

BETWEEN “LOGIC” AND “HISTORY”: COULD THE HOBBSIAN SOVEREIGN BE FEMALE?*

Marko SIMENDIĆ

University of Belgrade
Faculty of Political Sciences

ABSTRACT The paper examines the possibility of a woman being the sovereign in Thomas Hobbes’s political theory. Particularly, it is discussed whether, in Hobbes’s view, 1) a woman can become a Hobbesian sovereign, and 2) whether she can make a good sovereign. Although Hobbes’s answer to the second question is positive, his endorsement of custom as means of establishing the heir to the throne favours male over female heirs. Therefore, this question reveals a tension between Hobbes’s “logical” argument about the natural equality of men and women and his “historical” argument about the role of a (discriminatory) custom.

Key words: Hobbes, sovereign, women, custom, Pateman

“I do not therefore quarrel with them for having too little faith in argument, but
for having too much faith in custom and the general feeling.”

John Stuart Mill, “The Subjection of Women”

The recent commentary on Thomas Hobbes is ambiguous regarding one seemingly simple question: could the Hobbesian sovereign be female? The answer that comes from the “mainstream” scholarship on Hobbes seems to be

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an unequivocal “yes”. Quentin Skinner (2007, 170), for one, argues that Hobbes “even suggests that, because women are sometimes more prudent than men, and because prudence is self-evidently a desirable attribute in a representative, women may in some cases be better suited than men to exercise dominion over others.” Similarly, for David Runciman (2010, 16), Hobbes’s theory is neutral in this sense and, although he was referring to the sovereign as male, Hobbes “saw no reason why this should always be the case”. The problem with these two interpretations, however, is that their authors offered them only as side notes, without engaging in any thorough discussion of this issue. Moreover, not only does Skinner not expand on his claim about the superiority of a female sovereign, but he also fails to offer any textual evidence in its support.

On the other hand, Carole Pateman (1989) approached the question of Hobbesian patriarchy in great detail in her essay “‘God Hath Ordained to Man a Helper’: Hobbes, Patriarchy and Conjugal Right”. She argues that Hobbes’s peculiar account of family as a consequence of contractually accepted domination commits Hobbes to the view that “the sovereign cannot be the mother” (Pateman 1989, 456). Therefore, Pateman points out, the participants in Hobbes’s original contract are men and they should not be subsumed under the neutral term “individuals”. This leads Pateman to the conclusion that there can be no female sovereign in a Hobbesian commonwealth. In this paper I aim to propose a more nuanced interpretation.

Gabriella Slomp (1994) and Joanne Wright (2002) offer two different responses to Pateman’s account. Slomp discusses Hobbes’s views from the perspective of his philosophy and her approach is primarily textual. She starts from analysing Hobbes’s definition of “man” and goes on to discuss its normative implications on gender (in)equality in the civil condition. On the other hand, Wright offers us a more contextual and comparative account of what she describes as Hobbes’s instrumental view of gender. She concludes that, although Hobbes was no feminist, his take on these matters was nevertheless “provocative and unsettling” (Wright 2002, 141). Here I will not be dealing with Hobbes’s stance towards patriarchalism, or with his account of inter-family relations. Instead, I will try to limit my argument to a discussion of the possibility of sovereignty being vested in the woman’s hands.

