

« La question féminine »

Women and the Extreme-Right in Interwar France

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Introduction

Il serait injuste d'abandonner le chapitre des activités individuelles sans aborder, avec le respect et la circonspection qui s'imposent, la question féminine.¹

Colonel François de la Rocque

In 1918, the world saw not only the end of a war, but the end of an era. We so readily accept that the world was unequivocally changed by the First World War that historians have conceived of “the long nineteenth century,” ending in 1918. The Great War had effectively ended a century and wiped Europe’s slate clean; the postwar era saw an effort to rebuild society through a proliferation of competing movements such as socialism, conservatism, and feminism. However, many expressed a desire to return to prewar stability and “traditional values.” These conflicting desires succeeded in further splintering French people’s opinions and allegiances. Feminist movements, which had been stalled by the war, never regained their momentum. The ultimate failure of the feminist movement and the instability of French society, exacerbated by the growing threat from Germany, partially forced French women to look towards what historian Kevin Passmore calls “proto fascist” organizations, such as the Croix de feu.² French women did not spontaneously and homogeneously “turn” to fascism, but a new group of women supplanted the old; the “new woman” was replaced by the “new mother.”

Why then were women attracted to fascist and extreme-right organizations and ideologies? At first, these groups appear to be hostile to women’s rights, a fallacy that is supported by our modern understanding of left and right. However, as Charles Vallin, vice president of the PSF, claimed in 1937, history had taught Frenchmen that “we will not save

¹ François de la Rocque, *Service Public* (Paris: 1934), 75.

² Kevin Passmore creates this term to designate the authoritarian, semi-fascist, pre-Vichy policies of the Croix de feu in his book *Fascism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: 2002).

France without women.”³ Appealing to women was a powerful way for the extreme-right to combat the left, especially the growing Communist Party and feminist organizations. Recruiting women into the organizations and expanding their roles in the public sphere raised membership rates and gave the extreme-right organizations access into the feminine, private sphere. Although the feminist movements in France were unable to achieve many of their goals, feminism was an undeniable force. The extreme-right presented a new image of womanhood that celebrated “traditional” conceptions of femininity and through these “traditional” values, offered women both representation and participation in the political and economic, and therefore public, sphere.

I will attempt to answer how the extreme-right organizations appealed to women by examining how women’s roles and rights were defined within the organizations, specifically the Croix de feu and the Parti Social Français (PSF). In the first chapter I examine women’s increased participation in the extreme-right organizations and parties, through inclusion of women into the groups and the proposed extension of legal rights, such as suffrage. The second chapter chronicles feminine work and labor, demonstrating how the extreme-right privileged women by giving mothers economic power within the family and political representation through the family vote. In the third and final chapter, I examine political roles that were further expanded for women through the activist images of Joan of Arc, Nadine de la Rocque, and the fictional character Bouboule.

Through these measures, the extreme-right organizations and parties created a space for women and offered them extended rights and positions of power, yet praised traditional femininity. This combination of proposed rights and positive images of femininity appealed to women of many political persuasions and occupations, including mothers, single women,

³ Charles Vallin, “Aux femmes de PSF” (1937). Trans. Sean Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy: the Croix de feu and the Parti social français, 1927-1945* (Montreal: 2007), 176.

proponents of traditional femininity, and discouraged feminists. The facts speak for themselves: between 1928 and 1940, tens of thousands of French women joined extreme-right organizations. In this thesis, I present the argument that this rise in membership was due to deliberate measures taken by the extreme-right.

* * *

Pierre Nora wrote famously about the “*lieux de mémoire*,” a theory of collective memory in which the abstract idea of an event holds a more important place in popular imagination than the event itself. For instance, he maintained that the storming of the Bastille in 1789 was less important than the current celebrations on July 14th because of the connotations these modern events hold and the space they occupy in French people’s hearts and minds. Suzanne Citron has more recently evoked “*trous de mémoire*,” or memory lapses: historical events that had failed to capture the popular imagination and were then forgotten.⁴ It can be argued that most of women’s history, at least until fairly recently, has fallen into these holes. French women’s involvement in extreme-right or fascist organizations has been almost entirely forgotten or ignored. The scholars who have worked on this topic have been concerned with *what* women did in such organizations; I am attempting to solve *why* women were in these groups. I believe that the sheer fact of women’s involvement in extreme-right organizations is significant because of its somewhat surprising existence, as well as the more surprising fact that few people know of this existence.

Sources, Limitations, and Historiography

The majority of my research is based on two major documents from the Croix de feu and the PSF: *Service Public*, the 1934 book by Colonel de la Rocque, the leader of the Croix de feu, that outlines the organization’s goals and the 1936 PSF manifesto, “Une partie, un programme.”

⁴ Quoted in Siân Reynolds, *France Between the Wars: Gender and Politics* (London: 1996), 17.

I also looked at documents from other group members, such as memoirs from Croix de feu adherents, and from other extreme-right groups, such as the party manifesto of the Parti Populaire Français. My research was partially limited by lack of access to primary documents. In particular, most of the writings of La Rocque are held in archives in Paris, so I did not have access to these works. I also could not gain access to *Le Flambeau*, the Croix de feu newspaper, or the *Bouboule* novels which I cite in the third chapter. Additionally, there are few existing accounts from the women who were actually involved in these organizations, a common complaint in the field of women's history.

Secondary works on inter-war fascism and feminism were useful in contextualizing my question. René Rémond, Robert Soucy, and William Irvine, among others, have extensively studied French fascism. The role of women is addressed within their more general studies, but these historians do not delve into why women were attracted to such organizations. The history of women on the left and in feminist movements during the same period has been well documented by Mary Louise Roberts' *Civilization Without Sexes*, Siân Reynolds' *France Between the Wars: Gender and Politics*, and Christine Bard's *Les Filles de Marianne*, to mention a few of the most influential. However, these historians mention women's involvement on the right only in passing. Victoria de Grazia's work on Italian women and fascism, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, and Claudia Koonz's work on women in Nazi Germany, including *Mothers in the Fatherland*, set a precedent for works discussing women and fascism. These two authors address why women were attracted to such organizations and how fascists defined women's roles and rights, especially with regard to motherhood and maternity.

The recent historiographical trend is leading to similar work on France. In the past few years, Kevin Passmore has written on women in the Croix de feu and PSF, expanded on by

Cheryl Koos and Daniella Sarnoff. Particularly useful resources were Passmore's articles "Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism" and "Boy-Scouting for Grown-Ups," as well as Koos and Sarnoff's chapter "France" in Passmore's anthology *Women, Gender, and Fascism in Modern Europe*. Mary Jane Green has also made significant contributions to the field, including her articles "The Bouboule Novels: Constructing a French Fascist Woman" and "Gender, Fascism, and the Croix de Feu: the 'women's pages' of *Le Flambeau*." These secondary sources have helped to elucidate women's roles in the Croix de feu/PSF, but have not questioned how and why the organizations recruited women, which I address in this thesis.

Gender Relations, Feminism, and Fascism after the First World War

In his memoir, Henri Malherbe, a veteran and member of the Croix de feu, stated that the war had "reduced the preceding society to ashes."⁵ While rebuilding French society after the war, most French people advocated a return to "traditional values," meaning a recasting of gender roles in which femininity was equated with motherhood and submission and women were relegated to the home and the private sphere. Renate Bridenthal argues that women, as well as men, supported this endeavor, as "it often seemed easier to fall into stereotypical behavior considered feminine than to explore uncharted areas of work and sexual demeanor."⁶

However, some women resisted the return to the home after years of expanded work opportunities and increased participation in the public sphere. The "new woman" was born, a woman who was "liberated" in behavior, speech, and dress, whose experiences in formerly masculine roles during the war had led her to demand new roles in peacetime. The interwar era

⁵ Henri Malherbe, *La Rocque: Un chef, des actes, des idées* (Paris: 1934), 20. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

⁶ Renate Bridenthal, "Something Old, Something New: Women Between the Two World Wars," Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard (eds.) *Becoming Visible: Women in European History, Second Edition* (Boston: 1987), 478.

therefore saw a proliferation of feminist movements in France and the rest of the Western world. As various historians have remarked, it is more accurate to discuss plural *feminisms* rather than a unified French *feminism*. There were many groups with diverse opinions and political leanings, of different religious associations and social classes. Christine Bard designates moderate, reformist, and radical feminism, while Steven Hauss sees a right, center, and left divide, and Paul Smith uses a secular/Catholic divide.⁷ Luckily, this thesis does not attempt to enunciate a new definition or division of feminisms – for my purposes, it is essential to acknowledge the breadth of the movements and the decline of importance of feminism as the Second World War approached.

Between the two world wars, over 140 associations were organized by women dedicated to gaining women's rights. Some of the most influential groups were the Conseil National des Femmes Françaises, the Union Française pour le Suffrage des Femmes, and the Ligue Française pour le Droit des Femmes.⁸ As the titles imply, many of these organizations were working for suffrage. Women felt that their sacrifices during the war meant they deserved extended rights, specifically suffrage, after 1918. France and Italy were the only western European nations that did not extend women's suffrage after the First World War. Feminism seemed to have failed, in what is widely known as "*l'étrange défaite du féminisme*," and women who were agitating for more rights were forced to seek alternative means to achieve their goals, including joining extreme-right organizations.

The Italian fascist party and German Nazi party set precedents for women's involvement in extreme-right organizations in France. In Germany, Hitler prohibited feminist groups, and

⁷ Christine Bard, *Les filles de Marianne: Histoire des féminismes 1914 – 1940* (Paris: 1995) ; Paul Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic* (Oxford: 1996).

⁸ Paul Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic* (Oxford: 1996), 2, 14.

although he had female supporters, it is a myth that German women voted Hitler into power.⁹

However, Claudia Koonz argues that the Nazi party offered women “an alternative both to backward-looking Catholic parochialism and to the feminist vision of an equal future.”¹⁰

Although the extreme-right organizations in France had vast ideological differences to the Nazi and Italian fascist parties, the French admired the parties’ organization and effectiveness and borrowed elements such as the inclusion of women.

The Croix de feu, Colonel de la Rocque, and the Parti Social Français

The Croix de feu was founded in 1928 by Maurice Hanot, known as Hartoy, as a veterans’ organization open to those who had spent at least six months on the front lines.¹¹

Lieutenant Colonel François de la Rocque was a war hero, decorated with the Croix de guerre for his service on the front lines, who joined the Croix de feu in 1928. La Rocque’s wife and son, Edith and Gilles, remember in their biography of La Rocque: “In the months since he had left the army, La Rocque looked among the veterans’ federations for men who, despite ten years of disillusion, had safely guarded in their hearts the veritable spirit of the front.”¹² In the first election of the Croix de feu, La Rocque was elected vice-president, and in 1931, La Rocque became the president.¹³

From 1930 to July 1933, the Croix de feu grew by 500 members, partially because of the lack of association with a political group and its inclusion of all veterans who had served on the

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8, 29.

¹⁰ Claudia Koonz, “The Fascist Solution to the Woman Question in Italy and Germany,” Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard (eds.) *Becoming Visible: Women in European History, Second Edition* (Boston: 1987), 507.

¹¹ René Rémond, trans. James M. Laux, *The Right Wing in France* (Philadelphia: 1966), 286.

¹² Edith and Gilles de la Rocque, *La Rocque: Tel qu’il était* (Paris: 1934), 70-1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 53, 71; Rémond, *The Right Wing in France*, 286.

front lines, no matter their personal political affiliation.¹⁴ As La Rocque editorialized in *Le Flambeau*, the Croix de feu newspaper, on December 1, 1933, “No other group, no man, no government is supporting us. No matter what, if one comes to us, he will be cordially accepted.”¹⁵ The Croix de feu was an organization, and not a party, meaning that the group claimed no political affiliation and refused to participate in national elections. The Croix de feu’s rapid growth and paramilitary tactics, including the famous anti-parliamentary demonstration on February 6, 1934, which ended in a riot at the Place de la Concorde in front of the National Assembly, made the group a target of the government. On June 18, 1936, the government dissolved the group, citing illegal and violent methods. The organization reformed as a political party, the Parti Social Français, on July 12, 1936.¹⁶

The newly formed political party was immensely successful, registering seven thousand new members each day, according to Edith and Gilles de la Rocque.¹⁷ René Rémond believes that this success was due to the transformation of the Croix de feu into a conventional electoral machine, through which Croix de feu members could campaign for positions in the national government. Rémond says, “a part of the classic Right let itself be won over by the vocabulary, and taken in by the propaganda, of fascism. This betrayal of their ideas, this denial of what they represented, offered a counterpoint which was the exact reverse of the itinerary of the Croix de Feu.”¹⁸ Sean Kennedy adds that the PSF highlighted its Catholicism and presented itself as an alternative to the socialist Popular Front and its Jewish leader, Léon Blum, thereby attracting French conservatives and anti-Semites.¹⁹ The party grew enormously and claimed three million

¹⁴ Edith and Gilles de la Rocque, *La Rocque: Tel qu’il était*, 75.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁶ Rémond, *The Right Wing in France*, 291.

