Modernizing the Marianne: The French Feminist Movement and its Effects on Gender Equality

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MODERNIZING THE MARIANNE: THE FRENCH FEMINIST
MOVEMENT AND ITS EFFECTS ON GENDER EQUALITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Introduction..................................................................................................................1
Chapter 1: The Historical Evolution of the French Woman........................................6
  Liberty and Limitation...............................................................................................6
  Early Formations of Feminist Thought.................................................................9
  The Ramifications of International Warfare.........................................................12
  The Legacy of Modern Feminist Theory............................................................17
  A Movement is Born.............................................................................................21
Chapter 2: Contemporary Feminist Thought & Agenda in France............................31
  Multicultural Mayhem.........................................................................................31
  Third Wave Theory...............................................................................................35
  Faction-filled Feminism.......................................................................................39
  Liberté, Égalité, Parité..........................................................................................42
Chapter 3: Current Status of French Women.............................................................47
  Sovereignty of State Feminism............................................................................47
  Abuse and Action..................................................................................................52
  Equality in Education............................................................................................54
  Women and the Workforce....................................................................................55
  La Famille Française..............................................................................................57
Conclusion..................................................................................................................62
Appendix....................................................................................................................66
Bibliography..............................................................................................................75
Introduction

Throughout the French nation, the presence of one striking face is habitually weaved into the country’s culture and livelihood. All residents recognize it, all visitors encounter it. This distinctive face appears everywhere, whether in the architecture of government buildings, in the coins of European currency, in the postage stamped to mailed correspondence and packages, or even in the lessons of children’s schoolbooks. It is the face of a fair female, donning a Phrygian cap\(^1\), boasting the nation’s colors of blue, white and red, facing the future before her with a look of determination. She is affectionately referred to as “the Marianne” by the French public and embodies a powerful female persona for the nation.

During my time living and studying abroad in France, I had daily face-to-face interactions with the Marianne, particularly within my studies as she is incorporated into the national collegiate curriculum. At the French university where I attended, we learned of the Marianne’s origin and significant past that helps to confirm her strong contemporary presence in all things French today. Thus, her popularity stems from the power of her as an inspiring symbol of national unity and values.

Similar to the significance of the treasured American Statue of Liberty, (symbolically gifted to the United States by France), the Marianne serves as the emblematic, national figure for the French Republic. She represents liberty, democracy,

\(^1\) **Phrygian cap**: limp hat worn to symbolize liberty that dates back to Greek Antiquity, and became popular fashion amongst revolutionaries during the French Revolution.
and reason. Historically, she symbolizes the “Triumph of the Republic” over monarchical oppression and the promise of change for the future during the 1789 French Revolution. This formative moment of French history marked an important change in the national attitude towards freedom and equality with the implementation of universal emancipation, but reserved for the male population only. As a result, the imagery created to illustrate this shift to a democratic France resonates deeply with the formation of the modern national identity and tenants of citizenship. For instance, in 1830, Romanticist painter Eugene Délacroix personified the Marianne in his famous work, “Liberty Leading the People.”² His interpretation depicted her as a barefooted, bare-breasted woman of the people, armed with the French tricolor flag and a bayonet, and compelling her fellow citizens to push onward. She is illustrated as an exalted leader, yet remains one with her peers, giving her a dual purpose as an icon and as a commoner. Even today, portrayed on the current official French government logo,³ the Marianne is institutionalized as a political tool to further instill the values of the Revolution into society. But why was the image of a woman chosen to embody the very Republican ideals that restricted female participation at its formation, delayed female mobility in the centuries following, and continues to limit the female place in French society today? Although her face represents the common ideals shared and celebrated by French citizens of both sexes, she remains only a façade frozen in art and insignia, rather than a true representation of the French woman.

Over the years, her image has been slightly updated, yet she continuously embodies the principles rooted in the formation of the Republic first and foremost. In

² See Figure 1.
³ See Figure 2.
July 2003, the French government made a bold statement with an atypical interpretation of the Marianne symbol by humanizing her in the form of fourteen portraits of real French women publicly placed on the National Assembly building in conjunction with the nation’s Bastille Day holiday celebrations. The portraits, entitled “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui,” displayed women from various backgrounds, races, and regions all wearing the traditional Phrygian cap and national colors in diverse manners, contrasting the modern with the conservative. This divergent take on the classical Marianne image was meant to send a political statement of increased inclusivity and diversity by encouraging French women to identify with their national ideal, essentially endorsing the idea that all women can find themselves within their Republican identity. In their portraits, the Mariannes explained what the national symbol personally means to them. Despite the variety of answers, every woman expressed some trait or aspect associated of the traditional interpretation of the Marianne image, whether it is maternity, femininity, bravery, or selflessness. Even though the exhibit had progressive overtones through its exoneration of female individual expression, the emphasis on Republican values and specific choice of women presented suggests that its purpose was to serve as a carefully constructed, political propaganda tool by the French government to underscore traditionally French principles by creating the illusion of modernization. Due to the tight governmental control of her distribution and symbolism, the Marianne symbol is largely perceived only as an inspiration for nationalistic values, not a catalyst for female strength and activism. Consequently, the Marianne has evolved to represent a more maternal,

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4 See Figure 3.
5 See Figures 4-9.
selfless citizen who gives and does all she can for the nation’s best interest, sending the message to the French female population to do the same.

Despite being a more modern, Western nation, France seems to have contradicting traditions that place limitations on its female population. After personally experiencing and learning about France’s unique national culture, particularly regarding the presence of deeply rooted Republican practices in its society, I wanted to explore further what that meant for the status of women and female agency. The purpose of this thesis project is to ask the following primary question: How has the French feminist movement evolved, and to what extent has it affected gender equality in France?

In order to holistically answer this question, I have split my research into three chapters, each seeking to answer further secondary questions regarding the subject of gender equality in France. First, I ask the question: How has the status and conceptualization of the French woman progressed throughout history? In this chapter, I trace the plight of the French female population through a historical overview of roughly the past 225 years, beginning with the French Revolution, one of the most pivotal moments in nation’s history with the inaugural recognition of citizen equality, and highlighting the significant events and prominent players that have greatly influenced the evolution of the French woman. Specifically, I investigate the principal instances of female activism and the formation of feminist theory that directly impact the development of France’s modern women’s liberation movement. Subsequently, the second chapter asks: What kind of contemporary feminist movement exists in France today? After taking into account the historical evolution of feminism in France, particularly the recent surge of participation over the past four decades, this chapter
examines the overall landscape of the modern French feminist campaign, i.e. the present school of feminist thought and theory, as well as the leading feminist organizations and groups, including their diverse characteristics, agendas, and actions in response to some of the major national issues women in France face today. Furthermore, the third chapter poses the question: Where are there any visible disparities between the sexes in the political, economic, and social spheres of the French nation today? Here, I comprehensively assess the existing status of women by looking at the levels of female representation and participation in various areas of French life. This chapter compares the female condition to its male counterpart in the form of statistical and numerical data regarding fundamental issues, such as governmental recognition, employment, health care, et cetera. Finally, I conclude with the results of my research: an evaluation of the accomplishments of the French feminist movement, specifically concerning the modern state of the female population it strives to represent, as well as a catalog of the prevailing obstacles to gender equality that continue to constrain French women.
Chapter 1: The Historical Evolution of the French Woman

Throughout the history of the French nation, there exist noticeable trends of a resolute resistance to oppressive authority, an obligation to ideological values and personal rights, and a steadfast solidarity among its citizens, thus encouraging a communal commitment to justice in the face of adversity. In a similar manner, the crusade for gender equality shares these national traits. Its advocates have faced, and continue to face, a tumultuous journey, full of powerful, patriarchal competition; however, the resulting collective spirit and continuous perseverance of the pro-feminist movement over the ages justifies its desired inclusion within the framework of French society. This chapter delves into the evolution of the French feminist voice and uncovers the historical influences that motivated, shaped, and cultivated the women’s liberation movement.

Liberty and Limitation:

One of the earliest, most prominent examples of unyielding conviction in the name of justice is clearly identified during the French Revolution of 1789. According to the chronological description of French history in *L’Histoire de France*, by Gérard Labrune, Phillipe Toutain, and Annie Zwang, the mobilization of the French people against the monarchy’s oppressive rule spurred from the recognition of social, political,

6 *Patriarchy*: an ideology that “exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant, or masculine, roles and women always have the subordinate, or feminine ones” (Tong, 52).
7 *Feminism*: the belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes.
and economic maltreatment from the nobility and their ruler, King Louis XVI, paired with the Enlightenment ideals for individual equality for all citizens that greatly influenced the intellectual and psychological climate of the time (68). The desire for more representative government led to the powerful agency of the French public to band together. On August 26, 1789, constituents of the French National Assembly signed the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, advocating the three main principles that would later become the national motto: “liberté, égalité, fraternité,” (liberty, equality, and brotherhood) (Labrune, Toutain, and Zwang, 70). The dedication of the French citizens to achieving emancipation proved successful with the removal of monarchical domination and the formation of a more democratic governmental system, specifically including the completion of a new constitution ensuring universal, individual rights. Consequently, the French Revolution gave birth to strong Republican ideals that became increasingly essential to the core of the newly formed national identity and also continue to remain as a fundamental part of the French culture today.

Even though the French Revolution resulted in the state’s recognition of its citizens’ personal freedoms, it ironically failed to acknowledge women’s rights as well. This negligence of inclusivity prompted a swift backlash by the female population who desired the same levels of equality with the creation of the Women’s Petition to the National Assembly in 1789. According to public information on France’s official website provided by *Service d’information du Gouvernement*, regarding the "History of Women's Right to Vote," this decree sought to point out the disparities between the rights of men and women through the fundamental hypocrisy of the newly formed French government. Additionally, in 1791, Olympe de Gouges, a female playwright and political
activist created a form of parody document from the Revolution, entitled the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*. In her version, she challenged the presence of male authority and changed the formal language to include all women as well (*Service d’information du Gouvernement*). Despite these early efforts to improve the status of women, which drew upon the exact principles that inspired the recent revolution, the official incorporation of gender equality within governmental policy would not be put into place in France for over another 150 years.

Unfortunately, the exploitation of unbalanced power through political patriarchy continued to influence this newly formed framework of French society. French women experienced further marginalization with the dominant rule of Napoléon Bonaparte and the implementation of his *“Code Civil des Français,”* also known as the Napoleonic Code, in 1804 (Labrune, Toutain, and Zwang, 77). This law reinforced male dominion within the home by prohibiting women from obtaining a mutual-consent divorce, acquiring property rights, and freely entering into the workforce without the permission of her husband. In fact, the implications of the Code essentially granted French adolescents more rights and privileges than adult women: “[t]he Civil Code confirms the abolition of privileges, guarantees the right of ownership, strengthens the authority of the father within the family, like that of a boss over a worker. It makes the married woman an eternal minor” (Labrune, Toutain, and Zwang, 77)\(^8\). In other words, as they aged, French boys would eventually earn the property and familial rights of their fathers, whereas their mothers must remain stagnant, restricted, and powerless. French women were now essentially deemed politically and economically irrelevant by their own government.