Slomp (1994) proposes a gender-egalitarian reading of Hobbes’s theory. In her view, Hobbes’s very definition of the term “man” is “gender-free” and “by itself does not prevent women from enjoying equal rights inside the state” (Slomp 1994, 452). Slomp (1994, 450) is here primarily concerned with the sovereign power as a way of replacing natural equality with gender inequality through “matrimonial laws”. She, however, does not examine the source of this power and she is not explicit about the sovereign’s sex. Wright’s contextual approach, on the other hand, sets Hobbes’s treatment of sex and gender against Robert Filmer’s and James I’s patriarchalism and interprets it as a part of his “battle” with “the theory that all political power is derived from Adam, and that both fatherly and Kingly rule are natural and God-given” (Wright 2002, 131). Wright (2002, 134) here offers a brief discussion about Hobbes’s views on female sovereignty as a part of “his point about maternal dominion” and sees them as being inspired by “the recent rule of Queen Elizabeth”. However, she concedes that Hobbes’s argument about a female sovereign is “enigmatic”, although he did oppose the commonly held views that conjugal power trumped female sovereignty. A man, in Hobbes’s view, neither can become a sovereign by marrying a female monarch, nor can he exercise authority over their offspring. There can be only one Hobbesian sovereign, both in the commonwealth and in the family. And, in same manner in which the (female) sovereign is superior to any (other) head of family in her commonwealth, she is the sole holder of authority within her own family.

None of these three discussions, however, offer a complete answer to the question of the possibility of a female Hobbesian monarch. Although Slomp (1994, 441) rightfully notes that “Hobbes denies any *natural* justification for patriarchalism” and that “[f]or Hobbes [...] patriarchal legislation is the product of *convention* and unopposed *custom*”, her account mostly concerns Hobbes’s philosophical argument about the natural equality of men and women and the place of women as subjects in a Hobbesian commonwealth. On the other hand, although Wright successfully relates Hobbes’s argument to the historical context of his writings, she has little to say about Hobbes’s own account of history. It is, in fact, Pateman who goes furthest in analysing Hobbes’s argument. In her view, even though Hobbes’s theory starts with an egalitarian account of human nature, the state arises as a consequence of paternal right: “In the *logical* beginning, all political right is maternal right. In the *historical* beginning, masculine or

‘paternal’ right holds sway” (Pateman 1989, 459). Pateman argues that it is men and not “individuals” who institute the original contract. Male domination is seen as pre-political.

This is a very odd step for Pateman to take. It is strange for an author that rightfully distinguishes between the two kinds of Hobbes’s argument to try and situate them within the unified chain of causes and consequences. This confusion leads Pateman (1989, 457-460) towards an account of “the conquest of women” in which men take advantage of mothers’ protecting their children and subdue them into a life of inter-marital slavery. As I am about to show, Hobbes does not need a theory that would “bridge” his account of natural equality and patriarchal state or family. These are two distinct modes of Hobbes’s argument. This, in turn, branches the question of the possibility of a Hobbesian female sovereign in two directions: 1) is there anything natural about a woman that would prevent her from becoming a sovereign and from ruling successfully? Or, from a different perspective, are there any facts about the sovereign authority that would make “the Seat of Power” inaccessible to women? 2) are there any arguments against a woman’s rule that could be derived from Hobbes’s account of history? I shall return to these questions after I briefly examine the conceptual bifurcation of Hobbes’s theory.

Hobbes’s account of sovereign authority lies on top of Hobbes’s two separate sets of arguments that seem to have inspired Pateman’s attempt at remodelling Hobbesian social contract. Following Pateman (1989, 459), I will call the first argument “logical” and the second “historical”. The first describes the generation of a commonwealth in abstract terms and presents us with the hypothetical state of nature in which atomized “men” who have “sprung out of the earth” like mushrooms covenant with each other and enter civility (Hobbes 1678, 205). This argument has strong normative consequences. The explanation of the philosophical nature of sovereign authority primarily serves to show us that if we want to live peaceful and secure lives, we need to accept the sovereign’s power as indivisible and absolute. On the other hand, there is the historical beginning to Hobbes’s theory, the argument that reiterates the classical account of the emergence of the state. Hobbes here argues that commonwealths have been formed as a result of successional enlargement of (patriarchal) families. Hobbes’s

