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Feminist mobilization and family change: a two-way relationship

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the interaction between feminist mobilization and family change. On the one hand, the second-wave women's movement was built upon a criticism of the family which implied a strong challenge on what feminist theory has called the “separate spheres” ideology, that is, the definition of the family as the “private”, as opposed to a public sphere defined as the only political one. Against this vision of the family as “the private”, the second-wave women's movement aimed at democratizing the family, introducing a political dimension to it, thereby shifting the boundary between “the private” and “the public”. On the other hand, actual family change, in relation with legislative reforms, notably the liberalisation of divorce, induced a mobilization of women on more pragmatic feminist grounds in order to change family law and family policy, thereby politicizing the family “from within”, as opposed to the usual “top-down” politicization of the family. Hence family change, in relation to family law reform, influenced women's gender consciousness and their involvement in women's movements. This influence of family change on civil society (expressly women's activism) will be illustrated by a case study of the evolution of a Quebec federation of women's groups called the Association Feminine d'Education et d'Action Sociale (AFEAS). To sum up, this interaction between family change and feminist mobilization can be presented as follows : the women's movement mobilized against the family as it was and in favour of family change, but family change also provoked individual participation in the women's movement. The state played a major role in this dynamic, since state laws both accelerated family change and were, in return, a key target of feminist mobilization.

Introduction

In order to analyze different aspects of the relationship between feminist mobilization and family change, I would like to recall the two dimensions of civil society that had been identified in the first steps of the Civil Society Network Project¹. The first one is civil society as a utopia, a “project” (notably the result of XVIIIth century enlightenment thinking), initially referred to in the CiSoNet project description as “an ambitious project of restructuring society, polity and culture in a way which allows equal chances, democratic participation, individual freedom and societal self-organization, under conditions of peace, limited government, social welfare, and basic civility”². The other dimension of the concept of civil society is more descriptive: what one might call the “actual” civil society refers to “an ensemble of non-governmental institutions and relations that tend to be non-violent, self-organizing, self-reflexive and dynamic”³. Hence civil society can be grasped as a normative as well as a descriptive concept. Moreover, in the attempt to define civil society, a lot of attention has been paid to its borders, to the extent that civil society often seems to be defined by what it is not: the state, the family, the market. This conference provides us with an opportunity to discuss the issue of borders between civil society and the family. In this paper, my aim is to reconsider these various dimensions of civil society, in relation with the family, from a gender perspective. First, by analyzing how the family has been apprehended in feminist theory, my focus will be on the normative aspect of civil society (the utopian civil society, the theoretical one). I will show how feminist theory has questioned the frontier between civil society and the family by politicizing the latter, and therefore aimed at family change. Yet there can be a gap between feminist theory and actual feminist mobilization... which occurs within civil society in the second sense of the term. Women who mobilize for family change are themselves members of families, and part of a particular civil society, and this affects mobilization. Therefore, the second part of my presentation will be devoted to analyzing how family change affects women’s mobilization on family issues within civil society. This analysis will be based upon a case study of the evolution of a Quebec women’s organization, the *Association Féminine d’Education et d’Action Sociale* (AFEAS). I will use this case study to illustrate how family change (and notably the increase in divorce rates), in

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European Civil Society Network (CiSoNet). 2005. "Project Dossier."41.

² *ibid.* p.3.

³ *ibid.* p.3

relation to family law reform, influenced women's gender consciousness, and therefore the form taken by their activism within civil society. Thus, there appears to be a two-way relationship between family change and feminist mobilization: feminism, guided by a particular utopia of civil society, criticizes the family as it is and aims at changing it; reciprocally, family change also affects gender consciousness and actual feminist mobilization. Throughout my demonstration, I will show that the state played a major role in this interaction, since state laws both accelerated family change and were, in return, a key target of feminist mobilization.

Feminist theory and the family: expanding the borders of civil society

Given that one of the focuses of this conference is on the borders between civil society and the family, I will first present how feminist theory has challenged the public/private distinction, showing that it is a gendered dichotomy, and stressing the political dimension of the family, thereby shifting the border between civil society and the family. I will stress the possible public policy implications of such politicization.

The gendered implications of the 'separate spheres' ideology

The theoretical distinction between the public sphere and the private sphere, which is central to Western political theory, actually refers to different distinctions, depending on the authors. This has notably been stressed by Susan Moller Okin⁴, who shows that the inclusion of civil society in the private or in the public sphere depends on the way these spheres are defined. She identifies two main definitions of the public/private dichotomy, the first one referring to the distinction between state and society, and the second one corresponding to the distinction between non domestic and domestic life (the latter referring to the family). According to the first definition, civil society (or what Okin describes as "the intermediate socio-economic realm"⁵) would belong to the private sphere, whereas if one uses the second definition of the dichotomy, it would belong to the public. Susan B. Boyd also notices this ambiguity in

⁴Okin, Susan Moller. 1998 (1991). "Gender, the public, and the private." Pp. 116-141 in *Feminism and politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P.117-118

⁵ *ibid.* p.117.

common uses of the “public/private” dichotomy⁶. She distinguishes three definitions of the “public/private” divide, along the borders of the state/market/family triad: the “public/private” divide may refer to the distinction between state regulation and private economic activity (state/market), the distinction between the market and the family, or the distinction between state regulation and family relations⁷. Following Okin, I will refer to the public/private divide in this presentation as the non-domestic/domestic dichotomy⁸.

The “separate spheres”⁹ ideology implies a clear disjunction between the public sphere, which is the sphere of public affairs, where civil society develops, and the private sphere, which refers to the family, and is outside of the political realm. In this theory, the family (the private sphere) and civil society (the public sphere) are clearly disconnected. Even if civil society builds upon the private sphere, it actually exists only in the public sphere. Constructing the family as “the private” implies that what happens in the family is not a political concern.

Feminist theory has revealed the gendered nature of this “public-private” dichotomy. Indeed, because of the gendered division of labour, an important part of women’s activities take part in the family, hence in the so-constructed “private sphere”, whereas men occupy the “public sphere”¹⁰. Therefore, this construction tends to exclude women and their activities from the political realm. This exclusion of women is all the more pernicious since most recent political theories adopt what Okin calls “false gender neutrality” (or the “add women and stir” assumption), pretending to be gender-encompassing while being in fact built upon a male model¹¹.

The criticism of this definition of the private sphere as non political is at the roots of second-wave feminist thought, as the well-known phrase “the personal is political” clearly expresses¹². Yet this phrase has multiple ramifications in feminist theory, as has been notably

⁶ Boyd, Susan B. (Ed.). 1997. *Challenging the public/private divide: feminism, law and public policy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

⁷ Ibid. p.8-9.

⁸ Okin, op.cit. p.118. Okin refers to it as the « public/domestic dichotomy ».

⁹ Okin refers to the public/domestic dichotomy as the « separate spheres tradition » (ibid. p.119)

¹⁰ This is well synthetized in Jean Bethke Elshtain’s title *Public man, private woman* : see Elshtain, Jean Bethke. 1993 (1981). *Public man, private woman. Women in social and political thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹¹ Okin, op.cit. p.120 ; Okin, Susan Moller. 1989. *Justice, gender and the family*. New York: Basic books.

