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To What Extent was the Political Arena Gendered Masculine in Early Modern Europe?

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Abstract

This essay explores the political sphere in early modern Europe in order to determine the extent to which it was gendered masculine. Although the early modern period signified a new era of female kings, the political sphere still contained huge power asymmetries between the genders. This is evident in the environment created by the political thought of the time and legal barriers that women faced. These conditions led to manifestations of "gender style" and internalised misogyny which truly reflect the masculine nature of the political sphere. By shedding light on these intricacies, this essay aims to make clear that the political arena in which early modern female rulers functioned in was simply not made for them.

Introduction

Early modern Europe witnessed a large number of women rise to major positions of power. Across the continent, women gained political authority as queen regnant or regent by ways of birth and inheritance. However, these women were considered to be exceptions to the generally accepted rule of female political incompetence. With this in mind, this essay will argue that although women finally had some scope to exercise formal power

and influence in early modern Europe, the political arena[190] remained gendered masculine. For that reason, this essay will focus solely on women in official political roles. This essay shall begin by discussing the Aristotelian nature of early modern political thought and how it formed the bedrock on which the masculine political arena was built. The legal barriers in existence during this period in various European countries that served to, not only exclude women from power, but also severely limit the scope of their power, will also be examined. Finally, two phenomena that truly reflect the masculine nature of the political arena will be analysed: "gender style" and internalised misogyny.

Although women were permitted to occupy these official positions at the apex of the political structure, they were otherwise systematically excluded from the political fray. As Zemon Davis points out, the only job that the average woman was permitted to occupy within the urban administration was within a hospital.[191] Where local government was concerned, women were unable to become notaries or secretaries for the chancellery. They were never invited to sit on town councils and were rarely called to the consultative or voting assembly. In this way, the political arena was almost exclusively reserved for males, and this societal order was considered to be "natural". Many scholars therefore deem the exclusion of women from politics to be the key characteristic of early modern political thought. This meant that even with such an increase in legitimate female rulers, the political sphere still contained huge power asymmetries between the genders.[192] To that end, examples of women in official positions of authority in major European powers such as Mary I, Elizabeth I, Catherine de Medici,

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[190] Sphere of intense political activity.

[191] Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Women in Politics', in Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (eds.), *A History of Women in the West, III. Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, (London, 1992), p.169.

[192] *Ibid,* p.168.

Mary of Hungary, Christina of Sweden and Maria Theresa will be drawn upon throughout this essay.

Early Modern Political Thought

A distinct undercurrent of female exclusion is easily detectable in late medieval political thought. For example, Leonardo Bruni, a prominent humanist of the renaissance, argued against the education of women in the art of oratory. He believed that, "These are the domains of men: the difficulties and contests of the forum, just as wars and battles... a woman will leave the roughness of the forum entirely to men".[193] In this way, Bruni, along with many of his contemporaries, was of the belief that no matter how capable women thought they were, politics was simply not their domain. This undercurrent flowed into the early modern period, causing the exclusion of women from the political arena to become a largely indisputable fact that dominated European politics.

The continuous flow of this undercurrent can be explained by the intrinsic connection between gender and political power that Joan Scott observes to have been in existence.[194] Scott defines gender as being the primary way of signifying relations of power during this period as it was consistently referenced in relation to the way in which political power is conceived, legitimated and criticised.[195] Power was only meant to be wielded by males. If females attempted to do so, it was considered to be frightening, as

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[193] Leonardo Bruni, *De Stuuiis et Litteris*, (1424), Cit.in: Becker, Anna, 'Gender in The History of Early Modern Political Thought', *The Historical Journal*, 60, 4 (2017), p.846.

[194] Joan Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), Cit.in: Becker, 'Gender in…Early Modern Political Thought', p.844.

[195] *Ibid*, p.845.

it implied a complete subversion of "natural" gender roles.[196] This meant that any woman who attempted to wield power and influence during the early modern period was considered by the majority to threaten social order.

