

WORK/FAMILY POLICY IN FRANCE: FROM STATE FAMILIALISM TO STATE FEMINISM?

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ABSTRACT

When one looks at the policies that target the relationship between work and family (here labelled ‘work/family policies’), contradictory views come from France. On the one hand, the state recognition of family interests is very strong, and was initially rooted in familialism, an ideology that promotes the family as an institution, and has often played against women’s rights. On the other hand, women’s – and especially mothers’ – labour force participation has always been relatively high compared to other western countries. To account for this ‘French paradox’, this paper puts work/family policies into historical perspective, in order to analyse them as a mix of policies coming from various public policy institutions (work, education, family). While state familialism has always been strong in France, it has been challenged and shattered by several social and political trends since the 1960s. Among these is the development of ‘state feminism’, with the creation of governmental bodies endowed with the formal mission of furthering women’s rights. Based on an empirical study of these institutions, this paper shows how they reframed work/family policy in terms of a policy of equality in employment.

INTRODUCTION

In France, maybe more than elsewhere, the family is a national stake.¹ The political importance of the family can be related to its demographic impact (Jenson 1986; 1998), to its role in social reproduction (Lenoir, 2003), and to its role as a symbol for representing the political order (Commaille and Martin, 1998). The family has been the object of mobilizations and political struggles at least since the French revolution, and these struggles led to a particular form of state recognition of family interests, through institutions and policies marked by the ideology of familialism (Lenoir, 2003). This ideology has different modalities,² but at its core, as demonstrated by Commaille, lays the

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recognition and promotion of the family *as an institution* (Commaille, 1993: 26), whose interests outpace those of its individual members. Given the gendered division of labour, this promotion of family interests may impede women's participation in the labour market. However, another sociological feature that has historically distinguished France from many other western countries is women's early and long-standing labour force participation. Following several authors who have stressed these tensions and contradictions in French politics and practices regarding work and family (Commaille, 1993; 2001; Jenson and Sineau, 2001; Morgan, 2003), the analysis of what could be labelled the 'French paradox' – between the strength of the familialist ideology and women's high rate of participation in the labour force – will be at the core of this article. Before turning to the French case, a few theoretical points must be stressed.

First, policies that target the interrelations between work and family (which I shall label 'work/family policies') are a puzzling object for public policy analysis. Indeed, focusing on the relationship between family and work implies a challenge to the dichotomist construction of family and work as distinct public policy domains, which have their own logics and traditions and are embedded in different institutions. In other words, work/family policies are usually not a public policy domain *per se*; they stand at the intersection of work policy and family policy (and possibly, as we will see, feminist policy). This means that the analysis of these policies implies looking at the margins and at the implicit assumptions of 'work policies' (ie labour law, employment policy) on the one hand, and family policies on the other. Indeed, policies that explicitly target the family actually have an impact on work, and policies that explicitly target work (employment policies, labour law) actually have an impact on the family, but this is not necessarily explicit (Barrère-Maurisson, 1992). Finally, policies that explicitly target the relationship between family and work can be framed³ either as family policy or as work policy, and may or may not be explicitly gendered. In analysing these policies, one must account for these various dimensions of the policy environment (Jenson, 1988: 155). This type of public policy analysis implies an attention to the distinction between representations and public policy devices (and the effects of the latter), and an acknowledgement of the fact that public policy is the result of an array of non necessarily integrated devices, institutions, discourses and (state and non-state) actors (Commaille and Jobert, 1999; Duran, 1999). In order to account for the complex regulation implied in care policies, Jenson has devised a very useful framework, which distinguishes between three dimensions of care: who cares, who pays, and how is it provided? (Jenson, 1997) We should keep this distinction in mind throughout the description.

Second, in analysing these welfare policies, I will be focusing primarily on their gender dimension, taking into account as often as possible the differentiations in gendering introduced by other social distinctions, notably class. This gender focus is based on the acknowledgement of the fact that due to the gendered division of labour, work/family reconciliation is socially constructed as a women's issue (Commaille, 1993). In fact, today women in France still do twice as much domestic work as their male spouses,⁴ and it is still their labour force participation, not men's, which is challenged by the presence of young children in the family.⁵

This gendering may or may not be explicit in welfare policies, but at any rate these policies are both influenced by normative representations of gender, and in turn have an important impact on women's social citizenship and on gender relations (Orloff, 1993; O'Connor, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996). In studying work/family policies, the choice of a gender perspective is reinforced by the assumption that the very (institutional and cognitive) distinction between work policy and family policy is rooted in the gendered division of labour.

Finally, in order to explain the current devices and discourses that define work/family policies in France, it is necessary to analyse their historical roots. Therefore, I will analyse the genesis and evolution of work/family policies in France, in order to explain (and eventually qualify) what I have labelled the 'French paradox'. In other words, I offer a genetic explanation of this paradox. In order to do so, I will focus on the cognitive and institutional framings of work/family policies: who defines these policies? Are they defined as work policy or as family policy, and how does this definition evolve over time?