¹⁷ Edith and Gilles de la Rocque, *La Rocque: Tel qu’il était*, 146.

¹⁸ Rémond, *The Right Wing in France*, 297.

¹⁹ Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy*, 152.

members by 1938.²⁰ However, as the Second World War approached, the PSF was viewed with trepidation as the “party of Hitler” and was ultimately banned after the war in 1945.²¹ La Rocque clung to the idea of unity and the possibility of the PSF’s reemergence after the war and many historians, including Rémond, credit the PSF as a precursor of post-war Gaullism.²²

Historians have long debated whether or not the Croix de feu/PSF was fascist. François Veuillot, a member of the Croix de feu, said in his memoir that the organization was “irreconcilable with a totalitarian regime... it had neither the intention, nor the inclination to press towards a Hitlerian or fascist dictatorship.”²³ Edith and Gilles de la Rocque said that while the Croix de feu “flirted” with parties of the right, “they became neither right nor left; the organization was concerned with uniting, and not dividing.”²⁴ It is important to note that the Croix de feu/PSF never self-identified as fascist. They did, however, exhibit many similarities to German and Italian fascists, which Robert Soucy and William Irvine believe made the Croix de feu/PSF fascist. Contradictorily, René Rémond argues that although the PSF had elements of fascism, it was not necessarily fascist. Kevin Passmore argues that the group started as fascist, but as the PSF became electoral and abandoned paramilitarism, it “ceased to be fascist, but remained within the authoritarian populist right.”²⁵ Instead of designating the Croix de feu/PSF as fascist, Sean Kennedy calls the groups “authoritarian nationalist movements,” emphasizing the groups’ focus on stability, national community, institutional pluralism, and hostility to democracy.²⁶

²⁰ Rémond, *The Right Wing in France*, 292.

²¹ Edith and Gilles de la Rocque, *La Rocque: Tel qu’il était*, 13; Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy*, 15.

²² Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy*, 258.

²³ François Veuillot, *La Rocque et son parti* (Paris: 1938), 48.

²⁴ Edith and Gilles de la Rocque, *La Rocque: Tel qu’il était*, 72.

²⁵ Kevin Passmore, “Boy Scouting for Grown-Ups? Paramilitarism in the Croix de feu and the Parti Social Français” *French Historical Studies* 19:2 (1995), 528-556.

²⁶ Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy*, 118.

I am not attempting to join this debate and label the Croix de feu/PSF as fascist or relegate the groups to the right or left. Instead, I think it is necessary to recognize that the groups refused to align themselves with other political parties or to the traditional right/left divide. Additionally, these right/left designations have changed since the 1930s. We must therefore recognize the inherent contradiction in trying to characterize the parties based on current political divisions and instead acknowledge the fluidity of these labels. The label of “extreme-right” is problematic as well, but I am following convention to avoid confusion; this contemporary appellation is based on the groups’ nationalistic, authoritarian, and anti-parliamentary beliefs. Keeping these apparent contradictions in mind, we can now explore how extreme-right organizations in interwar France attracted women and why.

One

Ouvert à toutes Françaises

The Inclusion of Women and Extension of Rights

Introduction

During the interwar period, the feminist movement in France was stalled by increasing concerns about the troubled economy, the internal threat of communism, and the external threat of fascism in general and Germany in particular. The growing frustration of those who observed the continuous, contentious process involved in the nominating, stalling, and rejection of bills designed to extend women's rights was expressed in the floor of the Senate by an unlikely character. In April 1932, after weeks of heated debates around a proposition for universal women's suffrage, a decorated veteran of the Great War stood up in front of the French Senate and cried out:

Our 1,500,000 comrades who fell on the fields of honor were heroically mourned by mothers, widows, and sisters, who now demand the Senate's respect. For national dignity, Mr. Vice-President, know how to preside. Watch over and restrain your old men. They are past the age of naughty giggling. So are we.¹

Amidst dismissals of women's suffrage from the esteemed senators, this man was simply asking to accord women the respect they deserved as "heroic" wives and mothers. He elevated the struggle to a basic question of human decency and "national dignity," and shamed the legislator's sexist comments and sexual innuendos (*fous rires polissons*). He was not asking for

¹ *Le droit des femmes* April 1932, quoted in Christine Bard, *Les filles de Marianne* (Paris: 1995), 332. My translation.

women's rights at all, but simply for respect and for the senators to stop laughing at them. This man was not, as may be assumed, a left-wing radical, but rather a member of the Croix de feu.

In fact, between 1918 and 1940, many extreme-right groups included women members and boasted policies that accorded women within their parties the kind of respect our war veteran demanded of the senators. This chapter explores measures that the extreme-right organizations and parties, primarily the Croix de feu and Parti Social Français (PSF), adopted to include women in their ranks, as well as policies they advocated that sought to extend political rights to women. As the organizations and parties had no political power, we must consider the highly theoretical nature of these documents and realize that no rights were guaranteed. For instance, even if the PSF did win an election running on a platform of women's suffrage, women still could not vote and would have had no role in its election. Once in power, the PSF could theoretically propose bills to grant women's suffrage, but these could still be defeated by opposition in the Senate. Furthermore, extreme-right organizations were questioning the very idea of democratic elections, and their proposed routes to power were not necessarily electoral. Nevertheless, the discussion of women's rights formed a large part of these groups' discourse. This chapter will explore how women's roles and rights were conceived, how they changed, and why the extreme-right devoted so much thought to this subject.

Gains in Women's Rights in the Early Twentieth Century

The Senate was the locus of legislative and legal attempts to gain women's rights in the early twentieth century. The slow gains and many setbacks in the Senate proved that women

could not gain civil rights through legislative attempts and political parties. Looking at the legislature shows how the extreme-right organizations emerged to pose an attractive alternative for women's political participation.

Perhaps the first important law to invoke is the 1901 Law of Association, the first law to guarantee freedom of association in France. (The earlier Republics, while supporting similar essential freedoms, never guaranteed the freedom of association because of the fear of the Catholic Church's influence in political life through religious affiliation.) The Law of Association mandated that each association had to write a charter outlining the membership requirements and rules of the organization. This law placed no restrictions on gender, breaking with a historically gendered concept of organizations and group membership. Indeed, it did not grant or even allude to women's rights, but its lack of gendered language allowed groups to individually determine women's status and offered women, albeit limited, freedom of political action. Women were therefore accorded more agency in extra-governmental politics, even though women were still not recognized as citizens and could not vote in national elections.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, notions of family, gender, and property began to change, allowing women more control over their income, labor, and children. In 1907 women received the right to control their own earnings, instead of automatically handing their wages over to their husbands or fathers.² In 1915, mothers were granted parental authority, but only if the husband was unable to fill his position as head of the family.³ Women were granted the right to join labor organizations without their husband's permission in 1920 and the right to retain

² Anne-Marie Sohn, "Between the Wars in France and England," Françoise Thébaud (ed.) *A History of Women in the West, Volume V* (Cambridge: 1994), 114.

³ Luc Capdevila et al, *Hommes et femmes dans la France en guerre (1914-1945)* (Paris: 2003), 114.

their French nationality after marrying a foreigner in 1927.⁴ We must remember, however, that nationality did not equal citizenship and women did not have the same privileges awarded to citizens.

Suffrage was one of the most hotly contested issues between the wars, although it was not agitated for by all feminist groups, nor was it opposed by all politicians. The interwar debates described here continued the many years of stop-and-start attempts to grant women's suffrage through legislation. The halting progress was due to relegating women's issues to the background whenever possible; only a few measures were debated in the Senate, and even fewer passed. The first important vote about women's suffrage took place on May 9, 1919, when, at Aristide Briand's urging, the Chamber of Deputies passed a bill giving women the vote without restriction. However, on November 7, 1922, this measure was rejected by the Senate. The Chamber then reaffirmed its commitment to universal women's suffrage, asking the Poincaré government to plead with the Senate for its support, but on November 21 the suffrage bill was again defeated in the Senate. The final vote was 134 for and 156 against. Interestingly, the only political party of which a majority rejected the measure was the Gauche Démocratique, the Democratic Left, showing the lack of support for women's suffrage by the left.⁵

The Senate blocked multiple bills proposing restricted suffrage for women as well. In April 1925 a bill for partial enfranchisement that would have allowed women to vote in municipal elections was stalled for three years and eventually defeated in June 1928 by a mere fifty votes. Municipal suffrage was defeated again in March 1929 and in March 1932. The Senate rejected another bill for women's suffrage in June 1931 and a measure proposing full political equality for women in November 1933. A suffrage bill was proposed once more in 1936, passed

⁴ Sohn, "Between the Wars in France and England," 114-5.

⁵ Paul Smith, *A History of the French Senate, Volume I* (Lewiston: 2005), 348-9.

in the Chamber, but was defeated in the Senate due to lack of support by the right and abstention of the Radical Party and most members of the Popular Front government.⁶ Although the left-dominated Chamber did support extending women's suffrage, and all measures were defeated by very small margins, the Senate blocked every attempt, showing the unfeasibility of achieving women's rights through the legislature and political parties in power.

The left was often behind the bills proposed and supported by the Chamber, but was still conflicted over how much to extend women's civic and political rights. The birth of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) in 1921 and its emphasis on mass membership sparked an interest in recruiting women constituents throughout the political landscape. Because the PCF's original goal was to build its strength by numbers they recruited women as well as men, but the party did not officially support women's suffrage for over a decade. It did, however, allow women candidates to stand in municipal elections in 1924 and presented an unsuccessful bill for women's full equality in the same year.⁷

In 1924 the adoption of a new constitution by the Radical Party called for admission of women to the party, but did not address women's rights, even after the formation of a women's section, or women's auxiliary group, in 1935. Although they called themselves the "party of suffrage," and traditionally supported universal male suffrage, the Radicals opposed women's suffrage.⁸ The Radical party may have been in fact radical at its conception in the 1870s, with its platform of universal male suffrage, but by the 1930s it was a moderate, center-left majority party that controlled Senate. In the interbellum period, the Radical party looked much more like our modern American right. Paul Smith argues that the establishment of women's sections in

⁶ *Ibid.*, 350-2.

⁷ Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic*, 121, 117.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66-68.

1935 in four republican parties was a “clear statement of recognition of the growth of women’s and feminist organizations, and of their power as a political constituency.”⁹ In reaction to these concessions from the left that included women into the political sphere, the extreme-right felt the need to loosen its policies and to contend for female constituents.

However, there were also reasons for the left to shy away from extending women’s rights, which essentially pushed women to the right-wing parties and organizations. The dominant argument against women’s suffrage held that giving women the vote would privilege the clergy, citing the clerical/anti-clerical tension that pervaded the French Republics. Many French people, women as well as men, thought that women would not be able to resist the influence of their priests and would turn anti-republican. Women were therefore considered politically as well as religiously conservative, as the Catholic Church had a history of association with the right and the anti-democratic, pre-revolutionary Ancien Regime.¹⁰ The sheer number of women in the country, disproportionately higher than the number of men due to the death tolls of the First World War, was used as another argument to deny women suffrage. Many politicians spoke of the “French exception” as well, the idea that France did not need to follow the example of other Western countries that had already granted women the vote, as France was a unique, inherently superior nation. The clericalism issue became less contentious as the years progressed and granting women’s rights was increasingly associated with “state reform” and “national reconstruction,” the key phrases of the extreme-right and, eventually, Vichy.¹¹ Women’s liberties and political action have often been associated with the right through Catholicism. Using the clericalism argument once again, many politicians on the right favored women’s suffrage

⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰ For more information on the “feminization of Catholicism,” see Caroline Ford, *Divided Houses* (Ithaca: 2005).

¹¹ Smith, *A History of the French Senate*, 347-51.

because they believed that women would vote conservatively.¹² Conservatives also pointed to women's activism in the social service milieu, which promoted traditional Christian values of family and home, while encouraging women's action in the public sphere.¹³

Inclusion of women into extreme-right organizations

Beginning in the early 1930s, the extreme-right organization Croix de feu and the political party Parti Social Français (PSF) began to include women in their ranks. The inclusion of women into the extra-governmental political sphere began with separate auxiliaries to the main groups.