The emergence of this line of reason can be traced back to Aristotle's conception of the spheres that early modern political thought was based upon. The most important feature of Aristotelian political thought was that man is a political animal, thus making politics a natural human tendency.[197] Alongside this, Aristotle saw the public and private to be linked, so that in order to be a virtuous human being, one needed to be involved not only in politics, but also in household affairs. This linked both the household *and* politics to the common good. Although Aristotle only mentioned women in connection to the household, this does not mean that he conceived them to be completely excluded from the political realm.[198] Becker observes that in the writings of early modern Aristotelians, these spheres were not antagonistic to one another, but rather 'mutually dependant and conceptually interwoven'.[199]

Marriage was considered to be the embodiment of this dependant relationship. Aristotle theorised that women had the virtues of a man, but in a mode of subordination. In other words, women exhibited male virtues, but only in response to, rather than in an expression of authority.[200] This inferred that although the sexes were thought to be alike to some degree, the masculine

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[196] Sarah Duncan, *Mary I: Gender, Power and Ceremony in the Reign of England's First Queen*, (Basingstoke, 2012), p.11.

[197] Becker, 'Gender in…Early Modern Political Thought', p.852.

[198] Judith A. Swanson, *The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy*, (New York, 1992), p.44.

[199] *Ibid,* p.853.

[200] Constance Jordan, 'Woman's Rule in Sixteenth - Century British Political Thought', *Renaissance Quarterly*, p.40, 3 (1987), p.434.

would always be superior to the feminine "according to nature".[201] In this way, the power relationship of husband and wife was classed as being inherently political and statesman-like.[202]However, marriage was not the usual sort of political relationship whereby the role of ruler and ruled is interchanged.[203] Power remained permanently in the husband's hands because he was the superior. This stagnant gendered relationship between husband and wife formed the foundation for political power in the early modern period.

This Aristotelian conception of marriage and the household formed the ideology around which the domestic and political sphere of the early modern period revolved. This gave society order and genders their place within it, all according to "nature". Males were to be the rulers and women were to be ruled over. Because the spheres were interwoven, women did not have to wait to be included in the political as, by definition, the political already embraced the domestic. This meant that in general, women were queen consorts, mistresses or favourites and therefore only had the ability to influence political proceedings on an informal basis, at the will of the king. This caused the political arena to become inherently gendered masculine in the early modern period, as the very concepts it had been based upon since the late medieval period were patriarchal.

Attacks on Female Rule

It is evident from the reaction of prominent figures in early modern society that even when women became rulers and were involved in the political arena, it continued to be perceived as a

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[201] Donato Acciaiuoli, *In Aristotelis Libros Octo Politicorum Commentarii,* (Venice, 1566), Cit.in: Becker, 'Gender in…Early Modern Political Thought', p.859.

[202] Becker, 'Gender in…Early Modern Political Thought', p.858.

[203] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1259a39-b10, Cit.in: Swanson, *The Public and the Private*, p.53.

masculine realm. In 1553, Mary I the first Queen Regnant of England, ascended to the throne and many observers were horrified. This was a huge diversion from the accepted social order and gender norms that existed in England at the time. Although females were technically allowed to inherit the throne, English society had refused to accept it until this point. This is apparent in the succession crisis and subsequent civil war that occurred when Henry I's heir Matilda attempted to lay claim to the throne in 1135.[204] Furthermore, the precedent in England was that rulers were exclusively male, regardless of what the laws of the land might have said. For this reason, the very existence of Queen Mary I served to spark a huge debate surrounding gynecocracy which would span across the continent and continue for fifty years.[205]

John Knox, the infamous Scottish reformer, was arguably the main instigator of this gynecocracy debate. In his text *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, he makes one of the most aggressive arguments against female rule from this period. This text was intended to be a protest against the Catholic rule of Mary I. However, from analysing the content of the *Monstrous Regiment* it becomes clear that this was not Knox's only focus, as it quickly turns into an attack on the whole concept of female rule itself. For this reason, it is considered to be a critical text for understanding the arguments against female rule and therefore, the context in which women attempted to wield power in the early modern period.[206] As Jansen notes, Knox wrote with such outrage, it seemed almost as if no woman had ever ruled before.[207] Being a man of the Church, Knox did not use political theory to argue his point, but rather based the text on reason drawn from his

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[204] Duncan, *Mary I: Gender, Power and Ceremony*, p.11.

