



Symposium: Article

Stating Family Values and Women's Rights: Familialism and Feminism Within the French Republic

Anne Revillard

ISP Cachan, Ecole Normale Supérieure, 61 avenue du président Wilson, 94235, Cachan, Cedex, France.

E-mail: anne.revillard@gapp.ens-cachan.fr

Owing to demographic, economic and social reasons, the family has been a key element in the building of the French Republic. Familialism, here defined as the defense of the family as an institution, is therefore strongly institutionalized within the state. Even as it implied changing views on women's labor-force participation over the years, this ideology has been an important source of gender-bias in French law and public policy. For this reason, it is likely to have influenced the women's policy agencies (WPAs) that were created, starting in the 1960s, with the specific aim of promoting women's rights and interests. In this paper, I explore the paradoxical assumption, according to which women's policy, while being at odds with familialism, was also influenced by it, and I offer an explanation for this influence, by means of an analysis of the discursive and political opportunities faced by WPAs.

French Politics (2007) 5, 210–228. doi:10.1057/palgrave.fp.8200124

Keywords: state feminism; women's policy agencies; France; family policy; gender; familialism

Introduction

While the French republican ideal is supposed to be grounded on individual, gender-neutral citizens, the legal framework and public policies around which the French Republic^{1,2} defined itself targeted not only individuals, but also families. Because of demographic, economic and social reasons, the family has been a key element in the building of the French Republic. This translated into a bifurcated political model in which ideals of equality and freedom were promoted in the public sphere, but familialism, an ideology grounded on the defense of the family as an institution, implying male dominance and gender differentiation (Commaille, 1993), was accepted as a ruling principle for the private sphere. Hence, familialism is a key vehicle of gender-bias in French law and public policy. Beyond its focus on family issues, familialism conveys a



conservative view of the whole social order, with the family as its basis, headed by a male breadwinner. Feminist movements³ have challenged this view of the social order since the beginning of the 20th century. Since the 1960s, this view has faced another type of challenge, one coming from within the state, with the development of women's policy agencies (WPAs), that is, governmental bodies whose specific goal is promoting women's rights and interests. This resulted in a conflict of values between feminism and familialism within the state apparatus, revealing the state as a site of struggle rather than as a monolithic entity (Mc Bride Stetson and Mazur, 1995, 6; Migdal, 2001, 3–22). Drawing on issue-framing literature (Ferree *et al.*, 2002; Muller, 2004, 2005), I demonstrate herein how women's policy, as defined by these agencies, is supported by a particular definition of the 'women's issue', marked by a strong focus on equal employment. I offer an explanation for this framing of the women's issue in terms of discursive and political opportunities (Kitschelt, 1986; McAdam *et al.*, 1996; Ferree *et al.*, 2002), linking it to the broader Republican–familialist context. My claim is that the weight of familialism in the French political context has influenced the definition of the women's issue by WPAs. Indeed, the conflict in values between familialism and feminism has resulted, in part, in a differentiation according to policy domains. The weight of familialism in family law and family policy, closing opportunities for feminist reforms in these policy domains, has pushed WPAs to define women's rights on different grounds, notably around matters pertaining to the public sphere, such as equal employment. However, over the course of time, one can draw distinctions among WPAs' attitudes toward familialism and family issues. While these varied strongly in the 1980s according to the party in power, they tend to converge, in the 1990s and 2000s, in a form of acknowledgment of family issues by means of work–family reconciliation. After describing the historical roots of state familialism, I analyze how French WPAs generally defined their policy in conflict with the familialist tradition, and I then draw a more nuanced picture of their relation to familialism.

Familialism in the Building of the French Republic

While the republican ideal is grounded on universal, gender-neutral, individualistic values, familialism — implying a more collective view, gender-differentiation, and male dominance — has played an important role in the building of the French Republic as well (Commaille and Martin, 1998; Verjus, 2002; Lenoir, 2003). There were two important stages in the integration of familialism within the Republican model: the definition of family law by French revolutionaries, and the first developments of a social policy targeting families during the Third Republic.



What is familialism?

Jacques Commaille defines familialism as the defense of the family as an institution and as implying a belief in the primacy of family affiliation over individual dynamics (Commaille, 1993). It generally concurs with a value put on the gendered division of labor and on women's subordination within the family. In France, this ideology has religious roots: initially embedded in the old-regime political use of the family metaphor, it was later promoted in the 19th century by upper-class notables linked with the Catholic Church (Verjus, 2002; Lenoir, 2003). Given the emphasis on secularism in the French Republican model, what does the latter have to do with familialism? In fact, the Church–state rivalry, underlain with a competition for social control, had a strong influence on the way family issues initially were dealt with by the French Republic, as reflected by family law and family policy.

The republican definition of family law

In 1804, the Civil Code defined the legal framing of the family following a strict model of gendered division of labor, putting married women under the authority of their husbands (Dekeuwer-Défossez, 2003). Therefore, the legal principles ruling the private sphere departed those valued by Republicans in the public sphere: a logic grounded on a family unit as opposed to individuals, subordination instead of equality, gender-differentiation as opposed to gender-neutrality.⁴ This dichotomist legal order, with different principles guiding the public and the private spheres, resulted from the political debates and law-making process following the Revolution. Indeed, Anne Verjus shows how members of the Convention decided to draw a distinction between the domestic and the political sphere, in order to distinguish themselves from the old-regime, conservative, assimilation between the family and the political order — with the family used as a political category and a symbol of the Monarchy (Verjus, 2002, 45–52). Therefore, even though the main features of familialism may seem to contradict republican ideals, the very choice of separating the legal framing of the private sphere — seen as natural and not political — from that of the public sphere, departs from the old-regime assimilation of the political order and the family, and in that sense is a key assertion of republicanism.

