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**Producing *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform* with Rachel Fuchs:
A Model for Co-Authorship, Collaboration, and Friendship**

**Mary Lynn Stewart, Simon Fraser University
and
Elinor Accampo, University of Southern California**

Mary Lynn Stewart:

In a generally very positive review of Rachel Fuch's *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France*, in the *American Historical Review* (vol. 89, December 1984), I suggested that the author might have explored the identities and politics of the legislators and bureaucrats who formulated, enacted, and enforced the laws on abandoned children that she had so ably studied. When Rachel and I met a few months later in Paris, I wondered if she would remember the review and be unhappy about the criticism. There was no need to worry, on either account. She remembered the review and agreed that there was more to be done about the politicians and bureaucrats, but she was, after all, a social historian. I acknowledged that my training in social history meant that I had not provided much biographical and political analysis of the men who shepherded sex-specific labour bills into laws in the manuscript I was writing. Then and there we began talking about the bourgeois men who introduced and administered various social policies that impacted working-class women. A year later, while lunching in the little café across from the entrance to the old Archives Nationales building, we were talking about some of our findings to that date and exchanging insights. We were both pleased with our progress and were lobbing back and forth ideas that might inform future research. Rachel was enthusiastic in a way we came to associate with her love of history, archival research, and of learning, the very qualities that attracted students and other scholars to her. A young woman at the next table politely interrupted to say that it was reassuring to hear senior scholars (we were both chuffed to be so considered) express so much interest in their work. She was an ABD who had not had much supervision or encouragement in her pursuit of a topic in Turkish history. We asked about her dissertation and engaged in a lively conversation about the challenges to doing Early Modern Turkish history. The profession would see more examples of Rachel's magnetism and generosity toward other, especially younger, scholars over the succeeding years. Even in a brief encounter, she was an interested and thoughtful mentor.

The real beginning of the collection of essays entitled *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870–1914* was at the café Ma Bourgogne on the Place des Vosges in Paris, when Rachel, Elinor, and I gathered after a day of research in the Public Assistance Archives. As stated in the Preface, on that occasion,

We discussed our respective projects, which were in various stages of formulation, and remarked on a similarity: they examined bourgeois men, politicians and

administrators, who were defining and proposing solutions to a series of problems involving working-class women and their children. After speaking about the possibility of compiling a collection of essays, each of us went back to the archives with more focused intentions of exploring why these privileged men, and possibly other politicians and administrators, were so interested in the plight of poor women and children; why they began in the 1880s; and how viewing their motives, strategies, and programs through the lenses of class and gender might explicate the politics of social reform in France.

Working together meant many trips back and forth. Rachel spent a productive weekend at my place in New Westminster, where she taught me some of the possibilities of my first computer. We soon realized that we had very different writing styles: Rachel deployed the “garbage in, edit out system” (her term) and I constantly edited, to Rachel’s dismay. Accordingly, we wrote in separate rooms and only after we each had finished a section – or, more precisely, after I had caught up with Rachel, who worked very fast – did we compare and critique them. Her criticisms were insightful and invariably constructive, as they would continue to be in the years to come, for all but my last book, still in press as I write this. I also read most of her subsequent work in manuscript form and followed her guidance to rid the manuscripts she sent of “wretched excess.” A recent review of some of these readings reminded me that I listed many instances of her use of three or more anecdotes, when I thought two would probably be sufficient to make her point. She did eliminate most of the fourth anecdotes but kept most of the third ones. Rachel and I also shared an apartment in Paris for three months, during which we each finished a first draft of our substantive essays—working in separate rooms. We did a preliminary edit of each other’s essays and took a long-weekend celebratory break in Venice. Rachel was good at playing as well as working.

Rachel, Elinor, and I worked in a truly collaborative way whenever we could get together in Paris and especially at the annual meetings of the Social Science History Association, the Society for French Historical Studies, and the Western Society for French History. It was through these meetings we discovered the work so relevant to the themes we wanted to explore that we approached the other contributors to our collection: Judith Stone, Theresa McBride, and Linda Clark. As our work progressed, the six of us read and critiqued all the essays. We all thought of possible publishers and contacted editors with whom we had contacts, but Rachel was particularly persistent in this regard. Not only did she convince Henry Tom of the Johns Hopkins University Press to take on our project, she also convinced him to have it appear simultaneously in hardcover and paperback.

Aside from strengthening the interpretation of politicians, their motivations and maneuvers in *Women, Work, and the French State: Labor Protection and Social Patriarchy, 1879–1919*, my experience with this collaborative venture informed my understanding of gender—then a relatively new concept in historical research—and gender relations, and especially the importance of family ties, both biological and adopted, in all my subsequent work. While I never pursued these subjects as thoroughly as Rachel did, I am still using gender as a category of analysis, along with intersectionality, and in my forthcoming book *Gender, Generation and Journalism in France, 1910–1940*, I examine three biological and adoptive mother-daughter pairs and a father-daughter tie between journalists. The whole experience with Rachel and other collaborators on *Gender and*

the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870–1914 has been positive and productive, both intellectually and socially. I made some of my best friends in the field through this endeavor.