“historical” argument is primarily descriptive. Hobbes is offering us two stories here: 1) a (pseudo-)history of the heads of families who have expanded their natural families through conquest and 2) a point about this historical description being in line with the more abstract features of supreme political authority that he presented in his “logical” argument. The two lines of argumentation are complementary. Although they start from different perspectives and although one discusses things as they could be and the other discusses events as they have happened, they both serve to reinforce the same conclusion.¹

In the *Elements of Law*, *De Cive* and *Leviathan* there is a conceptual watershed that runs along the lines of Hobbes’s two arguments. In its fullest expression in *Leviathan*, Hobbes (1651, 88) famously draws the distinction between two types of commonwealths: commonwealths “by institution” and those “by acquisition”. While both kinds are perfectly legitimate, the former come as a result of a hypothetical social contract between atomised individuals in the state of nature while the latter are a consequence of a conquest. It is not hard to see that the former type of a commonwealth primarily corresponds with Hobbes’s “logical” argument, while the latter relates to his “historical” account.² None of this should come as a surprise. Hobbes organised his entire opus by

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1. The relationship between Hobbes’s “logical” and “historical” argument has been analysed by the authors who discuss Hobbes’s role in the Engagement controversy. For a useful overview of such discussions see Hoekstra 2004. For example, Deborah Baumgold (2000, 35) argues that Hobbes “had eventually to recognize that the political force of his theoretical arguments depended on introducing contingent, historical ‘facts’ about the English constitution.” Hobbes’s duality of argumentation might be indicative of Hobbes’s effort to have it both ways: to legitimise subjection to the Parliamentary rule while at the same time arguing that only the monarch, historically, *is* the sovereign. The “logical” argument reveals Hobbes as a theorist of *de facto* authority, while his “historical” argument shows him as a royalist. See also Skinner 2002.
 2. This is not to say that Hobbes could have never imagined a historical situation in which individuals would escape anarchy by contracting with each other. In Hobbes’s (2005, 138) words, a commonwealth may be enlarged by “a voluntary conjunction of many Lords of Families into one great Aristocracie” or “by rebellion proceeded first, *Anarchy*, and from *Anarchy* proceeded any form that the Calamities of them that lived therein did prompt them to”. Hobbes’s historical descriptions of the emergence of civil authority correspond both with his account of “commonwealths by institution” and “commonwealths by acquisition”.

dividing his works according to different topics. *De Homine* thus primarily discusses human beings in their natural capacities, deals with their physical and psychological properties, while *De Cive* tells a story about them as citizens, their liberty and their roles within a commonwealth. *De Corpore*, on the other hand, is a philosophical piece on (meta)physics, *Behemoth* is dedicated entirely to examining the history of the English Civil War and Hobbes's *Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England* is aimed at refuting a legal theory by which common law is "the realisation of natural law in English circumstances" and, as such, superior to the sovereign's will (Cromartie 2005). Of course, it is true that all these diverse fields of Hobbes's enquiry overlap in certain ways. For example, Hobbes's account of the sovereign's authority is supported by his legal and historical writings and reinforced by his psychology and his materialist metaphysics. However, the place where all these separate aspects of his theory converge is *Leviathan*, Hobbes's treatise on these diverse elements as related to the nature of the state, power and authority. The structure of this paper will follow the division between Hobbes's two arguments. Firstly I will examine Hobbes's "logical" argument and then I will proceed with analysing his "historical" narrative.

A WOMAN MAKES A GOOD SOVEREIGN, TOO: HOBBS'S "LOGICAL" ARGUMENT

Hobbes's "logical" argument is developed from a thought experiment, a projection not unlike his argument "from *Privation*; that is, from feigning the World to be annihilated" (Hobbes 1656, 67). Similarly to Hobbes's argument from *De Corpore*, the ahistorical state of nature that precedes the "Sovereignty by Institution" is a "feigned" condition in which the human beings imagined "without all kind of engagement to each other" join a "Covenant of every one to every one" (Hobbes 1651, 111 and 1978, 205). This hypothetical account has a wide area of normative applicability, as it aims to show that we are supposed to think about civil authority as absolute and unitary, even if we are not standing over an abyss of civil war.