Family policy

Familialism later developed in social policy during the Third Republic (Accampo *et al.*, 1995), with the enactment of 'protective' labor laws at the turn of the 20th century and the generalization of family allowances in the 1930s. Here again, the rivalry for social control between the Church and



the state provided a strong impetus for the development of what Rémi Lenoir labels 'state familialism', a form of defending family interests that he distinguishes from 'Church familialism', in the sense that it is based on science rather than on religious values and puts forward family protection by means of different types of social provisions through a 'bureaucratic management' of families.⁵ This form of state intervention in family life, even though it distinguished itself, ideologically, from Church familialism, was still guided by a familialist ideology, in the sense that it promoted the family as an institution and targeted 'the family' as a unit, as opposed to individuals.

This form of state intervention aimed at families has implied changing views on women's labor-force participation throughout the 20th century (Revillard, 2006). While the 'protective' labor laws enacted at the turn of the century took the employment of working-class mothers for granted (Jenson, 1986), the family policy that gradually emerged as a distinct public-policy domain between the 1930s and 1960s, with its peak in the aftermath of WWII, defined itself on the basis of promoting a male-breadwinner model, with tax incentives and allowances that intended to maintain women as care providers at home and encouraged families of at least three children (Commaille and Martin, 1998; Martin, 1998). This model was also the basis of the social-security system that was established in 1945, which created a broad system of derived entitlement (Commaille *et al.*, 2002, 72).

Since the mid-1960s, familialist discourse and family policy have adapted to the increase in women's labor-force participation, accepting it as long as it was secondary to the fulfillment of family duties. This is reflected in the promotion of part-time employment and paid parental leaves (such as the *Allocation parentale d'éducation* (APE), created in 1985) (Jenson and Sineau, 2001). Beyond these changing views in terms of acceptance of women's labor-force participation, familialism has remained a consistent ideology in that it promotes the family as an institution at the basis of social organization and insists on women's family duties.

The defense of family interests is strongly institutionalized, within and without the state apparatus, with the Department of Justice in charge of family law, the *Caisse nationale des allocations familiales* (CNAF) in charge of family allowances and the powerful *Union nationale des associations familiales* (UNAF), which represents family associations at the national level (Minonzio and Vallat, 2006; Heinen, 2004, 291–292). Not only is the family movement much stronger than the feminist movement, but with the UNAF it also has a channel of representation within the state that has no equivalent on the side of the feminist movement. In the family-policy subsystem, the UNAF has a legal monopoly of representation, which entails a mobilization of bias and closes all opportunities of access for other social actors, such as the feminist movement



(Schattschneider, 1960; Bachrach and Baratz, 1970; Kitschelt, 1986; Mazur and McBride, 2006, 224–227).⁶

Bringing Feminism Within the Republican Model

Since the 1960s, governmental bodies have been created in France with the specific aim of improving women's 'condition' or women's 'rights', under the responsibility of ministers or secretaries of state especially appointed for this task. While their policy tends to put them at odds with state familialism, the way that they have framed the 'women's issue' can be explained also by their complex relationship with familialism, as well as by the broader Republican context.

The creation and development of WPAs

Amy Mazur and Dorothy McBride Stetson nominally define WPAs as 'any structure that meets both of the following criteria: (1) an agency/governmental body formally established by government statute or decree; and (2) an agency/governmental body formally charged with furthering women's status and rights and promoting sex-based equality' (Mazur and McBride, 2006, 215–216).

The impulse for the creation of the first WPA in France (1965), an advisory committee on women's labor called the *Comité du travail féminin* (CTF), came from right-wing senator and women's rights advocate Marcelle Devaud who, following a visit to the United States Women's bureau in 1952, convinced a group of women's organizations that she had cofounded, the *Comité international de liaison des associations féminines* (CILAF), to lobby in favor of the creation of a similar structure in France (Revillard, 2007).⁷ The CTF was the only WPA until 1974, when the newly elected president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, appointed Françoise Giroud Secretary of state for women's condition (*Secrétaire d'Etat à la condition féminine*). Although it did not result from direct pressure from women's groups, this appointment took place within a context marked by the development of the second-wave feminist movement, and the preparation of the UN's International Women's Year (1975). Other WPAs followed, as summed up in the table below.⁸

As Table 1 shows, WPAs have had various ranks within governments: delegations, secretaries of state, delegate ministers. They have had few means of functioning. Until the Roudy Ministry of Woman's Rights (1981–1986), there were almost no funds available, besides the operating budget, and no administration (the minister or secretary of state in charge had only a cabinet). Starting in 1981, a limited budget was available, and a small administrative staff was formed. The latter developed into the bureau currently known as the