I will first show that before the development of the explicit French 'family policy' between the 1930s and the 1960s, several provisions within labour law and education policies had an important impact on work/family relations, and tended to favour women's and mothers' labour force participation, as opposed to the familialist tradition (already strong in family law) that favoured traditional gender roles. This mix of policies coming from various public policy institutions (devoted to work, education, and the family) helps explain the 'French paradox'. Even though the symbolic weight of the familialist family policy in France should not be underestimated, this family policy has been challenged and shattered since the 1960s by several social and political trends, which will be described in the second section of this paper. Among these is the development of state feminism, by means of the creation of governmental bodies specifically aimed at promoting women's rights. In the last section of this paper, I argue that this eventually implied a reframing of work/family policy in terms of a policy of equality in employment.

1. 'WORKING MOTHERS' AND FAMILIALISM: THE GENESIS OF THE FRENCH PARADOX

In the nineteenth century, the essence of familialism as defined by Commaille was crystallized in the Civil code (Napoleon code), enacted in 1804, which defined the legal regulation of the family following a model of strict gendered division of labour, putting married women under the authority of their husbands.

However, at the same time, women's participation in the labour force challenged this legal male-breadwinner model. Indeed, the feminization of the waged labour force in France dates back to the last third of the nineteenth century. Women represented 25 per cent of the labour force in 1866 and 35 per cent in 1901 (Frader 1998: 11). In the beginning of the twentieth century, this participation was helped by the constitution of women's social citizenship around the representation of the 'citizen-producer' (Jenson, 1989: 245). Jenson shows that at a time when demographic concerns were on the rise in many European countries, the concern with reducing infant mortality resulted in different measures in France and in Great Britain. Indeed, French political leaders took for granted working class mothers' participation in the labour force as a necessary evil, and framed the issue in terms of 'protection' of working mothers, whereas in Great Britain, demographic concerns lead to the definition of a distinct citizenship for women, based on homemaking, which made it more difficult for mothers to access the labour force (Jenson, 1986). In France, this led to a 'protective' legislation inserted in labour law (Jenson, 1986; Cova, 2000; Battagliola, 2004). In 1909, a legally ensured mother's leave of eight weeks (to be taken consecutively before and after giving birth) was created, with a guarantee for the mother to retrieve her job after giving birth. The Strauss law, voted in 1913, created a *compulsory* post-natal leave of four weeks, with a daily allowance (that was a measure of assistance, and not insurance, and did not compensate for the lost wage). The law on social insurances of 1928–1930 represented the switch of protective legislation for mothers from assistance to insurance, with the creation of a maternity insurance, whose entitlement was based on the waged work status of the mother or derived from that of her husband. The insurance covered the medical fees, and ensured mothers an allowance to compensate for the lost wage for six weeks before and six weeks after giving birth (Cova, 2000: 147–48).

It is important to stress that these measures were not designed by French politicians with a feminist goal⁶ – but mainly for demographic reasons. As Jenson points out: 'Women as individual actors remained enclosed and invisible within the family. It was always the family which needed both healthy and rested parents in order to produce the nation's babies' (Jenson, 1989: 258). But even though these protective

measures were not designed to help women but primarily for families, they resulted in facilitating mothers' labour force participation. Therefore the model of women combining maternity and waged work emerged early in France.

However, it should be stressed that this model of the 'working mother' was mostly circumscribed to the working class (here, class affects the experience of gender). In this perspective, Lenoir puts forward the assumption of a dual system of legal regulation of the family at the time: family law (as defined in the Napoleon code) for the upper- and middle-classes, and labour law for the working class (Lenoir, 2003: 290–92).

As far as care for young children is concerned, full-day preschools were developed since the middle of the nineteenth century. Morgan (2003: 261) shows how this development of early childhood education can be linked to the fight of secular republicanism against the Catholic Church:⁷

This extensive set of public services was born out of the victory of secular republicanism over the Catholic Church in disputes over education in the late nineteenth century that raised the stakes in education and drove the decision to incorporate all forms of education – including schools for the very young children – into the national education system.

Here again, although the provision was not meant to help women combine child-care and waged work, it certainly had that effect. It is also worth noting that the development of the preschool system, as well as protective legislation for women in labour law, initially targeted in priority the working class (Morgan 2003: 272). Therefore, elements in labour law as well as in education policy tended to favour women's labour force participation, even though the latter was only a by-product of these policies.

