that had not been asked for a very long time in political theory and made it quite impossible to go on reading the classic texts in the way in which we had been taught.

But I think it is now often forgotten how much work had to be done to bring feminist perspectives into academic work. At the time, there were black and Latina women who were asking questions about race but nonwhite women’s voices got even less of a hearing than white women’s voices, and most white women did not listen to them. And, more recently, critical race theorists, starting from an analogous position to feminist scholars in those early days, have had to do a similar amount of extremely hard work. And so it is not surprising that scholarship on sexual and racial subordination has for the most part developed along parallel tracks. To begin to gain some understanding of each of these incredibly complex questions is a very difficult task and to try and bring

⁵ C. PATEMAN, *Feminism and Democracy* in *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1989, pp. 210, 214, 222.

them together within contract theory is even more difficult. We have only begun to scratch the surface in *Contract and Domination*.

It took me a long time to appreciate just how difficult it is to incorporate women as free individuals and full citizens, in either theory or practice. Consider, for example, these two problems. First, as I stressed in my answer to your previous question, the problem is not just a matter of outdated attitudes or unthinking prejudices and biases. Rather, it is a question of power structures that help constitute both our societies and our conceptions of ourselves. As Rousseau well understood we are always faced with the difficulty of how we can bring about a change in structures when individuals are as they are. For instance, the structure of employment is such that men monopolize the higher levels of occupations and the higher paying positions and success requires that employment must always be put first. This structure makes it a rational choice for women to marry and to do most of the unpaid care work in the home (to do what "women" should) – or, in the case of couples from higher status groups, to employ other women, now drawn increasingly from different ethnic or racial groups, to do the care work so that wives too can pursue lucrative paid employment. Thus both social structures and notions of masculinity and femininity continue to reinforce each other, and nonwhites do much of the care, service and dirty work. And this pattern continues despite universal suffrage, anti-discrimination laws, equal pay legislation and so on.

Second, there is the problem that I once labeled "Wollstonecraft's dilemma," because it is a problem that she grapples with in her political theory.⁶ On the one hand, women have demanded that the rights of citizenship should be extended to them, and the notion of a "gender neutral" citizenship is one conclusion of this demand. The problem is that women are then included in a practice of citizenship constructed from men's attributes, capacities and activities. Can women then appear as anything but lesser men? On the other hand, women have also insisted, often simultaneously, that women have specific capacities, talents, needs and concerns that should be recognized as the attributes of citizens and that they perform distinctive tasks which count as the work of citizens. But then women are demanding that everything that has been excluded from concept of "citizen" must be valued and count in political life, a

⁶ See *The Patriarchal Welfare State* in *The Disorder of Women*, pp. 195-204.

reassessment that is not possible given current conceptions of “citizenship.”

It was such dilemmas that prompted my comment that feminism posed the most important challenge to democracy (i.e., to democracy in the minimalist sense in which it is most commonly currently understood). To find a resolution of the dilemma requires an alternative conception and practice of “democracy.” Of course, the problems and dilemmas become immensely greater once that race is taken into account too. In *The Sexual Contract* I emphasized that men who were subordinate at work were masters at home: but the same can be said about white women. They may be subordinate to their husbands but they stand in a power relationship to nonwhite women. Even if equal to their husbands, in a racial order they enjoy the privileges of those with white skins and are superior to both non-white men and women.

Marriage occupied a central place in *The Sexual Contract*, but in *Contract and Domination* I recognize that to consider the racial as well as the sexual contract requires a revision of my argument. I argued that the marriage contract provided for legitimate, orderly access for each man to a woman of his own. But under the racial contract men’s choice of a wife must be limited if racial “purity” and racial power are to be maintained. I also stressed the connection between the marriage contract and the employment contract and how men’s status as husbands was linked to their first-class status as citizens. But this is true only for white men. For example, in the United States after emancipation efforts were made to ensure that former slaves regularized their unions and got married. Coverture was enforced – but this did not translate into the rights of citizens for black husbands. The civil rights of black men and women alike were severely limited and, especially in the Southern States, their political rights denied. For most of the twentieth century, major social policies largely excluded African-American men and women.