Table 1 Women's policy agency (executive branch) in France, 1974–2007

<i>Time range</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Name (area of concern)</i>	<i>Head of the department</i>	<i>Person in-charge</i>
1974–1976	Secretary of State	Women's condition	Prime Minister	Françoise Giroud
1976–1978	Delegation	Women's condition	Prime Minister	Nicole Pasquier Until January 1978, then Jacqueline Nonon
1978–1981	Secretary of State	Women's employment	Labor	Nicole Pasquier
1978–1980	Delegate Minister	Women's condition	Prime Minister	Monique Pelletier
1980–1981	Delegate Minister	Family and Women's condition	Prime Minister	Monique Pelletier
1981–1985	Delegate Minister	Woman's rights	Prime Minister	Yvette Roudy
1985–1986	Minister	Woman's rights	(no head of the department)	Yvette Roudy
1986–1988	Delegation	Women's condition	Prime Minister	Hélène Gisserot
1988–1991	Secretary of State	Women's rights	Prime Minister	Michèle André
1991–1992	Secretary of State	Women's rights and daily life	Labor	Véronique Neiertz
1992–1993	Secretary of State	Women's rights and consumption	Economy and Finance	Véronique Neiertz
1993–1995	Minister	Women's rights are part of the minister's assignments, but don't appear in the name of the minister	Social affairs, health and city affairs	Simone Veil
1995	Minister	Women's rights are part of the minister's assignments, but don't appear in the name of the minister	Intergenerational solidarity	Colette Codaccioni
1995–1997	Delegate Minister	Women's rights are part of the minister's assignments, but don't appear in the name of the minister	Employment	Anne-Marie Couderc
1997–1998	Delegation	Women's rights	Prime Minister	Geneviève Fraisse
1998–2002	Secretary of State	Women's rights and job training	Employment and solidarity	Nicole Péry
2002–2005	Delegate Minister	Parity and equal employment	Social affairs, labor and solidarity	Nicole Ameline
2005–2007	Delegate Minister	Social cohesion and parity	Employment, social cohesion and housing	Catherine Vautrin





Service des Droits des Femmes et de l'Égalité (Women's Rights and Equality Bureau). Besides this central administration, there is also an important local administration for women's rights, with regional and departmental delegates. Given the few means available to them, and given that gender issues cut across traditional public-policy domains, WPAs have devoted themselves mainly to transforming the policies conducted by other departments.

Women's policy, at odds with familialism... but influenced by it?

While cutting across policy domains, women's policy, as defined by these agencies, still has a consistency of its own. It is based on a particular definition of the 'women's issue', that is to say a definition of what is at stake and what needs to be transformed in women's lives (Gusfield, 1981; Rochefort and Cobb, 1994). This definition of the women's issue — what Pierre Muller calls the policy 'referential' (*référentiel*) — implies values, norms and 'algorithms', that is, causal inferences that give meaning to the observed situation and point to particular solutions (Muller, 2004). In other terms, the referential implies a selection, within women's lives, of particular elements that are conceived as crucial to the transformation of their status, and therefore represent key targets of intervention. For example, the 'algorithm' can be 'once women have control over their fertility, they will be able to take part in society on an equal footing with men'. According to such an algorithm, reproductive rights will be at the head of the agenda, implying interventions in the fields of birth control and abortion. This definition of women's issue is, to some extent, explicit in WPAs' discourse ('femocrats'⁹ occasionally assert their goals and their definition of the women's issue in speeches, interviews and reports). But their publication of blueprint documents provides us with a useful grasp of their underlying conception of the women's issue (Mazur, 2002, 47–62). By blueprint documents, I refer to the reports and press releases in which WPAs define their goals and general priorities of action, as opposed to their publications devoted to specific issues, such as the launching of a birth-control information campaign, or a press release following the enactment of an equal pay law. These blueprint documents are of particular interest in view of our present concern, because of their overarching nature, and in so far as they establish a hierarchy between the different domains that are the focus of WPAs' interventions. This definition of priorities can be explicit, or it can be deduced from clues such as the order in which the different topics are introduced in the report, the length of the discourse and the number of recommendations formulated under each topic. It is, therefore, primarily this type of document that I will use in order to analyze WPAs' definition of the women's issue (see Table 2). This will be complemented by other types of archival sources¹⁰



Table 2 The main blueprint documents produced by WPAs

GIROUD, FRANÇOISE. (1976). *Projet pour les femmes: 1976–1981*. Secrétariat d'Etat à la condition féminine, Paris.

MINISTÈRE DES DROITS DE LA FEMME. (1982). *Les Femmes en France dans une société d'inégalités*, Paris: La Documentation Française.

GISSEROT, HÉLÈNE. (1988). *Condition féminine (politique d'Hélène Gisserot, janvier 1988)*.

ANDRÉ, MICHÈLE. (1988). *Programme d'action du gouvernement en faveur des femmes (jeudi 27 octobre 1988)*.

NEIERTZ, VÉRONIQUE. (1992). '8 mars 1992: neuf mesures pour les femmes'. *Droits des femmes*, n. 32, p. 1–7.

CODACCIONI, COLETTE. (1995). *Conférence de presse du jeudi 1er juin 1995 (création du ministère de la solidarité entre les générations)*.

COUDERC, ANNE-MARIE. (1996). 'Communication au conseil des ministres du 6 mars 1996.'

PÉRY, NICOLE. (1999). *Une volonté gouvernementale — Une politique active de l'égalité femmes/hommes, 25 actions (présentée en Conseil des ministres)*.

SECRETARIAT D'ETAT AUX DROITS DES FEMMES ET À LA FORMATION PROFESSIONNELLE et MINISTÈRE DE L'EMPLOI ET DE LA SOLIDARITÉ. (2000). *L'égalité en marche*. Paris.

PÉRY, NICOLE. (2002). *Actions en faveur de l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes — Communication en Conseil des ministres de Madame Nicole Péry le 6 mars 2002*.

MINISTÈRE DÉLÉGUÉ À LA PARITÉ ET À L'ÉGALITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE. (2004). *La charte de l'égalité*.

Source: Archives of the *Service des droits des femmes et de l'égalité's* documentation centre, Paris.