This French social citizenship for (working-class) women, grounded on the participation in the labour force, did not mean equal citizenship with men. Indeed, women's pay was still conceived as a complement – and was indeed substantially inferior – to men's (which was defined as the main, if not the only, breadwinner). Family allowances – theorized in France by the social doctrine of the Catholic Church as a means to define a 'just' pay according to the number of children⁸ – were initially granted by individual factory owners to the male breadwinner, and they were made compulsory by a 1932 law⁹ (Hatzfeld, 1989: 103–72).

According to Lenoir, this shift from private nepotism to state-led social policy was an important step in the institutionalization of family policy in France by means of 'state familialism', that defined itself against 'Church familialism' (Lenoir, 2003: 232–61)). State familialism is a form of defence of family interests that Lenoir distinguishes from

'Church familialism', in the sense that it is based on science rather than religious values, and puts forward the protection of families by means of different types of social provisions through a 'bureaucratic management' of families. In making this distinction Lenoir shows how state-led family policy in France was defined throughout a confrontation with the Church that implied a competition for social control.

Demographic concerns are at the roots of this state familialism (Lenoir, 2003: 270–75), which resulted in a family policy promoting a model family of a married heterosexual couple and three children, with a strict gendered division of labour. This model was clear in the family policy that was institutionalized in the aftermath of Second World War, by means of tax incentives and allowances that aimed at keeping women as care providers at home and encouraged families of at least three children. A good illustration of this orientation is the 'homemaker's allowance' (*Allocation de mere au foyer*), created in 1939 and turned in 1941 into a 'single-pay allowance' (ASU, *Allocation de salaire unique*), which was maintained in 1946 after the war. The ASU is an allowance provided to mothers staying at home full-time caring for their children.¹⁰ Combined with family allowances it represented in 1947 (at its peak), 90 per cent of a workwoman's pay for a family with two children, and 150 per cent of a workwoman's pay for a family with three children (Martin, 1998: 1137). According to Martin this allowance may have played a significant role in the decrease in mothers' labour force participation that was observed after the war, especially for mothers of two children (whose labour force participation decreased from 23 per cent to 17 per cent between 1946 and 1954) (Martin 1998: 1140). Moreover, the social security system that was established in 1945 installed a broad system of derived entitlement, that hasn't stopped expanding since then (Commaille, *et al*, 2002: 73). According to this system, social rights are easily guaranteed to the whole family based on one (usually male) breadwinner's participation in the labour force.

More broadly speaking, the distinct 'family policy'¹¹ that was defined in the aftermath of the Second World War, had an enduring symbolic (as well as material) impact. It clearly defined the French model of family policy as a pro-family/pro-natalist model (Gauthier, 1996).

To sum up, work/family policies in France at the beginning of the 1960s are the result of a mix of various measures, some favourable, and some discouraging for mothers' labour force participation: on the one hand a strong preschool system, and some 'protective' measures in labour law that actually enable women to keep their jobs throughout maternity, and on the other a family policy that promotes traditional gender roles. Although some provisions actually favour mothers' employment, the strength of familialism, with its promotion of a traditional gendered division of labour, should not be underestimated. At the level of representations, this model is hegemonic.

2. CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILIALIST MODEL

This sway of familialism, that marked the 'peak' of French family policy, was gradually challenged and shattered by new trends, both political and social, starting in the 1960s. First, within public policies, a contradiction appeared between the promotion of a male-breadwinner model in family policy on the one hand, and the labour force policies of the time on the other, which implied an increased appeal to women's participation.¹² At the same time, major social and demographic change was taking place (Lefaucheur, 1992). Most important was the increase in women's – and especially mothers' – labour force participation. Women represented 34 per cent of the labour force in 1960, and 43 per cent in 1990 (Commaïlle, 1993: 5). Women (of all social classes) increasingly remained in the labour force while bringing up children. Important family and demographic change was also taking place, with a rise in divorce rates,¹³ a drop in marriage rates and in fertility rates.¹⁴

At the political level, the 1960s witnessed the rise of a new women's movement that increasingly challenged the gendered division of labour. Moreover, women, who had acquired the right to vote in 1944, were perceived by male political leaders of the time as a political stake. This was already manifest in the 1965 presidential elections, when socialist candidate François Mitterrand was the first to put women's rights at the core of his campaign strategy (Jenson and Sineau, 1995: 56). This new political visibility, combined with the fact that women also represented an economic stake, contributed in the creation of the first governmental bodies specifically devoted to the promotion of women's interests: a women's bureau (*Comité du travail féminin*) was created in 1965 within the department of labour, followed by the appointment of a secretary of state in charge of 'women's condition' (*Secrétaire d'Etat à la condition féminine*), Françoise Giroud, in 1974. Hence state familialism faced the rise of a potentially conflicting ideology, state feminism (see section 3).