Les Volontaires Nationaux, l'Association des Fils et Filles de Croix de feu, et le Section féminine

The Croix de feu was formed in 1928 as an organization for World War I veterans who had fought on the front lines. This extremely narrow requirement for membership persisted until the organization's dissolution in 1936, but auxiliaries were formed to include those sympathetic to the ideas and goals of the Croix de feu. In 1931, the Croix de feu formed l'Association des Fils et Filles de Croix de feu (FFCF) for their members' children, welcoming daughters, *filles*, as well as sons, *fils*. As in the Nazi party and other extreme-right organizations, youth groups were formed to instill the group's ideals in children to carry the group's mission on to the next generation. The inclusion of girls as well as boys meant the groups trained the next generation of

¹² Cheryl Koos and Danielle Sarnoff, "France," Kevin Passmore (ed.) *Women, Gender, and Fascism in Europe* (New Brunswick: 2003), 174.

¹³ Kevin Passmore, "Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism," *The Journal of Modern History* 71:4 (1999), 831.

future mothers as well as future soldiers. The skills of cooking, cleaning, and other typically feminine tasks taught to girls conformed to traditional gender roles, yet FFCF expanded these roles by instructing the girls in disciplines such as physical exercise. These groups followed the precedent set by the Nazi party and Hitler Youth, and also echoed the ideas of communist youth groups; the creation of FFCF was therefore another way to combat the growing Communist party.

In 1933, the *Volontaires Nationaux* (VN) was formed and, according to ex-member Jean-Maurice Hermann, “admitted all those who, without consideration of age, of sex, or of military past, accepted to combat the red flag and fight for national reconstruction [*redressement national*].”¹⁴ Hermann explicitly linked the VN to the fight against communism; again, this may explain why women were included into the organization, as the French Communist Party permitted and recruited women as well as men. The VN grew rapidly, and according to director Claude Popelin, claimed 300,000 members by 1935.¹⁵ In 1935 the *Croix de feu* formed the *Mouvement Social Français* (MSF) and allowed women to join in order to mobilize French people around the *Croix de feu*’s aims and to achieve “national reconstruction.”¹⁶ The creation of VN and MSF led to the first mention of women in the literature of the *Croix de feu*. For example, the memoirs of Henry Malherbe, a member of *Croix de feu*, first mentioned women in reference to the VN and FFCF in May 1933. All prior references had cited the *Croix de feu*; the *Briscards*, a paramilitary men’s organization; veterans; *mes frères* (my brothers); and *nos fils* (our sons).¹⁷ Not only were women allowed to work for the auxiliaries, but the formerly exclusively masculine literature and ideology of the *Croix de feu* expanded to include women.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Hermann, preface to Paul Chopine’s *Six Ans Chez le Croix de Feu* (Paris: 1935), 26. My translation.

¹⁵ Claude Popelin, *Arènes politiques* (Paris: 1974), 33.

¹⁶ Passmore, “Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism,” 824.

¹⁷ Henry Malherbe, *La Rocque: Un Chef, Des Actes, Des Idées* (Paris: 1934), 46.

The “women’s section,” as the women’s auxiliary of the Croix de feu was called, was originally created to assist in propaganda activities, but women quickly became active in the realms of social work and volunteering.¹⁸ Tasks assigned to men and women in the VN echoed traditional gender roles, as women were mostly placed to work in “feminine” spaces such as soup kitchens. The mere fact that women were leaving the home to volunteer for the Croix de feu, however, meant leaving behind their traditional roles as stay-at-home wives and mothers. This paradox intensified the division of a “garde intérieure section feminine” from the masculine “garde extérieure” as outlined in an article in *Le Flambeau*, the Croix de feu newspaper, on March 23, 1935.¹⁹ The division “intérieure/extérieure” again reinforces the division of women’s and men’s roles and relegates each gender to, respectively, the private and public sphere. Male members remained in charge of the administration and management of the organization and all political action, but women were encouraged to participate in the social aspect of the association. This ideology was institutionalized when women members were automatically registered in a new organization of the MSF, Action civique, in which they performed traditionally feminine roles through social work. As Kevin Passmore argues, “La Rocque established a clear hierarchy between the male and female, political and social parts of the movement, characterized in terms of the distinction between the front line and the home front.”²⁰

Involvement in the Croix de feu was more than an extension of the familial role, however, and many women members represented the “new woman” who emerged after the First World War. About forty-one percent of women members were employed outside of the home and most

¹⁸ Passmore, “Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism,” 817, 824-5.

¹⁹ Kevin Passmore, “Boy Scouting for Grown-Ups,” *French Historical Studies* 19:2 (1995), 542.

²⁰ Passmore, “Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism,” 824.

women were young, unmarried, and largely independent.²¹ Historian Robert Soucy estimates that there were as many as 100,000 active women members in the Croix de feu, making it the first right-wing organization to boast so many female members.²² Passmore argues that the inclusion of women's sections into the larger umbrella organization of Croix de feu, and later the PSF, led to a new "social politics" that would include women as well as men in the political sphere.²³ He maintains that the contradictions of women's involvement in the organizations were solved by relegating these women to the margins of the Croix de feu and presenting the association as nationalistic, rather than political. The Croix de feu was not a political party, but a national organization, and although women had no role in politics, they were accepted to be just as invested as men were in the future of France.²⁴ In this way, the Croix de feu set a precedent for female political participation in extreme-right parties and organizations.²⁵

Le Parti Social Français

When the Croix de feu was disbanded in 1936 and reformed as the political party Parti Social Français (PSF), its ranks were explicitly open to women. Robert Soucy estimates that there were as many as 400,000 women in the PSF.²⁶ The party manifesto, "Une partie, un programme," written at the party's conception in 1936, starts with an explanation of the party and its goals. The first part of the manifesto, entitled "Une mystique," outlines the PSF's goals and policies and explains how the party was both a continuation of the Croix de feu and a rejection of the republican system. The last sentence of this section declares that the PSF is

²¹ *Ibid.*, 834-5.

²² Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1939* (New Haven: 1995).

²³ Passmore, "Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism," 849.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 816, 828.

²⁵ Koos and Sarnoff, "France," 176.

²⁶ Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave*, 110-12.

“open to all Frenchmen and Frenchwomen [*ouvert à tous les Français et les Françaises*].”²⁷ The text thus explicitly includes women as well as men to welcome all French people, regardless of gender. The use of the feminine “*Françaises*” is an active attempt to attract women, instead of merely accepting women constituents, such as the wives or daughters of male members. The PSF therefore seems to ask women directly to play a greater role in the party and thus in politics. The manifesto ends by re-emphasizing that the party is open to “*tous Français et toutes Françaises,*” explicitly inviting women to join the party.

Other organizations

Inclusion of women in the ranks of political organizations was a widespread practice of the right during this period. The cooperation between women and the extreme-right can be linked to the history of women’s groups and feminist groups associating with extreme-right organizations, such as in the alliance between Elisabeth Cassou and the Union Française pour le Suffrage des Femmes, a Catholic women’s suffrage organization, and l’Union fédérale des associations d’anciens combattants et victimes de guerre, an organization for veterans and “war victims.”²⁸ In 1924 the Légion française, a fascist veterans’ organization, created a women-only section.²⁹ Pierre Taittinger, the head of Jeunesses Patriotes, an extreme-right youth organization, had connections to the women’s suffrage organization Union National pour le Vote des Femmes.³⁰ La Rocque revived traditions that had origins in women’s activism in social work, such as in the Association des surintendantes, the Guides de France, and Action catholique. In many ways women’s actions in Croix de feu and PSF read like a secularized version of the

²⁷ Parti Social Français, “Une partie, un programme” (Paris, 1936), 5.

²⁸ Bard, *Les filles de Marianne*, 350.

²⁹ Koos and Sarnoff, “France,” 175.

³⁰ Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic*, 97.

philosophy of Catholic feminism, emphasizing social work and elevation of women by their morality and position as wife and/or mother.³¹

Increased participation and an extension of women's roles attracted women to the extreme-right associations and parties such as the Croix de feu and PSF between the wars. These groups offered women a space in which they could participate politically and perform roles that were not legally open to women through the republican government. It is less simple to say definitively why the extreme-right organizations took these measures. The inclusion of women was a way to combat the policies of the extreme-left, especially the rapidly growing Communist Party, who welcomed women, and simply to gain power in numbers. The inclusion of women into the Croix de feu/ PSF was also a way to convey the organizations' populist message and the very existence of women members distanced the groups from the feminist movement. Feminist groups generally sought to improve the civil status of women using a sort of trickle-down activism that empowered women who were already socially superior. These women were wealthy, bourgeois, and educated, and were often related to politicians. These feminist groups targeted women of a similar background and had little interest in helping women of the lower classes. Like most liberal feminism, as opposed to radical feminism, early twentieth century French feminists sought to gain access to the system, meaning to the republic male-dominated legislature, rather than change the system, meaning disrupt the republic and construct a new government in its place. Unlike many feminists, women in extreme-right organizations used their social work to reconcile bourgeois and working-class women. By seeking to enfranchise the women of lower classes, the extreme-right groups promulgated their populist message. In some

³¹ Passmore, "Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism," 848.

ways, including women in social work jobs was a continuation of the traditional feminine role and propagated the male-female gender hierarchy. Women were presented as men's companions and helpmeets, as in traditional patriarchal family structures, and although they had some measure of agency, still had to respond to male leaders. In other ways, the extreme-right opened up a new realm to women. The inclusion gave women a space to participate in social and political life, but still managed to confine them to "traditional" ideals of femininity, making this an attractive compromise for both women and the extreme-right.

Civil rights proposed for women

During this time period, not only did extreme-right organizations open membership to women, but they proposed extending civil rights to women. Many of these debates centered on female suffrage, which the PSF finally endorsed in 1939. Documents from these organizations also suggested giving women more civil liberties, such as the right to work, and broader scope in the political arena, although they did not precisely outline how. The intention to give women rights, especially suffrage, and ambiguity over how to do so allowed the Croix de feu/PSF to recruit female members without defining a clear program and risking alienation of existing members and disrupting the gender hierarchy.

Croix de Feu

Colonel de la Rocque's 1934 tract *Service Public*, outlining the mission of the Croix de feu, suggests giving women legal rights without detracting from their traditional gender role. La Rocque proposes a plan of "feminine intervention in the political [sphere]," as it was too limiting to reduce women's roles "to their attributes of mothers, wives, homemakers."³² However, he insists that "our familial mission has not been in the least diminished"³³ and focuses more on the problem of young, unmarried women. The high death toll of World War I created a lack of young, eligible men which made these young, single, and unemployed women a burden on society. Left without potential husbands to support them, these women either had to work or become wholly dependent on the state. La Rocque therefore grudgingly acknowledges the need for these women to work and join the public sphere. These women had to be made useful to society, as well as protected by society, which could be done "by giving [each woman] a political status deserved by her intelligence and her work."³⁴ This translated to giving women jobs that complemented their supposed "feminine" attributes and creating laws to protect women and extend their legal rights. Women were promised the freedom to work for national reconstruction (*redressement national*) and for the good of the country, yet the arenas in which women could work were not explicitly defined.³⁵ La Rocque suggests giving some women some rights and extended political participation, a bit paradoxically, in order to protect what he considers women's main societal function as wife and mother. This development of woman's "political status" contains an implicit acknowledgement that women's roles and position in society were

³² François de la Rocque, *Service Public* (Paris: 1934), 75-6.

³³ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁵ Passmore, "Boy Scouting for Grown-Ups," 542.

changing and therefore necessitated societal and political participation. However, La Rocque still expresses a desire to keep traditional societal roles and maintain the existing social structure and gender hierarchy. *Service Public* does not explicitly promise women any civil liberties; rights are rather considered necessary by-products of advancing the Croix de feu's aims.

Most of La Rocque's discourse on women in *Service public* pertains to women's suffrage. He asks, "How can we introduce the family vote and women's votes to our system, as we must, if we don't want them to be achieved in the midst of disarray and improvisation?"³⁶ (The family vote was a proposal to give husbands and fathers extra votes for their minor children and wives, which I will discuss further in the next chapter.) La Rocque suggests allowing women to vote in municipal elections and to elect senatorial delegates, but he does not completely answer his own question and does not say how or when female suffrage will occur.³⁷ Generally, elections were a minor concern, as the extreme-right organizations were trying to break away from the republican, universal suffrage model. Elections would be held only once national reconstruction was under way. Therefore, giving women the vote at this point would have been practically irrelevant, as its realization would not have occurred for quite some time; the primacy of national reconstruction overshadowed seemingly individualistic concerns of suffrage.