¹² Okin draws a parallel between feminist critique and marxist critique of liberalism, implying that « the economic is political » (Okin, 1998, op.cit. p.122).

stressed by Anne Phillips¹³. Here, I will give some examples of the way this expression can be understood, in the view of their different implications for our initial question regarding the borders between civil society and the family. It should be stressed that what follows is not, at any rate, an exhaustive review of feminist literature on the family¹⁴. Rather, I will borrow from different trends of feminist theory in order to illustrate the various ways and extent to which feminism challenges the border between civil society and the family.

“The personal is political”: what takes place in the family has political implications.

In this first view, the sexual division of labor, which implies women’s primary assignment to the family, is criticized because it functions as a **brake** or an obstacle to women’s participation in civil society (work on the labor market, political participation). This can lead to public policy recommendations that aim at alleviating the burden of care work performed by women within the family in order to allow them to access to a fuller participation in the public sphere. The current understanding of equal opportunities on the labor market at the European level can be analyzed in such a perspective: indeed, this concept implies that one takes into account the sexual division of labor in the family in order to design equality policies for the labor market. Hence work-family reconciliation policies are conceived as a way to promote equality on the labor market.

Here, the consequences, for civil society, of women’s assignment to the family are acknowledged. In other words, the unequal division of labor within the family is identified as the roots of gender inequality within civil society. As Anne Phillips, who labels this perspective “private constraints on public involvement”, stresses, “in this version, ‘the personal is political’ draws attention to the dependence of one sphere on the other, noting that democracy in the home is a precondition for democracy abroad”¹⁵. In this perspective, what happens in the family has political implications, but is not considered political *per se*. Therefore, even though it explores what goes on in the family, this perspective only

¹³ Phillips, Anne. 1991. *Engendering democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press., chap.4 « Public spaces, private lives ».

¹⁴ for a review of feminist theories of the family, see Flax, Jane. 1982. "The family in contemporary feminist thought: a critical review." Pp. 223-339 in *The family in political thought*, edited by Jean Bethke Elshtain. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. Thorne, Barrie, and Marilyn Yalom (Eds.). 1982. *Rethinking the family. Some feminist questions*. Boston: Northeastern University Press. ; Nelson, Hilde Lindemann (Ed.). 1997. *Feminism and families*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁵ Phillips, Anne. 1991. *Engendering democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press. P.96

challenges the public/private dichotomy to a moderate extent. Indeed, the only political sphere remains the public one, and what takes place in the family, in the private sphere, only matters because of its consequences for women's access to – and status in – the public sphere.

“The personal is political”: what takes place in the family is political.

Taking “the personal is political” a step further implies apprehending the family not only as a means to an end (democracy in civil society understood as the public sphere), but also as an end in itself, that is, as a political site in itself. Here, what takes place in the family does not only have political implications, it *is* political *per se*, in the sense that it is the site of relationships of power between individuals. Or, as Anne Phillips phrases it, “democracy is as important in the household as anywhere else, for in the household there is unequal power”¹⁶. These unequal power relations can be analyzed in different ways, depending on what the various authors consider to be at the roots of power relations.

For radical feminists, the root of power relations within the family is body appropriation and violence. For example, Colette Guillaumin speaks in terms of “direct physical appropriation” of the women's class by the men's class¹⁷. This appropriation targets women's time, the “products” of women's bodies, their sexuality (sexual obligation) and their care work¹⁸.

For Marxist feminists, the root is economic dependence. For example, Christine Delphy shows how patriarchy implies an appropriation of women's labor force by men within marriage, which implies that women are economically dependent on their husbands¹⁹.

These feminist theories have been marked by the quest for an ultimate origin of women's oppression. Current feminist theory has shifted away from the “why”, in favor of the “how”, analyzing gender as a social construction that varies across time and space, remaining however a key vector of power relations in every society²⁰. Yet these explanatory theories should not be dismissed as much, provided they are read as identifying different aspects of gendered power relations within the family.

¹⁶ Ibid. p.101.

¹⁷ Guillaumin, Colette. 1992. *Sexe, race et pratique du pouvoir. L'idée de nature*. Paris: Côté-femmes., p.18

¹⁸ *ibid.* p.19-28.

¹⁹ Delphy, Christine. 1998. "L'ennemi principal." Pp. 31-56 in *L'ennemi principal. t.1: Economie politique du patriarcat*. Paris: Syllepse. P.45.

²⁰ Scott, Joan W. 1986. "Gender: a useful category of historical analysis." *American Historical Review* 91:1053-1075.

Because they consider the family as a political site in itself, it can be said that these perspectives take the border challenge a step further, defining the family as part of civil society, and not separate from it. However, this statement can be qualified. Indeed, most of these authors stick to a denunciation of unequal power relations within the family (which is the reason one feminist thought is often considered as “anti-family”). Some envision types of state intervention that could offset these power relations, such as a legal sanction of spousal violence or abuse. But most of the time, this harsh diagnosis regarding inequality and power relations within the family leads to what I would call “in spite of the family” feminism, that is, women’s liberation is sought in spite of the family – very often, on the labor market²¹.

Indeed, only a few authors render explicit what a civil family – if we refer to civil society in the utopian sense – would be like²². The positive utopia can often only be inferred from the denunciation of the negative aspects of the family as it is. This, I think, could be stressed as a possible limit of the challenge that has been expressed by feminist thought to the family-civil society border: while the family is certainly identified as a political site, the utopian vision of the family as a civil society (in the normative tradition that was identified at the beginning of this presentation), which actually shapes the authors’ relationship to values, is often missing. And yet, their denunciation of the family as it is is based upon the same values that have been earlier identified as characterizing the utopian civil society: equal chances, democratic participation, individual freedom, peace, social welfare, basic civility. Even though this is seldom explicit in feminist theory, it could be said that feminist theory is – at least partially – guided by the utopia of a “civil family”, by analogy to the utopian “civil society” of Enlightenment thinking. In this civil family, women would be bodily and economically autonomous, have equal rights to those of men, and, depending on the perspective, would either see their care work socially and economically recognized, or share it equally with men, or be freed from its burden through a socialization of care.

²¹ Such a position tends to ignore the gendered construction of the “public” itself. Indeed, as Okin stresses : “We cannot hope to understand the ‘public’ spheres – the state of the world of work or the market – without taking account of their genderedness, of the fact that they have been constructed under the assumption of male superiority and dominance, and that they presuppose female responsibility for the domestic sphere. We must ask: would the structure or practices of the workplace, the market, or the legislature be the same if they had developed with the assumption that their participants had to accommodate to the needs of child-bearing, child-rearing, and the responsibilities of domestic life?” (Okin, 1998, op.cit., p.130).

²² for more direct apprehensions of what the « civil family » could be like in a feminist perspective, see Okin, Susan Moller. 1989. *Justice, gender and the family*. New York: Basic books.