The locus of Hobbes's "logical" arguments in favour of equality between men and women is in his writing on the state of nature. By nature, Hobbes

argues, human beings are equal because their mental and physical capacities are roughly equal. Their equality reflects itself in their shared desire for self-preservation, their equal claim to the right to “every thing” and their ability to harm each other. Hobbes (1651, 60) argues that:

“Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there bee found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind then another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himselfe any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe.”

In other words, nobody is either intellectually or physically superior to anybody else to an extent that could justify natural political superiority (1651, 60-62). Although in Chapter 13 Hobbes discusses the natural equality of “men”, in Chapter 20, “*Of Dominion PATERNALL, and DESPOTICALL*” Hobbes (1651, 102) is explicit about women being equal to men in their natural capacities:

“And whereas some have attributed the Dominion to the Man onely, as being of the more excellent Sex; they misreckon in it. For there is not alwayes that difference of strength, or prudence between the man and the woman, as that the right can be determined without War.”

And war is, as Hobbes (1651, 103) reminds us by turning our attention to the myth of the Amazons, something in which women can be as successful as men. As Wright (2002, 133) rightfully notes, Hobbes’s employment of the myth of Amazons went against its common use in Hobbes’s time: “The very things that his predecessors and contemporaries found ridiculous, even monstrous, in the Amazons, Hobbes used to prove the logic of his argument.” Hobbes’s aim was not to present an undesirable alternative to male rule, but to show that all authority rests on the same set of principles, regardless of the sovereign. And a very important premise to this argument is that women are roughly equal to men in their ability to wage a war. The point of Hobbes’s argument

remains the same: women are by nature equal to men in the exactly same way as different men are roughly equal among themselves.

Although the natural differences between men and women are not as substantive as to justify one having authority over another, they are still noteworthy. Psychologically, women (and children) are more prone to “sudden dejection” than men, as they “rely principally on helps externall“ (Hobbes 1651, 27). On the other hand, Hobbes (1651, 101) considered men “naturally fitter than women, for actions of labour and danger.” In a similar vein, he believed that men, at least “in the beginning”, “are fitter for the administration of greater matters, but specially of wars; but afterwards, when it was grown a custom, because that custom was not contradicted”³ (Hobbes 1978, 219). Apart from being “for the most part” stronger (Hobbes 1889, 132), men are also “generally [...] endued with greater parts of wisdom and courage, by which all monarchies are kept from dissolution, than women are” (Hobbes 1889, 136). Hobbes, however, also slightly qualifies his previous statement: “[n]ot but that women may govern, and have in divers ages and places governed wisely, but are not so apt thereto in general, as men” (ibid.).

But the lines that distinguish the female nature from the male nature are far from being strictly drawn, not least because Hobbes often qualifies his statements about the superiority of men. Hobbes (1651, 112) famously argues that the men “of *feminine* courage” (the emphasis by MS) are not obligated to fight in wars. The fact that Hobbes extends his “allowance [...] for naturall timorousnesse” to men and that this gives them a *right* to disobey their sovereign is a very important argument. This shows that, for Hobbes, (1) men and women alike can have “masculine” and “feminine” characteristics and that (2) this is not politically relevant because it constrains, but because it extends the rights and obligations to both sexes. Hobbes identifies “naturall timorousnesse” with “feminine courage” in order to extend the “feminine” right not to participate in a war. On the other hand, Amazons’ belligerency makes them men’s equals in the field of battle. If men’s timorousness can be called “feminine”, we can surely call Amazons’ courage “masculine”.