Le Parti Social Français

The PSF manifesto "Une partie, un programme," demonstrates the expansion of women's roles in the political party, as opposed to the association of the antecedent Croix de feu. Although a woman's place was still considered to be the home and her role was wife and mother, the PSF recognized the necessity of women's work, both in the greater social, economic context and in

³⁶ La Rocque, *Service Public*, 204.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

the organization of the PSF itself. The manifesto discourages married woman from working, saying “The place of the married woman... of the mother, is at home,” adding that women’s return to the home would result in lower rates of unemployment.³⁸ The manifesto does not applaud or condemn employment of unmarried women; in fact, there is no mention at all of single women’s work. This silence can be taken as grudging support, as single women and female heads of families could not afford to stay at home.³⁹

The section then expands upon the family vote and women’s vote, saying that “the *women’s vote* and the *family vote* will be, initially, simultaneously introduced to municipal, neighborhood, and departmental scrutiny. The vote will be given obligatorily.”⁴⁰ At a first reading, this seems incredibly advantageous to women. However, the muddy wording does not actually promise the vote, only *consideration* at a local, municipal, and departmental level, and says nothing about the federal level. Contradictorily, it then says that the vote will be obligatory. This ambiguous language is indicative of the diverse opinions in the PSF and its lack of consensus on women’s suffrage. This document seems to try to trap women in the complicated wording and attract them with the intimation of suffrage and the potential for expansion of women’s rights. At the same time, women’s traditional roles were not diminished, and the platform did not alienate non-feminist women who shared the PSF’s “traditional” views.

Cheryl Koos and Daniella Sarnoff point out that the promise of women’s suffrage, both in this text and in others, focuses heavily on the moral strength of women, highlighting once again the importance of traditional gender roles.⁴¹ Playing to this reasoning of higher feminine morality, between January 7 and 14, 1939, the PSF published an article entitled “Le Parti Social

³⁸ Parti Social Français, “Une partie, un programme,” 33.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴¹ Koos and Sarnoff, “France,” 184.

Français et le vote des femmes” in the feminist newspaper *La Française*, which is in itself a fairly interesting event, showing the intersection between feminism concerns and extreme-right programs. In this article the PSF explicitly declared its support for universal women’s suffrage.⁴² The PSF gave more attention to women’s votes than the Croix de feu, but they also offset it against the family vote, a measure that accorded married men extra votes for wives and children, dividing those who believed in *some* form of women’s suffrage, as I will explore in the next chapter.

Other organizations

Political organizations other than the Croix de feu and PSF also discussed women’s political rights and expanded the scope of women’s roles between the wars. The majority of the right-wing parties believed that strengthening the family was necessary to improve the social order, and therefore the French nation, and thought that measures such as limited women’s suffrage could achieve these goals. Most of the right supported the family vote and almost uniformly supported extending the vote to war widows on behalf of their deceased husbands.⁴³ The Parti Démocrate Populaire, another extreme-right political party, included votes for women in its family suffrage proposal of 1926, and in 1927 supported a women’s suffrage bill.⁴⁴ In 1928, François Coty, the perfume magnate and head of the paramilitary organization Solidarité française, published a number of pro-suffrage articles in his newspaper *Ami du peuple*.⁴⁵ Similar articles appeared in women’s newspapers in an attempt to attract women to the organizations, such as the PSF’s article in *La Française*. Jacques Debû-Bridel, a member of Action française

⁴² Bard, *Les filles de Marianne*, 348.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic*, 122.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

and the Fédération républicaine, published pro-women's suffrage articles in the same newspaper in the 1930s.⁴⁶

There are many reasons why the extreme-right would advocate the extension of rights to women between the world wars. Many debates of the time centered on women's suffrage: the promise of future votes, combined with the idea of inclusion, suggested that women could work within the organizations to attain more rights on their own terms. Proposing rights was yet another way to combat the left, which was seen both at the time and today as more friendly to women. Platforms extending women's rights also followed the precedent set by the fascist parties in Italy and Germany, whose organization and populist-nationalist messages La Rocque admired. Additionally, elections were a secondary concern of the extreme-right organizations, to occur only after national reconstruction, so women's suffrage was not a pressing issue. While movements for women's rights were traditionally associated with the left, and the right was seen as hostile to women, the Croix de feu's refusal to align itself with either left or right permitted left-leaning women to join the organization. The Croix de feu presented itself as nationalistic, rather than political, and both the Croix de feu and PSF proclaimed national reconstruction as their primary goal, so women did not have to choose a political affiliation and could metaphorically enter the public, political sphere. Additionally, the left blocked all suffrage movements in the Senate, and the right therefore appeared more likely to give women the right to vote, among other civil liberties, if elected.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

Conclusion

The Croix de feu, PSF, and other extreme-right organizations in France welcomed women into their ranks and proposed extending women's legal and political rights between the wars. Although the expansion of rights and suffrage are generally ideologically associated with the left, these measures were adopted by the right to expand the size and scope of their associations. Proposing rights to women and creating room for them within extreme-right organizations was a way to challenge the left, particularly the rapidly growing Communist Party, which recruited women and let women stand in elections. It also presented an alternative to the moderate-left parties in power, who blocked all suffrage attempts in Congress, and the liberal feminist movement, which was exclusively bourgeois, educated, and detached from the general population. Furthermore, with the left in power, there was little risk that suffrage would indeed be enacted. Indeed, the ridicule with which the proposition was met on the floor of the Senate, and against which the war veteran with whose words this chapter opened, guaranteed its failure.

More importantly, the extreme-right policies towards women were also a way to regulate women's changing roles between the wars. The group of single, independent, working women that arose after World War I became a social reality that had to be faced and, to some minds, fixed.⁴⁷ Creating a space for these women within the Croix de feu and PSF and promising future rights helped build membership of the groups as well as answer some of the women's demands, all the while maintaining the traditional gender role of wife, mother, and social worker. The inclusion of women into the extreme-right associations and parties gave them a political and social sphere to participate in without sacrificing traditional ideas of femininity. Involvement in

⁴⁷ See Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes* (Chicago: 1994).

extra-governmental, extreme-right organizations was also a way for women to exercise political agency before formal suffrage, through organizations instead of individuals.⁴⁸ This philosophy intersects with the focus on the national and social, a characteristic of fascist and extreme-right organizations. The extreme-right argued that the nation had been wounded by the self-serving, individualistic republican government and in order to heal, French citizens needed to concern themselves with their nation and society, rather than their individual lives.

The legacy of these organizations' inclusion of women and extension of political rights can be seen in the Vichy regime. In 1938, Maréchal Pétain abolished disabilities of married women, who had had the same legal status as children, to allow them to testify in court, sign contracts, open bank accounts, take degrees, and apply for passports without their husbands' permission.⁴⁹ The eighth and final Vichy constitution, drafted in January 1944, granted women's suffrage (though not without certain caveats).⁵⁰ The extension of women's rights can also be seen in the debates over the family vote, which can be connected to familialism and natalism, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

⁴⁸ Siân Reynolds, *France Between the Wars: Gender and Politics* (London: 1996), 216.

⁴⁹ Sohn, "Between the Wars in France and England," 114-15.

⁵⁰ Reynolds, *France Between the Wars*, 215.

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L'impôt de sang des femmes

Motherhood as Labor, Family Benefits, and the Family Vote

Introduction

On October 13, 1919, the Senate debated the recent Treaty of Versailles that had ended the First World War. Although technically the victor, France had suffered hundreds of thousands of deaths, its cities were reduced to rubble, and its citizens were demoralized. The economy, population, and very spirit of France were decimated. Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau stood in front of the Senate to defend recent proposals to restrict access to contraception and abortion. Citing the devastating death tolls, Clemenceau said, “France will be lost, because there will be no more Frenchmen.”¹

Beginning with these laws restricting contraception and abortion in 1920 and ending with the 1938 Code de la famille, interbellum France saw a surge in natalist and familialist discourse. Natalism was the movement to repopulate France and natalists saw their mission in largely economic terms. Familialism was the belief that the family formed the vital cell of the nation and familialists encouraged large families and pushed legislation to protect the family. While natalists were mainly concerned with demographics and quantitative measures of the French

¹ Sénat, *Official Journal of the French Senate* (Paris: 1919).

population, familialists focused on their utopian conception of what a family *should* be, and therefore how the nation should be repopulated.²

The denatalism crisis of the 1920s and 30s was in some ways a continuation of a trend that had affected France since the end of the eighteenth century.³ As early as 1871, the French government blamed its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War on the declining population.⁴ Decreasing birthrates were blamed on a range of causes from feminism and working women to Malthusianism to the threat of war and cost of living. The low birthrate was compounded by staggering losses during the war that reached alarming numbers; Marie-Monique Huss estimates that France lost ten percent of its “active male population” and Luc Capdevila estimates that the loss of potential fathers resulted in 1.6 to 2 million unborn children.⁵ After the war, Germany’s successful pro-natalist campaign and eventual remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936 continued to fuel pronatalism in France.⁶

Governmental agencies and popular support

The government was ideally situated to promote natalist legislation and “protect” the French family. The bill that Clemenceau was supporting in his October 1919 speech was ratified on July 3, 1920, and prohibited all propaganda promoting contraception.⁷ On July 23, the Chamber prohibited the distribution of propaganda promoting birth control and outlawed

² Paul Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic* (Oxford: 1995), 217-218.

³ For more on populationism in eighteenth century France, see Carol Blum, *Strength in Numbers: population, reproduction and power in eighteenth-century France* (Baltimore: 2002). For Malthusianism in the early twentieth century, see Elinor Accampo, *Blessed Motherhood, Bitter Fruit: Nelly Roussel and the politics of female pain in Third Republic France* (Baltimore: 2006).

⁴ Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes* (Chicago: 1994), 99.

⁵ Marie-Monique Huss, “Pronatalism in the Inter-war Period in France,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 25:1 (1990), 39 ; Luc Capdevila et al. *Hommes et femmes dans la France en guerre (1914-1945)* (Paris: 2003), 113.

⁶ Huss, “Pronatalism in the Inter-war Period in France,” 62.

⁷ Anne-Marie Sohn, “Between the Wars in France and England,” Françoise Thébaud (ed.) *A History of Women in the West, Volume V* (Cambridge: 1994), 111.

abortion and condoms.⁸ That same year, Mothers' Day became a national holiday, officially recognizing the job of motherhood, and giving every mother with five or more children a medal, similar to war medals given to returning veterans.⁹ Also in 1920, the government created the Conseil supérieur de la natalité and sponsored the Code de la famille.¹⁰ In 1923 the French courts pursued stricter prosecution of abortions and created the Conseil Supérieur à la natalité, which pushed legislation restricting contraception and lobbied for municipal authorities to spend taxpayers' money on mothers' day celebrations and pro-natalist propaganda.¹¹

After World War I, independent pro-natalist organizations were formed, showing widespread demographic concern and popular support for natalist measures. These organizations were responding to the growing panic over the decimation of the French population as well as the growth in feminism. They saw their organizations as a solution to demographic concerns and a potential source of national power and pride, as restoring the population would restore France's former glory. Among these organizations was the Comité central des familles nombreuses, founded in 1917, which became the Fédération nationale des associations de familles nombreuses in 1921.¹² These organizations refined their goals and methods to disseminate their information through meetings such as the December 1920 Etats Généraux de la Famille in Lille and the 1938 Congrès National de la Natalité in Lyon.¹³ Some organizations gained the attention and support of the government; in 1914, Raymond Poincaré publically supported the Alliance nationale contre la dépopulation, which was originally founded in 1896. With the president's patronage, the alliance's message was able to reach a wider audience using propaganda posters

⁸ Accampo, *Blessed Motherhood, Bitter Fruit*, 218.

⁹ Capdevila et al., *Hommes et femmes dans la France en guerre*, 116.

¹⁰ Huss, "Pronatalism in the Inter-war Period in France," 42.

¹¹ Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic*, 213.

¹² Huss, "Pronatalism in the Inter-war Period in France," 44.

¹³ Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic*, 227, 210.

and magazines such as *La Vitalité française* and *La Mère et l'enfant*, which combined articles about women's and family health, women's suffrage, moralistic articles decrying contraception, and neutral articles about fashion and recipes.¹⁴ Using similar arguments, the Catholic right, a historical supporter of the family and opponent of contraception, was largely pro-natalist, and formed groups such as the Mouvement populaire des familles.¹⁵

The natalist movement cut across all political persuasions and all social strata in France. As evidenced by Poincaré's support for the Alliance nationale and the Popular Front's support of "pro-family" measures in 1936, the elites and politicians of the left rallied behind the movement. Both radicals and socialists were involved in the preparation of the law of 1920 and the Code de la famille. Communists supported natalism as well, responding to the right's insistence on population growth with their own pro-natalist articles in the Communist newspaper *L'Humanité*.¹⁶

Feminists, fascists, and familialism

For many, the "defense" of family (which usually meant the promotion of large families) translated to the defense of mothers. A number of feminists therefore supported familialist and natalist arguments as well, evoking "the republican motherhood tradition." In the late eighteenth century, women in the Revolution and new republic were praised and revered for their ability to influence and educate their sons and raise future citizens. Maternity was politicized and the family and reproduction were moved from the private to public sphere. In laws recorded as early as 1792, the French government insisted that all people were expected to participate in the war

¹⁴ Huss, "Pronatalism in the Inter-war Period in France," 43.