Public policy implications

Before turning to civil society in the descriptive sense of the term, I would like to stress some possible public policy implications of “the personal is political”. Indeed, feminists may try to build “civil families” at the individual level, but some legal and public policy provisions can also be envisioned so as to offset the relationships of power that have been denounced within the family.

I will only suggest here a few examples. The recognition and sanction of violence (including rape and sexual violence) within the family can be done in penal law. The guarantee of reproductive rights (birth control, abortion) can ensure that women have control over their own bodies, that the latter is not in the hands of men. When one turns to the economic roots of power relations within the family, that is, women’s economic dependence on their husbands, two main strategies can be considered in order for women to ensure their own economic security and social rights, depending on whether or not one chooses to challenge the gendered division of labor. These two strategies have been identified by Carol Pateman as forming what she calls the “Wollstonecraft dilemma”²³. The first strategy implies a claim for the economic and social recognition of the care work performed by women within the family²⁴. The second strategy implies a redistribution of this care work, through a socialization of care and/or an increase in men’s participation in it, enabling women to access to a decent position on the labour market, and to easier political and social participation at large.

Finally, women’s economic dependence raises the issue of the capacity of “exit” from the family²⁵. This has been an important concern in feminist literature on the welfare state. Indeed, while Esping-Andersen defined decommodification as the key variable in analyzing variations in welfare provision²⁶, Ann Orloff, for example, put forward the “capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household”²⁷. Several legal and public policy provisions can

²³ Pateman, Carole. 1988. "The patriarchal welfare state." Pp. 231-260 in *Democracy and the welfare state*, edited by Amy Gutmann. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²⁴ We will see, below, an example of such a strategy with the AFEAS.

²⁵ Hobson, Barbara. 1990. "No exit, no voice: women's economic dependency and the welfare state." *Acta sociologica* 33:235-250.

²⁶ Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. 1990. *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

²⁷ Orloff, Ann Shola. 1993. "Gender and the social rights of citizenship: the comparative analysis of gender relations and welfare states." *American Sociological Review* 58:303-328.

improve the capacity of “exit” (once this very capacity exists, that is, once divorce is legal), notably provisions regarding child support and welfare support for lone-mothers²⁸.

Of course, the law does not mechanically entail family change, but there is a power of the law to change objective relationships of power within the family (which may vary across socio-historical contexts).

I have demonstrated so far the different ways in which second-wave feminist theory challenges the idea of civil society and the family as separate spheres, and how appeals to legal and public policy provisions could be made in compliance with this critique. Underlying this feminist approach, yet seldom explicit, is the utopia of what one might call a “civil family”, through an analogy with the XVIIIth century utopia of the “civil society”. Once we have examined the family-civil society relationship from a feminist utopian/normative point of view (in compliance with the first dimension of the definition of civil society), we can turn to the descriptive dimension of the definition of civil society, that is, civil society as it is. This will enable me to stress the role played by family change in feminist mobilization.

Family change and feminist mobilization : an interactive process.

The example of the AFEAS in Quebec.

It may seem odd to choose to speak about Quebec to a research network devoted to studying civil society in Europe. However, I have chosen to develop the example of the evolution of a Quebec women’s organization because it appeared to me as a good illustration of the interactive process between feminist mobilization and family change. Quebec at large is a great laboratory for studying social change, because it is a nation that has experienced extremely fast social change²⁹. This is especially true in terms of family change: demographic and family changes have been particularly quick in Quebec, with for example the fertility rate dropping from 3.858 in 1960 to 1.452 in 2000³⁰, and the employment rate of women rising

See also the definition of defamilialization according to Ruth Lister : Lister, Ruth. 1997. *Citizenship: feminist perspectives*. Basingstoke: McMillan., p.173.

²⁸ Hobson, Barbara. 1994. "Solo mothers, social policy regimes and the logics of gender." Pp. 170-187 in *Gendering welfare states*, edited by Diane Sainsbury. London: Sage.

²⁹ Daigle, Gérard, and Guy Rocher. 1992. *Le Québec en jeu: comprendre les grands défis*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

³⁰ Institut de la Statistique du Québec:

from 25.3% in 1961 to 51.8% in 2001. Furthermore, it is a privileged setting for studying the interaction between social change and mobilizations within civil society, because Quebec also has a very dynamic civil society, with an old tradition of local organizations gathered around many social issues³¹ (these groups are called in Quebec *groupes communautaires*). Therefore, I am aware that the CiSoNet is not especially interested in the empirical findings of this study, but I am using this case study of a Quebec women's organization because it is a very good illustration of the way feminist mobilization and family change can interact, and of the role played by the state in this interaction.

The Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (AFEAS) is one of the two main national women's organizations in Quebec, along with the Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ). It was created on September, 22nd, 1966 by means of the merger of two women's organizations linked with the Catholic Church, the Union Catholique des Femmes Rurales (Catholic rural women's organization) (UCFR) and the Cercles d'économie domestique (household economy circles) (CED). It is composed of an "association" at the provincial level, federations (13 in 1967) at the level of the main cities in Québec, and "circles" at the local level. It should be stressed that parallel to the AFEAS, there is another feminine organization in Quebec with a comparable profile, but which refused the Church's hold, the Cercles de fermières (Farmer's circles), which have been the subject of an extensive study by Yolande Cohen³².

In a previous conference of the Civil Society Network, the issue of social movements was discussed, and the following definition of a social movement was offered: "We define social movements as informal networks of individuals and/or organizations, sharing a collective identity and engaged in political and/or cultural conflicts"³³. In this case study, I will not discuss the women's movement at large, but a particular women's organization. Therefore in the way I have built my research subject, the organization is stable: the AFEAS has existed

http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/march_travl_remnr/parnt_etudn_march_travl/pop_active/taux_emploi_1c.htm

³¹ Bélanger, Paul R., and Benoît Lévesque. 1992. "Le mouvement populaire et communautaire: de la revendication au partenariat (1963-1992)." Pp. 713-747 in *Le Québec en jeu: comprendre les grands défis*, edited by Gérard Daigle and Guy Rocher. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

³² Cohen, Yolande. 1990. *Femmes de parole. L'histoire des Cercles de fermières du Québec, 1915-1990*. Montréal: Le Jour.

³³ European Civil Society Network (CiSoNet). 2005. "Project Dossier."41.

since 1966, with a relatively stable structure. What is at stake is the identity of the organization, the way it frames its cause³⁴, which raises, in the last resort, the issue of its belonging to the women's movement. Indeed, the AFEAS initially rejected feminism, and its identity was built at least as much on the family as it was on women. The defense of the family was its primary concern³⁵. More precisely, it promoted an image of women that was completely mingled to the family. However, the AFEAS now identifies itself as feminist, and can be objectively characterized as feminist, if one refers, for example, to Beckwith's definition of feminist movements as involving « substantive elements involving challenges to patriarchy, assertions of women's rights to equality and justice, and critiques of gender based subordination of women to men »³⁶. While the family concern is still very important for the AFEAS, women's interests are now first, and are not confounded any more with family interests, even though family affairs are the AFEAS's main target of intervention.