The picture thus becomes infinitely more complicated once both contracts come into view. Progressive political movements were entangled in the racial as well as the sexual contract. In *Contract and Domination* I provide some illustrations of this; for example, women were very prominent in the movement against the slave trade in Britain (though discriminated against by male campaigners), but they never regarded black women, including black women in Britain, as their equals; again, the suffrage movement in the United States was largely segregated. The

legacy of this history becomes very visible in the revival of the women's movement from the late 1960s onward. Non-white women complained from the outset that they and their interests were largely ignored. The particularly difficult position of black women was highlighted in the 1990s when Anita Hill accused Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment during the hearings for his nomination to the Supreme Court. Not only did the Senators apparently find it difficult to believe that sexual harassment was an everyday part of the workplace, but much of the black community was hostile to Hill for being part of what was perceived as a white feminist agenda that operated to the detriment of black men, and for breaking the African-American code and criticizing a black man in public.

Moreover, the whole problem of the sexual and racial contracts has become even more complicated with the "war against terror." The position and attire of women is again being used, as it was in the heyday of colonialism, to illustrate the backwardness and alien character of non-white cultures and all the rhetoric about a clash of civilizations performs a similar function. It is also hard to be other than cynical about all the calls for democracy – the Palestinians held an election, judged free and fair by international observers, but their elected government was promptly boycotted by the United States and the European Union and ministers and representatives have been kidnapped and detained by Israel. And now, too, the sexual and racial contracts are part of globalization, although both contracts have been bound up with European expansion into other people's territories from the early modern period, as I explore in my contribution to the racial contract in our book.

Can you say something more about that?

In my chapter "The Settler Contract" I examine European expansion into North America and Australia and the use of the doctrine of *terra nullius*. The chapter is a companion piece to *The Sexual Contract*. I look at the arguments of Grotius and Locke, (the latter more briefly since there is now new scholarship on Locke and America) and I also consider the leading legal cases in both the southern and the northern New Worlds. The chapter begins with the verdict of the High Court of Australia in 1992 that the country was not *terra nullius* when the first settlers land-

ed in 1788. Political theorists today take the legitimacy of the state for granted, but this was a problem at the heart of theories of an original contract and in the early modern period there were questions about what justified Europeans crossing oceans and planting themselves in other people's lands. The doctrine of *terra nullius*, the claim that a tract of land is vacant, empty, uninhabited, uncultivated or a wilderness, provided a justification for dispossession.

There is a sense in which the settlers can be seen as the figures in the state of nature in the classic texts come to life. They did not journey to the New Worlds in order to become part of the societies and nations that had existed in the lands for so long. They went there to create new societies and political institutions, to create "civil societies," i.e., modern states. As Locke, for example, makes clear, what the settlers found was an actual state of nature. The lands are portrayed as still being in the first age of the world, as lacking cultivation, (private) property, and as lacking proper government or sovereignty. Therefore, the settlers (can be said to) make an original contract. The contract takes the form of a racial contract in which the settlers are the parties to the contract but the Native peoples are henceforth governed by it. Their lives, institutions and lands are brought within the jurisdiction and the boundaries of new states.

In the chapter, I distinguish between the strict logic of the settler contract, which I argue is exemplified by Australia where *terra nullius*, in the sense of uninhabited territory, became the law of the land, and the tempered logic found in North America where the existence of Native nations was given some form of recognition. The relevant jurisprudence deals with native title; the question of sovereignty is carefully cordoned off from scrutiny. My conclusion is that now that the doctrine of *terra nullius* has been repudiated, the problem of sovereignty cannot in the long run be avoided and a question mark hangs over legitimacy.