[205] Sharon L. Jansen, *Debating Women, Politics, and Power in Early Modern Europe*, (Basingstoke, 2008), p.7.

[206] *Ibid*, p.14.

[207] *Ibid*, p.2.

close reading of the Bible. From this reading, he formulated a three-pronged argument. Firstly, he used natural law to conclude that gynecocracy was "repugnant to Nature".[208] Secondly, he employed divine law to show that God had not intended for women to rule.[209] Finally, he simply argued that gynecocracy was the subversion of good order, equity and justice.[210]

The majority of the argument put forward in the *Monstrous Regiment* focused on divine law. Knox saw a spirit of "mercy, truth, justice and humility" in Deborah and Huldah, the "Godly matrons" of the Old Testament.[211] He felt that this portrayal of women was completely at odds with the queens of his lifetime. In this way, he compared queens like Mary I to Jezebel, a queen who was referred to as being the most dangerous seductress in the Bible. Much like many arguments against women at this time, Knox cited the story of the Fall as set out in Genesis III. In short, God punished Eve for bringing sin into the world by cursing women with the pain of childbirth and men's dominion over them. From this story, Knox reasoned that that God's image was reflected in human beings in two ways: the superior male image and the inferior female image.[212] It is clear that Knox drew influence from Aristotle when he then claimed that women would never be good governors because Eve showed that evil naturally lurks within

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[208] John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, (London, 1558), p.v.

[209] *Ibid.*

[210] *Ibid.*

[211] Jansen, *Debating Women, Politics, and Power, p.*20.

[212] Knox, *Monstrous Regiment of Women*, p.25, Cit.in: Jordan, 'Woman's Rule in Sixteenth - Century British Political Thought', p.434.

women.[213] He then concluded that if a woman stepped out of her subordinate role, it was an offence to God.

Knox considered natural law to be a reflection of God's divine moral law.[214] For this reason, it almost becomes a continuation of divine law against female power in the text. According to natural law, women were also subordinate to men. To illustrate this, Knox channelled modern Aristotelian thought. He began by stating that "woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him".[215] He referred to the natural condition of women as being frail, foolish, cruel and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment. By comparing them to the blind, the weak and the mad in this vein, Knox went on to imply that women *require* the aid and guidance of men to survive.[216] Referencing Aristotle once more, Knox stated that in contrast to women, men were "illuminated only by the light of nature" to govern over women.[217]

With his third point Knox was not necessarily adding anything new to his argument, but rather reaching a "logical" conclusion from the points he had already made. For Knox, justice was when God gives everyone their own rights.[218] By this logic, women's dominion over men was unjust due to the fact that God had not granted women the right to rule. Considering this alongside the fact that God gave such a clear indication of his disapproval of

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[213] *Ibid,* p.434.

[214] Jansen, *Debating Women, Politics, and Power*, p.16.

[215] *Ibid.*

[216] Jordan, 'Woman's Rule in Sixteenth - Century British Political Thought', p.432.

[217] Knox, *Monstrous Regiment of Women*, p.v.

[218] Jansen, *Debating Women, Politics, and Power*, p.19.

gynecocracy, Knox seems perplexed as to why female rulers had not already been removed by God himself.