Sonya Michel and Seth Koven developed the concept of "maternalism" to refer to "ideologies that exalted women's capacity to mother and extended to society as a whole the values of care, nurturance, and morality. Maternalism always operated on two levels: it extolled the private virtues of domesticity while simultaneously legitimating women's public relationships to politics and the state, to community, workplace, and marketplace. In practice, maternalist ideologies often challenged the constructed boundaries between public and private, women and men, state and civil society"³⁷. This concept is particularly heuristic for analyzing the evolution of an organization such as the AFEAS, which mingles the defense of women's interests and family interests, and at the same time articulates these claims in different ways

³⁴ Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford, Steven Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation." *American Sociological Review* 51:464-481, Zald, Mayer N. 1996. "Culture, ideology, and strategic framing." Pp. 261-275 in *Comparative perspective on social movements. Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*, edited by Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁵ Lamoureux, Jocelyne, Michèle Gélinas, and Katy Tari. 1993. *Femmes en mouvement. Trajectoires de l'Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (AFEAS), 1966-1991*. Montréal: Boréal., p.74-77.

³⁶ Beckwith, Karen. 2000. "Beyond compare? Women's movements in comparative perspective." *European journal of political research* 37:431-468, Mc Bride Stetson, Dorothy, and Amy G. Mazur. 2003. *Reconceptualizing the women's movement: discourses, actors and states. Paper presented at the 2003 International Studies Association Annual Convention Panel: State, Governance and Knowledge: Feminist Discourses. Available on the RNGS website.*

³⁷ P.1079 in Michel, Sonya, and Seth Koven. 1990. "Womanly duties: maternalist politics and the origins of welfare states in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920." *American Historical Review* 95:1076-1108.

(initially in a more familialist³⁸ tone, then in a feminist perspective) over the years. Therefore, while the AFEAS's stand over the years can be generally defined as maternalism, its evolution also reflects the diversity of maternalism. This diversity was already stressed by Koven and Michel for women's movements at the turn of the XXth century, but the study of a maternalist movement that is confronted with the rise of the second-wave women's movement, which questions the sexual division of labor, adds a new dimension to the analysis of this diversity.

Therefore, my aim is to analyze how the AFEAS went from a defense of the family that subordinated women's interests to a defense of women's interests within the family. In other words, I will try to analyze the rise of feminist consciousness within the AFEAS. The assumption I am putting forward is that family change, expressly the rise in divorce rates, played a crucial role in the rise of feminist consciousness within the AFEAS.

A few words must be said about the concept of "feminist consciousness". Feminist consciousness was initially defined by Ethel Klein as a form of group consciousness (in analogy to Marx's class consciousness) that was the result of a three stages process, enabling mobilization to occur: the "recognition of group membership and shared interests", the "rejection of the traditional definition for the group's status in society", and the blame for the consequent problems put on the system instead of individual responsibility³⁹. Patricia Gurin also established a link between women's "gender consciousness" and their mobilization, identifying four dimensions of gender consciousness : identification, discontent, withdrawal of legitimacy, and collective orientation⁴⁰. Later works insisted on the need to distinguish gender consciousness from feminist consciousness, in order to account for the possibility of a gender identification that does not necessarily entail feminist opinions⁴¹. For example, Esther Chow defines gender consciousness as "an awareness of one's self as having certain gender characteristics and an identification with others who occupy a similar position in the sex-

³⁸ Here, I am using the term familialism, as define by Commaille, to refer to the defence of the family as an institution. See Commaille, Jacques. 1993. *Les stratégies des femmes. Travail, famille et politique*. Paris: La Découverte.

³⁹ Klein, Ethel. 1984. *Gender politics. From consciousness to mass politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. P.3

⁴⁰ Gurin, Patricia. 1985. "Women's gender consciousness." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 49:143-163.

⁴¹ Rhodebeck, Laurie A. 1996. "The structure of men's andd women's feminist orientations: feminist identity and feminist opinion." *Gender and Society* 10:386-403; Tolleson Rinehart, Sue. 1992. *Gender consciousness and politics*. New York: Routledge.

gender structure”⁴². This would correspond to the first stage of gender consciousness as defined by Klein. I would reserve the term feminist consciousness for the two next stages, implying a will to challenge the group’s subordinated status, an analysis of this status as the result of a system rather than individual responsibility, and consequently the will to mobilize collectively in order to change relationships of power within the gender structure. According to Chow, gender consciousness is a “precursor” of feminist consciousness. This also corresponds to Klein’s idea of “stages” within gender consciousness. Yet the distinction between gender consciousness and feminist consciousness makes it clearer that the former does not necessarily entail the latter. The conditions that favour such a shift need to be analyzed. While feminist and gender consciousness are usually studied by means of quantitative methods, I argue that a qualitative approach shed a different light on the concepts of gender and feminist consciousness, enabling a more detailed analysis of the processes by which one can turn into the other⁴³. The evolution of the AFEAS since its creation provides a great field of study for such an analysis.

The present study is based upon the content analysis of the AFEAS’s archives, comprising of the organization’s news bulletin from 1967 to the present time (the news bulletin was initially called AFEAS⁴⁴, and took the title *Femmes d’ici*, starting in 1977), its research reports, advisory reports, and information leaflets, mostly from 1966 to 1989.

The AFEAS and its women

In order to analyze the rise of feminist consciousness within the AFEAS, a few words should be said about the profile of AFEAS members. First of all, the AFEAS is a mass organization: its membership has been steadily surrounding 35 000 members, at least between the end of the 1960s and the end of the 1980s, which is the time range I shall focus on in this study. The only comprehensive survey of AFEAS members (based upon a poll conducted with 932

⁴² Chow, Esther Ngan-Ling. 1987. "The development of feminist consciousness among Asian American women." *Gender and Society* 1:284-299. P.285

⁴³ for a qualitative approach of gender consciousness, see Klatch, Rebecca E. 2001. "The formation of feminist consciousness among Left- and Right-wing activists of the 1960s." *Ibid.*15:791-815.

⁴⁴ As the UCFR and the CED merged, so did their respective news bulletins, *Femmes rurales* and *L’Essor* (AFEAS, n°1, january 1967, p.2).

members) that I have found dates back to 1981⁴⁵. The survey shows that women of all ages belonged to the organization, with an over-representation of women aged 35-55. 86,4% of the women were married⁴⁶. The majority of the members (56,8%) were full time homemakers, and only 9,5% were working full-time in the labor market⁴⁷. Half of the members (49,1%) lived in a rural area, and ¾ of the members lived in cities of 16 987 residents or less⁴⁸.

The AFEAS, who claimed 35 000 members in 1967⁴⁹, initially comprised of an executive board, and eight provincial on the following subjects: urban commission, rural commission, education, finance, propaganda and advertising, homemaking, popular education, resolutions⁵⁰. The structure of the organization is pyramidal : the AFEAS is composed of an “association” at the provincial level, federations (13 in 1967) at the level of the main cities in Québec, and “circles” at the local level (around 600).