(speeches, interviews, press releases, budget and human resources data), as well as by interviews with people formerly or currently working in WPAs.¹¹

My focus on the cognitive dimension of women's policy does not imply that 'ideas' determine public policymaking, as opposed to interests or institutions (Palier and Surel, 2005). Rather, I am using the referential as a 'clue', a handle with which to grasp the sense of women's policy (Muller, 2005). In compliance with this perspective, I will not focus solely on discourse, but also on more concrete elements, among them, budget allocation and the way in which administrative bureaus are organized, since these also may reveal priorities of action and underlying conceptions of what is at stake in women's lives according to WPAs.



Based on the blueprint documents produced by WPAs, it initially appears that their definition of the women's issue has taken the form of inventories of topics: the women's issue has been divided into sub-questions such as equal employment, job training, violence, birth control and abortion, social rights, or political and social participation. However, beyond this logic of inventory, a common feminist referential can be identified, one that finds itself at odds with the familialist tradition. Indeed, all of these interventions are guided by a promotion of women's rights as individuals, by a questioning of gender subordination, of the gendered division of labor, and of women's assignment to the private sphere, more generally speaking. As such, they stand in opposition to familialism.

Among these fields of intervention, the professional sphere always has played a prominent role. This is well reflected by the founding works on 'state feminism' in France, which focus on equal employment policy (Lévy, 1988; Mazur, 1995). Employment issues already were the main concern of the first WPAs. For example, it was, logically, at the heart of the work done by members of the *Comité du travail féminin*. The Committee, in its discussions and its reports, strongly linked inequalities in employment to an inadequacy of job training — an analysis of inequalities that has endured since then (Revillard, 2007). Employment was also a key issue in Françoise Giroud's *Projet pour les femmes*, where 41 of 102 recommendations dealt with the professional sphere (Giroud, 1976).

When Mitterrand was elected president in 1981, he appointed Yvette Roudy as Minister of Woman's Rights (*Ministre des droits de la femme*). *Egalité professionnelle* was at the core of Roudy's policy, resulting in the 1983 equal employment law (Jenson and Sineau, 1995; Mazur, 1995; Thébaud, 2001). The emphasis laid on equal employment by minister Roudy then had a long-lasting influence on women's policy, by means of its impact on the structuring of the *Service des Droits des Femmes* whose foundations were laid at that time (1984). Indeed, the two main bureaus within this administrative body initially were defined as the 'equal employment and job training' bureau (*emploi, formation et égalité professionnelle*), and the 'individual rights' bureau (*droits propres*), corresponding to the way Yvette Roudy designed the two main axes of her policy: everything related to equal employment on the one hand, and the remainder on the other. This dual structuring of the *Service des droits des femmes* has persisted since then, with subsequent decrees regarding the service following in 1990 and 2000 (1990, 2000). Beyond this duality, interviews with people working in the administration suggest a hierarchy between the two bureaus, with the *égalité professionnelle* bureau holding the superior position. For example, when I asked a former head of the 'individual rights' bureau about the content of the bureau's activities, she answered that it was 'everything that was not equal employment'. The weight of the administration



in women's policy has initiated a path dependency (Pierson, 2004) and ensured the remaining centrality of equal employment issues in women's policy, as attested to by the blueprints defined by subsequent WPAs.

Finally, two dominant traits can be stressed in the way the women's issue is defined by WPAs in France: first, interventions focus primarily on the workplace; and second, they are, for the most part, conducted in the name of equality. Or at least, equality is the most valued principle, as opposed to principles such as 'dignity' or 'individual rights' that guide interventions in other fields than the professional sphere. These two traits can be explained partly by both the republican context and by the prevalence of familialism. Of course, promoting equal employment is a common feature of women's policy in other countries as well (McBride Stetson and Mazur, 1995); it is not specific to French WPAs. However, the insistence on equality and the concentration of intervention on the professional sphere take on a particular meaning within the French republican–familialist context. One can link the prevalence of equality as a guiding principle to the strength of equality as a republican ideal. Indeed, the Republican discursive opportunity structure (Ferree *et al.*, 2002) welcomes references to equality. While conducting a policy aimed at a specific group might be hard to legitimize within the universalistic, republican context, using equality — a core republican ideal — as a guiding principle of intervention, might help legitimize women's policy. In light of an analysis of women's policy in its relation with the republican context, one can assume that equality is the cognitive frame by means of which women's policy integrated itself within the Republic.

In turn, the concentration of interventions in the professional sphere can be explained in reaction to familialism. Indeed, while matters pertaining to the private sphere were strongly invested by the familialist tradition, WPAs defined their policy on other grounds, mainly in the public sphere. When WPAs invested the private sphere, it was by means of different issues than those invested by familialism, primarily reproductive rights and the fight against domestic violence, which were key targets of mobilization for the second-wave feminist movement. Certainly this represented a serious challenge to familialism, shedding light on power relations within the private sphere, and on women's right to have control over their bodies. However, the more traditional domains of familialism, for example, tax legislation and family policy, were never at the forefront of WPAs' agenda. Beyond the fact that these issues were not strongly put forward by the feminist movement, this can be explained by the structure of discursive and political opportunities that WPAs have been facing (McAdam *et al.*, 1996). While family issues were strongly invested by a familialist discourse, WPAs chose to develop their feminist discourse on other grounds. Moreover, WPAs rightfully perceived few opportunities for reform in the family policy subsystem; hence the focus on



the professional sphere. This influence of discursive and political opportunities appears even more clearly if we put the French case in comparative perspective. For example, in Quebec, women's interests were already strongly represented within the state (by means of a Council on Women's Status and a Secretary on Women's Condition) when the government decided to define a family policy at the beginning of the 1980s. This institutional strength enabled femocrats to perceive opportunities of influence on the family policy subsystem that was in the making. Moreover, they were pressed to exert such influence by a strong women's movement for which family issues were an important concern (Revillard, 2004). Therefore, WPAs in Quebec indeed became an important actor in the family policy subsystem, unlike what happened in France (Dandurand and Kempeneers, 2002).