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\(^8\)“Le Code civil confirme l’abolition des privilèges, consacre le droit de propriété, renforce l’autorité du père au sein de la famille, celle du patron sur l’ouvrier. Il fait de la femme mariée une éternelle mineure” (Translation mine).
Early Formations of Feminist Thought:

The restraining effects of the Civil Code on the female population can be viewed as a springboard for feminist debate over the definition of female identity in post-revolutionary France. Feminist scholar Andrea Mansker evaluates this thought-provoking time in French history in her article, “Vive ‘Mademoiselle’!” The Politics of Singleness in Early Twentieth-Century French Feminism,” by examining what matrimonial effects had on the female psyche and autonomy, in comparison to that of the unwed woman. She argues that unmarried French ladies, known as “Mademoiselles,” encountered extreme pressure to adhere to the societal standards of the time to avoid sexual suspicion and find a husband, or else face social exclusion for either being a “celibate spinster” or a promiscuous harlot (Mansker, 3). Therefore, donning the distinction of marriage endowed a certain level of public respect and honor, yet concurrently painted a very different, disadvantageous picture in the private sphere. Napoléon’s law branded a married woman’s social position for life by denying her the opportunity for autonomous mobility, beginning with the moment she lost her status as a single woman; “the linguistic effacement French women experienced when they procured the title “Madame” thus both accompanied and solidified the civil death they suffered upon marriage” (Mansker, 8). In this instance, it is striking to note the power of social titles and language use and its internal impact on how women view themselves as well as in comparison to one another. Consequently, the societal delineations associated with relationship statuses had the potential to feel equally as empowering and as oppressive for both single and married women, i.e., the “Madame” had social respect, whereas the “Mademoiselle” possessed social freedom. Ironically, this reputational, linguistic issue enforced further
division between the sexes as well, since French men did not share the same societal implications as there exists only one word to describe their gender for all ages and appellations: “Monsieur.”

This resulting identity crisis greatly influenced the feminist thinkers of the time who were grappling with the sexual and social ramifications of female singlehood amidst a society that remained hesitant to embrace a new kind of feminine autonomy outside of the family unit. With the formation of a new feminist agenda regarding female social acceptance, activists saw the opportunity to expand their discourse upon other inequalities in French society, for instance their lack of voting rights and underrepresentation in French politics. For the first time, women began to consider what it meant to possess an identity out of the home and beyond; “[r]eflecting on female singleness led them to a discussion of how to create an independent liberal self on which to stake their claims for full civil status” (Mansker, 13). Notably through the utilization of popular journals and publications of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s like La Française, Le Radical, La Citoyenne, and Le Journal des Femmes, activists cultivated feminist theory and exposed their growing desire for gender equality, as discussed in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron’s historical feminist anthology, New French Feminisms (18-21). In this journalistic, intellectual forum, the leaders of the early French feminist movement began formulating the basis for the academic analysis used to support sexual equilibrium in the years to follow. In particular, Carolyn Eichner describes the noteworthy French feminist writer Hubertine Auclert’s strategic utilization of public media through her own La Citoyenne publication in the article, “La Citoyenne in the World: Hubertine Auclert and Feminist Imperialism,” as a channel to expand the minds
of its readers to the sexual injustices of the era. Through the medium of print, Auclert audaciously brought to light gender-related issues in both domestic and foreign arenas, “established primarily to advocate French women’s suffrage and full citizenship, the influential, controversial, and groundbreaking publication also looked beyond national borders… [and] emerged not only as France’s first suffragist newspaper but also as its first feminist periodical to address imperialism (Eichner, 63). By comparing the plights of French females with their international colonized counterparts, Auclert sought to link and unify broader categories of women in the quest for gender equality. Her purposeful articles described the patriarchal practices enforced upon women in other cultures abroad, while simultaneously drawing attention to the visible sexual disparities also present on French soil. Subsequently, these pro-woman publications generated an important two-fold result: they illustrated the growing interest in women’s liberation by magnifying the feminist conversation through literature and media, and also impressively acknowledged the potential of multicultural feminist connections (which would not fully develop until the early 21st century).

During the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, the European continent experienced a swell of conflicting socio-economic and political ideologies that created both foreign and domestic divisions amongst its continental residents (Labrune, Toutain, and Zwang, 98). In her academic text, Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction, the distinguished feminist scholar Rosemarie Tong describes how, in regards to the female world, the rise of the Marxist and socialist movements during this time provided a framework for divergent feminist factions due to their central ideal that celebrates the abolition of social class as a tool to improve gender equality, “they regard
classism rather than sexism as the fundamental cause of women’s oppression” (96). In doing so, this branch of feminism utilizes socio-economic theory to open up the debate over introspective class and sexual consciousness and to develop a new form of defense against male chauvinism: “Marxist and socialist feminists hypothesized that unless capitalist economic structures are destroyed, people will have to be divided into two oppositional classes—the haves and the have-nots—and because of the ways in which capitalism and patriarchy reinforce each other, women, more than men, will find themselves in the ranks of the have-nots,” (Tong, 128). It is meaningful to note here how the feminist agenda is starting to diversify and interact with the new cultural changes and ideological influences of the national environment.

**The Ramifications of International Warfare:**

After over a century since the implementation of the Napoleonic Code, the outbreak of World War I provided French women with the first substantial period of social and economic development. According to Gordon Wright’s historical text, *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present*, French women were confined to primarily gendered professions during the years leading up to the Great War:

By 1906, women made up 37 percent of the total work force—a proportion higher than that in most European countries. Most of them, however, were confined to sectors that had long been, or were coming to be, regarded by society as constituting ‘women’s work’: domestic service, textiles, the garment trades, clerical jobs, and elementary teaching (where they gradually displaced men after the 1880’s). (285)

New opportunities for women quickly arose, accompanying the critical demand for labor and supplies during a state of war. While their husbands, fathers, brothers, and other male

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9 *Male chauvinism*: the belief that men are inherently superior to women.
family members and friends left to serve the French nation as part of the military force, the ladies of France similarly served their country by mobilizing on the home front. Their patriotic duty proved to be just as integral to the survival of the French state during a time of war and crisis:

On August 7, 1914, Council President René Viviani calls on the French women to replace mobilized men. Promoted guardians of the nation's values, they are not only ‘white angels’ (nurses), but also conducting trams, delivering coal...Workers in the war industry, they are called ‘munitionnettes.’ The nickname resembles that of ‘working girl’ (the seamstress), minimizing and feminizing their work. In 1918, there were 430,000 ‘munitionnettes.’ (Labrune, Toutain, and Zwang, 103)

For the first time, women were given the opportunity to have a profound economic impact in industries predominantly monopolized by men. Due to the lack of male competition for jobs and power, French women could discover a semblance of autonomy and self-sufficiency within both the household and the labor spheres. However, it is important to acknowledge that this slight rise to independence did not spur from the female acceptance and celebration by the male community itself, but rather as a result of their own absence from the French society during a stressful and atypical time of war. As seen in Labrune, Toutain, and Zwang’s text above, patriarchy still played a prevalent role in the French women’s professional debut into the industrial working world with the introduction of objectifying, feminine nicknames to describe their labor activities. The use of these gendered terms suggests a lack of respect and appreciation for the sacrifices and contributions made by the female community during the Great War.

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10. Le 7 août 1914, le président du Conseil René Viviani en appelle aux femmes françaises pour remplacer les hommes mobilisés. Promues gardiennes des valeurs de la nation, elles sont non seulement « anges-blancs » (infirmières), mais aussi conductrices de tramways, livreuses de charbon... Ouvrières dans l’industrie de guerre, elles sont qualifiées de « munitionnettes ». Le diminutif évoque celui de « midinette » (l’ouvrière de la couture), minimisant et féminisant ainsi leur travail. En 1918, on compte 430,000 « munitionnettes »” (Translation mine).
The allusion of pseudo-autonomy for the female population was quickly shattered during the post-WWI period with the resurgence of the previously practiced conservative values that marginalized women for their lack of economic strength and political status and exploited their reproductive and familial responsibilities. Anya Lee analyzes this counterproductive historical transition in her academic journal, “Nos Amis Étrangères: French Feminism and Foreign Women Between the Wars,” arguing that the increase of wartime female independence, accompanied by the rising concern for *la dénatalité* (diminishing birth rates) provoked a backlash from the pronatalist movement who:

attempted to glorify motherhood as an expression of nationalism and to popularize the idea that it was every French woman’s duty to raise a large family… [by focusing] heavily on women, as evidenced by a 1920 law that criminalized abortion and the circulation of birth control propaganda … [that] purportedly intended to stimulate the birth rate by limiting access to methods of birth control, but it specifically targeted female methods of contraception and made no mention of popular male prophylactics. (7)

By advocating a celebration of traditional, patriotic motherhood, the French policy makers were simultaneously easing the female threat to the emerging social problem of post-war masculine anxiety (Lee 8).

Additionally, limited female recognition occurred during a time of great political change and economic upheaval during the interwar period of the 1930s. Mass labor strikes and protests erupted throughout the country in response to the election of Socialist leader Léon Blum as Prime Minister along with the rise of the Popular Front coalition of the major French political parties. As the strikes grew in size and number, the French government was forced to respond with a compromising solution known as the 1936 Matignon Accords. This agreement mandated sizable improvements in French labor policy and conditions including wage increases, workweek hourly limitations, and paid vacation days. Labrune, Toutain, and Zwang note that the female contribution to the
implementation of these labor reforms echoed their rising levels of participation and presence within the workforce, “[t]he 1936 strikes highlighted the involvement of women and renewed the relationships within the working world” (113). Despite the appearance of sexual solidarity in domestic labor reform, other historians argue that the effects of larger economic forces, i.e., the international downslide caused by the American Stock Crash of 1929, impeded the full participation and equality of women in the workforce, “overall, the depression confirmed the primacy of the male breadwinner model,” in French interwar society (Lee, 11). Additionally, French women saw radical changes in their monetary compensation with the return of male laborers to the workforce: “[w]ages for women before 1914 averaged about half that paid to men for similar work; they were to rise sharply in the Great War, only to fall again during the interwar years to about 70 per cent of men’s wages” (Wright 285).

Despite the swift rise and fall of social and economic relevance of the female population during the interwar period, the dependency of the French economy and society on female laborers increased yet again in the 1940s, from the demands of yet another international warfare crisis: the Second World War. Once more, women reclaimed their wartime positions in supply factories and industries to fill the deficiency in male labor. However, during this time of international hostility, women in occupied France were also credited with other forms of patriotic sacrifice, by enduring the unethical atrocities of anti-semitism and aiding in the Resistance efforts to reclaim the nation from Axis control. Their proven heroism and commitment to the future of France received appreciation in the form of political representation (Marks and de Courtivron, 11). "Les grèves de 1936 ont souligné l’implication des femmes et renouvelé les rapports dans le monde du travail" (Translation mine).
For centuries, this right had been unavailable to the female population for a variety of unjust or unreasonable excuses made by both men and women. For example, “[m]ost of the early French feminists had avoided the sensitive issue of woman suffrage--in the belief, apparently, that the church’s hold on women was still too strong to risk entrusting them with the right to vote” (Wright, 284). After France was emancipated from Nazi occupation at the culmination of World War II by the Allied forces, the French female population was also liberated from the previously androcentric governmental practices. Officially approved by the Provisional Government of the French Republic in April 1944, women finally gained the right to vote in France.