Given this type of structure, there is of course a top-down dynamic in the flow of information: the executive board exerts some influence on the members at the local level, notably by means of the organization’s educative mission. In this perspective, the analysis of the news bulletins of the organization is quite interesting. Indeed, The AFEAS news bulletin had a crucial role in the organization, since it defined the agenda for all the local groups: each local group was supposed to take up and discuss the topics suggested by the bulletin, which gave educational material in order to organize the meeting, even literally providing local groups with meeting agendas. The bulletin also had, more generally, an essential role in diffusing the organization’s ideas: the aim was explicitly for women to integrate the organization’s vision, as this aim is clearly reflected in the function of “general propagandist” initially attributed to Cécile Bédard. In this perspective, each leading article was followed by a questionnaire that the reader was supposed to take after reading the article, in order to make sure its content was well understood and assimilated.

Yet the dynamic is not only top-down, but also, to a large extent, bottom-up. Indeed, the AFEAS’s provincial executive pays a lot of attention to the local members’ aspirations and opinions. The will not to shock the members with stands that would be too feminist is particularly stressed. The members’ opinions are channeled to the provincial executive by

⁴⁵ AFEAS, Lise Houle, *Sondage : les femmes de l’AFEAS, leurs caractéristiques et leurs opinions*, 8p.

⁴⁶ *ibi.* P.3.

⁴⁷ *ibi.* p.4.

⁴⁸ *ibi.* p.5.

⁴⁹ AFEAS, n°1, january 1967, p.22

⁵⁰ AFEAS, n°1, january 1967, p.9.

means of delegates that are chosen in each local circle. The AFEAS also quite often organizes polls and surveys among its members on the different subjects it chooses to study.

Therefore, the AFEAS is strongly linked to its members: the members's problems are reflected in the AFEAS's stands, and the AFEAS, at the provincial level, is very cautious not to be perceived at odds with its local members' aspirations – even though it also plays a crucial consciousness-raising role by means of its educational mission.

The first years (1966-1972) : the hold of religion and family values over the AFEAS

The AFEAS's link to the Catholic Church, and religious preoccupation, were initially very strongly asserted. This can be illustrated by the role played by the clergy in the association, the official ties to other catholic organizations, the religious tone of the discourse and the nature of the values endorsed, and especially the defense of family values.

The Church had an important role in the everyday life of the association. A priest (the only man in this women's only organization) attended to the AFEAS meetings in each federation⁵¹, and was supposed to give moral advice. It is also a priest, George-Etienne Phaneuf, who signed the leading article of the news bulletin every month. For example, in his first article, on the issue of progress⁵², he observes that the lengthening of education takes the youth away from faith and religious practice⁵³, and encourages the members of the organization to seek God's glory in their everyday life, within their households and within society at large⁵⁴. His third article was devoted to reasserting the values of marriage and the family⁵⁵ (an article in which he mentioned the Church's position against abortion⁵⁶). In the latter, he suggests that the AFEAS should play a role in promoting marriage and the family: "You have the duty to unite so that our country establishes conditions that guarantee the recognition and protection of the value of spousal love, for now and later (fair laws on marriage, divorce legislation, help for families with numerous children, TV and radio programming, etc.)"⁵⁷.

⁵¹ AFEAS vo.2, n°1, september, 1967, p.12-13.

⁵² George-Etienne Phaneuf, « L'activité humaine dans l'univers », p.4-6 in AFEAS, n°1, january 1967.

⁵³ Ibid. p.4. : « L'éducation plus poussée, semble éloigner nos enfants de la foi ou du moins de la pratique religieuse ».

⁵⁴ ibid. p.6

⁵⁵ George-Etienne Phaneuf, « Le mariage et la famille seraient passés de mode », p.10-13 in AFEAS, n°3, march 1967

⁵⁶ ibid. p.12.

⁵⁷ ibid. p.13.

Similarly, each meeting of AFEAS members at all levels had to begin with a prayer : in the guidelines that are given for organizing committees meetings at the local level, the first item on the agenda is “prayer”⁵⁸.

Another illustration of the religious perspective of the organization can be found in the religious vocabulary used by the leaders. For example, in her wishes for the new year in the first AFEAS news bulletin, the AFEAS president, Dominique Goudreault, says a prayer, wishes the AFEAS members a “holy year”, and hopes they will fill it up with actions that will help them “deserve paradise”⁵⁹. Dominique Goudreault is also president of the Canadian Catholic Feminine Organizations Committee, and a member of the directory board of the World Union of Catholic Feminine Organizations⁶⁰, to which the AFEAS is affiliated⁶¹.

In compliance with the role of Catholicism in the AFEAS’s identity, the defense of the family is one of the first political standpoints taken by the AFEAS: in an article entitled “The mutual rights and duties of family and society”⁶², Cécile Bidard, who is the “general propagandist” for the AFEAS⁶³, asserts the need to fight “for the defense of the family and the recognition of its rights”⁶⁴, referring to a 1958 press release by the religious authorities (épiscopat) which denounced the damage caused by the increase in divorce rates and women’s work outside of the home. The AFEAS consequently asserts a certain number of “family rights”, which represent as many duties for the state and society at large: “the right to unity”⁶⁵, “the right to fertility”⁶⁶, “the right to educate its children and supervise their education”⁶⁷ (in terms of education, a primary role is given to the parents, as opposed to teachers), “the right to economic security, grounded on its members’ work, and mainly the father’s”⁶⁸ (which leads to the promotion of the family wage), “the right to vital space”⁶⁹ (decent housing), “the right to be protected in its health, both physical and moral”⁷⁰, “the right to social security”⁷¹. In order

⁵⁸ AFEAS, n°1, january 1967, p.11 and p.13.

⁵⁹ Dominique Goudreault, « Souhais », p.3 in AFEAS, n°1, january 1967.

⁶⁰ AFEAS, n°1, january 1967, p.22.

⁶¹ AFEAS, vol.2, n°5, janvier 1968, p.3.

⁶² Cécile Bédard, « Les droits et les devoirs réciproques de la famille et de la société », p.10-14 in AFEAS, n°2, february 1967.

⁶³ She was previously the secretary general of the CED.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.10.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.11.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.12.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.12.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.12.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.13.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.13.

⁷¹ Ibid. p.13.

to secure these rights, a Ministry of the Family should be created, which should enact a “real family policy”⁷². Finally, Cécile Bédard suggests that the AFEAS could be one of the main promoters of the right of families. Here, the stand that is taken is clearly familialist, in the sense that the AFEAS promotes the family as an institution, at the expense of individual rights (for example, the family rights described above imply a stand against women’s reproductive rights, against divorce, and against an autonomous income for women, since the family wage is encouraged). Yet, since women are assigned a primary role in this defence of the family, which notably implies some form of political action (fighting for family rights in the public sphere), this stands can be characterized as maternalist, because the defense of family values is used as a way to promote a role for women in the public sphere, even though this doesn’t imply a challenge of the sexual division of labour.