¹⁵ Capdevila et al, *Hommes et femmes dans la France en guerre*, 120.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

effort, men by fighting, and women by bearing children.¹⁷ The gender roles were clearly defined; the female “mother-educator” complemented the male “citizen-soldier.”¹⁸ This division of gender roles also translated into a distinction between “active” and “passive” citizens. Women’s political participation was relegated to their ability to influence the men around them, as was often the case in the interwar period.

Many feminists championed the natalist and familialist doctrines by arguing that recognizing the power of some women would eventually aid all French women and was a step to achieving gender equality. This ambiguous language is indicative of vague discourse, and not actual legislation. Male pro-natalists had often used natalist arguments to “protect” fatherhood, meaning legally guarantee father’s authority over their children and their homes. These men were most concerned with infringement and potential restriction on fathers’ rights from mothers; ironically, feminists used the same logic to “protect” motherhood and mothers’ rights.¹⁹ While some argued that feminism was responsible for the lowered birthrate and that feminism would destroy the French race, some French feminists’ ideas also intersected with those of the extreme-right. Kevin Passmore calls these women familial feminists because they combined “acceptance of gender differences... with equality within the family while political emancipation would be reconciled with the protection of maternity.”²⁰ These women insisted that protecting French women, or legally guaranteeing French mothers’ rights, would defend France from the threat of immigrant women, especially Jews, and other undesirables and retain “*la France aux*

¹⁷ Huss, “Pronatalism in the Inter-war Period in France,” 44.

¹⁸ Capdevila et al, *Hommes et femmes dans la France en guerre*, 214.

¹⁹ Gisele Bock, “Poverty and Mothers’ Rights in the Emerging Welfare States,” Françoise Thébaud (ed.) *A History of Women in the West, Volume V* (Cambridge: 1994), 421.

²⁰ Kevin Passmore, “Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism,” *The Journal of Modern History* 71:4 (1999), 843.

Françaises.”²¹ Legally guaranteeing mothers’ rights, such as authority over their children, and denying these privileges to non-French women would “protect” the French family and therefore the homogenous, xenophobic, anti-Semitic right. This position was not supported by any legislation, however, and the discussion was complicated by the fact that women were not actually citizens, and could not therefore claim a legal distinction to undesirable or foreign women.

This nationalistic desire to repopulate France and to equate population with power is often seen as a hallmark of the extreme-right and was based in part on the success of similar movements in fascist Germany. Pro-natalist measures had extremely impressive results in Nazi Germany in 1934 and 1935.²² In her work on Nazi Germany, Claudia Koonz identifies the emergence of the “New Mother” in opposition to the “New Woman” of the 1920s; a woman whose political duty could be channeled through motherhood and thereby dissociated from both feminism and conservatism. She describes this militant mother role as “an alternative both to backward-looking Catholic parochialism and to the feminist vision of an equal future.”²³ As in France and the rest of Europe, women in Nazi Germany were encouraged to contribute to the war effort by having children. Koonz argues that most Nazi politicians officially supported women’s equality, and it was Hitler alone who insisted on excluding women from his government and eroding women’s rights during his rule.²⁴

²¹ Marianne Bard, *Les filles de Marianne: Histoire des féminismes, 1914-1940* (Paris: 1995), 405.

²² Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic*, 214.

²³ Claudia Koonz, ““The Fascist Solution to the Woman Question in Italy and Germany,” Renate Bridenthal (ed.) *Becoming Visible: Women in European History, Second Edition* (Boston: 1987), 507.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 514.

Extreme-right organizations' use of natalist and familialist rhetoric in the interwar period was a continuation of French ideology, an appropriation of fascist techniques, and a complement to official governmental policy. Extreme-right groups, such as the Croix de feu and Parti Social Français, fit into the national current of the time, but they also may have attracted women to their groups with their platforms explicitly privileging mothers, and therefore indirectly and implicitly privileging women. These groups did so by mounting an ideological defense of motherhood and giving mothers social advantages and cultural capital; the extreme-right thereby appropriated the language of "rights" and tactics from the feminist movement to appeal to women. They turned rhetoric into policy by extending economic benefits to mothers of large families and extending political advantages through family-based suffrage. This articulation of motherhood as labor increased women's representation through the family vote and gave women economic power through family allocations.

Defense of Motherhood

The extreme-right's defense of natalist and familialist policies often consisted of "defending" motherhood. The extreme-right's conception of femininity and gender roles can be described as a sort of synecdoche in which mothers stand for all women. The lowered birth rate was seen as a moral failure of the French people, and especially women, who had become too individualistic. The right linked these developments to class, citing the bourgeois new woman as a "bad" mother, whereas the more traditional woman of the working class was a "good" mother. Mary Louise Roberts, in her seminal work on gender between the wars, *Civilization Without*

Sexes, argues that “maternity symbolized physical and moral suffering for women in the same way that soldiery did for men.”²⁵ The extreme-right promoted the idea that mothers could restore male virility as well as morality by fulfilling their maternal duty.²⁶ Motherhood was also a nationalistic duty and was called the women’s “blood tax” (*l’impôt de sang*), analogous to men’s compulsory military service, and was an alternative for women to paid labor. The natural division of labor made motherhood women’s labor the complement and opposite of men’s work. Motherhood was therefore as important for society as outside labor, and if women were to work outside the home, they would disrupt this natural division of labor. Furthermore, the mother became the symbol of literal rebirth after the devastation of the First World War and natalist and familialist lobbies therefore sought to “protect” mothers’ rights and defend the ideal of *la famille nombreuse*, or the large family.

Le Croix de feu

The Croix de feu was one such extreme-right organization that defended motherhood and mother’s rights with pro-natalist and familialist policies. On September 29, 1933, Colonel de la Rocque wrote a letter to President Edouard Daladier, opening with the line, “Sixty thousand French families grouped behind a veritable army of veterans command us to plead with you.”²⁷ The creation of the Volontaires nationaux in 1933 created a space for women’s political participation and, in an article in the Croix de feu newspaper *Le Flambeau*, called all who sought to “protect the French family,” according to the memoir of Croix de feu member Paul Chopine.²⁸ These descriptions intended for, respectively, the French government and supporters but non-

²⁵ Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes*, 90.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 120-131, 90, 193.

²⁷ Henri Malherbe, *La Rocque: Un chef, des actes, des idées* (Paris: 1936), 119. My translation.

²⁸ Paul Chopine, *Six ans chez le Croix de feu* (Paris: 1935), 97.

members of the Croix de feu, sought to define the organization in terms of family – the ideal family that it supported as well as the support that it enjoyed among French families. Although this rhetoric of rescuing and protecting the family is central to the Croix de feu, it was far from revolutionary and must be seen in the context of thirty years of pro-natalist rhetoric and policy.

La Rocque's 1934 tract *Service Public*, which outlined the goals and philosophy of the Croix de feu, also emphasized the importance of the family. La Rocque states baldly that “the family... must be rescued.”²⁹ La Rocque proposes to do so by bowing to parental authority and obstructing state interference in child-rearing. The state must “recognize the father's rights and responsibilities as the head of the household [and] give the mother an eminent place in the legal home, giving the wife... the same guarantees as the husband.”³⁰ With this statement, La Rocque proposes legal equality to mothers and fathers. Although the wording is a bit ambiguous, he proposes giving mothers legal rights (“*une place éminente au foyer légal*”) and demands the state's deference to parental, rather than just paternal, authority. This support of mothers' rights gives mothers a measure of freedom of choice and control over their bodies; women now can make choices concerning their childbearing and childrearing free from the scrutiny of the government. In a system that expects all women to become mothers, this theoretically gives all women more power and autonomy. This rhetoric was more ideological than practical: the state's interference and scrutiny was largely informed by negative reactions to Malthusianism, and the government had never officially supported population control movements. In some ways, this text represents a reaction to a manufactured problem, and therefore creates a problematic solution. Indeed, the solution requires perfect harmony between husbands and wives. Women are

²⁹ François de la Rocque, *Service Public* (Paris: 1934), 114.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

free from scrutiny of the government, but not of their husbands. In some ways, this support of parental authority subtly reinforces the gender hierarchy at home.

The family is so central to La Rocque's view of France that he breaks society down into two elementary "cells:" the moral cell, or the family, and the economic cell, or commerce. He says that the family "cell" "transmits life, forms men; its direct participation in civil activity is obligatory."³¹ La Rocque explicitly equates the family with morality and, using familialist logic, depends on the family to restore morality of France. La Rocque also stresses the importance of tradition, saying that there is no family without tradition and that "the cult of tradition is the spring of national education."³² He views tradition as the noble heritage of Catholic France and as a route to social evolution. Rather than promoting an archaic, reactionary view of the world, La Rocque argues that tradition is necessary to avoid the mistakes of the past and to choose a path in life. Tradition is the base of education, which begins at home. La Rocque implicitly places women in this instruction role, evoking images of the republican "mother-educator" and, once again, deferring to the authority and wisdom of the mother.

Le Parti Social Français

In 1936, the Croix de feu disbanded and reformed as the political party *Parti Social Français* (PSF). Their manifesto from 1936, "Une partie, un programme," considers the role of women and mothers and the importance of the family. The PSF says that "the family is at once the goal, the justification, and the reward of the human effort,"³³ and implies that the destruction of the family would lead to the destruction of society. Essentially, the PSF's goal can be reduced

³¹ *Ibid.*, 203.

³² *Ibid.*, 117.

³³ Parti Social Français, "Une partie, un programme" (Paris: 1936), 31.

to protection of the family. The text goes on to say that the state must “protect the child and the mother [and] defend the moral and material patrimony of the family.”³⁴ As potential child-bearers and protectors of the family, women ensure the future of the nation as much, if not more, than children. The nation is therefore obliged to protect the mother, and this manifesto can be read as an ideological defense of motherhood as well as a call for improved legal protection of mothers’ rights.

The party’s constitution appears at the end of the manifesto. The first article calls for a “reconstitution of the family, the vital cell of the nation” and explains the motto by explaining, “Order by the Family and Work for the Country.”³⁵ The family becomes a governing force, but the manifesto does not explain how the family will “order” the country. The mother is the caretaker and educator of the family; it therefore seems that women (meaning mothers) will play a role in the governing of the country. Although this is not explicit, and perhaps this role will be a sort of moral monitor and educator, the idea of women governing is rather bold, especially at a time when few women held public office. In the doctrine of the PSF, women therefore seem to expand their role, both in the family and in the nation.

The Croix de feu and PSF, which extolled “tradition” and a clear division of gender roles, embraced motherhood as the ultimate, and perhaps the only, embodiment of a woman’s role and the expression of femininity. In these extreme-right organizations, the mother was viewed as the female equivalent of the male veteran, and therefore encouraged to join the organization and seduced to stay through literature extolling mothers and vague measures extending mothers’ rights, which were never explicitly defined. In the women’s sections, motherhood was given

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

priority, although married women were still a minority in the group.³⁶ Women's work, which challenged gender roles and was regarded with suspicion by many on the right, could be made acceptable by considering motherhood female labor. Even those who saw motherhood and career as incompatible could accept women's social work in the Croix de feu as an extension of the maternal role, thereby accepting working mothers but remaining suspicious of single women's work. Kevin Passmore argues that mothers were encouraged to join the Croix de feu and enjoyed a privileged position because "the supposedly feminine values of self-sacrifice and mutual understanding would... encourage working-class women... to produce... babies."³⁷ Contrary to common assumptions about the extreme-right, Croix de feu was not summarily averse to women's rights. The danger came from single, educated feminists who challenged traditional ideas of women's roles and threatened the status quo. Conversely, privileging mothers did not threaten the ideal social structure because these women were still performing traditional gender roles, and the Croix de feu/PSF therefore supported motherhood and mothers' rights.

Economic Initiatives

Another way in which the extreme-right expressed its familialist and natalist position was to promote economic benefits for large families and mothers with multiple children. More tangible than an ideological defense and vague promises of legal rights for mothers, these economic initiatives concretely rewarded women for having many children and taking a step

³⁶ Passmore, "Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism," 825.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 827.

towards repopulating France. The French government had pursued similar initiatives after the First World War, but although the right was largely natalist, it was slow to pass legislation to increase state spending, even in the form of family allocations.³⁸ This may explain the relative absence of national policies focused on child welfare, despite multiple propositions. The family allocations in the Third Republic were often the work of the left and were extended, as Marie-Monique Huss argues, “on a voluntary basis by philanthropic – and pronatalist – industrialists... and then extended by legislation, first to the public sector... then to the rest of the private sector.”³⁹ The establishment of *caisses de compensation*, or institutions that distributed family allowances, centralized economic benefits. A bit like our modern social security, in 1932 it became compulsory for every business to contribute to one such *caisse*, who then distributed money as they saw fit.⁴⁰

Le Croix de feu

In *Service Public*, La Rocque proposes several measures to provide financial benefits to families with multiple children. He says his goal is to “re-establish natality in the place of honor... to defend large families by according them a substantial allocation, proportionate to their responsibilities, taxes, and supplies of the public interest.”⁴¹ La Rocque does not elaborate on how to decide who gets assistance, how much each family should receive, or how the benefits will work, but his sentiment is clearly to encourage natalism and establish financial incentives to repopulate France. Later in his book, La Rocque specifically cites the rural family, which he considered the most traditional, honorable, and French. More concretely, La Rocque proposes

³⁸ Huss, “Pronatalism in the Inter-war Period in France,” 63.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴¹ La Rocque, *Service Public*, 115.

insurance and assistance to *familles nombreuses* and working-class families. Although he does not elaborate how much each family will receive per child, or if there are any stipulations on what the money should be used for, it is assumed that the money will be used to take care of the children. Because La Rocque considered care-taking a feminine pursuit, this allocation would go directly to the mothers of large families. Women would therefore have responsibility for the household economy and gain some measure of economic power.