Female emancipation arrived within l’Hexagone boundaries several years, and in some cases, even decades after numerous other neighboring European countries like Germany (1918), the United Kingdom (1928), and Spain (1931), to name a few (Women Suffrage and Beyond). Interestingly enough, the early female voting right victories from adjacent nations helped inspire French gender equality activists to persevere for equal political representation. For example, Lee discusses how the French feminist supporters utilized public broadcasts, like in the La Française news publication, highlighting their international connections with, and the successes of, other like-minded organizations to bolster their own domestic cause, “[d]rawing attention to similarities between France and Spain helped French women to identify more closely with their Spanish counterparts, which allowed them to rejoice in the same achievements and accept the implication that there would be positive repercussions in France (Lee, 14).

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12 *l’Hexagone*: colloquial term commonly-used to describe the French territory/nation by referencing the geographical shape of continental France of having six sides.

13 See Figures 10-12 for further visual comparisons of the European state of female emancipation during the early twentieth century.
Accompanying the empowerment of a voting voice in politics, French women also possessed the opportunity and motivation to further explore their place in other areas of society that were previously denied to them, particularly in the intellectual world.

The Legacy of Modern Feminist Theory:

In the years immediately following the long-awaited victory of female emancipation, advocates of gender equality continued their crusade by increasing their efforts to weaken other remaining oppressive patriarchal barriers regarding women’s political rights, especially those previously influenced by archaic Napoleonic principles of the nineteenth century (Marks and de Courtivron, 28). Women became more autonomous within their marital and familial relationships as the French government started to recognize the weight of their societal presence. It was during this formative time that the role and identity of the French female became a prominent subject of debate and discovery, especially within academic circles. Echoing the earlier supporters of women’s liberation during the late 1800s and early 1900s, post-war proponents of gender equality continued to use a scholarly forum in order to foster ideological principles and to deconstruct the fundamental relationship between the sexes. Drawing from the ideas of prominent social theorists of their past, like Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, and of their present, like Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, intellectuals during this time established the principal framework for modern feminist theory. Through the use of deep, personal introspection within the view of a scholastic lens, theorists established the causes of and developed responses to female oppression based on the application of abstract, philosophic principles. They formulated profound analytical works and critical
studies relating to the advancement of women in their modernizing society, which the academic community continues to recognize and study today in the 21st century.

One of the most prominent scholars associated with early feminist theory was the impressive Simone de Beauvoir, who is most well-known for her introspective social commentary on the relationship between the sexes, entitled *The Second Sex*. In her analysis, she traces the physical, emotional, and social phases of female growth and “lived experience”: beginning with the formative childhood years, followed by the period of puberty and sexual awakening, then moving onto the stage of marriage and motherhood, and lastly ending with the final period of maturity and old age in an attempt to comprehensively understand and articulate the female identity. She concludes the text with an inspiring call to the “independent woman” of her generation: “[w]hat is beyond doubt is that until now women’s possibilities have been stifled and lost to humanity, and in her and everyone’s interest it is high time she be left to take her own chances” (de Beauvoir, 751). As the title suggests, the common societal, patriarchal conceptualization of the woman is secondary, silent, and submissive; thus, de Beauvoir encourages her gender to break from the restraining roles imposed on them by exterior forces and realize their own individuality, further advocating the intellectual themes of the era of self-reflection and self-discovery. Even though she doesn’t adopt an aggressive feminist agenda in her investigation of the woman’s character and behavior per se, she raises compelling questions regarding the existential self and makes provocative evaluations of how the sexes identify themselves and interact with one another:

…paradoxically, it is harder for woman than for man to recognize an individual of the opposite sex as her equal. Precisely because the male caste enjoys superiority, man can hold many individual women in affectionate esteem: a woman is easy to love…Even ready to compromise, the woman has trouble adopting a tolerant
attitude. For the man does not offer her a green paradise of childhood…Closed in on himself, defined, decided…when he speaks, one must listen. (de Beauvoir, 732)

What is most striking of this text is its timelessness and relevancy to a much broader cultural context that extends light years beyond that of the French society of 1949. For instance, de Beauvoir highlights the female hypocrisy rooted in marital competition in her chapter regarding the subject of marriage, “[i]n France, as in America, mothers, older sisters, and women’s magazines cynically teach girls the art of ‘catching’ a husband like flypaper catching flies; this is ‘fishing’ and ‘hunting,’ demanding great skill: do not aim too high or too low; be realistic, not romantic; mix coquetry with modesty; do not ask for too much or too little” (447). This way of thinking, further influenced by societal constructions of proper female behavior, urges women to strategically vie one another for the sake of male approval, instead of encouraging other forms of healthy female competition, as in, for instance, the intellectual and professional world. These misguided techniques that emphasize the art of male seduction over personal gratification remained true for the fans of de Beauvoir in the decades following her publication of this text and are illustrated once more in today’s modern society.

It is important to note that despite her theoretical and literary acclaim by later gender equality advocates, de Beauvoir’s commentary regarding the imbalance of the sexes was just that, strictly observations of the human psyche. She was a thinker, intellectual, visionary, not a female rights activist (at least during this early time of early theory formulation). Ann Taylor Allen describes de Beauvoir’s socially confined era in her study, “Feminism and Fatherhood in Western Europe, 1900-1950s,” as a time of “sexual warfare” and male dominance that inhibited women from putting words into action (40). De Beauvoir’s works critiqued the restraining boundaries for women and
painted the unrealistic image of a sexless utopia, however she did not prescribe how to actively reverse the patriarchal order within her own society: “[w]hereas she urged women to find autonomy through meaningful work outside the home, moreover, she never encouraged men to transcend their own culturally defined limitations by caring for children” (Allen 53). The shift from female passivity to effectual activity would not occur for several decades within French society.

Simone de Beauvoir and her psychoanalytic\textsuperscript{14} contemporaries left a lasting legacy on feminist discourse by challenging and redefining the social structures that dictate the parameters of gender roles. For instance, they argue that through the existentialist principle of structuralism, “there is no liberation from oppression, but there is an immense energy released by the attempts to analyze and demystify the structures that determine and oppress us” (Marks and de Courtivron, 30). This way of thinking situated the feminine debate within a broader social discussion of human culture, expanding the initial goals of First Wave French feminist thought to a more intellectual, holistic acknowledgement of female discrimination, resulting in the movements of what is known as the “Second Wave.”

Kelly Oliver and Lisa Walsh delineate the tenants of this ideological evolution within their book \textit{Contemporary French Feminism}, by suggesting that in contrast to how the earlier feminists’ strategies were directly influenced by the idea of women’s inequality in relation to men, second wave French feminists advocate a different concept of sexual comparison with the idea of oppositional difference versus sameness (2).

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Psychoanalytic Feminism}: branch of feminist thought that “maintain[s] that the fundamental explanation for women’s way of acting is rooted deep in women’s psyche, specifically, in women’s way of thinking about themselves as women…they claim that gender identity and hence gender inequity is rooted in a series of infantile and early childhood experiences” (Tong, 129).
Through the exploration of social theory, in particular that of Sigmund Freud, many feminists of this era elevated the levels of literary and scholastic legitimacy for the gender equality movement. The proponents of this shift in feminist activism are known for their “attempt to unravel the most profound symbolic manifestations of an other femininity” by reevaluating the “physically grounded sexual differences related to the intricate dynamics of meaning, power, and language” (Oliver and Walsh, 3).

A Movement is Born:

As a result of this new second wave ideological shift, coupled with the formative 1960s era of public activism, feminism in France evolved into what is known as the “mouvement de libération des femmes” (women’s liberation movement), commonly known as the MLF, which serves as an encompassing umbrella term for a myriad of French feminist schools of thought and the collective of corresponding feminist organizations. Originating around 1970, the MLF took formal shape after a group of French feminists created a public spectacle in the name of gender equality by placing a wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier in Paris, honoring the silent and unknown female counterpart that is visibly absent from the memorial. The tactful setting of this act demonstrated their strategic aims and intended audience:

The tomb of the unknown soldier occupies a sacred place within the French symbolic order and within Western mythology. Located in the center of Paris it signifies patriotism, nationalism, and the masculine virtues of heroism and courage. The Arc de Triomphe is one of the most explicit signs of a French, and, by extension, of a victorious, universal, male order. It is the shrine of shrines that glorifies war and the cult of the dead…The wreath raised the possibility of another series of values, those, unknown, that might have come, that might now come into being through the absent women. (Marks and de Courtivron, 31)
By blatantly challenging the patriarchal values of the Republic on such a meaningful, patriotic national monument, the feminists intended to convey a message to the nation as a whole: we will no longer be invisible and we will no longer be silent.

Due to the cultivation of and support provided through the MLF, the dedicated community of exclusively female members created a welcoming forum for discussion, reflection, and organization amongst one another. Nearly a decade following the official formation of the movement, well-known activist Françoise Picq created a brief insider history of its swift growth and expansion, “The MLF: run for your life,” in which she described the movement’s humble beginnings, “[w]e found that the trappings of power had gone: there were no leaders versus rank-and-file, but only women, superb and each one different, to be discovered and loved. We all listened to each other, met new women, experienced solidarity between women and discovered a new way of being ourselves and of being politically active” (25). However, the MLF’s liberated, unrestrained atmosphere allowed for more opportunities of contention, rather than unity, “[t]here were always different opinions in the movement – feminist, Marxist, homo – or hetero – each one had its own way of doing things, its own approach, its own past and its own ideas” (Picq, 25).

Consequently, multiple feminist groups took form (Psychanalyse et Politique, Féministes Révolutionnaires, Choisir, and the tendence lutte des classes, to name a few), each advocating alternative aspects of femininity and resisting sexual oppression with different strategies.

In congruence with the Second Wave’s celebration of individual exploration of what it means to be female in an androcentric world, the MLF became known for its variety of perspectives, rather than for its success as an agent for social change. Although
one could argue that the presence of opposing feminist factions provided the occasion to internally progress and foster further theoretical development through an assortment of ideas, the marked diversity during the early origins of the MLF instead suggests a lack of overall organizational structure and an unified ideological direction. Éléonore Lépinard confirms this idea in her article, “The Contentious Subject of Feminism: Defining ‘Women’ in France From the Second Wave to Parity,” claiming that “there was no common political utopia or common understanding of who was the actual subject of this struggle called feminism” (7). Due to the emphasis on their own personal discoveries of womanhood, the MLF members struggled to create a foundational, collaborative identity and establish a shared understanding of their common goals. Lépinard notes that the defining issues of divergence among the main MLF feminist factions, “encapsulated in the conceptual opposition between sexual difference and gender – is linked to the differing definitions of femininity and of women’s liberation that each trend has tried to impose as the legitimate one. Indeed, the dispute was, and still is, simultaneously a theoretical, political, and emotional one” (8). Only ten years after its creation, the MLF found itself not only in a battle between the sexes, but also a power struggle for legitimacy amongst its feminist members. Picq saw this inner contention as counterproductive and stifling to the movement’s progress, “[o]ur ideological struggle has become a struggle between sisters; rather than helping us to move forward through the dynamic of contradiction, the lack of formality has paralysed the movement, has turned it into a closed world in which rival factions confront each other” (Picq, 30). The inner disaccord of the MLF polarized its constituents into two larger camps: the “differentialists” and the “materialists,” each vying for the “right to represent the feminist
movement and to define what feminism is, what liberation is, ultimately what women are” (Lépinard, 11).

The first faction, the “differentialists,” is associated with the most notorious MLF group called the Psychanalyse et Politique, commonly referred to as Psych et Po. As their name suggests, this group advocates the use of introspective psychoanalysis as a foundation for creating change and raising awareness regarding the sexual disparities in the French society: “[t]he courant de la différence¹⁵ claimed that sexual difference surpassed any other difference. In their view, sex identified identity, self-perception, experience – through motherhood in particular – language, and psyche in such an irresistible way that it overpowered other social differences” (Lépinard, 9). According to this way of thinking, one’s sexual distinction trumps all, including race, ethnicity, religious preference, and economic status.