How did these changes affect work/family policies? According to Jenson and Sineau (2001: 88–9), a shift in work/family policies appeared with the advent of the Fifth Republic in 1958. The political discourse then appeared more favourable to women's paid work. Supported by a new experts' discourse on the relevance of early childhood education, the day-care system started developing, although it remained way below the actual needs. In 1972, a means-tested allowance was created to compensate some of the cost of childcare for women in the labour force (Commaïlle, *et al*, 2002: 78).

Yet the economic crisis, starting in 1973, questioned this 'new model of gender equality' (Jenson and Sineau, 2001: 89) that had developed within family policy. Therefore, work/family policies from this period

onward have been marked by ambivalence: while the political discourse broadly speaking encouraged women's labour force participation, some measures tended to weaken the work position of particular categories of women.

First, it is worth noting that in spite of the economic crisis, women remained in the labour market (Jenson and Sineau, 2001: 94). In fact, the years between 1975 and 1985 have seen a fast increase in women's labour force participation, from 58.6 per cent to 70.8 per cent for women aged 25–49 from 1975 to 1985.¹⁵

Within family policy, the model of the 'working mother' was also encouraged by measures that aimed at helping to combine paid work and care for young children (Hantrais, 1994: 151). First, the child-care system expanded. Between 1974 and 1980 the infrastructures (mostly day nurseries and family day care) grew by 72 per cent (Jenson and Sineau, 2001: 90). According to Norvez (1998: 63), the fast growth of the public day-care system was helped by the pre-existence of a strong administration in charge of implementing family policy at the local level, the *Caisses d'allocations familiales* (the bureaus in charge of distributing family benefits). These bureaus took over the responsibility for developing the public day-care system by means of allowances awarded to local day-care centres. The fraction of social spending, within family policy, devoted to non-parental childcare increased significantly from the 1970s onward: 2 per cent in 1970, 12 per cent in 1980, 25 per cent in 1990, and about 30 per cent in 1998 (Norvez: 63). Based on this example, the assumption could be made that the pre-existence of state-led familialist institutions may have been an asset for the eventual development of facilities that favour mothers' paid employment (notably as opposed to more liberal welfare regimes, without an explicit family policy). Indeed, the strength of familialism in France led to the creation of institutions that were eventually mobilized for other ends (ie work/family reconciliation), and the pre-existence of this dense web of local institutions in charge of family policy was an asset in ensuring the relatively fast development of the day-care system. However, it should be stressed that the expansion of day-care nurseries slowed down in the 1980s and 1990s, in spite of President Mitterrand's electoral promise of creating 300,000 places in day-care nurseries. Indeed, the increase was 44 per cent between 1981 and 1988, and 29 per cent between 1988 and 1995 (*ibid*).

Meanwhile, other types of child-care arrangements were legally organized and promoted: the employment status of child caregivers (*assistantes maternelles*) was defined in 1977. Child caregivers can care for up to three children in their own house, and they can also be regrouped in a family day-care centre (*crèche familiale*) (Norvez, 1998: 64). Two types of allowances were created to help parents hire child caregivers: the allowance for childcare at home (AGED, *Allocation de*

garde d'enfant à domicile) in 1986, and the allowance subsidizing the employment of a licensed mother's assistant (AFEAMA, *Aide à la Famille pour l'Emploi d'une Assistante Maternelle Agréée*) in 1990 (Jenson and Sineau, 2001: 103). The provision of pre-elementary education, which is provided by public schools starting at the age of three or two, also increased during the 1970s and 1980s.

Finally, it should be mentioned that since the 1980s, the national administration federating the family benefits bureaus, the *Caisse nationale des allocations familiales* (CNAF), has also been a key purveyor of expertise on work/family reconciliation (Commaille, 1993). This played a role in raising awareness on the issue, as well as enabling an assessment of the existing policies.

Nevertheless, tendencies to promote a traditional gendered division of labour still exist in family policy. For example, during his presidency, Giscard d'Estaing called for recognition of the 'status of mother' (Jenson and Sineau, 2001: 92). An unpaid parental leave was created in 1977, which enabled a working parent to suspend their employment for up to two years to take care of a child under the age of three; as Jenson and Sineau point out, this leave was initially labelled the 'mother's leave' in the government's draft bill (ibid: 93), which clearly reflected the model of gendered division of labour that inspired the government.

In 1985, a paid parental leave was created, the *Allocation parentale d'éducation* (APE), which was made available to parents who left work to take care at home of their child under three years of age, starting with the third child. This provision was clearly underpinned by pro-natalist concerns, but it was also defended by its supporters in the name of work-family reconciliation. Its opponents, however, denounced it as a form of mother's wage. The allowance was extended in 1986 by means of a weakening of the employment criteria for eligibility¹⁶ (Jenson and Sineau, 2001: 99–101). In 1994, its reach increased, since it was made available starting with the second (as opposed to third) child, and it was made compatible with part-time employment.