It is important to acknowledge the fact that Knox's beliefs were not unusual. The validity of female rule was a question that dominated literature during the early modern period. Before Knox even wrote the *Monstrous Regiment*, Thomas Becon had already drawn a parallel between Mary I and Jezebel, and John Ponet had described her succession as a violation of moral law.[219]Sir David Lyndsay echoed Knox by also grounding his argument in the Christian tradition but went even further in his condemnation of female rule.[220] The Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives argued that women did not have the energy, intelligence or discretion to rise to political power.[221] All of these men focused on women's ability to rule, rather than their eligibility. In this way, they show that Knox was not by any means abnormally misogynist in the context of the early modern period. Moreover, they illustrate the deeply ingrained masculine gendering of the political arena.

Regents like Catherine de Medici of France also experienced similar attacks on their legitimacy. For instance, in 1576 *Le Discours Merveilleux de la vie, Actions et Déportements de Cathérine de Médicis, Royne-Mére*[222] was published anonymously. The contents of this text combined fact with fiction to paint Catherine in a bad light. The main crux of the treatise was that Catherine was completely evil and would do anything to retain her power. It accused her of a myriad of crimes such as orchestrating the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre and murdering everyone who

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[219] Maria Zina Gonçalves de Abreu, 'John Knox: Gynaecocracy, 'The Monstrous Empire of Women'', *Reformation and Renaissance Review*, 5, 2 (2003), p.171.

[220] *Ibid,* p.170.

[221] *Ibid.*

[222] *The Wonderful Life, Actions and Deportations of Catherine de Medici, Royne-Mere.*

she considered to pose a threat to her power.[223] It even went so far as to infer that Catherine had corrupted her sons to live lives of debauchery so that she could usurp their power for herself.[224] This text was hugely successful in France, as many considered the French monarchy under Catherine to be an evil regime infected with foreigners.

Such constant scrutiny caused Catherine to sponsor literature such as David Chamber's *Discours de la Legitime Succession des Femmes*[225] on the defence of female rule. As Monter remarks, this discourse was high quality political propaganda.[226] Published in 1579, Chambers text put forward an idea that much of the literature surrounding early modern politics also argued; that the objection to women's rule on the basis of incapability came from a place of fear. He argued that it seemed that men felt that were they to renounce political authority, they would lose their handle on other subtler forms of subordination.[227] Contemporary historians tend to concur with this theory, with Smith stating that there was a deep-seated fear about what female rule meant for men's role in society.[228] Mirroring John Calvin, Knox feared emasculation and argued that men became effeminate under women. Similarly, Christopher Goodman despairingly wrote that males had become

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[223] Leonie Frieda, *Catherine de Medici*, (Phoenix, 2005), p.372.

[224] *Ibid.*

[225] *Discourse on the Legitimate Succession of Women.*

[226] William Monter, *The Rise of Female Kings in Europe, 1300-1800*, (New Haven, 2012), p.96.

[227] Jordan, 'Woman's Rule in Sixteenth - Century British Political Thought', p.449.

[228] Victoria Smith, '"For ye, Young Men, Show a Womanish Soul, Yon Maiden a Man's": Perspectives on Female Monarchy in Elizabeth's First Decade', in Jamie Daybell and Svante Norrhem (eds.), *Gender and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe*, (New York, 2017), p.143.

"bondemen" in their acceptance of female rule.[229] It should be noted that this fear of emasculation was common and provided a strong basis for male resistance to women in power, thus ensuring the gender of the political arena remained masculine.

Legal Barriers

Another salient issue that Chambers touched upon within his discourse was that of the legal barriers that women faced in the political arena. Women faced legal barriers that not only prevented them from gaining power, but also limited the scope of their power when they finally attained it. In this way, the law was a major contributor to the maintenance of the masculine nature of the political arena. Chambers focused on France as its laws had a huge impact on the political power that women could acquire. Most monarchies in Europe followed a common rule of thumb when it came to succession to the crown, in that they practiced male preference and only recognised female rule when it was absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, France completely excluded women from realm and rule throughout the whole early modern period. This was provided for by the infamous Salic Law, which originated in the 1400s when the ancient Carolingian Salic Ordinances were resurrected.[230]

The problem with Salic Law was that the ancient text it was based upon did not actually contain any mention of the exclusion of women from power. By the mid-1500s, the public had discovered that the Salic Law had been a forgery. This revelation did not deter the French however and the custom remained in force. Jurists and political scholars quickly legitimised the custom by echoing Aristotle and asserting that it upheld the "natural" right of men. To this end, Claude le Prestre[231] justified the custom when he

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[229] *Ibid,* p.144.