On the other end of the feminist spectrum, the “materialists” greatly differed ideologically from their opponents. Whereas the “differentialists” exalted sexual individuality, this branch believed that female emancipation would be achieved “only when gender difference became socially meaningless” (Lépinard 10). Therefore, their main objective was to achieve universal androgyny to remove the presence of oppressive patriarchy. One of the most notable members of this feminist camp, Christine Delphy, explained the beliefs of her constituents in her article “For a Materialist Feminism,” claiming that “[m]aterialist feminism is therefore an intellectual procedure whose advent is crucial for social movements and the feminist struggle, and for knowledge...In the same way that feminism-as-a-movement aims at the revolution of social reality, so

¹⁵ Courant de la différence: name attributed to the Psych et Po faction by other members of the MLF (Lépinard, 9).
feminism-as-a-theory (and each is indispensable to the other) must aim at the revolution of knowledge” (Delphy, 198).

Accompanying the ideological differences within the MLF factions came a whirlwind of philosophical and sociological thought. Following in the introspective footsteps of the prominent de Beauvoir, the three most famous foundational theorists within the scope of the MLF are Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray. In her article, “The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move,” Delphy appropriates this trio with the imposing title, the “Holy Trinity” of French feminist theorists for their notoriety, both domestically and internationally (168). Each of these women contributed to the understanding of the detrimental power of patriarchy over women and over the greater society in their own diverse approaches. Their writings and works also continued the literary culture initiated by their forefathers, or more accurately foremothers, of the feminist campaign in France. Interestingly, despite their involvement and passion for the advancement of women, none of these women personally identified as a “feminist,” but instead as writers, intellectuals, or philosophers. This distinct appellation has led to much controversial debate by non-French outsiders seeking to understand and define the parameters of a concrete “French feminist” theory as well as delineate its leading pioneers (Delphy 187).

Most commonly associated with the Psych et Po feminist faction, Hélène Cixous uses psychoanalytic techniques to elevate the woman and open up feminist discourse. In particular, she endorses writing as a tool for women to unearth their female identity and challenge the present patriarchal limitations in literature and beyond. In 1975, she created what would later become one of her most famous works, *Le Rire de la Méduse* ("Laugh
of the Medusa”), in which she builds on this idea by encouraging her gender to lay claim to their place in the writing world, “[w]riting is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it…Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery […] and not yourself” (Cixous, 246-247). As an academic herself, she recognizes the power in textual expression as a means of obtaining female legitimacy and respect by men:

> It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (Cixous, 251)

In other words, women have the potential to find and build their outward socio-political voice through their own inner literary voice. Cixous is also famously credited by her feminist peers and scholars in coining the term écriture féminine (“feminine writing”), as she brought the essential relationship between female sexuality and language to light and prominence (Tong, 275).

Similar to Cixous’ psychoanalytic method, Luce Irigaray campaigned for female personal discovery and liberation away from the dominating, traditional, masculine conceptualization of the human psyche. Although she took foundational cues from the original male social theorists like Lacan and Freud, she desired a philosophical revolution in which women defined themselves, instead of accepting the outsider masculine perception as their own reality (Tong, 155). Published in 1977, Irigaray’s work, Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un (“The Sex Which is Not One”), served as liberation text for women to find their own place outside of the male-dominated world, and specifically the economy:

> Let women tacitly go on strike, avoid men long enough to learn to defend their desire notably by their speech, let them discover the love of other women
protected from that imperious choice of men which puts them in a position of rival goods, let them forge a social status which demands recognition, let them earn their living in order to leave behind their condition of prostitute. (106)

Irigaray’s revolutionary works explored a variety of ideas regarding the human condition, in which she advocated the practice of self-definition, no matter how rebellious or contradictory. Tong acknowledges her philosophic independence and headstrong spirit, “[r]efusing to be pinned down even by her own theory, Irigaray vowed to liberate her life from the phallocentric concepts that would squeeze its multiple meanings—its exciting differences—into boring sameness” (158).

The final piece of the “Trinity,” Julia Kristeva, entered into the French feminist discourse in the height of the 1970s, and soon gained recognition from her contemporaries for her detailed study of the relationship of the sexes in China that she used in comparison to the status of women in France. Her research and writings helped connect the gender equality battle for French women to a bigger stage and to a broader range of ideas, similar to the work of Auclert in the years leading up to WWI. In her more recent in-depth female analysis, “The Meaning of Equality,” she acknowledges the power of the individual woman and the concealed genius tucked away inside of her:

Mothers can be geniuses, not only of love, tact, self-denial, suffering, and even evil spells and witchcraft but also of a certain approach to living the life of the mind. That approach to being a mother and a woman, at times warmly accepted and at times outright refused or wrought with conflict, bestows upon mothers a genius all their own. Women, greater in number and in confidence than ever before, have proved this beyond cavil: though curled up like children in space and in the species, women are also able to work toward unique, innovative creations and to remake the human condition. (Kristeva, 96)

By elevating the position of the mother, Kristeva points out the untapped power hidden within the ordinary lives of women. Specifically as procreators, mothers have a unique relationship within the family and possess the potential to directly influence and reshape
their child’s view of the world and of the female sex. Kristeva continues to contribute to the philosophical and theoretical advancement of the female intelligence today, however her particular celebration of female singularity distinguishes her writing from her fellow feminist colleagues who otherwise advocate the idea of the collective.

The intellectual expression cultivated by these three women, and countless others, eventually inspired other forms of feminist progress in the subsequent years, such as spreading awareness through public demonstrations and eventually facilitating effectual change in the form of social and political reform. One of the biggest victories for women’s rights made by MLF members and its supporters was successfully lobbying for the legalization of abortion in France. At the time of the MLF’s formation, women in France faced criminal charges for seeking out ways to terminate unwanted pregnancy. Recognizing the inherent dangers and health risks associated with unsanctioned procedures, feminists in favor of legal and safe access to medical care during this time relentlessly advocated for a change in the law. On April 5, 1971, 343 French women signed a public declaration stating the following:

A million women have abortions in France each year. Because they are condemned to secrecy, they are aborted under dangerous conditions. If don’t under medical control, this operation is one of the simplest. These millions of women have been passed over in silence. I declare that I am one of them, I have had an abortion. Just as we demand free access to birth-control methods, we demand freedom to have abortions. (Marks and de Courtivron, 190)

This document, known as the “Manifesto of the 343,” essentially condemned the signers as criminals, one of which being Simone de Beauvoir. Fortunately, the Manifesto produced positive results by bringing together MLF members through the founding of the group Choisir by Gisèle Halimi to help protect the signers, by drawing public attention to the issue at hand, and ultimately by influencing the progress of the policy change. Backed
by the adamant support by committed women’s groups, the Minister of Health Simone Veil, forced official legislation to repeal the law forbidding abortions in 1974 (Marks and de Courtivron, 26). The new policy became known as the “Veil Law” and remains in place today, providing French women with the right to access safe and legal procedures.

Although the Veil Law was a substantial victory for women’s rights, the MLF struggled to organize further efforts to improve the status of women in France. The French feminist movement’s evolution from foundational theory to forceful action was generally slow to develop due to its focus on academic development over other forms of progress. While this led to a variety of influential feminist scholarship and intellectual debate, it did not transfer into rapid, tangible improvement for French women in the realm of their daily lives and toward equal standing with their male counterparts.

Even though France is by far not the only country that has a complicated history with recognizing and establishing equality of the sexes, it does have unique national and cultural characteristics that shape its relationship with gender roles, female representation, and the feminist movement as a whole. As seen throughout the entirety of France’s feminist development, the women’s movement struggled with additional limiting factors beyond patriarchal dominance, such as the impacts of the restrictive political regimes and ideologies, the false illusions of autonomy caused by the international warfare conditions, the delayed political acknowledgement and emancipation, the lack of organization and unity amongst feminist group members, and the national importance of scholarly development over social change. Thus, the effects of these complications have left a legacy on and continue to influence the actions made by
France’s modern women’s liberation movement, as discussed further in the following chapters.
Chapter 2: Contemporary Feminist Thought and Agenda in France

As a direct response to France’s profound intellectual, cultural, and political evolutions over the past century, the modern feminist movement has since transformed into a variety of diverse ideological factions and women’s groups designed to advocate specific elements of, and combat hindering barriers to, gender equality. In this chapter, I analyze the most recent issues of gender imbalance and changes in feminist theory that profoundly shape the discourse and landscape of the women’s liberation movement in France. Subsequently, I also examine several prominent feminist organizations and activists, noting specifically their contrasting agendas and contributions regarding the elevation of the status of women that communally comprise the contemporary women’s movement in France.

Multicultural Mayhem:

Some of the most highly visible and influential issues inside the Hexagon, and thus within the national feminist discourse as well, are the pronounced implications of decolonization and the Islamic religion on French society. The increase of Muslim immigrants from northern Africa over the past fifty years has simultaneously caused a ripple effect of internally negative sentiments toward their foreign identity as “outsiders,” as well as a rise of “Islamophobia” in France. Consequently, modern women’s organizations are now challenged with controversial cultural inequalities, in addition to
the previously existing patriarchal forces, in their campaign for improved female recognition, rights, and representation.

As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, in France’s attempt to rebuild and return to its status before destructive, international warfare, there was a noticeable resurgence of Republican values, one of the founding principles of post-revolutionary France (Labrune, Toutain, Zwang, 124). These values of liberté, égalité, fraternité, as well as laïcité (secularism) have since helped shape the conceptualization of what it means to possess a French identity. Considered to be a historically defining characteristic of French citizenship as well as its governmental and educational institutions, laïcité denotes a nationally accepted level of neutrality in relation to religion that is continuously seen in France today.

Accompanying its ideological adjustment, France experienced a dramatic demographic transformation as well. Due to the decolonization of French territories in the years following World War II, predominantly from North Africa, immigrants from these liberated areas now comprise a significant portion of the modern French population, thus affecting the nation’s ethnic and religious makeup with the presence of Islam. After decades of establishing a considerable foothold, the immigrant population has contributed to the diversification of French culture and elicited a variety of responses by the rest of the nation regarding their societal integration. In her article, “Secularism as a Barrier to Integration? The French Dilemma,” Jane Freedman describes the results of this growing trend, “the creation of a large Muslim population [in France] has posed some

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16 In 1905, the official separation of church and state was adopted in France (Labrune, Toutain, and Zwang, 98).
17 In 1882, France passed an educational reform mandating that all schools be free, public, and secular (Labrune, Toutain, and Zwang, 94).
18 See Figure 15: Evolution of Immigrant Population Distribution in France
particular questions, mainly regarding the production of a second and third (and even fourth) generation who have forged their own identities as French Muslims” (7). Hence, newcomers to the French tradition are faced with a conflicting identity crisis, as enforced by the Republican ideal of citizenship, “namely the residual assimilationism which demands some kind of cultural uniformity as part of its project of integration” (Freedman, 6). Challenging the traditional formation of an identité française, the Muslim community in France has adopted its own modified version of nationality, namely one that includes a defining religious component, otherwise absent from the majority of the French population. Unfortunately, this divergent form of national identity can be disenfranchising for immigrants: “Muslims, even those who were born in France and have French nationality, are often reminded of their foreign origins through discrimination and racism; many describe themselves as ‘second-class citizens’” (Freedman, 8). Due to France’s conventional conceptualization of national citizenship, immigrants struggle to overcome the distinction as “outsiders” and achieve full acceptance by the broader French population.