Elinor Accampo:

When Rachel, Mary Lynn, and I met at Ma Bourgogne in the summer of 1991, I had known Rachel for a decade and had more recently come to know Mary Lynn through conferences and sharing our work. I was in the early stages of researching my second book, which I thought would be on the neo-Malthusian (birth control) movement that had arisen in the late nineteenth century, whose agenda sought to reverse the perceived perils of depopulation and pro-natalist views. Rachel suggested I look at materials in the Public Assistance Archives, and it was there that I came across a riveting passage in an article by the 1890 General Inspector of Public Assistance, Henri Napias. Emphasizing that France’s “weak birth rate” was the most serious issue of the day, he quoted one Dr. Proust that a woman’s “life itself does not belong to her... she must conserve her health and multiply all her forces for her children.”¹ The ample work published since 1991 on the French pro-natalist movement reduces the surprise element of these words today, but in that year they came as a shock to me because of their implications for feminism, women’s citizenship, and the very notion of female personhood. (They also no doubt resonated because I had recently read and taught Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* in which the few fertile women remaining in this dystopia were nothing but baby-producers.) If the General Inspector of Public Assistance believed that motherhood equaled the totality of any and every woman’s life, how would this precept be converted to policy? Such questions converged nicely with Mary Lynn’s and Rachel’s interests, and the notion of “co-authoring” a book, as we said at the time, was an exciting prospect.

Once I had returned home to California, however, another reality set in. University obligations, the strong pressure I felt to make progress on my monograph, and family constraints dampened my enthusiasm for our collective project. Not only was I unable to spend entire summers or sabbaticals doing research in France, I realized that I would not be able to find enough material to devote a chapter of our collection to Napias or any other such reformer. I harbored the guilty hope that Rachel and Mary Lynn would become distracted by their other projects and obligations as well, and that their interest in our co-authored project would wane, or at least be postponed. Email was only in its infancy among academics, and in this early stage we relied exclusively on phone calls and communicating in person. When Rachel first called to ask about my “progress,” after waffling for a time, I finally had to present her with my decision to pull out of the project. She was understanding and sympathetic, but she, being Rachel, persisted. I remember gazing out my kitchen window during one very lengthy phone conversation in which she finally accepted my decision, but in the same breath managed to convince me to contribute a chapter-length introduction instead. This time I could not say “no.”

As with Mary Lynn, our collaboration had very long-term impacts on my work and on my life, and especially in the friendships I developed with all the contributors, who all continued to meet for meals or drinks at annual conferences long after the collection appeared. Rachel’s influence was particularly important in shaping the rest of my career. A very early user of e-mail, she urged that we share our ideas on that platform, and thus I was the first member of my department to ask to have e-mail access on my office computer. More important than introducing me to new technology, collaboration and friendship with Rachel shaped my intellectual trajectory, especially

¹ Henri Napias, “Les Revendications ouvrières au point vue de l’hygiène,” *Revue d’hygiène* 12:8 (1890), 9.

in her insistence that I be a part of this collective endeavor. Reading my colleagues' contributions to the collection offered a stimulating intellectual experience, and figuring out how to synthesize and contextualize them for the introductory essay forced me to think on a different register. The process enhanced my own understanding and knowledge about the Third Republic and the rise of the welfare state; it also allowed me to acquire a much more nuanced perspective with which to pursue the research on my own book.

Beginning with this collection, Rachel and I henceforth shared almost all our work and edited one another's manuscripts. As I continued to research the rhetoric and politics of neo-Malthusianism, depopulation, and pro-natalism—with determination to find the women's voices in these predominantly male movements—Rachel prodded me to tear myself away from the National Archives and Police Archives and go to the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, where I had never been. She somehow knew that this library had information about Nelly Roussel, one of the few women involved in neo-Malthusianism. Indeed, Roussel's abundant private papers offered a trove of rich material. As I started to incorporate this archival material into my research on neo-Malthusianism, it wasn't long before Rachel helped convince me to write a biography. Her years of advice and the body of her scholarship continue to influence questions I pose and archives I seek out in my current project on the 1918 influenza epidemic. To ponder her impact on my scholarship and career as a whole is humbling.