[230] Sarah Hanley, 'Configuring the Authority of Queens in the French Monarchy, 1600s-1840s', Historical Reflections, 32, 2 (2006), p.453.

[231] Member of *Parlement* in Paris.

stated that it abided by "the first Law of Nature" which demanded that the "natural" (royal sons created by Kings) succeed to the crown, not "the foreigners" (women).[232] The fact that Salic Law continued to be a key characteristic of French politics even when it was proven false reflects the real belief within early modern society that the "natural" political order was masculine. Men were considered to be much better suited to political life than women in every conceivable way. They were rational French natives who would never be distracted by pregnancy. In this way, Salic Law ensured that the political arena in France was gendered masculine by systematically excluding women from inheritance.

In saying this however, women were increasingly given the role of regent in France during this period. Custom and law reserved advisory authority for male relatives until François I developed a justification for female regency: maternal devotion.[233] Up until this point, male relatives had largely disgraced the regency, while women had not been given the chance to make any such mistakes. Hence, the change was welcomed. François I appointed his mother, Louise of Savoy, as the King's Representative during his absence in Italy in 1515 and Spain from 1523 to 1524.[234]Letters from 1515 show that François chose her due to her strong maternal instincts and capacity to protect him at all costs. Nevertheless, even with this vote of confidence from the king, Louise still faced many obstacles because of her gender. The *parlement* repeatedly challenged her position, arguing that she was only appointed due to a severe lack of other candidates.[235] Catherine de Medici faced similar opposition when she was

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[232] Hanley, 'Configuring the Authority of Queens', p.457.

[233] Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France*, (London, 2004), p.20.

[234] *Ibid.*

[235] *Ibid, p.21.*

appointed as regent in 1552. For example, the regency ceremony she was given emphasised her secondary status.[236]

Further afield in the Habsburg Netherlands, female regents also faced legal barriers. Mary of Hungary was regent there in the period from 1531 to 1555. Her letter of resignation illustrates the ways in which the law inhibited her from fulfilling her role as regent. Mary stated, "Even if I possessed all the aptitudes necessary to govern well...experience has taught me that a woman is not suited to this purpose, neither in peacetime nor even less in times of war".[237] As a woman, she was forced to leave the "conduct of war to others".[238] She explained that such a limitation on her power had become extremely frustrating because it meant that she could never claim credit for her own army's success but became a convenient scapegoat whenever things went wrong. Monter points out that this was an extremely common limitation of female regency, but Mary was the only one to ever explicitly define it as being a problem during this period.[239] [50] This serves to illustrate the extent to which laws ensured that the political arena was gendered masculine, even when women were included.

Laws were also overturned in some states to *allow* women to inherit the throne. This occurred, extremely controversially, in the Holy Roman Empire. In 1713, Emperor Charles VI put forward the Pragmatic Sanction. This extended the principle of inheritance to include the possibility of a female Habsburg succession so as to ensure the succession of his daughter, Maria Theresa, upon his

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[236] *Ibid.*

[237] Mary of Hungary, *Letter from Mary of Hungary to her Brother Charles V*, (Brussels, 1555), trans in: Jane de Longh, *Mary of Hungary, Second Regent of the Netherlands*, (London, 1958), p.264.