Consequently, these two recent developments have caused a controversial clash in French society, publicly illustrated in l’affaire des foulards (the headscarf affair) that initially began in 1989, when a headmaster denied three Muslim girls wearing religious headscarves (referred to as hijabs19) admission to school in a predominantly immigrant Parisian suburb. He justified his actions “on the grounds that it would contravene the Republican principle of secularism” if public displays of religion were permitted in

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19 Hijab: the Muslim practice of veiling women. “Depending on the cultural style and interpretation of modesty, it can include covering the hair or the entire head and face. It may include the khimar--fabric covering the throat in the way that a wimple does--along with a head-cover. It may include a long, loose-fitting coat-like dress that comes to the ankle and has long sleeves to the wrist,” as defined in Gisela Webb’s Windows of Faith (261).
educational institutions, the very instruments utilized by the government to promote a
distinct French national identity among the adolescent population (Freedman, 10-11). In
the years immediately following, the incident intensified into a national debate between
the expression of universal rights versus the preservation of universal commonality
(Freedman, 13). Heightened further by the growing fears of religious fundamentalism
within the national Muslim community and of an Islamic infiltration of their society,
French traditionalists lobbied for legislation to protect neutrality and the Republican
ideal, resulting in the 2004 bill banning blatant symbols of religion in schools during the
administration of President Jacques Chirac (Freedman, 19). The problematic implications
of this law not only underline the problematic social dilemmas surrounding
underrepresented minorities, but also the complicated relationship between gender
equality and religion. Thus, this debate compelled the French women’s liberation
movement to consider new elements of oppression that inhibit female autonomy.

Within the scope of the discourse on gender equality, the immigration issue has
created ideological, political, and structural chasms amongst the larger feminist
movement. It is important here to reiterate France’s unique history and committed
preservation of Republican values as a significant influence in shaping the national
perception of minorities, and more specifically the feminist response to the representation
of minority women. Since the celebrated ideal of universal equality holds such a
noticeable presence throughout French society, modern feminists are faced with the
question of defending the rights of the oppressed individual versus the larger collective as
they conceive their approach to these contemporary concerns.
Third Wave Theory:

From a broader theoretical standpoint, the recent transition to the Third Wave of feminist thought has opened the door to new discourses on female diversity, and more specifically how women experience oppression from multiple sources based on various elements of their personal identities. This contemporary branch of feminism seeks to represent a wider array of multicultural perspectives, thus making female equality a more relatable goal to the vast population of women (Tong, 285). Furthermore, Third Wave feminism places new value on the individual desires of modern women, unlike the previous schools of thought that attempt to dictate the aspirations and needs of all women in a universal, all-encompassing way (Tong, 288). As a result of this more progressive philosophy, Third Wave feminists have introduced new concepts and ideas that further promote acceptance and empowerment amongst the larger female community, such as multiculturalism, intersectionality, and new definitions of personal autonomy.

The modern feminist concept of multiculturalism centers on the idea that all women are not created and constructed analogously. Therefore, depending on her social, economic, and personal characteristics, each woman will experience her identity and status differently (Tong, 200). This school of thought broadens the scope of feminist issues to apply to a much more comprehensive look at the plight of women. For instance, multicultural feminism challenges the ideas of more radical strands of feminist theory that argue that sexism is the only or most important issue women face. Third Wave also differs from liberal feminism in that it does not stress women’s sameness to each other or to men (Tong, 204). Instead, multicultural feminists seek to combat other oppressive factors of society, such as racism and classism that hinder women’s development.
Furthermore, multicultural feminism celebrates diversity among women as a symbol of strength and unity, instead of weakness and division. As a result of the increased diversity of cultural and religious expression among women evident in the national immigration debate, this more inclusive feminist strategy has become increasingly more pronounced within the French women’s movement.

Whereas there exists a prolific amount of literature regarding the early surge and influence of French feminist thought of the 1970s, the number of published academics interested in the theoretical development of the modern women’s movement is unfortunately very limited. Throughout my research process, the work of one feminist scholar in particular stood out as both extremely relevant and insightful into the individuality of the French gender equality debate. In her critical study of the Third Wave’s theoretical effect in France, “Autonomy and the Crisis of the Feminist Subject: Revisiting Okin’s Dilemma,” Éléonore Lépinard argues that multiculturalism can be beneficial to understanding the aims of underrepresented female French citizens and claims that the variety in feminist thought has brought more discourse development. She notes that the multiculturalist “critique of the liberal, substantive vision of autonomy” has caused noticeable changes in the gender equality debate, i.e., by highlighting the “need to pluralize the feminist subject, its aspirations, values and political goals, and to displace its racial and class location;” by devaluing the antiquated and “imperialist gaze that permeated Western feminism” in relation to the lives and concerns of non-Western women; and finally, by encouraging the use of neutrality regarding “women’s capacity for autonomy” (209-210). Thus, armed with a multiculturalist perspective, progressive members of the women’s movement now seek to reach a broader, more diverse audience.
and aim to represent the needs and rights of those previously excluded from the MLF, namely immigrant women.

Related to the inclusive themes of multiculturalism, the feminist concept of intersectionality\(^\text{20}\) can be used to expand the discourse on oppression by correlating patriarchy with other elements of repressive forces such as race, ethnicity, religion, et cetera. However, within the French context, intersectionality can be viewed as a threat to the established notion of universalism and neutrality. In 2014, Lépinard completed an in-depth case study, “Doing Intersectionality: Repertoires of Feminist Practices in France and Canada,” in which she compared the varied use and understanding of this concept through personal interviews of women active in feminist organizations from both nations. Her study provides helpful and relevant insight into the French feminist movement both internally (by interviewing multiple women’s organizations with different purposes and goals) and externally (by juxtaposing the French case with that of a different nation) to determine its national notion of inclusion. In order to characterize the assorted women’s organizations, Lépinard divided them by their identity, into either single axis\(^\text{21}\) or dual axes\(^\text{22}\), as well as by their function, into either those “focused on advocacy” or those “acting as service providers” (884). After she collected and coded her data, she positioned each women’s organization, based on their understanding of intersectionality

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\(^{20}\) **Intersectionality**: concept used (in the context of feminist scholarship) to describe the intersection between “at least two axes of domination, such as race and gender” that “constitutes a social category with a specific experience of social life,” and is “aimed at providing a tool to critically analyze social and political practices and, in particular, feminist practice” (Lépinard, 878-879).

\(^{21}\) **Single axes organizations**: term Lépinard uses to describe “women’s organizations that do not claim to represent a specific group of women but rather frame their identity and claims on the basis of gender alone” (883-883).

\(^{22}\) **Dual axes organizations**: term Lépinard designates to describe “women’s organizations that present themselves as representing one or several immigrant or ethnic groups and serve specifically women from these groups” (883)
in relation to their individual group’s female representation and interests, into one of four categories (or “repertoires”) of inclusion: intersectional recognition, gender-first, individual recognition, or intersectional solidarity.

The results of her case study suggest that despite the increase in multicultural awareness in the larger feminist discourse, both single and dual axes organizations prioritize gender concerns over other intersectional factors: “French feminist organizations across the board prefer a ‘gender-first’ repertoire.”

Although they do recognize that cultural proximity or similar backgrounds foster comprehension, when they refer to the logic of ethnic-based services for women, they tend to combine it with a strong commitment to universalist principles” (Lépinard, 894). According to her data, this also holds true for the both kinds of organization functions, “the favored repertoire of both advocacy-oriented organizations and service-provider organizations is the gender-first repertoire, which confirms the hegemony of this repertoire in France” (Lépinard, 896).

Furthermore, her findings reaffirm the impact of France’s conception of citizenship and nationalism on its women’s liberation movement, “French feminist activists appear clearly in line with the dominant French concept of abstract citizenship and difference-blind universalism that reject the use of ethnic categories in the French public sphere” (895). However, this failure to acknowledge the presence and individual

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23 Gender-first: term used to describe the women’s organization repertoire of inclusion in which “any woman can represent the interests of all women,” and supports the idea that “the fight for an intersectional group’s specific interest can be subsumed into the fight for any woman” (Lépinard, 886).

24 See Figure 13: The Frequency Distribution of Repertoires of Inclusion by Organization Identity.

25 See Figure 14: The Frequency Distribution of Repertoires of Inclusion by Organization Function.
needs of other social groups further stifles the potential of immigrant women to successfully merge into the French culture, “[t]he tendency of French organizations to subsume or disregard ethnic differences mirrors the dominant republican imperative to ignore processes of racialization” (Lépinard, 899).

Even though newer developments in feminist theory call for more inclusivity amongst the wider female population regardless of social and cultural differences, it appears that this is not commonly shared in French women’s groups due to the national tendency to ignore individual distinctions for the sake of benefiting the larger collective. Thus, the categories of women that are already alienated in the broader French society can also be further underrepresented by the larger feminist community based on this universalist ideology. In other words, racial and religious differences are principally viewed as irrelevant in the discourse on gender equality in France.

Faction-filled Feminism:

Due to the ideological disconnect between the established notions of French identity and the expansion of more inclusive feminist theory, women’s groups have continued to split based on their conceptualization of inclusivity and diversity, particularly regarding the rights of immigrants. Potentially the most well-known women’s organization advocating the rights and protection of minorities today, “Ni Putes Ni Soumises” (“Neither Whores, Nor Submissives”), was formed in 2003 by a French Muslim woman named Fadela Amara in reaction to the widespread violence towards women occurring in the impoverished immigrant suburbs, known as banlieues. Nicole Fayard and Yvette Rocheron describe the NPNS feminist ideology in their article “Ni Putes ni Soumises: A Republican Feminism from the Quartiers Sensibles,” with the term
“féminisme d’urgence” (emergency feminism) which “encourages women to repossess public space now, not by theorising, but through individual and collective strategies of resistance based on values of self-definition, autonomy, citizens’ rights, laïcité, and mixité” (2). As opposed to the more intellectually- and theoretically-based feminist groups that dominated the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s and 1980s, NPNS favors a more publicly active avenue to voice their agenda and affect the lives of women in need:

What is essential for NPNS is to educate boys and girls, and provide adequate legal and welfare resources to support potential and actual victims. Thus, NPNS recommend a three-pronged approach: support networks for victims and pro-active and reactive measures to help individual women; speaking out in secondary schools [...] and the regeneration of the quartiers by the authorities. (Fayard and Rocheron, 6)

The pronounced connection with NPNS and the Muslim community, and therefore its Islamic religion, is utilized to shed light on the inequalities directly impacting migrant women. During the heated debates of l’affaire des foulards, NPNS took a firm pro-law stance, advocating secularism as a means of evening the playing field for women. In an interview with The Guardian’s Rose George, entitled “Ghetto Warrior,” NPNS founder Amara claimed that the hijab practice was “archaic” and “subjugating” to the female congregation of the Islamic faith, suggesting that her own religion constricts women with instances of patriarchal oppression. However, NPNS’s position on the issue alienated some members of the female immigrant community that felt as though they possessed the right to express their religion in the way they chose, once again illustrating the feminist debate concerning the representation of the individual versus the collective. This internal conflict among the female community serves as an example of the kind of female
diversity that the Third Wave movement aims to highlight by recognizing that the opinion of one feminist may not comprehensively align with that of another.