3. I will return to the question of “custom” in the next subsection of the paper.

Hobbes seems to believe that there is no sharp distinction between male and female natural characteristics. The natural characteristics of men and women differ only in scope, but not in kind. But what makes a characteristic “feminine” or “masculine”? Why is one’s lack of courage identified with *feminine* courage? Hobbes (1651, 25) considers courage a passion and defines it as an aversion to something hurtful “with hope of avoyding that Hurt by resistance”. “Courage” is a “name” for Hobbes, and it signifies a natural characteristic, namely a certain kind of aversion. But Hobbes is a nominalist and for him naming is entirely conventional: “I suppose the Originall of Names to be Arbitrary, judging it a thing that maybe assumed as unquestionable. [... H]ow can any man imagine that the Names of Things were imposed from their natures?” (Hobbes 1656, 12) Similarly, the attribute “feminine” in “feminine courage” neither says anything about the *nature* of courage, nor about the *nature* of femininity. It is simply stands a result of a customary and never entirely accurate generalisation that treats “timorousness” and “feminine courage” as synonymous. This custom can be easily altered by the sovereign, who plays a decisive role in defining words. (Stanton 2010) And after all, it takes only one (female) Hobbesian sovereign to disregard the custom and establish the matrilineal right to succession.

By nature, Hobbesian men and women have equal access to the same pool of physical and mental characteristics. Although they can be more or less successfully generalised, potential differences between men and women are only quantitative; they manifest themselves individually (in each and every man or woman) and, as I have already remarked, they are not politically significant. The same applies to the natural characteristics required for the sovereign’s office. In *De Cive* Hobbes (1978, 233) argues that:

“nothing hinders, but that the common-weale may be well governed, although the Monarch be a woman, or youth, or infant, provided that they be fit for affaires, who are endued with the publique Offices, and charges.”

As long as they are “fit for affaires, who are endued with the publique Offices, and charges”, men and women alike can be (good) monarchs. Now, although Hobbes believes that certain characteristics that are desirable in a sovereign (such as “wisdom and courage”) are more often found in men, the fact remains

that there are no natural impediments to the rule of a female monarch. Although it is indeed always more desirable to have a wise and brave sovereign, neither of these characteristics is a requirement for appointing a Hobbesian sovereign, let alone a condition for evaluating her rule. In fact, *not* evaluating the sovereign's performance is one of the key prerequisites for having a stable commonwealth. Correspondingly, the second "disease" of a commonwealth that Hobbes (1651, 168) lists in *Leviathan* is "[t]hat every private man is Judge of Good and Evill actions." Apart from those established by customary rules of succession, there are no external standards for choosing a sovereign. And the custom can be abrogated by the sovereign. Its implementation depends on the sovereign's will to put it in action and, ultimately, it is the current Hobbesian sovereign's will which determines who is going to become the future sovereign (Hobbes 1651, 99). If there are any obstacles to the rule of a female sovereign, they do not have a preferential status of a natural fact. Instead, they are contingent on the sovereign's will or, if the sovereign is silent, on custom. In the next part of this paper I will turn to examining custom as a part of Hobbes's "historical" argument.

A WOMAN CANNOT (EASILY) MAKE A SOVEREIGN: HOBBES'S "HISTORICAL" ARGUMENT

In his "historical" narrative Hobbes describes the states as "greater families" that "for the most part [...] have been erected by the Fathers, not by the Mothers of families" (Hobbes 1651, 85 and 102-103). This argument is where the "patriarchal" Hobbes appears and his account indeed describes (in his view historical) transition from paternal dominion over a family to paternal dominion over a "PATRIMONIAL KINGDOM", a kind of "monarchy by acquisition" (Hobbes 1889, 135). Commonwealths by acquisition are brought into existence by forceful incorporation. In other words, historically, the subjects join the contract by submitting to the stronger and victorious (male) sovereign in exchange for their lives. As Robert Kraynak (1983, 92-93) argues, Hobbes's historical account of "the evolution of men from barbarism to civilization followed a typical pattern: families, tribes, and petty kingdoms were consolidated by war or agreement into commonwealths or cities, which were either great monarchies or small republics." In the process, except for

the pseudo-historical narrative about the Amazons, the initial (or natural) maternal domination over the offspring was replaced by paternal authority over women and children and, consequently, by a commonwealth ruled by a man. In the *Elements of Law*, Hobbes (1889, 135) argues:

“And the whole consisting of the father or mother, or both, and of the children, and of the servants, is called a FAMILY; wherein the father or master of the family is sovereign of the same; and the rest (both children and servants equally) subjects. The same family if it grow by multiplication of children, either by generation or adoption; or of servants, either by generation, conquest, or voluntary submission, to be so great and numerous, as in probability it may protect itself, then is that family called a PATRIMONIAL KINGDOM, or monarchy by acquisition”.

Therefore, Pateman is right to argue that, in Hobbes’s vision of history, it was predominantly men who forced women into subjection and then went on to expand their families into kingdoms. Pateman is, however, wrong when she tries to integrate the “historical” with the “logical” set of arguments.

The question about the possibility of having a woman ruling a Hobbesian commonwealth touches upon a single aspect of Hobbes’s “historical” argument, namely his account of custom and its role in hereditary monarchies. For Hobbes (1651, 100), “where Testament, and expresse Words are wanting, other naturall signes of the Will are to be followed: whereof the one is Custome.” And the custom says that male heirs should be preferred to female. Hobbes (1889, 136) is clear about this as early as in the *Elements of Law*:

“Again, seeing every monarch is supposed to desire to continue the government in his successors, as long as he may; and that generally men are endued with greater parts of wisdom and courage, by which all monarchies are kept from dissolution, than women are; it is to be presumed, where no express will is extant to the contrary, he preferreth his male children before the female. Not but that women may govern, and have in divers ages and places governed wisely, but are not so apt thereto in general as men.”

In *De Cive* Hobbes (1978, 219) offers a similar explanation. The important difference here is that he underlines the role of the custom in the right of succession.

“Among children the Males carry the preheminance, in the beginning perhaps, because for the most part (although not alwayes) they are fitter for the administration of greater matters, but specially of wars; but afterwards, when it was grown a custome, because that custome was not contradicted; and therefore the will of the Father, unlesse some other custome or signe doe clearly repugne it, is to be interpreted in favour of them.”

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes (1651, 100-101) continues to emphasise that we can deduce the right to succession from custom and argues that a custom may also “advance the Female.”

“But where neither Custome, nor Testament hath preceded, [...] a Child of his own, Male, or Female, [is to] be preferred before any other; because men are presumed to be more enclined by nature, to advance their own children, than the children of other men; and of their own, rather a Male than a Female; because men, are naturally fitter than women, for actions of labour and danger.”

Finally, in his “historical” discussion in *The Dialogue*, Hobbes (2005, 140) notes in his discussion about the German hereditary law:

“The Heir was the Eldest Son; The issue of the Eldest Son failing, they descended to the younger Sons in their order, and for want of Sons, to the Daughters joyntly, as to one Heir, or to be divided amongst them, and so to descend to their Heirs in the same manner [. ...] The right of Government, which is called *Jus Regni* descended in the same manner, except only that after the Sons, it came to the eldest Daughter first, and her Heirs; the reason whereof was, that Government is indivisible. And this Law continues still in *England*.”