Le Parti Social Français

The motto of the Parti Social Français itself, “Travail, Famille, Patrie,” stated the importance of the French family. Better known as the Vichy slogan, the PSF originally invented this phrase, and their goals were to “Rehabilitate Work, defend the Family, save the Country.”⁴² The manifesto’s section on “Work” highlights areas for reform, which include commerce, artisanal work, and the intellectual professions. The manifesto states that the agricultural professions will be reorganized as well, but does not expand on how this will happen. The specific appeal to agricultural reform may have been particularly appealing to women, who worked in disproportionately high numbers in agriculture and industry. The more pressing reform, however, is “the nullification of agricultural debts [and] progressive allowances to benefit families with three or more children.”⁴³ This measure rewards those who protect both *famille* and *patrie*, often conceived of literally as land.

The section ends by attacking socialist policies and explaining where they have failed and why the PSF will work. The text explains that socialism is “contradictory to the aspirations of the

⁴² Parti Social Français, “Une partie, un programme,” 7.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 24.

French worker [who is] attached by every fiber of his being to his family.”⁴⁴ This suggests that socialism is anti-family at the same time as it extols the “traditional family values” of good Frenchmen and provides a justification for economic allocations. The PSF goes on to applaud the governmental policies of family allocations and the *caisses de compensation*, but says that positive results have not yet been achieved. Rather than continuing these governmental policies, the government itself needs to change entirely; only then will the PSF be able to implement policies that really aid and protect the family.

The next section of the manifesto is entitled “Family,” and starts by saying that the PSF seeks to protect “the Souls of our Children... no sacrifice is too large to justify and impose our choice.”⁴⁵ The societal question is essentially a question of how best to protect the family, and therefore the future of France. This section again justifies benefits for families with multiple children by saying that the family forms the base of society. Benefits will therefore be given to families based on the parents’ salaries and the number of children. The benefits are neither reward for having children nor punishment for failing to do so, but rather the state’s duty because supporting families is necessary for the proper functioning of society. The PSF explicitly questions natalist policies, saying that “state intervention in this domain is odious... There is no better ‘natalist policy’ than a social, truly French, policy: defense and respect of children [and] mothers.”⁴⁶ While demonstrating the extreme-right’s distrust of state intervention in private affairs and drawing the line between public and private, this position is paradoxical in that the manifesto also declares its support of family benefits. The contradiction here may be attributed, perhaps unsatisfactorily, to the difference between natalism and familialism. However, this

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

ambiguity may have helped attract women to the PSF's policies; while explicitly privileging mothers and large families, the PSF decries official governmental control over women's reproduction. This seems to give women a measure of bodily control, unregulated by the state, but women remained pressured by the extreme-right organizations (and, presumably, their husbands) to produce *une famille nombreuse*.

The Croix de feu/PSF's proposed benefits to families conformed to traditional ideas of morality and popular demands to repopulate France, yet, in some senses, extended rights and power to women. As the main care-takers of the family and holders of the household purse-strings, mothers would be the main recipients of the family allocations. Perhaps unintentionally, the Croix de feu/PSF's pro-family policies would give economic power to women for having children. Motherhood therefore becomes the woman's equivalent of men's paid labor, complete with a paycheck for her services. In an ideal extreme-right system, all women would become mothers, and therefore all women would receive these benefits. The popular support for such measures resulted in the Code de la famille, a set of laws passed between November 12, 1938, and July 29, 1939. The code included tax advantages for large families, repressive abortion policies, and a reorganization of family allowances that especially helped peasant families and families with more than three children.⁴⁷ The last measure of 1939 replaced this *allocation au premier enfant*, the benefit for the first-born child, with the *allocation de mère au foyer*, the benefit for the stay-at-home mother.⁴⁸ Instead of giving money to all families with children, this benefit was given only to women who did not work outside the home, thereby equating a mother's work with outside labor as well as eliminating the possibility of a woman receiving

⁴⁷ Huss, "Pronatalism in the Inter-war Period in France," 62.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic*, 249.

double payment for her children and work outside the home. This code was also the work of the left, but it enjoyed wide Senate and popular support, and was later supported and enforced by Vichy.

Political Initiatives

In addition to economic benefits to mothers, the extreme-right extended its “defense” of French families by giving political advantages to those with multiple children. This most often came in the guise of family-based suffrage. The idea of the family vote, which originated in the 1870s, appears throughout French history in various mutations. The central idea was to give men an extra vote for each family member, thereby privileging large families. Paul Smith argues that the campaign for the family vote was revived in interwar France “by pro-natalists and conservatives searching for an alternative to the individualism of universal suffrage.”⁴⁹ This may be too narrow a view, however, as the Radical left supported various incarnations of the family vote. For instance, in 1923, the Chamber of Deputies voted to give fathers extra votes for each minor child. The family vote enjoyed wide popular support as well, seen in the 1935 creation of the Ligue pour le vote familial and the 1939 declaration of support for the family vote by the Haut Comité de la Population. The majority of the extreme-right supported the family vote as well, including Christian democrats and the Parti Démocrate Populaire, who adopted the family vote in its official platform. Other forms of the family vote included giving married men one

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

more vote than unmarried men and giving men extra votes only if they had three or more children.⁵⁰

Le Croix de feu

Not surprisingly, the Croix de feu promoted having large families by proposing the family vote. Their conception of the family vote would give each male head of household additional votes for his wife and for each minor child. Women were expected to influence their husbands' decisions without having their own votes; the family vote would encourage women's political *representation*, but it would not increase women's political *participation*. An article in *Le Flambeau*, the Croix de Feu newspaper, called for the family vote and "protection of the French family" on October 1, 1931, according to Croix de feu member Henri Malherbe's memoir.⁵¹

La Rocque supported and encouraged the family vote in his 1934 book *Service Public*. In the tract he says that the family vote "establish[es] the influence of the most solid support of our country," implying that families are not only the foundation of society, but the support of the nation.⁵² He then asks, "how can we introduce the women's vote and the family vote to our system, which we must do, if we do not want them to gain their place in the middle of disarray and improvisation?"⁵³ La Rocque does not answer his own questions, except to say that the family vote should be applied without delay to municipal and senatorial delegate elections. La Rocque never fully explains his logic behind extending the family vote, but constantly insists upon the importance of family as the building "cell" of the nation and the importance of large,

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 51, 149, 226-7, 241.

⁵¹ Malherbe, *La Rocque*, 106.

⁵² La Rocque, *Service Public*, 115.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 204.

traditional, French families. This then follows natalist policies, aimed to repopulate France, by equating more children with more political representation, as well as familialist policies, whose goal was to protect the family, by strengthening the political representation of the family through suffrage.

Le Parti Social Français

The PSF manifesto “Une partie, un programme,” also declares the party’s support for the family vote. The PSF conceives of the family as a cohesive political unit that “has the right to be represented in the state.”⁵⁴ In this explanation of the family vote, women are enfranchised through their husbands, but still have the legal status of children. The unity of the family is represented by the unity of the family vote, in which husbands and wives necessarily agree. The family vote can be seen as privileging mothers and giving incentives to young women to marry and have children, but the proposed legislation would, in fact, be advantageous only to men with wives and children. Women were considered productive members of society solely due to their child-bearing capacity, and therefore only mothers were to be rewarded with legal rights. The PSF also describes the family vote as “the indispensable complement to the feminine vote.”⁵⁵ This image of complementary measures was not reflected in the PSF’s actual action; many members offset female suffrage against the family vote, dividing support for those who wanted some sort of political representation for women.

In reality, the family vote was far from ideal: the issues of orphans, female-headed families, and illegitimate children plagued the various conceptions of family suffrage. The left

⁵⁴ Parti Social Français, “Une partie, un programme,” 34.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

often opposed the family vote because it opposed any reform of the electoral system, whereas some on the right opposed the family vote because it existed within the republic electoral system and did not create a completely new system. Some feminists supported the family vote, as it would give women some form of political representation, but others opposed it, claiming it would create what Smith calls “a two-class voting system.”⁵⁶ Some familialists opposed what they saw as capitulation to feminism, which they believed threatened the family itself. Yet in many ways, the family vote was an effective compromise, if not necessarily desirable. The family vote was never made into law, so it is impossible to gauge its success, but the idea managed to offer women representation while maintaining a male majority in the electorate. The family vote managed to appease female suffragists while maintaining extreme-right conceptions of gender roles and the family. As long as a woman was a wife and mother, fulfilling the extreme-right’s ideal image of femininity, she would gain a vicarious vote through her husband. It was assumed that women could influence the ideas and votes of their husbands. In an ideal marriage, this would mean that the wife was represented politically without ever having to leave the home to go to the ballot box.

Conclusion

The familialist and natalist policies proposed by the extreme-right in interwar France can be seen as a way to integrate the nationalistic desire to repopulate France with the new proposed familialist regime that included extending rights and political roles for women. The natalist and

⁵⁶ Smith, *Feminism and the Third Republic*, 235.

familialist policies of “defending” mothers’ rights, extending economic benefits to large families, and proposing the family vote reflect the political current of France at the time. These measures complement the extreme-right concept of family as the building block of society and the analogy of society as a large family, as well as integrate traditional ideas about gender roles and the ideal image of femininity as wife and mother. The ideas proposed here by the extreme-right also drew heavily on Catholic concepts of large families, stay-at-home mothers, and strong state/parental authority. Additionally, the familialist measures paved a path for women to enter the political sphere as part of a family, which deserved rights as a collective unit that individual women did not. Because these measures were a synthesis of fascism, feminism, and familialism, the extreme-right was able to attract fascists, feminists, and familialists to their organizations.

The intersection of these groups and their support for familialist and natalist measures reflects a common trend that pervaded French society at the time. The low birthrate and high death rate were troubling to all people of all political persuasions; they were French first and could only benefit from an increased birth rate and more French citizens. Although these measures did not directly improve the political representation or economic benefits to women, they directly helped families and mothers. It is important to note that few women were feminist at this time; French women were overwhelmingly Catholic, conservative, and married. Maintaining traditional gender roles and not losing their feminine identity and perceived power as a mother may have been as important to French women as it was to men. The extreme-right realized the universality of their proposals and these measures would have attracted women to the group, as well as their husbands and families, without alienating conservative, traditionalist, sexist men. In light of the population crisis, any alternative perspective could be considered anti-family, and therefore anti-France.

Three

A la Jeanne d'Arc

Images of Ideal Women and Models of Political Activism

Introduction

In 1922, Victor Margueritte wrote *La garçonne*, a novel about a thin, single girl who worked outside of the home, wore short skirts and bobbed her hair, and defied gender roles. The *garçonne* demonstrated virile, masculine qualities such as independence and tomboyishness combined with a lack of modesty. In the 1920s, the word *garçonne*, like the Anglo-American “flapper,” came to define a crisis over gender roles. By the 1930s, however, the “new woman,” more politically active and suffragist with, one imagines, more sensible clothes, replaced *la garçonne*. This image of femininity competed with the “new mother,” the embodiment of feminine and maternal virtue that was extolled in the platforms and propaganda of the Croix de feu and Parti Social Français, as discussed in the last chapter.¹

The extreme-right was invested in creating its own image of femininity to oppose the visibility of women on the left. In a time when women rarely held positions of power, the only prominent women in politics were either socialist or communist. Léon Blum’s Popular Front government, elected in 1936, boasted three women ministers: Irène Joliot-Curie, Suzanne Lacore, and Cécile Brunschvicg.² Although these positions were largely symbolic, the perception of women’s governmental participation was the point: the female ministers

¹ Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: 1994), 9.