Additionally, the impact of the *laïcité* ideal on NPNS’s thesis and actions confirms the results of Lépinard’s case study regarding the inclusional repertoires by taking a “gender-first” approach to advocating female rights of immigrants: “NPNS’s opposition to the Muslim headscarf illustrates the paradoxical dynamics of inclusion/exclusion. This is why NPNS’s state secularism excludes significant groups of female activists and other women in the quartiers who claim the right to religious difference, although they would support them individually should they encounter violence” (Fayard and Rocheron, 14). However, through this repertoire, the NPNS agenda has a stronger chance of survival in the broader debate of women’s rights due to their respect for the principle of French universality. Part of its success in being legitimized within the French political arena can be attributed to their objective to transform the needs of individual women to that of the larger group, “[b]y listening to women’s testimonies, NPNS offer a voice that refuses to speak from the subaltern position of the gendered post-colonial subject, and thus moves in from the margin of the Republican polity” (Fayard and Rocheron, 13). This activist group creates progress for women’s liberation and recognition by working with the French system instead of against it.

In contrast, French multicultural feminists refute this more traditional strategy that discourages individuality, and instead seek to celebrate differences amongst the female community. According to the Liane Henneron’s discussion on the French feminist reception to state intervention in women’s rights (the ban on public veiling, for example),
“The Feminist Movement and French ‘Laïcité’ (Secularism): When Feminism Confronts a Republican Ideal,” the views of Amara and her contemporaries are not shared amongst the wider women’s movement. In reaction to NPNS, an opposing organization also formed in 2003, “Les Blédardes,” that advocated a different position in defense of immigrant women (Henneron, 10). Their mission is to empower women who experience oppression intersectionally from “double discrimination,” i.e., from both sexual and racial marginalization (Henneron, 10). In this respect, this organization can be situated in the multiculturalist camp of feminist thought by acknowledging the presence of multiple and different forms of female oppression. Lépinard notes in her study, “From Parity to Intersectionality: A Difficult Passage,” that “Les Blédardes” also relate to the broader discourse on this more modern feminist concept to achieve legitimacy within their own national cause, “[i]nspired by their reading of American black feminists and by the recent discovery of post-colonial theory in the French academic space, they point to the radical divergence of political interests between them and white French women” (18). Feminist activist groups like “Les Blédardes,” such as RAJFIRE, Choisir, Santé des Femmes, reveal the importance of a comprehensive view of women, specifically within the oppressed Islamic immigrant community in France who lack adequate representation within society and understanding for their beliefs.

Liberté, Égalité, Parité

Another contemporary controversy that has created a profound effect on the women’s movement in France is the issue of political gender parity. Originating almost two decades ago, the French Socialist party drafted a constitutional amendment in 1999, dictating that women should account for 50 percent of all political candidates and
positions in the upcoming election. While this bill advocated for an overall improved female representation within the French political scene, it simultaneously highlighted other larger social, cultural, and institutional issues that impede full equality of the sexes. Caught in a tug of war between supporting progress of any sort for the status of women and challenging the bill for its ignorance of diversity and its own exclusivity, the French feminist movement once again experienced further divisions in the place of unified action. Furthermore, similar to how the multicultural debate revealed larger national issues, the disputes regarding the parity bill also brought to light the need for the broader French public to consider a more progressive approach in addressing the societal changes of the modern era, specifically by adopting a better understanding of intersectionality and diversity, and thus applying it to the antiquated Republican ideology of universal citizenship.

The evolution of the parity bill from its early conception to eventual adoption in the French constitution reveals the patriarchal challenges within the state for women involved with the political system. At the birth of the parity bill, the original agenda sought to make the argument that sexual difference was irrelevant in applying universal principles that govern the French nation. After failure and continuous disputes by the National Front and right-wing politicians, the pro-parity policy writers changed their strategy in order to appeal to their opponents by emphasizing how the increased inclusion of women in politics would pragmatically provide wide-spread benefits by boosting the public opinion of and trust in the French government. Due to multiple political scandals and noticeable nepotistic issues in the years prior, the national perception of the French political system was a very sensitive issue and in need of improvement. Parity advocates
took advantage of this institutional weakness and portrayed women as potential saviors of the government’s tainted reputation by drawing attention to their feminine strengths and characteristics. Lépinard describes this development in the parity conversation in her political case study from the top down, “Identity Without Politics: Framing the Parity Laws and Their Implementation in French Local Politics.” Based on the overly exploited notion of possessing natural maternal instincts and being essentially “[d]eprived of men’s faults—women were presented by the media and politicians as hard workers, devoted to their fellow citizens, more human, and less competitive—there was no question they would change the political system” (Lépinard, 39). In this respect, those in favor of the bill were sending a mixed message: women are needed in the government because they are the equal to men under the French notion of universal citizenship, yet also because they bring alternative elements to the political table from their male counterparts (but only the most traditional, least threatening ones).

This contradictory, sameness versus difference argument was ultimately one of the contributing factors to the resulting divergent feminist factions, namely due to the lack of true and total female representation. Throughout the debate, women on both sides of the political arena were conflicted and faced with two options: drastic or limited reformation of the status quo. The drastic course of action highlighted the opportunity to make a case for real, impactful change for the broader female population, taking the risk of challenging centuries of patriarchal tradition. The more reserved option prefers the accomplishment of menial success, by working with the political system so as to not rock the boat or further strain the relationship between men and women in the government. In the end, the latter option proved more pragmatic and feasible, but also continued to
exclude and fail to represent the needs and rights of the majority of French women.

Lépinard explains the restrictive influence of the bill in the context of broader political and societal change:

The rhetorical arguments used to defend and define parity limited its political content. First, women may have a claim for representation, but this does not extend to other oppressed groups who have been excluded from traditional party politics and could benefit from this legislation, because their difference cannot be defined as universal in nature. Second, instead of criticizing a political system based on women’s exclusion and the role that political parties may play in it, they asked for women’s inclusion without calling into question the political system itself. (41)

While the parity bill did bring to light institutional gender disparities through the largest unified effort of activism since the initial surge of feminist movement in the 1970s, it also failed to draw attention to the modern aims of French women’s groups, like the underrepresentation of minority rights for example. In other words, the law fails to recognize the intersectionality of oppression that Third Wave feminism seeks to emphasize. In another one of Lépinard’s analytic studies on the rights and representations of French women, “For Women Only? Gender Quotas and Intersectionality in France,” she evaluates what the bill means for the larger feminist agenda:

The parity claim did shatter the foundations of the republican doxa, but never intended to extend its scope beyond women. The fact that the political representation of ethnic minorities and of minority women has not been an item on the feminist movement’s agenda lately suggest that the gains earned from parity have not been distributed evenly between women, nor have they directly rippled through to other minorities. (282-283)

She also confirms once more how the ignorance of diversity and hesitation for change ripples through French society and polity, “[t]he lack of reflection during the parity debate on the issue of ethnic diversity is very symptomatic of the blind spots of the dominant rationale in favor of parity,” as well as the governing body as a whole (Lépinard, 285). The consequences of the parity bill on the overall feminist movement
once again reinforce the far-reaching authority of the Republican ideology over the
French nation.

The more progressive climate of today’s global society encourages an increased
level of diversity, acceptance, and equal opportunity, especially amongst the developed
Western nations. In France’s case, the inclusion of new social categories into its national
framework challenges its institutional foundation upon the ideas of universality and
neutrality in regards to specific societal delineations. As demonstrated previously in the
first chapter, the legacy and prominence of established Republican values restrict and/or
stall drastic social change in France, particularly towards the female population. With the
marked addition of modern, liberal issues like multicultural diversity and comprehensive
gender equality into the public sphere, French feminists are faced with new demands to
incorporate in their agendas, simultaneously appeasing the changing society and
opposing fixed national tradition. Further complicated by the unstable foundation of the
women’s movement and delayed instances of female activism in France, it is not
surprising to learn that the current feminist groups struggle to approach modern issues
with unanimity and organized efforts. Whereas some activists energetically embrace the
progressive transformations and seek to modernize French society to its fullest potential,
others feel the need to propose gradual change in order to preserve the national
Republican ideology. As a result, the feminist movement continues to remain conflicted
and divided over the issue of ideological identity as it did during its formation during the
1970s.
Chapter 3: Current Status of French Women

After taking into account the evolutionary, theoretical, and aspirational facets of the feminist movement from both the past and present, it is imperative now to examine the current state of gender equality in France. This chapter discusses the modern status of women in multiple facets of French society by surveying the established state policies and recent proposals pertaining to women’s rights, as well as the available national statistics regarding their representation and participation in the various spheres of society. By integrating political, social, and economic factors in a comparison on sexual status, I intend to establish a more holistic assessment of the current status of France’s national gender equality.

Sovereignty of State Feminism:

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the legalization of political parity generated a maelstrom of interior and exterior responses from both its traditional adversaries and progressive advocates. Within the context of the governmental system, the tradition of male superiority remains evidently dominant in both positions of authority and political clout. Even after the adoption of the parity legislation, the presidency of right-wing Nicolas Sarkozy, lasting from 2007 to 2012, illustrated the French inclination for political androcentricity with a disproportionate ratio of male members of Cabinet, Secretaries of State and seats in Parliament. Consequently, the law was further reinforced and implemented in 2012, giving an ultimatum to political parties: either proactively increase
the inclusion of female candidates or compromise the amount of monetary support they receive by the state. In her analysis on French political equality, “Towards Parity Democracy? Gender in the 2012 French Legislative Elections,” Rainbow Murray explains the conditions of the amendment: “For legislative elections, the law stipulates that parties will lose a proportion of their state funding if they do not field a minimum of 48% candidates of each sex. Parties are funded in two portions: one based on votes, the other based on seats won. Parties who do not respect parity lose funding from the first portion” (198). Although this new addition increases the severity of the parity issue, the financial stipulation, however, only has a limited effect on the larger, more influential political parties, i.e., the more conservative party Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) and the opposing left-wing Socialist Party (PS):

This requirement has been more binding for small parties with few or no parliamentary seats, as they are wholly dependent on the first portion of funding... The ironic consequence is that it is precisely the parties with seats in parliament who have the least incentive to implement the law, even though it is these same parties that have the most impact on the gender balance in parliament. In order to reduce the incentive or parties to ignore parity and offset the financial loss, new legislation was introduced that increased by 50% the amount of funding sacrificed. (Murray, 198-199)

Due to their size and political popularity, these larger parties are less motivated to open up more seats for female candidates, especially when they are already occupied by a male incumbent. The loophole in this parity law provision is to prioritize parliamentary seat placement for male candidates, and designate either unattainable or less impactful seats for women. This tactic spurs from the chauvinistic idea that women lack the experience, tact, and qualifications necessary to adequately serve in the government. Therefore, the overshadowing logistics of the parity legislation actually puts its aims for bridging the gap in the political gender divide at risk.
Fifteen years and nine constitutional reforms after its original adoption, the parity bill has achieved slow progress in the face of France’s patriarchal party system. Despite the committed efforts to better incorporate women into the political scene, the gender gap has only recently started to reduce due to the male domination at the highest levels of party control. However, in spite of the lingering omnipresence of patriarchy, the mandated female inclusion has created new advantages for women politicians that were previously unavailable, such as the potential for higher upward mobility, and inspired women’s interest and involvement in the political scene. The participation of women in the government is also very contingent upon the party in control. With the change in national leadership and political ideology from the 2012 presidential election, left-wing François Hollande made history by establishing France’s inaugural, fully gender-equal Cabinet and reinstating a ministry dedicated to the rights and needs of women, underscoring the importance and capability of women in the governmental structure. He also expanded the aims of the Observatoire de la Parité to stretch beyond matters of policy and assess other areas of concern like the discrimination against women through violence and the media through the newly formed Haut Conseil à l’Égalité entre les Femmes et les Hommes. This updated governmental body dedicated to gender equality helps to better represent the modern needs of French women by “ensuring consultation with civil society and to stimulate public debate on policy issues of women’s rights and political equality.”