Rachel's contribution to *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France* was remarkable from its start to its completion. Not only was she a driving force in getting the project off the ground and aggressively seeking a publisher, her scholarly contributions are stellar. Her chapter, "The Right to Life: Paul Strauss and the Politics of Motherhood," cleverly demonstrated how the "pro-life" term in the contemporary United States had a different meaning for early Third Republic reformers: rather than indicating an anti-abortion stance, it reflected the French notion that children had the right to live *after* they were born. Paul Strauss, who held both municipal and national offices for fifty-seven years, doggedly sought to establish policies "to preserve infant lives by aiding and protecting mothers".² A patriotic (but not right-wing) nationalist, Radical republican, and anti-clerical, Strauss's work exemplified the view that depopulation was a threat to France, and it needed to be combatted through health and hygiene policies that would prevent infant deaths. Improving the health of and maternal options (such as breastfeeding) for mothers was a most logical course to reduce infant mortality. As Rachel demonstrated, Strauss's work represented "the interrelationship of public policy, designed by relatively rich men, and the private lives of poor women."³ These policies entailed surveillance and intervention into private lives. However, always the social historian, Rachel also showed how women were not just passive objects of reform. On the contrary, they "helped set the agenda by persisting in their marital and child-rearing habits," and pressured the government to adjust to those habits. Strauss thus spearheaded a new moral code that avoided condemning non-marital sex. His programs extended to single as well as to married mothers and, in general, made the lives of economically poor mothers easier. The balance between administrative surveillance and the agency of poor women that she portrayed with such nuance

² Rachel Fuchs, "The Right to Life: Paul Strauss and the Politics of Motherhood," in Elinor Ann Accampo, Rachel G. Fuchs, and Mary Lynn Stewart, eds, *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870–1914* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 82.

³ Fuchs, "The Right to Life," 104.

gave us an original and methodologically innovative account of social reform. Her thorough research on Paul Strauss humanized and complicated him as a bureaucrat and politician.

Rachel's other scholarly contribution to our collection is the Conclusion. When we initially submitted the book manuscript to the press, it lacked a conclusion; the readers' reports and the editor told us to write one. I do not recall how we decided who would take on this task, but Rachel stepped right up. The result is a masterful synthesis that places in comparative perspective one of the main arguments of our book: examining the history of the welfare state in France through gender and the family shows conclusively that it began much earlier than previous historians had stated. The first part of the conclusion provides an extensive overview of the history of the welfare state and draws on the works of nineteenth-century writers such as Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde, institutional theorists such as Theda Skocpol, historians of degeneration (Robert Nye, Daniel Pick), and historians of the welfare states in Great Britain, Germany, the United States and Russia. Rachel then addresses the themes of each chapter from a cross-national comparative perspective: reform programs for mothers and babies, mother's pensions, labor reform, gender-specific labor laws, maternity leaves, divorce, and the implementers of reform, including women inspectors. Meticulously noting the timing of reform and legislation on each of these themes in each of the countries she considers, her conclusion attempts to provide an overall explanation for how and why the welfare state originated. Rachel departs from other historians' and theorists' explanations based on structural-institutional, social-control, and political arguments. She shows that concerns about depopulation existed throughout the modernizing countries, but were far stronger in France. These concerns intensified in the wake of wars (Franco-Prussian, Boer) and in the context of international tensions leading to the war that ultimately broke out in 1914. She shows, moreover, that "In all countries, the rhetoric of eugenics and racial degeneration linked the declining birth rates to other signifiers of cultural crisis, such as crime, insanity, tuberculosis, alcoholism, syphilis, and economic performance."⁴ In France especially, the medical profession and women's organizations were "pivotal" in linking depopulation with family welfare, and together made them a part of the political agenda.

It is difficult to do justice to Rachel's ambitious, complex, and nuanced conclusion, which covers and accomplishes so much. In re-reading it today, one of the things that most strikes me is how much the concerns for child and maternal welfare between 1870 and 1914 in all the countries she covered served as the foundation for the welfare state and continued to hold a central place in subsequent schemes for developing national insurance. The current discussion of health insurance in the United States today could not offer a starker contrast to the European past in the very absence of child and maternal welfare as a topic of concern. This gaping hole would have been a painful shock to Rachel. It is all the more appropriate, therefore, to conclude with the following recollections that Rachel's colleague at Arizona State, Laurie Manchester, shared in the summer of 2017:

The morning after Trump was elected, a bunch of us were walking to a history meeting and suddenly we all thought of her. "Thank God Rachel didn't live to see this!" several of us exclaimed. But Victoria Thompson, who was much closer to

⁴ Rachel Fuchs, "France in a Comparative Perspective," in Accampo *et al*, *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France*, 175–6.

her than I, correctly noted: “Rachel would not have taken this as a defeat. She would have put on her power suit and thrown herself into preparing for the next election.”⁵

Rachel was not just a scholar of women, gender, the family, and the welfare state; the profound sense of empathy she had for those left outside the power structure also drove her public activism on the local level. The new presidential regime would have galvanized her on all levels and infused her with renewed purpose in her efforts to shine the spotlight on refugees of political injustice, both past and present.

Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870–1914

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⁵ Laurie Manchester, e-mail to Jean Pedersen, May 10, 2017, as quoted in Jean Pedersen, e-mail to Elinor Accampo, July 17, 2017.

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