This reform resulted in a halt in the so-far steady increase in labour force participation of mothers of two children among whom was a child aged under three (Commaille, *et al*, 2002: 80). While being promoted as a 'work/family reconciliation' measure, the APE actually weakened (already low-qualified) women's position on the labour market: while the law guarantees women a right to recover their job after the leave, employers don't always abide by this legislation, and the leave often results in workplace discrimination and decreased chances of professional promotion, while favouring a traditional division of labour within couples (Fagnani, 1998: 354–57).

The implementation of the APE, a measure overwhelmingly used by women (98 per cent of the recipients are women), also illustrates the

limits of gender-neutral discourse in family policy. As Fagnani (2001: 106) stresses, the will to promote less gendered parental roles has favoured the use of a gender-neutral discourse in family policy, but this may result in impeding the fight against gender discrimination by occulting actual gender disparities.

Therefore, as Norvez (1998: 59) stresses, family policy in France is on the edge 'between work/family reconciliation and the temptation of a mother's wage' (Norvez, 1998: 59). However, these measures are not necessarily promoted for ideological reasons, according to a familialist vision of family policy, but they are above all driven by employment policy choices (Fagnani, 2001: 111).

Indeed, as Commaille, *et al*, demonstrate, the focus of employment policies on the fight against unemployment underpins these family policy measures in two ways. On the one hand, the employment of child caregivers by parents, helped by measures such as the AGED and AFEAMA, is seen as a way to create new jobs, especially for low-qualified, often unemployed women, as well as turning black market jobs into official ones. On the other hand, the APE is used as a way to take out of the labour market (and out of unemployment statistics) women who benefit from the allowance, who are also in their majority low-qualified women standing on the margins of the labour market (Commaille, *et al*, 2002: 89–91).

In terms of care, this implies a differentiation of family policy impact on women according to social class: middle- and upper-class women are the ones who benefit the most from allowances such as AGED and AFEAMA, which enable them to remain in the labour market, while poor women suffer from the lack of provision of public day-care centres, and the APE pushes them to adopt a traditional gendered division of labour which marginalizes them even more from the labour market (Commaille, *et al*, 2002: 80; Fagnani, 1998: 347–50). Therefore, Norvez's analysis of French family policy as being on the edge between work/family reconciliation and the temptation of a mother's wage can be qualified in terms of class: actual reconciliation policies are promoted for upper- and middle-class women, while poorer mothers are enticed to stay at home caring for their children, and receiving the APE (Fagnani, 2001).

Therefore, it can be argued that the class differentiation of work/family policies has been reversed since the end of the nineteenth century: while the model of women combining waged labour and mothering was initially constituted within public policy as a working-class model, it is now a middle-to upper-class model, whereas poor, low-qualified women are more encouraged to stay at home caring for their children or work only part-time on the labour market.

When in the labour market, these low-qualified women also constitute a care labour force; they can be employed as professional caretakers,

whose professionalization is still very limited (Bergeron and Saint-Pierre, 1998).¹⁷ The development of 'family services', more broadly speaking, also illustrates this increasing connection of family policy with employment issues (Lallement, 2000). The creation of jobs related to these services has been encouraged by several tax rebates (1992, 1995), and provisions such as service-work cheques (1994) or service-work remittances (1996), that facilitate the legal hiring, by individuals, of helpers for specific caring and domestic tasks. Ninety-nine per cent of these jobs, which involve care, housekeeping and educational tasks, are occupied by women, working part-time for the most (Lallement, 2000: 278–79). The development of this type of family service also weakens women's position in the labour market.

While they are actually strongly linked to employment policy issues, these work/family policies have been developed, as Table 1 shows, as *family* policy; that is, they are part of the official explicit public policy labelled in France as 'family policy'. I will now examine another, more recent framing of work/family policies: that in terms of equal opportunities in employment.

3. WORK/FAMILY POLICY AS EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICY

Women's right to participate in the labour force, and eventually, gender equality in the family as well as in the workplace, are key stakes underlying work/family politics. However, the history of work/family policies in France shows that women's rights have hardly ever been promoted *per se*. Women's right to work has been, by and large, the by-product of policies that aim at other ends: macroeconomic policies, education policy (with the underlying Church/state rivalry), and demographic concerns. In view of this, it appears particularly interesting to analyse the action of state institutions whose official aim is the promotion of women's rights.

As mentioned earlier, starting in the mid-1960s, state familialism was faced with the institutionalization of women's interests within the state, with the creation of governmental bodies specifically in charge of promoting women's rights and interests. Following Mazur and McBride Stetson (1995: 1–2), I will use the term 'state feminism' to describe the activities of these women's policy machineries. This use of the expression 'state feminism' does not imply a judgment on the actual feminist meaning or outcome of these activities; it only refers to the asserted intention of improving women's status. Similarly, I may refer to the policies promoted by these organizations as 'feminist policy', based on their asserted aim to improve women's status.