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26 See Figure 16: Gender Parity Percentages in the French Government (1997-2014).
27 Taken from the HCEfh website: “d’assurer la concertation avec la société civile et d’animer le débat public sur les grandes orientations de la politique des droits des femmes et de l’égalité” (Translation mine).
Even though the majority of the top Cabinet positions were given to men (i.e., Finance, Industry, Foreign Affairs, et cetera), women still made significant gains in balancing the gender scales and better representing the needs of their female constituents in the political arena. Two female Cabinet members, in particular, have capitalized on their authoritative positions to improve women’s rights and voice concerns, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem as the Minister of National Education, Higher Education and Research, and Marisol Touraine as the Minister of Social Affairs, Health, and Women’s Rights. Their feminizing stake, among those of other female governmental officials, in the French political domain sends a positive message of support to their female constituency, and also impacts a legacy for the subsequent generations of French female politicians, “[t]he inclusion of some junior women in the new government offers up the potential for a future pipeline of women leaders” (Murray, 210).

Despite the restricting contingencies surrounding the implementation of the parity law, there has been a noticeable growth of state feminism activity at a variety of levels within the French polity. Predominantly within the past decade, several acts of legislation and organized institutions have developed sharing the primary goals of gender equality and protection of women’s rights. In her article, “Fifty Years of Feminising France’s Fifth Republic,” Murray notes that the majority of gender equality change agents reside in, and gain their authority from, the governmental system, “[a]s parties serve multiple functions including agenda-setting, policy-making and being gatekeepers to political office, the feminisation of parties is a critical step towards achieving broader levels of gender equality…the main forces for change are currently located within the state (women ministers, the Observatoire de la Parité) rather than in wider civil society”
Armed with federal assets and the drive to improve the female condition, “the presence of feminist women in positions of power within the state has been a useful means for pursuing women’s rights, through promoting policies that benefit women, resourcing research and providing information to the public and the business sector, for example through their websites” (Murray, 478). For instance, current Cabinet member Najat Vallaud-Belkacem utilizes the Internet to spread awareness and provide updates for the public on governmental legislation, actions, and news through her self-titled website and use of educational infographics. This adaptation to the recent demands of digital accessibility and transparency further modernizes her political image, distributes her platform aims, and expands her public audience.

Under Hollande’s administration, Vallaud-Belkacem has served in a variety of offices including as the Spokesperson for the Government, as the Minister of Women’s Rights (later expanded to the title of Minister of Women’s Rights, the City, Youth, and Sports), and now as the Minister of National Education, Higher Education, and Research. Drawing from her experience in diverse political positions and interest in promoting a feminist agenda, Vallaud-Belkacem has proposed and passed numerous legislative reforms that directly improve the status and rights of women. Last year, in coordination with the 70th anniversary of women’s emancipation in France, Vallaud-Belkacem and her feminist-friendly contemporaries advocated a more proactive law to improve and ensure female rights, known as the “Loi pour l’Égalité réelle entre les Femmes et les Hommes” (Law for the real equality between women and men). This pro-women legislation seeks to comprehensively remove gender disparities within a myriad of approaches and spheres of society. The primary tenants of the law advocate progress in
regards to specific issues of contention for French women: to improve labor conditions
by utilizing “new ways to achieve equality in the workplace;” to alleviate financial strains
on mothers by “laying the foundation for a government guarantee against unpaid
alimony/child support;” to address the issue of violence against women, “protect
victims,” and “prevent recidivism;” to reverse the negative, female stigma and “reduce
gender stereotypes;” and finally, to “generalize parity in all the spheres of society.”
This commitment to a better future highlights the successful treads made by female politicians
to adequately represent the women’s concerns. It also suggests solidarity among the
French female community since it is made by women for women.

**Abuse and Action:**

Furthermore, the issue of gender violence has become an increased area of
care in modern French society. According to the statistical publications by the
*Ministère des Affaires Sociales, de la Santé, et des Droits des Femmes*, one woman dies
roughly every 67 hours from domestic violence in France today. In 2014, 217,000 women
were physically or sexually abused by a spouse, and 84,000 women were victims of rape
or attempted rape assault. In addition to the growing number of violent attacks against
women, there is an alarming small percentage of victims who come forward and report
the incidents of aggression. In response to this growing societal problem, the current
French government has taken new steps to combat this trend of aggression and better

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28 Taken from “Les mesures essentielles de la loi pour l’Égalité réelle entre les Femmes et les Hommes” webpage: “de nouveaux moyens pour parvenir à l’égalité professionnelle, poser les fondements d’une garantie publique contre les impayés de pensions alimentaires, violences faites aux femmes: protéger les victimes, prévenir la récidive, faire reculer les stéréotypes sexistes, généraliser la parité dans toutes les sphères de la société” (Translation mine).
The most recently proposed legislative action plan in the favor of women’s rights is known as the “4ème plan interministériel de prévention et de lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes” (4th interdepartmental plan for the prevention and fight against violence towards women) intended for implementation during the timespan of three years (2014 to 2016) (“Plans de lutte contre les violences aux femmes”). This updated legislative plan calls for a doubling of the prior budget with an increase of €66 million during the overall three year plan, and also has numerous changes from the previous proposals, 61 to be exact, under the umbrella of three top priorities: “to organize public action around one principle of simple action: that no declared violence will remain unanswered, to protect the victims, and to mobilize the entire society.”

With a targeted aim of dedicated care and awareness of victims of violence, this plan sends the message to the French public that safety is their government’s primary concern. One of the many measures within this plan is the implementation of a national emergency telephone number dedicated to aiding victims of violence. This number, “3919,” is specifically designed for accessibility to the mass public by remaining free of charge and readily available seven days a week. The French government additionally guarantees further access to protection for victims of violence through the construction of 1,650 supplementary emergency accommodations to be completed by 2017. The final theme of this reform is to actively change the existing violent behavior and sexist

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29 Taken from “Les mesures essentielles de la loi pour l’Égalité réelle entre les Femmes et les Hommes” webpage: “organiser l’action publique autour d’un principe d’action simple: aucune violence déclarée ne doit rester sans réponse, protéger les victimes, et mobiliser l’ensemble de la société” (Translation mine).
attitudes prevalent among the various elements of French society, i.e., in the workplace, in the education system, in sports, and elsewhere. By instituting a transformation of societal conduct and increasing access to safety, this plan offers new preventive and protective measures to ensure the security of victims of violence.

**Equality in Education:**

The French education system also has elements of imbalance between the sexes. In particular, the areas of study and higher levels of scholarly and professional training are divisively gendered, reflecting the stereotypical social and occupational trends for both men and women. According to the data collected by the *Observatoire des inégalités*, female and male students both share a moderately fair representation at the university level, at 58 percent and 42 percent respectively; however, there is a disproportional participation rate in academic degrees by the two sexes (“Les inégalités entre les femmes et les hommes en France”). For instance, women make up 77 percent of the students majoring in humanities and only 23 percent of those in the science field. This sexual division continues beyond academia and affects how students pursue internships and other occupational opportunities, i.e., men typically monopolize mechanical and technological specialties, whereas women dominate in the social and health spheres (“Vers l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes,” 4). Therefore, the basis for gendered trends in the professional world begins at the academic level.

The strategic prevention of sexist behavior and sexual violence in key spheres of French society, particularly in the education system, is another recently proposed area of change by the government. The objective is to institutionally initiate the understanding of mutuality by communicating the need for equality and respect between the sexes to the
younger generations, both at an early age as well as within the collegiate atmosphere. Over the past two years, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem has proposed new measures to encourage equality in French schools, known as the “ABCD de l’égualité” (ABCD of equality) and “Plan d’action pour l’égualité entre les filles et les garçons à l’école” (action plan for the equality of girls and boys at school). According to the published legislation proposal, this education reform has four strategic aims: by implementing holistic change in "the widespread training of educational personnel in the gender parity,” by equipping educators through “the dissemination of appropriate and widespread educational tools to help teachers to convey the value of equality between girls and boys students,” by informing students through “the enriched teaching sequences prepared by teachers from refurbished and simplified tools,” and to expand the message beyond the classroom by providing “information for parents.” Logistically, the plan calls for a modern transformation of the national education system’s internal structure to incorporate and consider the equal representation of both sexes. Thus, this education reform increases exposure to the gender equality conversation to the French public in the form of students, parents, educators, and administrators.

**Women and the Workforce:**

Accompanying their slow success within the government, French women have also seen some progress in other professional sectors as well. According to the most recent quantitative data collected by France’s National Institute of Statistics and

30 Taken from the “Plan d’action pour l’égualité entre les filles et les garçons à l’école” webpage: "La généralisation de la formation du personnel éducatif à l'égualité filles-garçons, la diffusion d'outils pédagogiques adaptés et généralisés, pour aider les enseignants à transmettre la valeur d'égualité filles-garçons aux élèves, des séquences pédagogiques enrichies préparées par les enseignants à partir d'outils rénovés et simplifiés, l'information des parents" (Translation mine).
Economic Studies, referred to as INSEE, the overall status of women in the labor force has improved and the gender gap has started to diminish to an extent. Over the last 20 years, the national male employment growth has remained at a fairly constant level, whereas it has risen from 56 percent to 62 percent for women, revealing their increased infiltration of the labor market at various levels. Additionally, French women achieved a more favorable unemployment rate than their male counterparts for the first time ever in 2013. However, this positive trend does not hold as true for immigrant women. They remain the most disadvantaged within the labor market and occupy less than half of the active working force of the French immigrant population (“Vers l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes,” 5).

Despite the recent increase of female participation in the French workforce, there still exist strong professional concentrations and labor-related inequalities based on gender. For instance, women represent over half of the employees in the following occupations: vendors, teachers, nurses, administrative assistants/secretaries, childcare professionals, among other social welfare jobs. Men, on the other hand, take over the vocational sectors of construction, manufacturing, agriculture, military, commerce, and technology (“Vers l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes,” 7). Thus, this concentrated division of labor impacts the way men and women are financially compensated. The apparent income disparity between the sexes reveals the limitations French women face in the working world. Even after obtaining a qualified education and skilled training, women still earn significantly less than men in France. Women are also more likely to work part-time. In 2013, nearly a third of the female working population in

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31 See Figure 17: National Unemployment Rate by Gender.
32 See Figure 18: Average Net Salary for Full-Time Jobs by Gender.
France were considered part-time employees, whereas there was less than ten percent of part-time male workers in the labor force (“Vers l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes,” 8).