² Siân Reynolds, *France Between the Wars: Gender and Politics* (London: 1996), 159.

represented Blum's commitment to women's rights. Without actually changing the status quo in the Senate or Chamber, the Blum government was able to assert their respect for women and make concessions to feminist demands. Feminist groups, while not aligned with any political parties, were clearly situated on the left. Many of their leaders were women from wealthy political families who were related to high-ranking Radical or socialist politicians.³

The extreme-right, particularly the Croix de feu and the Parti Social Français, responded by portraying women to attract women. The Croix de feu newspaper *Le Flambeau* added a "woman's section" aimed at increasing female readership and participation in the Croix de feu. It included recipes, household hints, and the column "*Ce qu'une femme doit savoir*," which mimicked and complemented the column "*Ce qu'il faut savoir*" that reported current events and governmental policies concerning veterans.⁴ These pages reprinted speeches from a wide range of female orators, such as Mlle. Casanova, a militant anti-Communist and acolyte of La Rocque from Marseilles, and other contributors such as Marcelle Tinayre, who advocated female suffrage, and Colette Yver, who opposed feminism and advocated arranged marriages.⁵ However, as Mary Jane Green points out, most of the stories and speeches exalted motherhood and "urge[d] women to extend the moral ideals of motherhood, Service and Sacrifice, to the whole of France."⁶

The Croix de feu/PSF appealed to women through images of traditional femininity, but these examples also expanded the possibilities for female political action. It seems that as long as women embodied traditional values and virtues, they were paradoxically given more autonomy

³ Christine Bard, *Les filles de Marianne* (Paris : 1995), 384.

⁴ Mary Jane Green, "Gender, Fascism, and the Croix de Feu: the 'women's pages' of *Le Flambeau*," *French Cultural Studies* 8: 23 (1997), 231.

⁵ Sean Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy* (Montreal: 2007), 206, 63-4.

⁶ Green, "Gender, Fascism, and the Croix de Feu," 235.

in the public sphere. The Croix de feu/PSF disseminated three distinct images of women who espoused traditional feminine virtues but also furthered the organizations' message through their own activism: the saint Joan of Arc, Colonel de la Rocque's daughter Nadine, and Bouboule, a fictional character.

France as family

In the last chapter I showed the importance of the family in the political pedagogy of the extreme-right in interwar France and how this focus on the family gave women a political and economic role as mothers. The right described France as a large family, emphasizing the unity of all French people and reinforcing and legitimizing the paternalistic, patriarchal government. However, this allegory also gave women a significant role in the nation; as mothers were accorded a prominent role in the family, they would occupy a similar place in the nation.

The Croix de feu/PSF created an analogy between the family and the nation, seen most clearly in the PSF's manifesto "Une partie, un programme," in which "the rights of the family [*famille*] are... those of the *patrie*" – simply on a smaller scale. The PSF calls for a strong state that will dominate "in the name of the general interest, the individual and collective interest."⁷ The call for strong executive power with virtually no check, diminished powers of the deputies and senators, and "the simplification of the bureaucratic apparatus,"⁸ represents the head of the executive government as a strong, paternal authority with no check on his power, analogous to the traditional father of the family. When it turns its attention to the family, the manifesto

⁷ Parti Social Français, "Une partie, un programme" (Paris: 1936), 36-7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 39-41.

declares that the PSF will protect the family and defend the *patrie* above all else.⁹ The PSF thus makes society a priority over the individual, in contrast to the individualistic, self-serving Republican government.

Sean Kennedy argues that in this manifesto as well as other documents and propaganda, the PSF created a portrait of a regenerated France as “a highly regulated national community modeled upon the patriarchal family, with its culture, values, and sense of nationhood defined in essentialist terms.”¹⁰ This patriarchal view of the nation might suggest that men would lead the government alone; however, as Cheryl Koos and Daniella Sarnoff argue, the idea of nation as a large family broke down public and private distinctions. As Marie-Thérèse Moreau, a member of the right-wing organization Jeunesses Patriotes and a proponent of women’s rights, said in a February 1927 meeting, “if one acknowledges that the *patrie* is an extension of the *foyer*, one must conclude that the intervention of women in the affairs of the state is logical.” Lucienne Blondel, a member of Solidarité française maintained that the home was a microcosm of the nation and the world. Using logic contrary to Moreau’s, she stated that because the world has an impact on the home, women should be involved in *le monde* as much as *la maison*.¹¹ These women, among others, believed that women still had an important role to play in a patriarchal society without necessarily changing the gender hierarchy. This image of France as a large family expands upon my argument in the last chapter of women’s role as mothers. In individual families, women were represented and gained power through their roles as mothers. In the allegory of the nation as family, women are not only represented, but, to some extent, ruled.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰ Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy*, 142.

¹¹ Cheryl Koos and Daniella Sarnoff, “France” in Kevin Passmore (ed.) *Women, Gender, and Fascism in Modern Europe* (New Brunswick: 2003), 177-9.

France as feminine

Because “la France” is gendered feminine, women were always involved in the conception of the nation. However, the choice of feminine images of France varied politically. Since the revolution of 1789, the symbol of the French Republic was Marianne, a beautiful woman typically depicted in a Roman gown and Phrygian cap representing republican values.¹² In the nineteenth century, the right responded to this allegorical woman with the more Catholic but equally feminine image of Joan of Arc. In political cartoons France was often represented as a woman, and citizens were encouraged to think of their *patrie* as a mother. Kevin Passmore argues that the extreme-right had often depicted France in terms of “suffering femininity” and that during the war soldiers were encouraged to think of fighting for their women and nation, which were in some ways interchangeable.¹³

In La Rocque’s 1934 book *Service Public*, the Croix de feu upheld this tradition of feminizing France. La Rocque described the “formation of a mother cell penetrated with this mystique, this discipline, this patriotic and human religion [*ce culte patriotique et humain*].”¹⁴ On a 1935 visit to a children’s summer camp, or *colonies de vacances*, La Rocque told the children that “we all owe allegiance to our ‘mother,’ France.”¹⁵ He later described France as

¹² On the symbolism of Marianne, see Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into battle: Republican imagery and symbolisms in France, 1789-1880* (Cambridge: 1981) and *Marianne au pouvoir: L’imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: 1989).

¹³ Kevin Passmore, “Boy Scouting for Grown-Ups,” *French Historical Studies* 19:2 (1995), 541; Kevin Passmore, “Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism,” *The Journal of Modern History* 71:4 (1999), 823.

¹⁴ François de la Rocque, *Service Public* (Paris: 1934), 20.

¹⁵ Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy*, 106. For more on the *colonies de vacances*, see Laura Lee Downs, *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working-class Movements and the Colonies de vacances in France, 1880-1960* (Durham: 2002) and “‘Each and every one of you must be a chef’: Toward a Social Politics of Working-Class Childhood in the Extreme Right in 1930s France” *Journal of Modern History* 81:1 (2009).

mother not only to her citizen-children in the metropole, but to the colonies, calling France “the sweetest of all adoptive mothers.”¹⁶

Joan of Arc

Joan of Arc, the French peasant who heard the voice of God, led her country to victory against the English, and was martyred in 1431, was co-opted by the right wing as a symbol not only of France but of their groups and mission. Despite her bellicose history, Joan of Arc was represented as the embodiment of traditional femininity. Even in her own time, she represented feminine virtue, and Joan referred to herself as “*Jeanne la Pucelle*,” or the virgin/maiden.¹⁷ All of France claimed Joan as their patron saint, as Maurice Barrès argued in a speech to the Chamber of Deputies in May 1913:

There is not a single French person for whom Joan of Arc does not command profound veneration. Each of us can personify our ideals in Joan of Arc. She is for royalists the loyal servant who threw herself to the aid of her king; for Cesarians, the providential figure who came forward when her nation needed her; for republicans, the child of the people... even revolutionaries can put her on a pedestal by saying she appeared as a figure of scandal and division but became an instrument of salvation.¹⁸

Although this speech described Joan of Arc’s universal appeal, the fact that it was delivered by a member of the Action Française attests to her association with the extreme-right. Nadia Margolis argues, “Joan’s relationship with God and king presage a more natural affiliation with the Right,” and Caroline Ford claims that Joan “became the public chosen saint of those who linked throne

¹⁶ La Rocque, *Service Public*, 160.

¹⁷ Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: the image of female heroism* (New York: 1981), 22.

¹⁸ Maurice Barrès, quoted in Michel Lamy, *Jeanne d’Arc: Histoire vraie et genèse d’un mythe*, (Paris: 1987), 369. My translation.

and altar or who associated the Church with right-wing causes.”¹⁹ Right wing propaganda emphasized these religious and monarchical attributes, as well as Joan’s humble country origins, and she was typically portrayed as a virginal peasant girl, rather than as a brave soldier and leader.

Joan of Arc was beatified in 1909 and was not canonized until May 26, 1920, after the First World War. Public sentiment was largely pro-Catholic as the French had again won a victory and felt that right, and God, was on their side. On June 24, the Chamber adopted Barrès’ proposition to make Joan of Arc’s saint’s day into a national holiday.²⁰ This canonization also reflects the representations of women and uneasy gender relations after the war. Joan of Arc easily could have presented a threat to conventional masculinity as she let a troop into battle, the ultimate masculine role, and, to add insult to injury, did so dressed as a man. Despite religious and societal bans on transvestism, Joan’s virginal status meant she had not achieved full womanhood and therefore her cross-dressing was not a perversion of gender roles. Marina Warner argues that Joan’s transvestism did not “abrogate the destiny of womanhood” but rather was a way for the virginal saint to “transcend her sex.”²¹

The Croix de feu and PSF downplayed this gender-defying role by emphasizing her youth, chastity, devotion, and spirituality. La Rocque cited Joan of Arc as the image of “*la mystique française*,” the phrase he used to describe the indescribable spirit and legacy of France as interpreted by the Croix de feu.²² As the party grew to include women and children, the PSF increasingly used images of Joan of Arc. With the creation in November 1935 of the Mouvement

¹⁹ Nadine Margolis, “The ‘Joan Phenomenon’ and the French Right,” *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc* (New York: 1996), 268 ; Caroline Ford, *Divided Houses* (Ithaca: 2005), 112-3.

²⁰ Lamy, *Jeanne d’Arc: Histoire vraie et genèse d’un mythe*, 368.

²¹ Warner, *Joan of Arc: the image of female heroism*, 145.

²² La Rocque, *Service Public*, 28.

Social Français, the umbrella group that encompassed the Section féminine and the youth groups, the PSF projected a “softer, familial image,” according to Sean Kennedy. The PSF organized a parade for Joan of Arc’s saint day in May of each year and starting in 1936, members of the PSF were encouraged to bring their families and children.²³ In addition to the parade, laudatory articles about Joan of Arc dominated the first page of the May addition of *Le Flambeau*, the Croix de feu/PSF newspaper every year.²⁴ For example, the front page of the May 16, 1935 edition of *Le Flambeau* was devoted exclusively to Joan of Arc (see figure 1). The headlines read “Joan of Arc, symbol of the Country and daughter of the People,” “Under the invocation of Joan of Arc,” and “How her memory has been honored.”²⁵ While these articles emphasize Joan’s young, virginal image (“daughter of the People”), the photograph dominating the page depicts a statue of Joan of Arc brandishing a sword while mounted on a horse. This militant image highlights the nationalistic, paramilitaristic side of the Croix de feu; the inherent contradiction of this image juxtaposed with praise of Joan’s feminine attributes may reflect the uneasy integration of women into the public realm while keeping traditional gender roles intact.

In their propaganda, the Parti Communiste Français responded with their own images of Joan of Arc, depicting her as a peasant girl, who was betrayed by the king and monarchy.²⁶ “New women” bobbing their hair described the new style as “à la Jeanne d’Arc.”²⁷ The left’s appropriation of Joan of Arc suggests the success of the right in using her as a symbol to draw women away from the Communist party and feminist groups and entice them to join their own. However, in addition to their concessions to women’s participation and representation in politics,

²³ Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy*, 74.

²⁴ Green, “Gender, Fascism, and the Croix de Feu,” 233.

²⁵ See Fig. 1

²⁶ Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy*, 109.

²⁷ Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes*, 86.

the Communists' appropriation of Joan of Arc also made it necessary for the extreme-right to present new, more political images of ideal femininity to attract women.

Nadine de la Rocque

Held up as a more modern ideal of femininity and role model for Croix de feu/PSF women was Colonel de la Rocque's daughter Nadine. Nadine de la Rocque completed her *bachelière complète*, the equivalent of a high school diploma, but gave up a university education to help her father's cause. She was a close companion to her father from 1932, when she left school at age eighteen to work for the Croix de feu, until her death in 1934. According to *Le Flambeau*, Nadine continued to read and study and members of the Croix de feu described her with the phrase "Head of a child, brain of a man [*Tête d'enfant, cerveau d'homme*]." *Le Flambeau* accorded Nadine the title of *chef*, a word with not only masculine but leadership connotations. However, Nadine conformed to the Croix de feu's vision of the woman's role in the organization; her attempts to persuade the working poor to join the Croix de feu was an example of women's social work to strengthen and expand the Croix de feu. In a eulogy after her death, *Le Flambeau* quoted from Nadine's letters and diaries:

Never worry about yourself, suffer silently, but proclaim your patriotic faith, affirm it everywhere and without fear, for therein lies the existence of my father, there will humbly be my own; I will go incessantly into workers' homes, to poor families, where I have already formed sincere friendships... I would like to always serve.²⁸

²⁸ Green, "Gender, Fascism, and the Croix de Feu," 238. My translation.