State feminism in France was built around the issue of equality in employment (Lévy, 1988). Even though it is hard to generalize because

Table 1. Work/family policies: the main legal provisions

Maternity and parental leave:

Maternity leave:

Mothers are allowed to suspend their job contract for 6 weeks before the presumed date of delivery, and 10 weeks after.

They are obliged to suspend her work at least 8 weeks, including 6 weeks after the delivery.

Reference : Labour Code, articles L 122–26 and L 224–1.

Online resource : www.legifrance.fr

Parental leave: up to the child's third birthday

Reference : Labour Code, article L122–28–1.

Family allowances:

The *allocations familiales* are not means-tested. They are provided starting with the second child. if there are two children : €117.14 per month

if there are three children : €267.21 per month

for each additional child, add €150.08 per month.

Online resource: Caisse d'allocations familiales, <http://www.caf.fr/catalogue/>, visited on 9 January 2006.

Financial provisions for childcare

Since January 2004 the various allowances devoted to childcare (APJE²⁵, AAD²⁶, AFEAMA²⁷, AGED²⁸, APE²⁹) have been replaced by a single childcare allowance, the PAJE (*Prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant*). The PAJE is composed of:

A means-tested birth/adoption allowance: €840.96.

A 'basic' means-tested monthly allowance during the child's first three years: €168.20 per month.

A complement for 'free choice of activity' (*complément de libre choix d'activité*) if one of the parents reduces or interrupts their activity to care for their child(ren). If one of the parents interrupts their activity, this allowance is €353.67 for parents who already benefit from the 'basic' allowance, and €521.85 for those who don't. The amount is lower if the parent's activity is only reduced.

A complement for 'free choice of childcare' (*complément de libre choix du mode de garde*) if the parents hire a child caretaker, directly or through a specialized service. The amount varies according to family income, and parents are eligible until the child's sixth birthday. For direct hiring of a child caretaker at home, in the lowest income range, the amount is €368.48 per month for a child aged 0–3. For example, for hiring a professional child caretaker, hired through a specialized service, the amount can be up to €763.29 for the same income category, depending on the type of child caretaker.

Online resource: Caisse d'allocations familiales, <http://www.caf.fr/catalogue/>, visited 9 January 2006.

Day-care infrastructure:

In 2003:

Day-care centres: 242, 630 places

Family day-care: 67, 359 places

Online resource: INSEE 2003:

http://www.insee.fr/fr/ffc/chifcle_fiche.asp?ref_id=NATENF02308andtab_id=198, visited 9 January 2006.

the political leaders in charge of this function of furthering women's status have endorsed different visions of what could be labelled the 'women's issue', it is yet fair to say that women's paid work has always been a key stake in the definition of 'women's policy' by these authorities (Mazur, 1995).

For example, the women's bureau that was created in 1965 (and lasted until 1984) was devoted to women's paid labour (*Comité du travail féminin*). The promotion of the image of the 'working woman' was also key in the action of the ministry for women's rights during the socialist government from 1981 to 1986 (Jenson and Sineau, 1995; Thébaud, 2001). Minister Yvette Roudy defined equality in employment as the key issue for women and her priority of action. This resulted in the 1983 equal employment law (*loi sur l'égalité professionnelle*), which notably set up a framework for some form of affirmative action in favour of gender equality in employment. More generally speaking, this ministry's action and discourse clearly promoted paid employment and equality in employment as the key to women's emancipation.

This focus on women's paid labour means that when they have been envisioned by these governmental bodies (which has not always been the case), work/family policies have mostly been apprehended as part of a broader policy of equality in employment. In other words, while they were framed by state familialists as family policy, work/family policies were framed by state feminists as 'work' policy.¹⁸ For example the *Comité du travail féminin* (1965–1984) created from the beginning a work group on the issue of work/family reconciliation. Other governmental bodies devoted to women's rights have been more reluctant to tackle the issue of work/family reconciliation. For example, Roudy, minister for women's rights from 1981 to 1986, clearly distinguished the issue of equality in employment from work/family reconciliation issues, which was dealt with by family secretary of state Georgina Dufoix in a rather conservative way (Jenson and Sineau, 1995: 239–57).