Further, the general conservatism of the values that are endorsed is not inconsistent with some form of gender consciousness: the organization is gathered around a defense of a particular vision of women’s identity, the homemaker. The AFEAS clearly promotes woman’s role as a homemaker: homemaking is, along with religious and educational issues, the main topic that is dealt with in the news bulletin, be it knitting, cooking, decoration, etc. In 1967, the AFEAS justifies the need for a homemaking committee by stressing “the importance and wealth of her mission as a homemaker”⁷³. Because the AFEAS is a gathering of women for women, it is the site of some form of gender-consciousness. Yet because it is not accompanied by a questioning of relationships of power between men and women, this gender-consciousness is not, at this stage, a feminist consciousness.

The gradual rise of a feminist consciousness

In the first years of its existence, the AFEAS was confronted with the very fast social changes that occurred in what is commonly referred to in Quebec as the “quiet revolution” (which included, beside the very fast demographic changes mentioned above, a fast secularization), the rise of the second-wave women’s movement, and the institutionalization of women’s interests in Quebec⁷⁴, in Canada⁷⁵ and worldwide⁷⁶. These changes converged in promoting a

⁷² *ibid.* p.15.

⁷³ AFEAS vo.2, n°1, september, 1967, p.15.

⁷⁴ In Quebec, a Council on the status of women (*Conseil du statut de la femme*) was created in 1973.

⁷⁵ Canada’s Prime Minister Pearson announced in february, 1967, the creation of a Royal Commission on the Status of Women, in order to investigate women’s social and legal status.

new image of women as autonomous, working on the labor market. The AFEAS's reaction to these changes was ambiguous. Indeed, the meaning of this new image of women was ambivalent for the AFEAS. On the one hand, it opened the possibility of improving women's rights and status, a focus that was initially secondary for the AFEAS, whose focus was more on the family than on women themselves – but yet a focus that corresponded to the interests of its constituencies. On the other hand, the value put on women working outside of the home tended to discredit the homemaker. This tended to put the organization on the defensive, since the very identity it was built upon (symbolically, but which also corresponded to the material life of its members) was questioned. This explains the AFEAS's initial ambivalence facing feminism.

For example, when the AFEAS prepared for the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (Bird Commission), in 1967, it was asked to document “woman's work outside of the home” and “the recycling of the married woman who wants to go back to work”. In its final report, the AFEAS stressed the need to keep promoting women's role as homemakers: “We shouldn't neglect the problem faced by a woman who has chosen to stay home; she has the right to be taken care of. Isn't the real woman, above all, a wife and a mother who devotes herself entirely to her family and her home? Doesn't her contribution to society deserve to be highlighted?”⁷⁷.

The AFEAS's puzzlement facing the change in women's general image appeared even more explicitly when the organization chose as its general theme of study and action for 1974-1975 « Come to terms with your condition as a woman » (« Assume ta condition de femme »). This revealed the need felt by the AFEAS to position itself regarding the current evolutions in women's roles, and the new women's liberation movement that had emerged, as president Azilda Marchand herself stresses : « This topic of study will enable us to assess some aspects

The Commission was chaired by journalist Florence Bird. All organizations and individuals interested in the subject could submit reports to the commission. The Bird Commission had an important effect in structuring the women's movement's thinking and action in Quebec, as in the rest of Canada : see Collectif Clio (Ed.). 1992. *L'histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles*. Montréal: Le Jour. P. 469

⁷⁶ the activities surrounding the 1975 UN International Women's Year had an important influence on the AFEAS's feminist consciousness. During 1975, a column was devoted to this event in every issue of the AFEAS's news bulletin. See also Lamoureux, Jocelyne, Michèle Gélinas, and Katy Tari. 1993. *Femmes en mouvement. Trajectoires de l'Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (AFEAS), 1966-1991*. Montréal: Boréal. P.93-94.

⁷⁷ Cécile Bédard, « Le statut de la femme (éditorial) », p.3 in AFEAS, vol.2, n°6, février 1968.

of women's⁷⁸ condition in 1974, facing the rise of women's liberation movements, the evolution of traditional women's roles, the more active participation of women to social and political life »⁷⁹. In her editorial, under the headline « independence crisis : teenage crisis », Azilda Marchand denounces women's excessive liberation as a « teenage crisis »: « The promotion of women does not mean waging a war against men ; it does not mean giving up one's personality as a woman and becoming a man ; it is not a matter of wearing more or less clothes ; it does not mean rejecting love, refusing children, abandoning all family or social responsibility ; it does not mean refusing all constraint, thinking only about one's self, refusing to attend to the needs of one's friends. This conception of freedom is a teenage attitude of a global refusal of now outpassed feminine roles. A woman must face her destiny and take hold of it. To conquer her maturity, she must assert her personality, increase her knowledge, give herself the means to choose her fields of activity, put her talent and competence at the disposal of others ». At the same time, Azilda Marchand stresses that « Coming to terms with one's condition does not mean accepting injustice »: « To achieve this human and spiritual development, a woman needs to be helped by favorable laws, that depend more on the environment than on individuals. No one can be liberated without legal and institutional stability, without sufficient security in everyday life, without economic ease, without a family and work spirit. All economic injustice, all social discrimination against women, is an assault against justice and peace. Even if women are non-violent, they can and will become aggressive to defend her rights and make sure justice is ensured »⁸⁰.

This last assertion, denouncing injustice and discrimination against women, appears in stark contrast to the previous ideal of a subordination of women to the good of their families, earlier endorsed by the AFEAS itself. It shows that the organization has come a long way, and has achieved feminist consciousness. This gradual shift from gender consciousness to feminist consciousness (or, as Yolande Cohen described it for the Cercles de fermières, from «féminin» to «feministe»⁸¹) also appears in the bulletin's evolution. In september, 1972, the

⁷⁸ Very often, I have to use the plural in the English translation because the singular wouldn't sound right in English, but it should be stressed that all the speeches of this time period use the singular « la femme ».

⁷⁹ Azilda Marchand, « Assume ta condition de femme », p.2-3 in AFEAS, vol.9, n°1, September 1974.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 2-3.

⁸¹ Cohen, Yolande. 1992. "Du féminin au féminisme: l'exemple québécois." Pp. 521-537 in *Histoire des femmes en Occident. Tome V: Le XXème siècle*, edited by Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot. Paris: Plon.

AFEAS bulletin takes on a « new profile »⁸². This « new profile » resulted in a decrease in the space allocated to homemaking advice, to the profit of information dealing with the organization's action and the initiatives developed by the different committees. It also clearly implied a euphemization of the religious dimension of the bulletin. For example, the priest who had a leading article in each issue was now a member of the freshly created « directing committee », but did not publish a piece of his own anymore. The gradual secularization of the AFEAS also appeared in a change in the organization's « constitution », where the article regarding the priest's presence in the association was changed from : « the association **must** ask a priest for advice » to « the association **can** ask a moral counselor for advice »⁸³.