[238] *Ibid.*

[239] *Ibid.*

death.[240] The sanction was finally passed by the Diet of Prague in 1723. Unfortunately, this did not stop the War of the Austrian Succession from occurring in 1740. The conflict lasted for eight years and was fought over the issue of female succession. This war is a clear indication that even in the late early modern period, citizens still refused to allow a female to rule over them. The fact that her succession stirred such incredible aggression and hostility within the people of the Holy Roman Empire reflects the deeply ingrained patriarchal political consciousness of the early modern period. In this way, although Maria Theresa emerged the victor and was crowned queen of Hungary and Bohemia, the political arena was still gendered masculine.

"Gender Style"

It is clear that the large majority of early modern society deemed a queen to be completely unacceptable. In fact, many political theorists felt it actually called into question the legitimacy of the monarchy itself.[241] This provoked an incalculable amount of criticism. While kings also suffered their fair share of criticism, their failings were never blamed upon their gender. With this in mind, female rulers chose to curate, what Zemon Davis calls, a "gender style" for themselves so as to counteract such criticism.[242] Many differing "gender styles" can be observed throughout the early modern period. Like many early modern kings, Mary I chose to invoke the "two bodies" theory. She utilised it in such a way that the mysterious qualities of the "body politic" could overcome the imperfections of the female "body natural" which she possessed. As Weil states, this notion mystically fused together, her mortal body and the immortal body of the "king-who-never-dies", thus

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[240] Monter, *The Rise of Female Kings,* p.161.

[241] Carole Levin, 'Power, Politics, and Sexuality: Images of Elizabeth I', in Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert and Maryanne C. Horowitz, *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, (Arizona, 1987), p.96.

[242] Zemon Davis, 'Women in Politics', p.170

ensuring that the ills to which all mortal flesh were subject (including femaleness) did not diminish the aura of divine authority attached to the ruler's person.[243]

Elizabeth I also took on a distinct "gender style" during her reign. While Mary I endeavoured to compensate for her feminine failings in ways that she hoped would make her indistinguishable from other kings, her sister went out of her way to stand out. As the harbinger of Reformed religion to England, she made a conscious effort to replace the Virgin Mary in her subject's minds. To this end, she cultivated an image of herself as the "virgin queen". She was both a virgin and mother to the nation.[244] This "gender style" served a myriad of practical purposes. Elizabeth's self-presentation was calculated so that she distinguished herself from other women to emphasise her exceptionality as a ruler and therefore preserve her power.

More than this however, this "gender style" meant that Elizabeth could claim that she was a mother to her nation, thus providing a reasonable excuse to remain unmarried for the duration of her reign. This may have been because she simply did not wish to be married but was more likely due to the loss of power she knew she would endure if she were to marry. Perhaps Elizabeth had learned from her sister's experience with Phillip of Spain that as a woman, she should not risk fracturing her sovereignty by marrying.

Unfortunately, Elizabeth's "gender style" did not provoke loyalty from all of her subjects. Her subjects were extremely anxious for her to produce a male heir so that society could revert back its natural patriarchal order. For this reason, some reacted with hostility and became focused on her sexuality rather than her abilities and achievements. As Levin notes, speculation

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[243] Rachel Weil, *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England 1680-1714,* (Manchester, 1999), 166, Cit.in: Schulte, *The Body of the Queen,* p.2.

[244] Levin, 'Power, Politics, and Sexuality: Images of Elizabeth I', p.95.

surrounding Elizabeth's sexuality gave her subjects an outlet through which they could voice the insecurities they had about having a female ruler.[245] Her subjects, members of the court and even foreign ambassadors gossiped about her love affairs and speculated about the number of illegitimate children she had. This implication that the queen was unchaste undermined her authority and caused the common view that she was an unfit monarch. Members of her court actually asserted that if these rumours were true, they should simply disqualify the queen from power.[246] This is interesting given that it was acceptable for kings to have a mistress during this period. It is clear that unlike that of their male counterparts, female rulers had to choose a "gender style" in order to portray themselves as the perfect hybrid of masculine and feminine qualities. Even when women carefully crafted these images of themselves however, they always seemed to backfire much like Elizabeth's, thus illustrating the extent to which the political arena continued to be gendered masculine, even when women were in power themselves.