In the 1990s some political theorists looked to the notion of "group rights" or to the defense of "group identities" in an effort to address patterns of oppression or domination not easily subsumed under the paradigm of distributive justice. But attempts to determine what constitutes a group worthy of specific rights did not yield any unproblematic criteria or definitions. Some critics charged, moreover, that the attempt to define groups risked saddling individuals with ascriptive identities they might not have freely chosen themselves. In your collaboration

with Mills, did you consider of such issues as individual or group rights, given the apparent fluidity of ethnic and racial identification and the overlapping nature of any given individual's group involvements in the United States?

The debate about group rights in political theory in the 1990s was mostly conducted under the heading of "multiculturalism." The argument was whether two very different categories of people, non-white immigrants into Europe and North America and the Native peoples of North America and Australia, should have cultural rights. The debate raised a variety of problems about the character of groups and how the relevant groups were constituted. But one of the striking things about this literature was that "race" was rarely mentioned. The discussion, as the term "multiculturalism" implies, was about cultural groups and important political and historical questions about colonialism and race tended to drop by the wayside. And, until feminist scholars intervened, the problem of the subordination of women, and more generally the question of individual rights, within the groups received very little attention.

In *Contract and Domination* we do not directly address the problem of "groups" (as I've mentioned, Charles presents an argument for reparations for African Americans). But, of course, the construction of the category of "race" is also the construction of groups – in this case "white," "black" or, more generally, "non-whites." In my chapter on the intersection of the racial and sexual contracts I discuss the construction of a modern understanding of "race." Throughout human history various groups have seen "us" as being very different from "them." But the now familiar idea of "race" and the construction of racial hierarchies based on the color of skin, facial features, type of hair and so on, and the claim that lack of various capacities and attributes can be read off from such bodily characteristics, is a conception that developed in the early modern period along with theories of original contracts and ideas about the stages of human development. Kant, for instance, is important in the emergence of the idea of "race."

Once the idea of race has come into the world, social and political orders start being built on that basis and people start thinking of themselves in terms of race. Then all the familiar problems arise about how individuals are to be categorized. The problem of who was "white" was of course the most crucial, since that carried with it power and privilege. Everyone gets caught up in the new way of thinking and in racial power

structures, whether they want to uphold the racial order or dismantle it. Both racial and sexual differences are popularly seen in terms of blood and nature, yet in both cases (except for the natural fact that women not men have babies) the differences are political constructs that serve to designate women and non-whites as fit only for subordination not freedom. Like the idea of property in the person, race is a political fiction but an extraordinarily powerful social and political force. Despite all the recent challenges to taken-for-granted conceptions of sexual and racial difference, they are very tenacious; power and privilege are hard to dislodge.

In The Racial Contract, Mills contends that «the economic dimension of the Racial Contract is the most salient,» insofar as the moral and legal dimensions set the stage for the broader project of financial exploitation.⁷ While this may be plausible when considering the history of colonialism, how well does it help to explain the contemporary stance of the West with regard to problems such as the outbreak of tribal and sexual violence in Africa over the last decade or so? Does the developed West's reluctance to intervene in the genocide in Darfur, for example, suggest that there are no resources worthy of economic exploitation?

I agree with Charles that economics is central to the racial contract, but I disagree that it is the “most salient” aspect. Sexual power is also central to the racial contract. Or, more accurately, the three dimensions of the original contract intersect and have reinforced each other. The state has upheld laws and policies that have consolidated structures of racial and sexual power, the sexual contract has been refracted through race, the racial contract has shaped sexual relations, and both contracts have structured citizenship.