WPAs Facing the Familialist Tradition: A More Nuanced Account

While employment issues always have been their core concern, French WPAs have actually endorsed a diversity of attitudes toward familialism over the years. In the 1980s, these varied according to the party in power. In the 1990s and 2000s, the distinction along party lines tends to fade, leaving a more uniform acknowledgment of family-related concerns, restricted, however, to work-family reconciliation.

Gender and the family as partisan issues in the 1980s

Party lines strongly shaped femocrats' attitudes toward familialism in the 1980s, as shown by the experiences of ministers and delegate Monique Pelletier, Yvette Roudy and Hélène Gisserot, whose mandates encompassed the years 1978 and 1988.

Monique Pelletier, lawyer, local elected representative for the *Union pour la démocratie française* (UDF) and a mother of seven, was appointed delegate minister on 'women's condition' (*condition féminine*) in 1978 during Giscard d'Estaing's presidency. In 1980, the family was added to her mandate. But even before this, Monique Pelletier already showed a strong preoccupation for family issues and insisted on the need to take homemakers into account in her action in favor of women. Moreover, according to her, being in charge of family issues actually gave her more legitimacy and power to act in favor of women:

It enabled me to be more feminist, because I was simultaneously in charge of the family. [...] There is a very high number of family organizations, so I had a sort of weight... It was no longer a small thing advancing on a corner. It was something that represented... all ministers' care about family issues. In terms of votes, it is very important. So I was better perceived,



because I represented strength, roots, but at the same time the marching wing of feminism.¹²

This assertion must, of course, be analyzed within its context: Monique Pelletier is all the more prone to introduce her concern with family issues as a feminist strategy because I interviewed her about her action in favor of women. However, her justification reveals that she conceives the defense of women's rights and the promotion of family values as compatible goals (Robinson, 2001, 94).

Yvette Roudy, to the contrary, perceives familialism as being at odds with feminist goals:

[...] every time the feminist claim comes up, each time one talks about rights for women, the champions of the patriarchal ideology feel threatened. So they intervene, and they are powerful, because they have strong organizations. It is the familialist trend, champion of the patriarchal ideology.¹³

The contrast between Pelletier's and Roudy's accounts of the family movement is quite revealing of their different views regarding the compatibility between the promotion of women's rights and the defense of family values. Indeed, while Pelletier described family organizations as an asset whose support helped her augment her capacity for action in favor of women, Roudy depicts the family movement as 'patriarchal' and as an obstacle in the promotion of women's rights. This perception partly explains why she locates women's rights, for the most part, out of the family, as described earlier with her strong focus on equal employment.

However, the definition of women's policy in reaction against familialism is not the only reason for this avoidance of family issues. Closed political opportunities for reform in the family policy subsystem also play a role in this choice. Indeed, Roudy and her counselors initially had ambitions of reform in several policy domains that are traditional strongholds of familialism, such as tax legislation, family law and retirement policy. For example, the Ministry of Woman's Rights initially promoted individual taxation, as well as the inclusion, within family law, of a provision that would allow women to transmit their last name to their children. Endeavors in these respects failed systematically, mainly due to opposition from the ministers in charge of finance and justice. Therefore, Roudy soon perceived that political opportunities were closed, and reform efforts in these fields were abandoned. As a result, as Jane Jenson and Mariette Sineau show, this is the time when the sharpest conflict arose between state familialism and state feminism.¹⁴ Indeed, while Yvette Roudy defined equal employment as the key issue for women, family issues, and notably work-family reconciliation issues, were dealt with by



family secretary of state Georgina Dufoix in a rather conservative way (Jenson and Sineau, 1995, 239–257).

Family concerns returned to WPAs' agenda when the Right regained power in 1986, and H el ene Gisserot¹⁵ was appointed delegate for 'women's condition'. Indeed, Gisserot strongly insisted on the promotion of *m eres de famille*. However, while the expression *m eres de famille* refers to mothering as a main function of the women involved, Gisserot also used the expression to refer to mothers in the labor force and to promote work–family reconciliation measures. Here is how she introduces her course of action in favor of *m eres de famille*, in a special issue of the delegation's news bulletin in 1987:

While the promotion of women's status and role in society requires the preservation of their personal dignity and the quest for equal employment, it should not exclude their role within the family. Women are now ubiquitous (*doubl ement pr esentes*), in the production apparatus as within the family. They are at the pivot of these two fundamental structures, of which they are one of the regulating elements. The future of our society, with all the challenges it implies, largely depends on the way they can fulfill this double mission (Gisserot, 1987).

As we will see, this focus on reconciliation continues during the following years. Yet Gisserot combines it with the mobilization of more traditional familialist rhetoric, speaking of *m eres de famille*. But because it is combined with an insistence on women's rights, this promotion of *m eres de famille* does not have the same connotation here as it does for familialists. Here, as was the case with Pelletier, the familialist rhetoric seems to play a strategic role in improving WPAs' legitimacy under a right-wing government.

Therefore, the stands taken by femocrats under left- and right-wing governments can be analyzed as revealing different ways to deal with the familialist tradition: a rejection of familialist values under the left, and a rhetorical use of the latter under the right. However, in both cases, because of a lack of political opportunities for reform — linked to the actual strength of familialism within the state apparatus — the public sphere, and notably the professional sphere, stay the main site of intervention.

'Reconciling' women's rights and family policy?

The influence of party politics on the handling of family issues by WPAs somewhat decreases in the 1990s, a fact that can notably be linked to the extension of the definition of equal employment policy to work–family reconciliation.