Hence the evolution of the AFEAS news bulletin reflects the gradual assertion of a feminist consciousness, along with a secularization of the organization. Yet the AFEAS's attitude towards feminism, as the previous quotes indicate, remained ambivalent. This can be explained by the gap between the image of women as accomplished wage-earners, promoted by the second-wave women's movement, and the value the AFEAS puts on homemaking. At any rate, it was not obvious for homemakers to become feminists. Therefore, if the general diffusion of feminist ideas created the context for feminist consciousness within the AFEAS, the latter cannot be fully explained just by the influence of these outside ideas. Indeed, as some aspects of the organization's discourse show, the AFEAS might as well have reacted by a defensive stand, reinforcing its conservative agenda and rejecting feminism as a whole. Therefore, other elements must be considered in order to fully explain the rise of feminist consciousness within the AFEAS. In order to investigate this, let us consider the issues the AFEAS chose to take on, as far as women's status is concerned.

The AFEAS's fight for the recognition of women's "invisible labour"

What was the AFEAS's feminist agenda? First of all, it should be stressed that not all of the agenda was feminist: for example, the AFEAS was clearly against abortion. In April 1971⁸⁴, it clearly stated its opposition to any furthering of women's right to abortion (according to the existing law, only therapeutic abortion was authorized if the woman's physical or mental

⁸² Azilda Marchand, « « Profil nouveau » de la revue AFEAS », p.2-3 in AFEAS, vol.7, n°1, september 1972.

⁸³ Stressed by Azilda Marchand in a press conference on September, 8th, 1972. See AFEAS, vol.7, n°3, november 1972.

⁸⁴ Azilda Marchand, « La question de l'avortement est-elle réglée ? », p.12-13 in AFEAS, vol.8, n°5, january 1974.

health was at stake). It campaigned openly against any improvement of the law⁸⁵. But the AFEAS did have a feminist agenda, whose **red thread** ever since the 1970s has been the demand for a recognition of women's « invisible labour », that is, all the work that is performed by women within the family, the « private sphere ».

How did the AFEAS identify this invisible labour (since it is invisible) ? It started off with what one might call the **emerging** part of the iceberg, that is, the part of this labour that looks the most like visible labour – or, labour accomplished within the « public sphere » : that accomplished by women who work for their husband's business (often in agriculture, but also in the crafts and reselling). These women were called by the AFEAS « femmes collaboratrices ». In September, 1974, the AFEAS launched a research project on women's social and legal status as workers in their husbands' business. The research took place within the AFEAS itself, by means of a questionnaire that was passed to 1800 of the members who worked for their husbands businesses. The fact that the AFEAS launched the research within its own organization had a consciousness-raising effect in itself on the women who answered the poll. The results of the poll showed that most of them knew very little about their rights and legal status. Therefore, legal consciousness-raising⁸⁶ towards its members was a crucial aim of the AFEAS's action after the poll, besides the political mobilization for rights improvement. Indeed, based upon the results of the poll, the AFEAS started to campaign for social rights for these women. This campaign in favor of the recognition of the work done by women in the “private sphere” for their husbands' business (which belongs to the “public sphere”) is a typical example of a feminist challenge to the separate spheres ideology.

Further, the research done on women working for their husbands' businesses lead to a broader questioning of women's work within the family, which was at the basis of other campaigns that aimed at improving homemakers' social rights (for example, in terms of pensions entitlement)⁸⁷. Hence the AFEAS went from questioning the “private” status of the most

⁸⁵ « L'AFEAS dit NON à l'avortement sur demande », p. 11 in AFEAS , vol.7, n°8, April 1973.

⁸⁶ Here, one can stress the role played by civil society in improving legal consciousness in people's everyday life. The AFEAS held informative meetings about family law and the legal status of collaborative wives : see

Lamoureux, Jocelyne, Michèle Gélinas, and Katy Tari. 1993. *Femmes en mouvement. Trajectoires de l'Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (AFEAS), 1966-1991*. Montréal: Boréal. P.99-100. For a definition of legal consciousness, see

Ewick, Patricia, and Susan S. Silbey. 1998. *The common place of law: stories from everyday life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁸⁷ This effect of the demand concerning collaborating women on other demands for homemakers was asserted by former president Azilda Marchand : « When collaborating

“public” of the types of work that can be accomplished within the private sphere, to questioning the private status of a labour that was initially more “private”, that is, care and domestic work (which, as opposed to the first category, did not result in direct exchange on the market, and therefore was less easily identified as having a public dimension). Yet by questioning the status of women working for their husbands’ businesses, the AFEAS had opened Pandora’s box, and this led to a radical challenge of the political status of housework – which, interestingly enough, took place without implying **a contention** of the sexual division of labour. The AFEAS’s most successful campaign, in the search for a recognition of housework, was aimed at family law: it fought for, and obtained, the creation (1989) of what is called the « family patrimony ». The family patrimony is a provision by which regardless of the marriage contract, property and belongings commonly used by the spouses, *e.g.* real estate and cars, are presumed a common good and must be equally shared between the spouses in case of divorce or death of one of the spouses. This is a very strong legal provision because equal sharing is imposed regardless of the marriage contract, even in the case of a marriage contract based on separate ownership of property. Therefore, even if the wife has not contributed to the acquisition of these, she is still entitled to half of the goods. This often is the case in households with a strong division of labor, in which the woman remains at home.

In view of the AFEAS’s claims, and especially that in favor of the family patrimony, we start guessing that a decisive impulse for feminist consciousness within the association might have come from a very concrete family change, that is, the rise in divorce rates. Indeed, the family patrimony aims at recognizing a homemaker’s contribution in case of divorce or death of the husband. This assumption, which would still need to be tested by means of interviews with AFEAS members, receives some form of confirmation from the analysis of the AFEAS’s archives. Indeed, in order to test this assumption, let us consider the way the AFEAS deals with the issue of divorce.

The AFEAS facing the increase in divorce rates

women will have obtained satisfaction, it will be easier to claim autonomy and financial security for other categories of homemakers who work » (Marchand, Azilda. 1980. "Les femmes au foyer, hier et demain." *Canadian Women's Studies / Les cahiers de la femme* 2., p.48, cited by Lamoureux, Gelinat and Tari, op. cit. p.96).

The AFEAS initially echoed the Church's condemnation of divorce, its view as something damaging for the family. In compliance with this view, it encouraged matrimonial counseling to avoid divorce: for example, an article is devoted to matrimonial counseling in the June, 1967 issue of the AFEAS news bulletin⁸⁸. Though this article generally endorses the idea of a shared responsibility of the spouses in making the marriage work, the following remark should be noted: "Although nobody would negate the courage and sometimes, the heroism, that is needed by some husbands to live with their wives, the reverse might be more frequently true"⁸⁹. Following its annual meeting in August, 1967, the AFEAS, among other social policy resolutions, asked that matrimonial counseling centers be funded by the ministry in charge of family affairs, "in order for them to become accessible to all classes of society"⁹⁰. In 1968, divorce was made easier in Quebec by a federal decision that created provincial divorce courts in Quebec and extended the available motives for divorce⁹¹.