I have already referred to the colonial project of creating new civil societies in a *terra nullius* but, of course, extraction of resources was another major driving force of colonialism. We hear a lot about post-colonialism today but while the occupation of Iraq and the new rush to exploit and appropriate the riches of Africa, by China as well as Western countries, is perhaps “post” in that some of the methods have changed, in other respects it looks sadly familiar. And, in the last analysis, the extraction is still upheld by military might. The prosperity of the rich countries is un-

⁷ C.W. MILLS, *The Racial Contract*, p. 32.

derwritten by the transfer of resources from the global South. The poor and destitute of the world – more than two billion people live on less than two dollars a day – are overwhelmingly nonwhite. To be sure, many are exploited and persecuted by their own governments, the members of which enjoy palatial living and overseas bank accounts, but the economic policies and international organizations backed by the governments of the rich countries have increased global inequality. Nor is it only Europeans who see other peoples as inferior or unfit to govern themselves. The global racial contract is enmeshed in a series of lesser racial contracts that serve to maintain transfer of resources.

Although little has been done to stop the pillage, rape and slaughter in Darfur (and Sudan has oil) the conflict and atrocities have received a fair amount of publicity. You mention intervention; but what kind of intervention might bring about the desired results is an extremely difficult question. Military might can often defeat the predators but how is a peace worth the name to be built? For one thing, armies, whether conventional or peacekeeping, have a very poor record in their dealings with girls and women. One might ask why Darfur is in the headlines whereas other tragedies have been and remain virtually ignored. Consider, for example, how little has been said about the four million people who have died in the Congo over the past several years in the conflicts there, or that for a quarter of a century from 1975 there was silence about the Indonesian invasion of, and killings and atrocities in, East Timor, or that at present two million Iraqi refugees are ignored by the occupying powers, the United States and the United Kingdom.

I explore aspects of some of these questions in my chapter “Race, Sex and Indifference.” In the final section of the chapter I discuss some economic issues and use “contract” in a much broader sense – as a metaphor – so that, following Charles’ lead with the global racial contract, I can address what I call the global sexual-racial contract. I also bring this contract together with Norman Geras’ contract of mutual indifference. The contract of mutual indifference, he argues, is visible in the realities of our time; it reflects a world in which, in general, people remain unmoved by large-scale atrocities, mass deprivation and distress. Geras does not deny that there are people and groups who are motivated by humanitarianism and make efforts, sometimes very heroic efforts, to assist others in torment or distress, but most people, most of the time, do not do so. The contract reflects general not universal relations of mutual indifference

and takes the form that I do not come to your aid in an emergency and I do not expect you to come to mine. Geras argues that we lack a social morality of mutual aid and so are governed by mutual indifference.

I do not attempt to discuss the reasons for governmental policies and inaction but it is clear that the problem of indifference is exacerbated by the willingness of numerous governments around the world to prop up corrupt, predatory and brutal rulers and elites when it is perceived to suit their economic and strategic interests. The “war on terror” now gives a new fig leaf to any government that is oppressing its own people and the recent example of the United States supporting the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia suggests that the “war on terror” might lead to new proxy conflicts in Africa.

I raise the enormous and complex question of why people are so willing to turn a blind eye, do not want to hear, or both know and do not know about atrocities, suffering and the torments that humans inflict upon each other. I do not pretend to have an answer to this question, but I make a suggestion. In *The Racial Contract*, Charles argues that the suffering of whites counts for a great deal more than that of nonwhites and there are certainly plenty of examples to support this. But my argument is that the sexual contract is just as important as the racial contract in helping to account for indifference. Geras’ book is about extreme suffering and dire emergencies, but indifference is part of everyday life. In the home the lesson is learned that girls and women are worth less than boys and men. No “war on terror” has ever been declared about the myriad forms of violence suffered by women. Yet violence against women is endemic globally. No country provides adequate physical security for women but we avert our eyes from what happens to “our” women and we do not want to know about what is done to “their” women.

Nor do all cases of suffering receive the same attention. The contract of mutual indifference is refracted through the sexual and racial contracts. Consider, for instance, that only in the 1990s did violations of women’s rights start to be seen as violations of *human* rights or that rape in warfare has been acknowledged as a crime and prosecuted only in the 21st century. The use of rape as a weapon of war and its use in what we now call ethnic cleansing to try to “dilute” the bloodline of the enemy began to receive attention only when it happened in Europe, in the Balkans in the 1990s. Much less has been heard, for example, about the tens

of thousands of girls and women raped during the genocide in Rwanda or during the conflicts in the Congo.