Admittedly, until 1995, right-wing governments were still more inclined to link women to the family and to promote family values as being in keeping with the defense of women's interests. This was the case with Simone Veil



(1993–1995) and Colette Codaccioni (1995), who were in charge of women's rights as well as family issues. However, Anne-Marie Couderc was in charge of women's rights as the delegate minister for employment (1995–1997), and Nicole Ameline (2002–2005) and Catherine Vautrin (2005–2007) are not in charge of family issues.

Moreover, left-wing women's policy departs from the silence on family issues that was characteristic of the Roudy years: Michèle André, Véronique Neiertz, Geneviève Fraisse and Nicole Péry define work–family reconciliation as an important issue for women's rights. For example, in 1989 Michèle André organized a conference on 'Women's Work and Family Strategies in the EEC', that aimed at defining priorities for the third European program on equal opportunities (1991–1995). 'Reconciling the family and occupational responsibilities of women and men' indeed became one of the objectives of the program as defined in 1991.¹⁶ Throughout the 1990s, work–family reconciliation was one of the main focuses of study of the French equal employment council (*Conseil supérieur de l'égalité professionnelle*), under the lead of a taskforce created in 1988 to investigate 'firm management and family responsibilities'. When Nicole Péry presented her actions in favor of gender equality to the cabinet in a meeting of 6 March 2002, she delineated 'promoting equal employment and the "management of the times of life" (*articulation des temps de vie*)' as her first goal (Péry, 2002).

This fading of the political cleavage regarding the way femocrats handle family issues was confirmed when the Right came back to power in 2002: the 'management of the times of life' is one of the five axes of Nicole Ameline's 2004 'Equality Charter', and the 'reconciliation (*articulation*) between professional activity, personal life, and family life' is contained in title II of the March 2006 equal pay law.

Therefore, by means of work–family reconciliation, family issues are now more consistently taken into account by WPAs, in so far as they relate to equal employment. While the means to equal employment initially focused on job training, they now include work–family reconciliation. Even though family policy itself is still marked by party politics, the way WPAs handle family issues, by means of work–family reconciliation, has tended to bridge political splits. How can this apparent consensus be explained? The feminist movement, which focused all its energy in the struggle for political 'parity' since the beginning of the 1990s (Bereni, 2007), has had little influence on these issues. Rather, the impetus to the linking of work–family reconciliation with equal employment policy came from the changing definition of equal opportunities at the European level (Hantrais and Letablier, 1996, 116–135; Hantrais, 2000, 113–139; Letablier, 2002, 64; Jacquot, 2006). Therefore, for WPAs, family issues were all the easier to integrate into women's policy because they were linked to the WPAs' main goal: equal employment.



But this trend toward work–family reconciliation was encouraged also by French as well as by European employment policy. In France, employment policy encourages the hiring of child-care givers by parents as well as the development of ‘family services’, which, while being a means of work–family reconciliation for some women, also represent low-paid, part-time jobs for others who occupy them (Lallement, 2000, 89–91; Commaille *et al.*, 2002). At the European level, work–family reconciliation is seen as a way to increase women’s employment, which is a key goal of the European Employment Strategy. Therefore, European reconciliation policy stands at the crossroads between equal opportunities policy and employment policy, two policies whose goals, while converging on the idea of reconciliation, are different: equal employment on the one hand; a more flexible labor force on the other (Stratigaki, 2004; Thévenon, 2004; Jönsson and Perrier, 2007). Yet this new concern with work–family reconciliation within employment policy provided WPAs with a strong discursive opportunity to focus on reconciliation, since the frame resonance (Snow *et al.*, 1986, 477) with employment policy increases the potential impact of WPA’s discourse.

Conclusion

As Amy Mazur stresses, *la République* is a surprising mix of gender-bias and gender-blindness (Mazur, 2001, 161). Within the republican model, the mixed fates of familialism — welcome in spite of its gender-bias — and feminism — pressed to prove its universalism — provide a good illustration of this phenomenon. By means of cooptation and/or struggle, both familialism and feminism have developed within the state apparatus in relation to components of the republican ideal. Indeed, state familialism, in a republican–secularist manner, defined itself in reaction to Church familialism. WPAs have used the equalitarian frame to integrate itself within the Republic, in spite of a lack of legitimacy in a political context where policies aimed at specific groups are perceived as being at odds with the ideal of universalism. Moreover, WPAs defined their policy in opposition to familialist values, and this translated into the centrality of equal employment in their activities. A more nuanced account shows that femocrats’ attitudes toward familialism have varied according to political cleavages. Today, family issues are more uniformly integrated into women’s policy, but only in so far as they relate to employment issues (via work–family reconciliation). To be sure, WPAs target more directly gender-based power relations within the private sphere as well, by means of the improvement of reproductive rights and the fight against violence against women. However, some key strongholds of familialism, for example, family policy (including family allowances, tax provisions for families and extending



to the family-based tax system in general) and family law, even though these have undergone major changes in the past few years, have never been high on WPAs' agenda. Therefore, the coexistence of feminism and familialism within the state apparatus still tends to resolve in a differentiation between public-policy domains, between family policy and equal employment policy, eventually resulting in 'contradictory injunctions' for women (Commaille, 2001).