Yet since the end of the 1980s, work/family reconciliation has been an asserted preoccupation of women's policy machineries. For example, in 1988, the advisory council for equality in employment (*Conseil supérieur de l'égalité professionnelle*) defined work/family reconciliation as one of its research priorities.¹⁹

In the 1990s, this state feminist preoccupation with work/family reconciliation was reinforced, which can be linked with two contemporary dynamics. First, the debate over the reduction of work hours (with the establishment of the '35 hour' week) spurred a reframing of work/family issues as a time issue, around the idea of 'articulation of social times', a concept that was widely spread by women's policy machineries. Second, at the European level, work/family reconciliation policies were framed as part of a broader gender equality policy, and part of

equal opportunity policies in the workplace, especially since the 1990s (Hantrais, 2000: 113–39; Hantrais and Letablier, 1996: 116–35; Letablier, 2002: 64).²⁰ The latter definition of the issue was increasingly appropriated by French state feminists, especially during Nicole Pery's office from 1997 to 2002 under Lionel Jospin's left-wing government. Indeed, 'facilitating the management of life's times' was one of Pery's eight main policy orientations in her programme entitled 'equality marching' (*L'égalité en marche*). In this perspective, she even explicitly targeted family policy, aiming at a more 'feminist' family policy, and insisted on the need for further male participation in family tasks (Secrétariat d'Etat aux droits des femmes 2000: 5–6). Women's main responsibility for childcare was identified as a brake on professional equality (ibid: 32). This orientation regarding 'time management' notably included an increase in the availability of public day-care centres (*crèches*), an experimental programme for childcare in poor neighbourhoods, especially adapted for atypical working hours, an improvement in the availability of public transportation, and an action inciting municipalities to better take into account the issue of time management.

The creation of a paternity leave in 2002 can also be analysed as a way to promote a more equalitarian view of gender relations in family policy. Indeed, in 2002, Jospin's left wing government created a new leave of 11 days (that added to the three days that were traditionally granted) that can be taken only by fathers within four months following the birth of a child. As Truc (2003) shows, the non-compulsory character of this leave made it difficult for fathers to claim, and indeed, this leave is still under-used by fathers.

Between 2002 and 2005, under Minister for parity and equality in employment Nicole Ameline's office,²¹ work/family reconciliation policy was still defined as part of a strategy of equal opportunity in employment. For example, the issue of work/family reconciliation is included in Ameline's 2005 draft bill on pay equality.²²

But this framing of the work/family issue as a work issue may also be used as a way to transfer the responsibility for work/family reconciliation facilities from the state to private firms. Indeed, firms are strongly incited to play their part in work/family reconciliation efforts, with measures such as the 'equality label', created by Ameline in December, 2004. This label is awarded to firms that develop innovative gender equality strategies, especially in terms of work/family reconciliation.

Therefore, in feminist policy, work/family reconciliation appears as a means to equality in employment. This new framing of work/family reconciliation introduced by state feminism should be qualified. Indeed, its reach is hard to assess, and is certainly very inferior to that of state familialism which, in France, is grounded on strong, well-established

state institutions, as well as a strong family movement. Women's policy machinery, by comparison, is a small administration with little budget, and its position is rather weak and not very legitimate within governments. Moreover, work/family issues are not the core of state feminism, which is the defence of workplace equality in the strict (literal) sense. Therefore its discourse cannot be hegemonic. However, these administrations can be the breeding ground for new ways of framing work/family issues, and they are the first to frame these issues in terms of women's rights.²³

Conversely, in their promotion of women's rights, state feminists may be tempted to put forward traditional family policy goals. For example, Ameline argued in favour of her pay equality draft bill by putting forward its eventual positive demographic outcome:

Women work, and the more they work, the more they have children. Seeing to it that women feel totally invested in professional life means winning on two fronts: creating performance, and favouring our demography.²⁴

This type of statement confirms that women's rights are seldom promoted *per se*, and still need to be fought for, even according to state feminists, in the name of 'higher' political concerns such as economic and demographic growth.

4. CONCLUSION

As the above quotation illustrates, the complexities and ambiguities of work/family policies in France cannot easily be reduced. As Commaille (2001) stresses, there is a structural tension in French family policy between the referentials of emancipation, institution and protection, that imply contradictory injunctions for women. These conflicting values embedded in work/family policy can be explained by the plurality of actors involved (expressly state familialists and state feminists) and the mix of various public policy devices implemented over the years. Beyond this structural tension, two main current trends may be stressed in conclusion. First, in terms of policy framing, in spite of the enduring strength of state familialism, work/family policy is more and more linked to 'work' policy issues, be it the political management of care work in relation with macro-economic dynamics and employment policy, or the reframing of work/policy reconciliation by state feminism as an issue of gender equality in employment. Yet it should be stressed that this definition of reconciliation policy as gender-equality policy is still far from being hegemonic. Second, in terms of impact, the recent evolution of these policies implies increased class inequalities, which are especially visible amongst women.

NOTES

¹ I wish to thank Jacques Commaille for his comments on this article.

² Rémi Lenoir, in particular, introduces a very useful distinction between state familialism and Church familialism (Lenoir, 2003: 232-61).

³ In using the concept of frame, I am inspired by Bacchi's 'what's the problem' perspective (Bacchi, 1999).