The most common objection to arguments for universal mutual aid is that our natural inclination, and our first obligation, is to care for those closest to us. The most common response to this objection is that, even if this is the case, there is no reason why it should preclude assistance to others abroad. What is usually overlooked is that it is not true that all those closest to us receive assistance. There is an hierarchy of worth at home and abroad. The interrelationship between the sexual and racial contracts encourages turning a blind eye, corroding everyday life at home and fostering indifference to destitution and suffering abroad.

Your recent work has dealt with the question of basic income. Do you think that basic income represents a meaningful response to the problem of racial and gender discrimination?

The introduction of a basic income would not be a solution but I think it would be a step in the right direction. Or, at least, it would be if the income were set at an appropriate level; that is, at a level that provides a modest standard of living. The reason for supporting a basic income is also important. It is often seen as another form of poor relief and a below subsistence level of income is advocated. While I support measures to provide for the poor, income at this level has little potential for social change. I see basic income not as poor relief but as an important part of the process of democratization, the creation of a more democratic society and a more democratic form of citizenship. The other crucial element is that a basic income is paid unconditionally, with no employment tests, and so on.

If these two requirements were met, individuals would have a wide range of opportunities – providing that they were willing to live on the income at a modest level – which includes the opportunity not to be employed. (Because the income is unconditional they could take paid employment if they wished). This possibility worries some supporters of a basic income who hedge it about with conditions and argue that the income should be below subsistence level as an incentive to be in the paid labor force. The institution of employment is both undemocratic and central to the creation and maintenance of the sexual and racial con-

tracts. National and international economic policies in recent years have supported the spread of employment across the world. A basic income at least offers the potential to start turning the tide and opening up discussion of ways of organizing production on a more democratic basis.

Universal suffrage is now accepted in virtually every country as a basic right of citizens. What is not accepted – indeed, ruled out by structural adjustment and privatization and the reduction of citizenship to another form of consumption – is that citizens have a right to subsistence, to a decent standard of living. My argument is that the latter right is as fundamental as the right of the suffrage; that is why I see a basic income as a democratic right. Like the suffrage, the material security provided by a basic income underpins the enjoyment of other rights.

Material security would enable all individuals to participate, to the level that they wished, in social and political life, to be active citizens. A basic income would help undermine the sexual and racial contracts. It would provide the opportunity to leave or refuse poorly paid jobs with unsatisfactory and dangerous conditions, and to avoid or to leave abusive relationships. For the first time in history, all women would be economically independent – as Mary Wollstonecraft advocated in 1792 – and thus could avoid subjection within marriage. If a basic income is seen as part of democratization then it would be possible to open the question of the relationship between marriage, employment and citizenship, and between paid and unpaid work, and some of the props of the racial and sexual contracts could be weakened.

There is also an important symbolic dimension to basic income. Both women and nonwhites are overrepresented in the ranks of the poor, and the condition of the poor often means the respect due to fellow citizens is withheld from them. If all citizens, as a right, were granted income to live in a modest and decent fashion the temptation to deny respect would be removed. Acknowledgement of a democratic right to a basic income would be a major symbolic affirmation of full membership of all individuals as citizens. This would help diminish the lesser citizenship that is part of the sexual and racial contracts.

Interest in a basic income has been growing recently and there is considerable grass roots support for it around the world. Not surprisingly, since the policy runs counter to current neo-liberal economic dogmas, only one government, the Brazilian government, has enacted legislation for a basic income; the Alaska Permanent Fund is another example (not

at subsistence level). The question whether universal employment for all adults is feasible today is seldom asked, nor is the assumption that the institution of employment is a necessary part of democracy often challenged, even though nineteenth century productivist models are no longer ecologically sustainable.

(Interview given on May 30, 2007)