Internalised Misogyny

The idea that the political arena should be a place exclusively reserved for men was not just a male belief. Many women believed that nature had made them incapable of carrying out the task of ruling a state. This had the negative effect of discouraging them from fighting for such roles. Likewise, when they were forced into positions of power, their own self-doubt often undermined their authority and, in many cases, forced them to give it up. This was arguably true of Mary of Hungary. A severe lack of self-confidence and submission emulates from the words of her letter of resignation. As such, she lamented that "a woman is never so much

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[245] *Ibid,* p.101.

[246] *Ibid.*

respected and feared as a man, whatever her position".[247] This could have been due to the conception of a woman's place in society at this time. Perhaps this, along with the limitations put on her power, made Mary feel as if her position was completely unnatural, thus causing her to resign.

Christina of Sweden articulated this idea particularly well as she became the only dogmatically misogynist female monarch. During her reign Sweden rose to the top of its international prestige. Her personal rule saw Sweden gain large swathes of territory, the end of a war with the Holy Roman Empire and the arrival of various internationally renowned European scholars.[248] However, Christina consistently displayed nothing but contempt for the idea that women were intelligent beings.[249] She thought that women's deficiencies *and* good qualities made them unfit to rule.[250] When she abdicated in 1654, her beliefs caused her to successfully persuade the *Riksdag*[251] to install a law similar to Salic Law.[252]

Interestingly, the Swedish government reversed this law not long after, but Christina continued to oppose female rule privately. In her autobiography she wrote that women should never govern, and that everything she had seen of women who ruled or "pretended to rule" made them seem ridiculous in one way or

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[247] Mary of Hungary, *Letter from Mary of Hungary to her Brother Charles V*, (Brussels, 1555), trans in: de Longh, *Mary of Hungary,* p.264.

[248] Monter*, The Rise of Female Kings,* p.146.

[249] Sven Stolpe, *Christina of Sweden*, (London, 1966), p.49.

[250] *Ibid.*

[251] Sweden's Diet.

[252] Monter, *The Rise of Female Kings,* p.146.

another.[253] Furthermore, Christina supported Salic Law and deemed it to be completely just. It is clear that Christina was reacting to the violation of what she, and Aristotle, perceived as the correct (and "natural") social order. For this reason, what Christina expounded throughout her life can be categorised as internalised misogyny. Her story therefore indicates the sheer extent to which the political arena was gendered masculine.

Conclusion

By the close of the early modern period, prominent European political theorists were still vehemently opposed to female inclusion. In the mid 1700s Jean-Jacques Rousseau was still expounding the Aristotelian conception of a traditionally sex-roled society[254] and Immanuel Kant continued this into the 1800s. Yet, the early modern period witnessed an explosion in female rulers across Europe and it is undeniable that these women were relatively successful in their positions. Women gradually made the transition from politically subordinate queen consort to queen regnant who, like Elizabeth I, oftentimes governed alone. Even in countries like France, where female succession was prohibited, women such as Catherine de Medici gradually enabled themselves to act as regent and from there, began to break down the various limitations put on their power. This new era of female kings meant that, on a surface level it appeared that the early modern political arena was not gendered at all. But the continuous flow of the undercurrent of female exclusion throughout this period meant that the political arena remained gendered masculine.

To conclude, this essay has sought to highlight the intricacies of early modern politics in order to make clear the fact that the political arena in which these female rulers functioned was not made for them. The political thought that circulated during this

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[253] *Ibid*, p.150.

[254] Penny A. Weiss, 'Rousseau, Antifeminism, and Woman's Nature', *Political Theory,* 15, (1987), p.81.

period and the legal barriers that women faced explain this to some extent. This essay has sought to clarify this further by dealing with two other key aspects of early modern female rule, "gender style" and internalised misogyny.

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