In 1973, the AFEAS's leading article was about « the lone woman »⁹²(la femme seule). The hardship faced by divorcees, widows and unwed mothers are dwelt upon, and the article stresses two points: the need to change the way « we » (married women) look at lone women, and the need to improve the legislation.

Another element in favor of my assumption comes from the final report regarding women's status as collaborators in their husbands' business, which came out in September, 1976⁹³ (the research had started two years before, in September, 1974). The report raises the issue of these women's economic insecurity, notably in case of death of the husband or in case of separation or divorce⁹⁴. Indeed, the summary of the research⁹⁵ stresses that the initial impulse for the research came from witnessing several members of the AFEAS finding themselves in very difficult situations following the selling of the company, the death of the husband, or, « more and more frequently, following separation or divorce »: "For the past few years, the AFEAS has been witnessing the hardships endured by many women who take part, with their husbands, in the well-being of the family business. These women, after working hard and with

⁸⁸ Bédard, Cécile. 1967. "Les centres de consultation matrimoniale." *L'AFEAS* 1:5-9.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ AFEAS, vol.2, n°2, October 1967, p.3.

⁹¹ Dandurand, Renée B. 1988. *Le mariage en question*. Quebec: Institut Québécois de Recherche sur la Culture., p.30

⁹² « La femme seule », p.4-7 in AFEAS vol.7, n°6, February 1973.

⁹³ Muguette Perreault, « 'La femme collaboratrice du mari' : qu'en ferons-nous ? », p.2-4 in AFEAS, vol.11, n°1, September, 1976.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p.2.

⁹⁵ Solange Gervais, « La femme collaboratrice du mari dans une entreprise à but lucratif. Recherche scientifique de l'AFEAS », p.6-9 in AFEAS, vol.11, n°1, September, 1976.

practically no pay for many years, often find themselves very **poor (démunies)**, when the business is sold or in case of bankruptcy, or when the husband dies, or, more and more frequently, in case of parting or divorce»⁹⁶.

The role played by the increase in divorce rates is even clearer in the campaign in favor of the « economic rights of spouses » by means of the family patrimony. Indeed, the increase in divorce rate, in the 1970s and 1980s, directly affected some members of the AFEAS and the women around them, to the extent that Lamoureux, Gelinas and Tari describe the campaign for a recognition of housework as a « social emergency »⁹⁷. Indeed, the divorce rate increased from 8,7% in 1969 to 44,8% in 1987. Lamoureux, Gelinas and Tari quote Lise Drouin-Paquette, who was president of the AFEAS from 1983 to 1985 : « We became aware of women's poverty. (...) We became aware of the fact that we did not have any financial security. That was a big shock. Every single woman in the AFEAS experienced it : her sister, her sister-in-law, her neighbour... »⁹⁸. This quote suggests that the members themselves were not that affected by divorce. Indeed, in 1981, only 1% of members of the AFEAS were divorced, according to the poll that took place at the time⁹⁹. However, the divorce rate within the AFEAS might have increased during the 1980s. This should be the subject of further inquiry. At any rate, the fear of divorce, coming from the experience of the divorce of close relatives and neighbors, definitely had a consciousness-raising effect. Yet it should be stressed that the rise in divorce rates in itself did not mechanically entail the mobilization (it was not the case in other countries where the divorce rate increased). Mobilization happened only because there was a grassroots structure, the local circles of the AFEAS, that enabled women to share their experience of family change, and translate it into political terms, with the help of the cognitive frame provided by the AFEAS's provincial executive, which read the experience of divorcee women in terms of injustice, lack of recognition of housework, and denial of women's rights, and promoted the right to autonomy for women.

Conclusion

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.6.

⁹⁷ Lamoureux, Jocelyne, Michèle Gélinas, and Katy Tari. 1993. *Femmes en mouvement. Trajectoires de l'Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (AFEAS), 1966-1991*. Montréal: Boréal., p.109.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p.111-112.

⁹⁹ AFEAS, Lise Houle, *Sondage : les femmes de l'AFEAS, leurs caractéristiques et leurs opinions*, 8p., p.3

The evolution of the AFEAS is quite interesting to analyze as far as the interaction between civil society and the family is concerned, especially in the light of feminist critiques of the public/private divide. Indeed, while the AFEAS has always endorsed and promoted family values, the meaning of this endorsement has shifted over time, along with the gradual rise of a feminist consciousness within the organization. The family was initially promoted as an institution to the expense of women's rights within the family – but in a way that still enabled some form of participation of women in civil society by the means of the defence of the family's educational and moral role in society (which is why I think the label “maternalist” is justified even for the initial stages of the AFEAS). In a broader context of assertion of women's individual rights, and by means of a questioning of the status of the work performed by women within the family, the AFEAS progressively endorsed a demand for women's autonomy within the family. This implied a questioning of the relationships of power within the family, especially as they are grounded on women's economic dependence on their husbands. Family change played an important role in the demands that were made regarding women's status in the family, since the rising divorce rate revealed women's economic dependence. Throughout this process, the AFEAS challenged the public/private divide from many angles, shedding lights on relationships of power and dependence within the family and analyzing the private sphere itself in political terms, in terms of injustice and discrimination. This represents a radical challenge on the public/private dichotomy, which implies a politicization of the private sphere itself (and not only a denunciation of the effects of the private on the public), and hence an extension of the limits of civil society. It is interesting to notice that this challenge came from an organization that was initially quite conservative, with a membership quite different from the usual profile commonly associated with the women's movement: AFEAS women are not urban professional women, but rural homemakers. This radical politicization of the family was only made possible by the interaction of the family change lived by AFEAS members and the consciousness-raising efforts developed by the head of the organization at the provincial level, by means of the AFEAS's educational mission. Indeed, family change in itself was not enough to foment a mobilization. It yet had to be read in terms of gender inequality and the need for women's autonomy, a cognitive frame that was provided by the head of the organization, and was made available to these women because they were initially members of local AFEAS circles. Therefore the existence of a very dense network of grassroots organizations in Quebec is a key factor that enabled the link between family change and feminist consciousness and mobilization to be made. Such a

mobilization challenges the “feminism in spite of the family” perspective which I identified in the first part of this paper as the most common in feminist claims. This different perspective was made possible by the sociological profile of AFEAS women, who were both subjectively and objectively attached to the family (they valued the family, and quite often, they were trapped in it). Targeting the family was the only way for them to gain autonomy, since their inclusion in the labor market was difficult (not to mention the case of women working for their husbands’ businesses). It was also a way to define a kind of feminism that corresponded to their aspirations and beliefs, making it possible to keep on stressing the importance of family life (by means of the “value” – both symbolic and economic – of family work) while trying to make it more “civil”.

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Archives

Most of the AFEAS's archives have been scanned and are available online :

I have also consulted the 1970-1977 issues of the AFEAS news bulletin at the AFEAS headquarters in Montreal.