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2006 APSA Meeting. I wish to thank Amy Mazur for her support and her very insightful comments. The title of this article is inspired by David Meyer's 'Restating the woman question' (Meyer, 2003).
- 2 The term 'Republic' is used here both in its common sense of a political regime (that originally dates back to the French Revolution), and as a set of values that form the 'republican ideal', that is, equality, freedom, universalism and secularism. While these values can be characterized as stable components of this ideal, their salience varies across time. Hence the republican ideal is not immutable in its content: for example, this paper addresses familialism and feminism in relation with the republican ideal. Moreover, the Republic also refers to a set of institutions, legal frameworks and public policies (notably, in our case, those that target the family and gender relations) in so far as they relate to the Republican ideal.
- 3 Feminist movements will be broadly defined here as movements devoted to 'improving the status of women as a group and undermining patterns of gender hierarchy' (Mc Bride Stetson and Mazur, 1995, 16).
- 4 Even as women were deprived of the right to vote, *citizens* were designated in a gender-neutral way. At its origin, the republican model was conceived as universalistic.
- 5 Kimberly Morgan also shows the role of the state-Church rivalry in the development of preschool education (Morgan, 2002).
- 6 The same has been noticed in other policy subsystems in France, such as job training, with the prevalence of management and organized labor (Mazur, 2001, 159).
- 7 Marcelle Devaud then became president of the CTF. Her trajectory, like several others in WPAs, challenges the state/movement dichotomy (Banaszak, 2005).
- 8 For a detailed analysis of French women's policy agencies, see Mazur (2000).
- 9 By 'femocrats', I refer to people working in WPAs, be it at the political level or within the administration.
- 10 I consulted the archives of French women's policy agencies in two locations: at the *Service des droits des femmes* and at the national archives, *Centre des Archives Contemporaines*, in Fontainebleau.
- 11 As part of my dissertation, I have conducted 30 interviews with people formerly or currently working in WPAs.
- 12 Interview with Monique Pelletier, 22 November 2005. All translations are by the author.
- 13 Interview with Yvette Roudy, 28 September 2005.
- 14 I use the expression 'state feminism' to refer to WPAs' activities (McBride Stetson and Mazur, 1995, 1–2).
- 15 Unlike Monique Pelletier and Yvette Roudy, Hélène Gisserot did not belong to a political party, but was a senior civil servant, working for the *Cour des Comptes*.
- 16 See <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c10915.htm>.



References

- Arrêté ministériel du 4 octobre 1984 relatif à l'organisation des services relevant du ministre délégué auprès du premier ministre, chargé des droits de la femme.
- Arrêté du 21 novembre 1990 relatif à l'organisation du service du secrétariat d'Etat aux droits des femmes (administration centrale).
- Arrêté du 21 juillet 2000 relatif à l'organisation du service des droits des femmes et de l'égalité.
- Accampo, E.A., Fuchs, R.G. and Stewart, M.L. (1995) *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870–1914*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. (1970) *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Banaszak, L.A. (2005) 'Inside and Outside the State: Movement Insider Status, Tactics and Public Policy Achievements', in D. Meyer, V. Jenness and H. Ingram (eds.) *Routing the Opposition: Social Movements, Public Policy, and Democracy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bereni, L. (2007) 'Du 'MLF' au 'Mouvement pour la parité'. La genèse d'une nouvelle cause dans l'espace de la cause des femmes', *Politix* 20(78): 107–132.
- Commaille, J. (1993) *Les stratégies des femmes. Travail, famille et politique*, Paris: La Découverte.
- Commaille, J. (2001) 'Les injonctions contradictoires des politiques publiques à l'égard des femmes', in J. Laufer, M. Maruani and C. Marry (eds.) *Masculin-féminin: questions pour les sciences de l'homme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Commaille, J. and Martin, C. (1998) *Les enjeux politiques de la famille*, Société, Paris: Bayard.
- Commaille, J., Strobel, P. and Villac, M. (2002) *La politique de la famille*, Repères, Paris: La découverte - Repères.
- Dandurand, R.B. and Kempeneers, M. (2002) 'Pour une analyse comparative et contextuelle de la politique familiale au Québec', *Recherches sociographiques* 43(1): 49–78.
- Dekeuwer-Défossez, F. (2003) 'Droit des personnes et de la famille: de 1804 au PaCS (et au-delà)', *Pouvoirs* (107): 37–53.
- Ferree, M.M., William, A., Gamson, J.G. and Rucht, D. (2002) *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giroud, F. (1976) *Projet pour les femmes: 1976–1981*, Paris: Secrétariat d'Etat à la condition féminine.
- Gisserot, H. (1987) Editorial (Les mères de famille). *DFI — Délégation Condition Féminine Information:1*.
- Gusfield, J.R. (1981) *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking–Driving and the Symbolic Order*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hantrais, L. (2000) *Social Policy in the European Union*, (2nd edn). Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Hantrais, L. and Letablier, M.-T. (1996) *Families and Family Policies in Europe*, Harlow, NY: Longman.
- Heinen, J. (2004) 'Genre et politiques familiales', in C. Bard, C. Baudelot and J. Mossuz-Lavau (eds.) *Quand les femmes s'en mêlent. Genre et pouvoir*, Paris: La Martinière.
- Jacquot, S. (2006) *L'action publique communautaire et ses instruments. La politique d'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes à l'épreuve du gender mainstreaming*, Ph.D. dissertation in political science, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris.
- Jenson, J. (1986) 'Gender and reproduction, or babies and the state', *Studies in Political Economy* (20): 9–46.
- Jenson, J. and Sineau, M. (1995) *Mitterrand et les françaises: un rendez-vous manqué*, Paris: Presses de la FNSP.
- Jenson, J. and Sineau, M. (2001) 'France: Reconciling Republican Equality with 'Freedom of Choice'', in J. Jenson and M. Sineau (eds.) *Who Cares? Women's Work Childcare, and Welfare State Redesign*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.