In the last three passages Hobbes clearly distinguishes between nature

and custom. The right of succession is, when there is no explicit sovereign's will, a matter of custom rather than of nature. And in all three cases the structure remains the same: 1) male heirs are preferred to female; 2) elder heirs are preferred to younger. Hobbes is also always careful to qualify his claims as the sovereign has the power to change laws, including the customs that have transformed into laws. History on its own does not simply tell us how we should behave or how we should conceive of civil authority. There is nothing prescriptive about Germany, to take Hobbes's (1651, 45) example, being “as all other Countries, in their beginnings, divided amongst an infinite number of little Lords, or Masters of Families, that continually had wars one with another”. This is just a description of the state of affairs that Hobbes considered as leading to the establishment of a commonwealth. It has a rather limited normative applicability, as what it describes is neither the only, nor the desired way for a small community to develop into a state. This argument does not tell us that we ought to form our commonwealths as the Germans did and its purpose is constrained to reminding us of the obligation to keep the “Covenants of the Vanquished to the Victor, or Child to the Parent” (Hobbes 1651, 111). Furthermore, although present in Hobbes's “historical” account, male authority has no special properties that would make it indispensable to a Hobbesian political system. If we, for example, imagine Germany as a matriarchy, the nature of political authority in Germany will remain the same. The sovereignty remains the same, regardless of it being exercised in patriarchal Germany or by the Amazons.

The fact that something “was grown a custome, because that custome was not contradicted” or that “men are *presumed to be* more enclined by nature, to advance [...] rather a Male than a Female [child]” (the emphasis by MS) does not entail a strong normative component. However, these statements do carry a certain weight. It is, as Slomp (1994, 441) argues, custom and not nature that ultimately determines whether the sovereign is going to be male or female. Hobbes is primarily interested in the stability of the social order and he is certainly more likely to endorse a well-established custom that favours male heirs than to contradict it for equality's sake. Hobbesian civil condition is, in contrast to its natural counterpart, the realm shaped by (artificial) inequality. How should this inequality be structured is of little

importance, as long as the sovereign serves the primary purpose of its office and protects the lives of its subjects. Apart from the equality of all under the sovereign, (Hobbes, 1651: 93) equality has no value in a Hobbesian commonwealth. Therefore, unless women are actually superior to men in governing a commonwealth, Hobbes has no reason to recommend the custom to be changed.

Here we see how the argument about natural or “logical” equality might actually work against a woman becoming a sovereign. Precisely because women may make equally good (and not better) monarchs as men, there is no need to advocate the change of the custom that favours male monarchs. In order for Hobbes to make a step from a description and towards a prescription, he needs to be convinced that what he is prescribing would be beneficial to the stability of the commonwealth. Such is, for example, the case with him advocating a monarchy. Although the other forms of government are also possible within the Hobbesian universe, the unity of the sovereign representative’s will is easiest to achieve in a monarchy:

“the Resolutions of a Monarch, are subject to no other Inconstancy, than that of Humane Nature; but in Assemblies, besides that of Nature, there ariseth an Inconstancy from the Number” and while “a Monarch cannot disagree with himselfe, out of envy, or interest; [...] an Assembly may; and that to such a height, as may produce a Civill Warre” (Hobbes 1651, 96).

There is, then, perfect compatibility between the unity as the crucial feature of a stable commonwealth and the psychological unity of a single person and that makes monarchy stand out from all the other ways of organising political authority. However, Hobbes cannot speak of such a link between the male or the female nature and the nature of a monarchy. And, as in his own account of the laws of succession, when a decision needs to be made and when there is no explicit reason to advocate one solution over another, Hobbes falls back to custom and generalisation. Therefore, even if Hobbes does grant that women can make good sovereigns and that there are no natural impediments to their rule, his “historical” line of argumentation effectively prevents them from having equal access to the throne.

CONCLUSION

Hobbes’s account of human nature presents all human beings, men and women alike, as roughly equal in their mental and physical capabilities. Therefore, there are no natural impediments that would render women unable to fulfil the role of the sovereign. And although Hobbes does indeed note that, historically, the states have developed from extended families dominated by their male heads, there were no historical reasons for him to believe that the rule of a male sovereign is the only possible (or at least desirable) form of authority. This becomes evident if we keep in mind that Hobbes himself was born during the forty-four years long reign of Elizabeth I. Moreover, Elizabeth I’s reign was not unprecedented even by Hobbes’s time, as Scotland was ruled some twenty years before his birth by Mary, Queen of Scots. Therefore, even if Hobbes did envisage the original forms of civil organisation as dominated by men, he could have never believed that this was the only historically possible way of conceptualising the political order.