⁴ In 1998 in France, women provided 69 per cent of the time devoted to domestic work within heterosexual couples, as opposed to 81 per cent in 1966 (Méda, Cette and Dromel, 2004: 8).

⁵ In 2003 in France, among heterosexual couples, with one child under three the labour force participation of women was 80,2 per cent (97,1 per cent for men), and it fell to 58,3 per cent (96,7 per cent for men) with two children with at least one under three, and to 36,3 per cent (95,6 per cent for men) with three children among whom at least one under three (Colin, Djider and Ravel, 2005: 3).

⁶ However, it should be stressed that the women's movement was a strong supporter of these measures and lobbied for them (Cova, 2000).

⁷ This analysis challenges Gosta Esping-Andersen's classification of the French welfare state within the « conservative-corporatist » regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

⁸ In France, there hasn't been a strong mobilization of men in unions in favour of a family wage, unlike what happened in Great Britain for example. This has facilitated women's participation in the labour force (Frader, 1998).

⁹ In 1913, a yearly allowance had already been created for needy families of more than three children, which was a refiguration of state-insured family allowances (Cova, 2000: 150).

¹⁰ This allowance was suppressed in 1978 (Commaille, Strobel and Villac, 2002: 77).

¹¹ For a general presentation of family policy, see Pitrou (1994), and Commaille, Strobel and Villac (2002).

¹² As Jane Jenson stresses 'The modern French economic system had come to rely upon women workers' (Jenson, 1988: 159).

¹³ The divorce rate, which had remained steadily around 10 per cent until 1965, increased up to 20 per cent in 1978, and 26 per cent in 1982 (Thery, 1996: 119).

¹⁴ The fertility rate decreased from 2.9 children per woman in 1964 to 1.93 in 1975, to 1.65 in 1994 (Lutinié, 1996: 1-3). Therefore the main decrease was in the 1965-1975 period.

¹⁵ Internet resource : INSEE: http://www.insee.fr/fr/ffc/chifcle_fiche.asp?ref_id=NATCCF03103&ndtab_id=303&ndsouspop=1.

¹⁶ The parent only had to have been employed for a minimum of eight semesters within the ten years preceding the birth or adoption of a third child.

¹⁷ The link with employment policies is also strong in policies that target care for dependent adults within the family (Martin, 2001).

¹⁸ This broad assertion should however be qualified according to the different political leaders in charge of women's policy machineries. For example, it can be stressed that in 1980-1981, Monique Pelletier was simultaneously in charge of 'women's condition' and of family issues. Hélène Gisserot, Delegate for women's condition (*déléguée à la condition féminine*) from 1986 to 1988, was also more open to family issues, and endorsed the right wing government's campaign in favour of a recognition of mothers' status (*statut de la mère de famille*).

¹⁹ See for example (Conseil supérieur de l'égalité professionnelle 1989).

²⁰ The same dynamic (defining women's equality as women's participation to the labour market, and linking it to reconciliation policies) was observed in other western countries (Bacchi, 1999). Interestingly enough, Hantrais (1995) has argued that the French model of social policy, with its strong state intervention on work-family issues, may have influenced this orientation at the European level. While the EU played a key role in the impulse to link reconciliation policy to gender-equality policy, its efficiency is now questioned, notably due to the effect of the gender mainstreaming strategy (Heinen, 2004).

²¹ Nicole Ameline was replaced, in the Villepin government formed on 2 June 2005, by Catherine Vautrin, who is delegate minister for social cohesion and parity (*Ministre déléguée à la cohésion sociale et à la parité*).

²² The bill passed its second reading at the National Assembly on 12 December 2005, and the Senate is to give it its second reading on 17 January 2006. The initial draft bill is available at the following address: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/projets/pl2214.asp>.

²³ It should be stressed here that some feminist critiques argue against the 'work-family reconciliation' perspective because it contributes to defining 'reconciliation' as a women's issue (Bachmann, Golay *et al* 2004).

²⁴ 'les femmes travaillent, et plus elles travaillent, plus elles ont des enfants. Faire en sorte que les femmes se sentent totalement engagées dans la vie professionnelle, c'est réussir sur un double titre': créer de la performance et favoriser notre démographie', intervention by Nicole Ameline on April, 28th, 2005, in an Internet chat: http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/information/actualites_20/egalite_professionnelle_nicole_ameline_52865.html. Visited on 9 January 2006.

²⁵ *Allocation pour jeune enfant*, or young child's allowance.

²⁶ *Allocation d'adoption*, or adoption allowance.

²⁷ *Aide à la Famille pour l'Emploi d'une Assistante Maternelle Agréée*, or allowance subsidizing the employment of a licensed mother's assistant.

²⁸ *Allocation de garde d'enfant à domicile*, or allowance for childcare at home.

²⁹ *Allocation parentale d'éducation*, or parental educational allowance (paid parental leave).

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