- Jönsson, A. and Perrier, G. (2007) 'Le développement des politiques de conciliation de l'Union Européenne: déplacement ou dépassement de la dichotomie genrée public-privé?', Paper presented at the 'Genre et action publique' Seminar, IEP Paris, 4 January 2007.
- Kitschelt, H. (1986) 'Political opportunity structures and political protest: anti-nuclear movements in four democracies', *British Journal of Political Science* 16(1): 57–85.
- Lallement, M. (2000) 'France's New Service Sector and the Family', in J. Jenson, J. Laufer and M. Maruani (eds.) *The Gendering of Inequalities: Women, Men and Work*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Lenoir, R. (2003) *Généalogie de la morale familiale*, Paris: Seuil/Liber.
- Letablier, M.-T. (2002) 'L'égalité: un enjeu de politique familiale', *Informations Sociales* (102): 60–71.
- Lévy, M. (1988) *Le féminisme d'Etat en France - 1965-1985: 20 ans de prise en charge institutionnelle de l'égalité professionnelle entre hommes et femmes*, Ph.D. dissertation in political science, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris.
- Martin, J. (1998) 'Politique familiale et travail des femmes mariées en France. Perspective historique: 1942–1982', *Population* 53(6): 1119–1154.
- Mazur, A.G. (2001) 'Republican Universalism Resists State Feminist Approaches in France', in A. Mazur (ed.) *State Feminism, Women's Movements, and Job Training. Making Democracies Work in a Global Economy*, New York: Routledge.
- Mazur, A.G. (1995) *Gender Bias and the State: Symbolic Reform at Work in Fifth Republic France*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Mazur, A.G. (ed.) (2000) *Appareils gouvernementaux chargés des droits des femmes, représentation et démocratie en France. Une étude internationale et comparative*, Ministère de l'emploi et de la solidarité/Service des droits des femmes, Paris.
- Mazur, A.G. (2002) *Theorizing Feminist Policy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mazur, A.G. and McBride, D. (2006) 'The RNGS data set: women's policy agencies, women's movements and policy debates in western post-industrial democracies', *French politics* 4(2): 209–236.
- McBride Stetson, D. and Mazur, A.G. (1995) *Comparative State Feminism*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- McAdam, D., McCarthy, J. and Zald, M.N. (eds.) (1996) *Comparative Perspective on Social Movements Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Meyer, D. (2003) 'Restating the Woman Question: Women's Movements and State Changes', in L.A. Banaszak, K. Beckwith and D. Rucht (eds.) *Women's Movements Facing the Reconfigured State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Migdal, J.S. (2001) *State in Society. Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Minonzio, J. and Vallat J.-P. (2006) 'L' Union nationale des associations familiales (UNAF) et les Politiques familiales: crises et transformations de la représentation des intérêts familiaux en France depuis 1945', *Revue française de science politique*, 56(2): 205–226.
- Morgan, K. (2002) 'Forging the frontiers between State, Church, and Family: religious cleavages and the origins of early childhood education and care policies in France, Sweden, and Germany', *Politics and society* 30(1): 113–148.
- Muller, P. (2004) 'Référentiel', in L. Boussaguet, S. Jacquot and P. Ravinet (eds.) *Dictionnaire des politiques publiques*, Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po.
- Muller, P. (2005) 'Esquisse d'une théorie du changement dans l'action publique', *Structures, acteurs et cadres cognitifs. Revue française de science politique* 55(1): 155–188.
- Palier, B. and Surel, Y. (2005) 'Les "trois i" et l'analyse de l'Etat en action', *Revue française de science politique* 55(1): 7–32.
- Péry, N. (2002) Actions en faveur de l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes — Communication en Conseil des ministres de Madame Nicole Péry le 6 mars 2002.



- Pierson, P. (2004) *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Revillard, A. (2004) Reshaping social rights — The women's movement, state feminism and family policy in Quebec: Paper presented at the Law and Society Association Meeting, Chicago, 28 May.
- Revillard, A. (2006) 'Work/family policy in France: from state familialism to state feminism?' *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 20(2): 133–150.
- Revillard, A. (2007) *La cause des femmes au Ministère du travail: le Comité du travail féminin (1965–1984)*, Research report, DARES-CNRS, ENS Cachan, http://www.melissa.ens-cachan.fr/article.php?id_article=1073.
- Robinson, J.C. (2001) 'Gendering the Abortion Debate: The French Case', in D. Stetson and D. McBride (ed.) *Abortion Politics, Women's Movements, and the Democratic State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rochefort, D.A. and Cobb, R.W. (1994) *The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda. Studies in Government and Public Policy*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Schattschneider, E.E. (1960) *The Semisovereign People; A Realist's View of Democracy in America*, New York: Rinehart & Winston.
- Snow, D.A., Rochford, E.B., Worden, S. and Benford, R.D. (1986) 'Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation', *American Sociological Review* 51(4): 464–481.
- Stratigaki, M. (2004) 'The cooptation of gender concepts in EU policies: the case of 'reconciliation of work and family'', *Social Politics* 11(1): 30–56.
- Thébaud, F. (2001) 'Promouvoir les Droits des Femmes: Ambitions, Difficultés et Résultats', in S. Berstein, P. Milza and J. Bianco (eds.) *Les années Mitterrand. Les années du changement (1981–1984)*, Paris: Perrin.
- Thévenon, O. (2004) 'Les enjeux pour l'emploi féminin de la Stratégie européenne pour l'emploi', *Revue de l'OFCE* 90(3): 379–417.
- Verjus, A. (2002) *Le cens de la famille. Les femmes et le vote, 1789–1848*, Paris: Belin/Socio-histoires.