Having said that, it is clear that, while Hobbes’s “logical” argument supports natural equality between men and women, his “historical” account tips the scale towards favouring a male monarch. Let us briefly sketch out what Hobbes has done here:

- 1) Hobbes’s argumentation takes two distinct routes and this duality is also present in his account of the state and sovereign authority.
- 2) Hobbes’s discussion branching into “logical” and “historical” arguments underlines the distinction between nature and custom.
- 3) This makes it possible for him to argue that men and women are roughly equal by nature and, at the same time, to acknowledge that they have been historically treated unequally.
- 4) Although a woman may make a good sovereign, she, because of the customary law of succession, has rather weak chances of becoming one.
- 5) Such inequality of chances does not trouble Hobbes since he is primarily interested in the sovereign’s ability to rule successfully and, apart from that, there is no external criterion that would prompt Hobbes to argue against the custom that favours male heirs. And equality could never be such motivator, precisely because it is natural equality that causes the horrors of the state of nature.

As far as the sovereign's office is concerned, Hobbes's arguments 1-3 make it equally suitable for men and women, but 4 and 5 do not make it as equally accessible. Why did Hobbes not take that additional step and argue in favour of the sovereign's office being equally accessible to men and women? When speculating about Hobbes's reasons behind such a reluctance we can be less or more charitable towards him. In a less charitable reading, Hobbes was more satisfied with customs of the time than he was enthusiastic about equality. Such a cynical Hobbes would, then, argue that women might make good sovereigns while being very aware that they are not likely to become, or even that they generally should not become sovereigns. Such a reading would match some of the more unsympathetic readings of the condemned man's liberty to resist the sovereign's attempt to punish him (Hobbes 1651, 111). Although he knows that overwhelming discrepancy between the sovereign's and the convict's power would make the convict's resistance futile, Hobbes still insists on following through the logic of his argument about self-preservation. Similarly, we might say that Hobbes is cynical about women as sovereigns. While he does grant them that possibility, by being content with customs that favour male heirs, Hobbes makes it very difficult to argue that a woman *should* indeed have the same chances of becoming a sovereign as a man has.

Nevertheless, instead of discussing what Hobbes intended to do or what he should have done, I believe that we should turn to what he *did* do. Here I would like to point at a different lesson we can learn from Hobbes regarding a female monarch's sovereignty. Hobbes's view can be particularly valuable primarily because it separates the conceptual from the contextual or historical aspect of this issue. It is, therefore, not the human nature, nor the nature of the social contract that determines the monarch's sex but the blend of particular historical circumstances: the right of succession, the distribution of political power, etc. *Contra* Robert Filmer's account, there is nothing divine, sacred nor metaphysical about male sovereignty in Hobbes's work. When it comes to one's ability to perform the role of the sovereign, sex is contingent and this is quite a powerful message coming from a 17th century political thinker.

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Između „logičkog” i „istorijskog” argumenta: da li Hobsov suveren može biti žena?

Marko SIMENDIĆ

Sažetak: Tekst razmatra mogućnost žene u ulozi suverena/suverenke u političkoj teoriji Tomasa Hobsa. Naročita pažnja posvećena je pitanjima da li, prema Hobsovom gledištu, 1) žena može da postane hobsovski suveren, i 2) da li bi ona bila dobar suveren. Iako je Hobsov odgovor na drugo pitanje pozitivan, njegovo odobravanje običaja kao sredstva za utvrđivanje naslednika trona, favorizuje muške nad ženskim naslednicima. Prema tome, ovo pitanje pokazuje tenziju između Hobsovog „logičkog” argumenta o prirodnoj jednakosti muškaraca i žena i takozvanog „istorijskog” argumenta o ulozi (diskriminišućeg) običaja.

Ključne reči: Hobs, suveren, žene, običaj, Pejtmen