When Nadine died from typhoid fever in August 1934 at the age of 20, her last words (to her priest) were supposedly “I love Joan of Arc.” In many ways, Nadine’s life echoed that of the Maid of Orleans, or at least the Croix de feu/PSF’s understanding of the saint’s life. Nadine’s youth, chastity, spirituality, and daughterly devotion were emphasized in a eulogy written by Noël Ottavi that appeared on the front page of *Le Flambeau*. Ottavi noted “the complete spiritual union of our leader and his daughter... their existences founded one in the other.” Like Joan of Arc, Nadine was remembered as a martyr and her father’s words at her deathbed were supposedly, “All this for France... even this, my God,” apparently offering up not only his daughter’s work, but her life, for the good of his country.²⁹ Nadine’s untimely death provided the opportunity to turn her into a saint and her short, chaste, and selfless life into a model for young women in the Croix de feu/PSF.

Mary Jane Green draws on Nancy Huston’s anthropological work on virgins’ unique ability to enter the masculine sphere to interpret Nadine’s role in the Croix de feu. Citing Celtic, Aztec, and modern Western examples, Huston argues that by not yet fulfilling the woman’s role of childbearing, young women were allowed to enter the male, public realm innocuously and still maintain their femininity. As Green says, “there is a certain cultural logic in the selection of this unmarried daughter to embody the highest ideals of the Croix de Feu, despite its rhetorical idealization of a woman’s role as mother.”³⁰ Emphasizing the patriarchal structure of the Croix de feu, Samuel Kalman argues that La Rocque represented the masculine and Nadine the feminine, “who understood her duty to serve the league and France, assenting to the patriarchal

²⁹ Mary Jane Green, “The Bouboule Novels: Constructing a French Fascist Woman” in Melanie Hawthorne and Richard Golsan, ed. *Gender and Fascism in Modern France* (Hanover: 1997), 66. My translation.

³⁰ Green, “Gender, Fascism, and the Croix de feu,” 238.

structure of the CDF/PSF and the nation as a whole.”³¹ Like the women members of the Croix de feu/PSF, who were mainly young and unmarried, Nadine was able to perform “feminine” roles without sacrificing her femininity; if she had lived, she almost certainly would have married, had children, and withdrawn from her work.³² Indeed, the martyred daughter masked the contradiction inherent in the maternal ideal.

Bouboule

Between 1927 and 1937, Thérèse Delhaye de Marnyhac, using the pseudonym T. Trilby, published a series of seven novels about the character Bouboule. In addition to the Bouboule series, Trilby wrote about fifty other books, mostly children’s books and romance novels. Not much is known about the author, but the first-person narrative suggests that Trilby shared the political views of her protagonist and was sympathetic to the Croix de feu.³³ The seven books tell the story of Béatrice Lagnat de Sérigny, or Bouboule, from her first meeting with her future husband through her role as a political wife to the final books in which she becomes active in the Croix de feu and works against the Popular Front.³⁴ Her movement from simple country girl to political activist makes her a modern Joan of Arc. With her opposition to “modernity” and the parliamentary system, admiration for Mussolini and Italian fascism, and distrust of communists

³¹ Samuel Kalman, *The Extreme Right in Interwar France: The Faisceau and the Croix de feu* (Burlington: 2008), 126.

³² Green, “Gender, Fascism, and the Croix de Feu,” 237-8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 230.; Green, “The Bouboule Novels: Constructing a French Fascist Woman,” 50.

³⁴ The titles are *Bouboule ou une cure à Vichy* (1927), *Bouboule, dame de la Troisième République* (1931), *Bouboule en Italie* (1931), *Bouboule à Genève* (1933), *Bouboule dans la tourmente* (1935), *Bouboule chez les Croix de feu* (1936), and *Bouboule et le Front Populaire* (1937). Mary Jane Green’s article “The Bouboule Novel: Constructing a French Fascist Woman” summarizes and analyzes the entire series.

and immigrants, Bouboule embodies the values of the Croix de feu. Green suggests that the word “bouboule” itself, meaning little ball, represents an affinity for a maternal, plump, anti-*garçonne* image of femininity.³⁵ Bouboule appears to be a bit of paradox, as she was both politically active and a devoted wife and mother. However, these roles are relegated to separate stages in Bouboule’s life, resolving the paradox and reconciling two images of femininity. The Bouboule novels themselves were also paradoxical in that they downplayed their political messages, focused on romantic or family-oriented plots to make them more accessible to women, and presented a clear political message only in the last two volumes.³⁶

Bouboule joined the Croix de feu in 1936, in the sixth novel in the series, *Bouboule chez les Croix de feu*. The plot of this book, which Mary Jane Green characterizes as “a sort of political bedroom farce,” consists largely of Bouboule and her husband hiding their involvement in the Croix de feu from each other.³⁷ To join the Croix de feu, Bouboule reverts to her maiden name and lists her occupation as *fermière*, or farmwoman, rather than housewife or mother. Bouboule thinks she has to give up or at least hide her well-established identity as a wife and mother to join the Croix de feu. Kevin Passmore argues that Bouboule “used her status as a mother to empower herself politically; subsequently, she found that rejection of motherhood in favor of single womanhood provided still greater possibilities for personal initiative.”³⁸ Green argues that by using her father’s name rather than her husband’s, Bouboule was able to appropriate the role reserved for activist women which had traditionally been that of *fille*, meaning both “daughter” and “girl” (like Nadine de la Rocque).³⁹ The reconciliation at the end

³⁵ Green, “The Bouboule Novel: Constructing a French Fascist Woman,” 54.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁸ Passmore, “Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism,” 816.

³⁹ Green, “Gender, Fascism, and the Croix de Feu,” 236-7.

has further implications that neither Green nor Passmore explore: Trilby suggests that wife/mother and activist are two separate stages in life. After Bouboule performs her expected role of wife and mother, she is free to pass to the next stage and become politically active.

Bouboule wavered between presenting a submissive, traditionally feminine attitude and defying authority; she was hostile to feminism, but praised the idea of women's suffrage, much as the male members of the Croix de feu did.⁴⁰ In the Croix de feu parade celebrating Veterans' Day, Bouboule finds a balance between participant and on-looker:

I march on the sidewalk with the Croix de feu. In the parade, there are very few women, which is preferable. Let us hope that the next time there will be not even one more, as they [women] are better in the crowd, walking with enthusiasm, and prompting those who forget to salute the flag.⁴¹

Women were literally relegated to the margins of the Croix de feu, but they still had a defined role in the organization. The woman's place was to support the Croix de feu and, by their actions, inspire those around them to do so as well. This incarnation of ideal femininity thereby resolved earlier contradictions that divided *fille* and activist from mother.

Bouboule therefore presented another ideal image of femininity that both followed and defied gender roles to attract women to the Croix de feu. Bouboule executed her feminine gender role by successfully raising daughters who make the appropriate choices: one marries a Croix de feu section leader and the other joins a convent, a modern interpretation of the Catholic practice of giving one child to the country (or party) and the other to the church. In the last novel of the series, *Bouboule et le Front Populaire*, Bouboule becomes a grandmother, not only completing her role of motherhood but passing the duty of child-bearing and -rearing to the next generation. The novel has an explicit anti-socialist political message; Bouboule fights the Popular Front by

⁴⁰ Green, "The Bouboule Novels: Constructing a French Fascist Woman", 58. My translation.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

working alongside peasants who Communist labor agitators are trying to corrupt. Bouboule was not rejecting her maternal role, but passing to the next stage in life of political activism. She therefore represents and reconciles both archetypal images of mother and *fille*.

Conclusion

In addition to the gendered construction of France, the Croix de feu/PSF presented three archetypal images of femininity to their female members: the traditional right-wing Catholic icon, Joan of Arc; a modern melding of the maid and the *fille* in Nadine de la Rocque; and Bouboule, the mother turned activist after she has fulfilled her maternal responsibilities. In ways, Nadine was the new Joan of Arc and Bouboule was the “new mother.” Each of these women managed to maintain her femininity and perform prescribed gender roles and each represented some combination of the Croix de feu feminine values of religious devotion, humility, and virginal or motherly purity.

There were contradictions inherent in positing women as arbiters of change in a movement that defined women by their reproductive capacity. Women could not be good mothers while working for the Croix de feu. Thus, although women were told that motherhood defined their political role, the role models with which they were formerly presented were either virgins or women whose childrearing years were behind them. The Croix de feu/PSF was able to newly reconcile the separate roles of wife/mother and political activist in the character of Bouboule. Bouboule integrated the left-wing and feminist image of a “new woman” with motherhood, Catholicism, and political action. Although we cannot measure the effectiveness of

this image, Bouboule and other representations of femininity presented by the extreme-right can be considered creative attempts to offer women both an alternative and a reaction to the *garçonne* and the “new woman” that were more compatible with right-wing maternal and paternalist ideology.



Figure 1. *Le Flambeau*, May 16, 1935.

Conclusion

The French refer to the 1920s and 1930s as, respectively, *les années folles* and *les années noires*. The giddy, “crazy” postwar 1920s devolved into the “black years” as France was hit by economic and population crises, threats to international security from an aggressive Germany, and threats to internal stability from Communism, feminism, and rapidly changing gender roles. Following war years of increased freedom and participation in the public sphere, French women were frustrated with the postwar return to the home. The left wing in France offered women expanded participation and representation in the public sphere and presented the attractive, modern image of the “new woman.” The extreme-right recognized this battle for French women’s loyalty and responded by presenting structural and ideological reforms.

The extreme-right, particularly the Croix de feu and the Parti Social Français, countered the challenge from the left by offering women an increased role in their organizations and parties and proposing extended rights such as suffrage. The right integrated the “traditional” mother with the “new woman” and presented motherhood as labor; moral value became economic value. This equation of child labor and child-rearing with outside labor restructured women’s role as mother as both a continuation of “traditional” values and a new way to offer women extended economic power and political representation. Furthermore, the extreme-right countered the left’s images of the “new woman” by presenting their own images of femininity. Nadine de la Rocque became a new Joan of Arc and the fictional character Bouboule represented the Croix de feu/PSF conception of the “new mother,” melding mother and “new woman.” Through policies and ideologies that extended women’s roles in the Croix de feu/PSF, these organizations responded to challenges from the left and feminism, resolved contradictions of tradition and modernity, and

redefined womanhood of the right for the twentieth century while maintaining their commitment to motherhood, Catholicism, and “traditional” values. These images, ideals, and programs all combined to create opportunities for women that they found attractive on the eve of the Second World War.

Two major bodies of work exist that border this thesis’ scope. Scholarship on the extreme-right and fascism has touched upon women’s involvement in extreme-right groups, but has not considered how or why this involvement occurred. Students of feminism and women’s history have considered women’s changing roles and rights between the wars and new images of femininity available to women, but have not explicitly linked these phenomena to the right-wing. Not only does this thesis bring these two scholarships into conversation, but it shows how the right responded to the left.

This study used only a small portion of Croix de feu/PSF documents; future research can delve into the archives of Colonel de la Rocque, the Croix de feu, and the PSF. These theories and approaches can also be applied to other organizations and political parties of the extreme-right, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the right wing in interwar France. The same approach can be used as well in the study of women in the Vichy regime where, again, we should consider both the actuality of women’s agency as well as the appeal of Vichy policies.

As noted, common perceptions of the extreme-right discount it as reactionary and hostile to women, relying on modern judgments of right/left and their relative stances on women’s rights. Other misconceptions include the idea that the right “brainwashed” women, which denies women’s agency. My hope is that the reader comes away with a more nuanced understanding of both the right-wing in interwar France and women’s history. This thesis has implications for the greater study of French history as well; we must consider the interdependence of issues

concerning women, gender relations, and the extreme-right. Further dialectic study and interdisciplinary approaches are merited in these arenas. Additionally, this thesis reconsiders the separation of political and social history, a division that at best seems arbitrary and at worse obscures comprehension.

This thesis challenges the classic assumption that the right offers something old and the left offers something new. Linking left and right to our modern notion of “progress” is misleading – as I have proven, the extreme-right offered new policies and images to women while acknowledging the challenges they faced after the First World War and the new desires they harbored, stirred up by feminism and the left. The purpose is therefore not to vindicate the right, but rather to consider how the left’s demonization of the right has inhibited our ability to seriously examine the right and truly understand the possibilities it presented to women.

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