La Famille Française:

State-institutionalized family policy, namely regarding child care, has been a fundamental part of French citizenship for centuries, dating back to the regime of Napoléon. The patriotic image of its young children representing the future and hope of the nation has been a resonating theme in the France’s history, and thus has affected the state’s involvement. There is also a nationally recognized dual ideological-economic significance rooted in protecting family rights and values, as noted in the study, “Family Policies in Germany and France: The Role of Enterprises and Social Partners,” by Ute Klammer and Marie-Thérèse Letablier: “This tradition is embedded in republican ideas about the early education and socialization of children. Children are viewed as a ‘public good,’ a fitting object for social investment” (674). As a result, the French are firmly supported by their government to conceive the next generations as an expression of nationalism in the form of highly subsidized health and child care. Katherine Roussos outlines these state-funded benefits as part of her evaluation of women’s rights, “From the City of Ladies to Watch Bitches: Real French Feminism,” as follows:

To combat population decline, all parents are rewarded by the government starting with their second child (115 euros per month, which more than doubles with the third). Added to these benefits are various monthly or occasional governmental gifts for lower- and middle-income families. A third of children under age two attend government-funded daycare, “nannies” are also subsidized, and almost all children are in school by age three. Full coverage for medical visits during pregnancy and delivery, including midwifery, are also meant to encourage French women to procreate, in spite of equally reimbursed birth control pills. (66)
These numerous parental provisions are meant to remove a portion of the inhibiting factors to procreation such as lack of financial support and professional security.

Even though the French family policies reward women in the form of financial support for bearing children and expanding their families, they may also limit the upward mobility of these mothers’ professional careers. With each consecutive child, women are granted longer time off from their labor responsibilities, in some cases up to multiple years, and therefore, are less inclined to reclaim their position in the workplace. Thus, women are encouraged by the state to have larger families, yet simultaneously distance themselves from the national labor force. As a result, the national percentage of working mothers reduces with the addition of more children into the family unit.33 Due to this sexualized form of long-term parental leave, discrimination based on gender in the labor market has also become more visibly pronounced and also state-sanctioned. In Jeanne Fagnani’s comparative analysis, “Family Policies in France and Germany,” she echoes this gendered trend in parental employment:

In reality these benefits encourage a large number of mothers, often with few qualifications, to stop working altogether or to permanently reduce their working hours after the birth of a child. Parental leave […] enables those women or men who worked before the birth to withdraw from the labour market until the third birthday of the youngest child, with a guaranteed return to work. These measures then become ‘poisoned chalices’ that serve to perpetrate sexual discrimination on the labour market. (45)

Furthermore, a bill was passed in 2002, elongating the allocated time period of the paternity leave from three to fourteen days. Designed to alleviate parental duty disparities and encourage fathers to have a more active role within the domestic sphere, the law could be suggested as a positive step in the political recognition of gender imbalance in

33 See Figure 19: Percentage of Parents in the Workplace by Gender and Number of Children (< 3 years old).
French society, “for the Socialist Government, this was aimed at encouraging ‘real parental parity’ and at promoting a more equal division of child-rearing tasks within couples” (Fagnani, 48). Yet, even though this reform gives men the option to spend more time with their families, this does not automatically indicate that they have an active, participating role in their households. Jan Windebank’s discusses the presumptions made by the implementation of paternity leave in her study, “Social Policy and Gender Divisions of Domestic and Care Work in France,” stating that, “[g]ender-neutral policies which merely give men the opportunity to change their behaviours and participate more in domestic and care work make two assumptions: first, that there is a desire on the part of men to do this and second, that there are not contradictory forces at work pulling men in the opposite direction (for example, the labour market)” (Windebank, 30). The tendency to have an unequal division of domestic labor between husband and wife in France was confirmed by INSEE’s Time Use Survey conducted in 2010. The results of the survey illustrated that employed women spend more time doing daily household tasks like kitchen chores, laundry, as well as child care, than their spouses. Working men, on the other hand, spend more time on personal time, animal care, and yard work when at home. In general, French women spend close to an hour and half more on daily domestic duties than men, in addition to their existing working schedule.}\(^\text{34}\)

Overall, French family policies provide unique and beneficial aid to mothers that are otherwise absent or limited in other neighboring nations. They also celebrate the traditional maternalism ideal over all, keeping in line with the post-war pronatalism traditions of the past and lacking a modern conceptualization of motherhood. Klammer and Letablier also note that recent reforms have not had a dramatic impact on France’s

\(^{34}\) See Figure 20: Daily Household Time Use of Employed Women and Men
social progress, “the logics underlying social policy funding in France have not undergone a remarkable change, in family policy or in other related fields. Reforms of the family benefit system have been rather an adaptation to changing contexts rather than radical reforms” (Klammer and Letablier, 686). Due to the lack of social development regarding the female familial role, traditional motherhood has remained a praised and rewarded position for French women over other more progressive alternatives.

In contrast, French single mothers often struggle to achieve similar financial security. Further constrained by the other limiting factors for women in the workplace, single mothers face difficult challenges in adequately providing for their families. In 81.5 percent of single women raising children, one out of three live below France’s national poverty line (“Vers l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes,” 9). Without the assistance of a spouse or partner, single mothers lack the time and resources to fully experience motherhood in the same capacity as complete family units do.

The existing status of women in France highlights the recurring theme of effectual change stifled by established tradition. Fortunately, there has been significant growth in institutionalizing feminist objectives at the state level. The most influential agents of change for improving disparities between the sexes exist in the political system in the form of state feminists. The rising number of politicians who share an interest in and understanding of women’s rights suggests a trend in political support for creating a more balanced French society. By implementing legislation aimed at protecting and improving the female status at the state level, social and economic change can subsequently follow. Exhibiting governmental support and commitment to the female population sends the message to the general public that gender equality is a national concern. However, it is
important to note that this trend could be short-lived due to its reliance on the connection with the more liberal-leaning Socialist Party that currently holds leadership of the French government.

While there has been noticeable progress in political gains and raising national awareness of the feminine condition, women are still underrepresented and disadvantaged in other areas of French society, as in their personal autonomy within the home and labor force. The difference in educational specialties, job concentrations, and pay separates the sexes professionally and economically. In addition, mothers are encouraged to distance themselves from the workforce in order to spend more time at home, advanced further by the glorified pronatalism tradition in France. Despite the access to elongated parental leave, household duties between the sexes remain unbalanced. The presence of domestic violence and aggression also reveals a trend of female vulnerability within the household.
Conclusion

The legacy of the Marianne as the ideal Republican woman portrayed throughout French society remains a contradiction of sorts. She is meant to serve as an inspiration to pursue justice and liberty, yet solely for the sake of the Republic and not necessarily for her own. But what if it is the Republic itself that infringes on her ability to achieve personal freedom? Can she continue her quest for liberation or must she adhere to the values that hamper her progress in society? These are the questions women in French society are faced with as their nation attempts to adjust to the diversity of the modern era. After taking into account the prominent historical, theoretical, and contemporary elements of its national feminist discourse, it is evident that the French nation has had a challenging relationship with the women’s movement, and thus stunted the national growth of a healthy balance between the sexes.

A prominent and recurring theme throughout the majority of collected research on this topic is the peculiarity of the French nation regarding its reactions to change and contention to its established culture and traditions. France is a special case to study based on its unique history and traditions of universal citizenship and Republican ideology that in turn, affects the nation in all capacities. From the larger institutional level down to the individual level, the national notion of belonging has a strong hold on the fabric of the French population. Despite the esteemed values of freedom, solidarity, and equality fostered within the revered French Revolution and the resulting formation of the modern
French state, the larger public struggles with the principles of inclusion and acceptance of diversity.

As a result of this cultural trait, the embedded nature of universality into the French culture affects the goals of the feminist movement as it imposes yet another oppressive factor to female agency. French women are challenged with the task of legitimizing their presence in a society that habitually glorifies their exclusion by firmly clinging to the patriarchal traditions of the past in the major social, economic, and political forms. By expressing a need for change in an organized fashion, French feminists risk appearing as a “threat” to the state due to the its own insecurity in the face of contention and interruption of the status quo, instead of eliciting a positive image of female solidarity in the name of equal rights. Thus, the French feminist movement has had a slow development due to its national paradox of inclusionist ideals versus exclusionist practices. This setback contributes to the movement’s struggle to include the various multicultural perspectives of its diverse women’s population, among other modern feminist issues highlighted by Third Wave theory. Furthermore, the movement’s historical emphasis on intellectual and theoretical cultivation over other active forms of change has delayed the collective organization and presence of visible manifestations of female solidarity. As with any social movement, without a firm foundation to build from, productive development is hard to achieve. Numerous opposing women’s factions and groups have formed over the past 40 years, based on the movement’s members’ inability to collectively unite and agree on a primary feminist platform and course of action. The research has shown that while feminist organizations largely support the idea of improved
female social, economic, and political mobility, they differ on how to consider the ideals of the Republic in their strategic plans for change.

Seventy years since women’s emancipation and 15 years since the implementation of the parity law, an area of substantial progress for the French female population has been an increase of political activity and participation. Under the current leadership of President François Hollande and the Socialist Party, there have been more significant gains in legitimizing the rights and representations of women than ever before. Supported by a more progressive-minded government, women are now further empowered to pursue political office and improve their social standing. Therefore, newer policy developments endorsed by feminists at the state-level have helped to institutionalize women’s issues as a government priority. Although the French political system still has a predominantly male constituency and control over the most powerful offices, the increased female involvement during the recent past and present has helped to establish a new norm of a dedicated female presence in politics. As the numbers of women in political office and female-friendly legislation continue to grow, it is reasonable to suggest that the androcentric dominance in French politics is beginning to dwindle.

Women in France have also begun to close the gap in labor representation by pursuing higher levels of education, participating more in the workforce, and most recently, by possessing a lower unemployment rate than men. However, they still occupy the lower professional sectors and earn less financial compensation based on their gender. French women also participate significantly more in household and domestic duties, further limiting their activity in the labor force. Over the past 50 years, women have
increased their visibility and elevated their presence in French society; however, they still have a long road ahead of them before real parity in the home and labor force occurs.

As seen in the modern evolution of the French women’s movement, the greatest opportunity to improve gender imbalance is by increasing the number of influential feminist stakeholders in the government in order to actively and publicly address troubling issues of inequality in French society. Through these pro-woman politicians, new programs and legislation targeted at improving better relations between the sexes can be put into place to bring about effectual change from the top down. If the French government continues to take progressive steps to advance female inclusion, the broader society can follow its lead and improve the status of its national gender equality.
Appendix

(Fig. 1) Eugene Délacroix’s “Liberty Leading the People.” Source: “Le 28 Juillet. La Liberté guidant le peuple (28 juillet 1830),” louvre.fr.

(Fig. 2) Official governmental logo of the French Republic featuring the Marianne. Source: “Symbols of the French Government,” gouvernement.fr.
(Fig. 3) National Assembly decorated with the “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui” display.

(Fig. 4) “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui:” Alice

(Fig. 5) “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui:” Awa
“Marianne d’aujourd’hui:” Caroline

“Marianne, j’espère qu’elle aura de plus en plus de visages différents”

“Marianne, pour moi, c’est n’importe quelle femme engagée en politique ou dans la vie sociale. En France, nous ne sommes pas assez nombreuses à le faire. Mais pour que la République avance, pour que ces femmes avancent, il va bien falloir qu’on s’y mette.”

“Marianne, c’est une femme de cœur, qui regarde l’autre avec un a priori positif et chaleureux”

“Savoir dresser ses cartes, c’est peut-être le meilleur moyen de faire de la République quelque chose d’ancien et d’ancrage davantage, moins penser aux différences.”

“Marianne d’aujourd’hui:” Linda

“Marianne, c’est une femme de cœur, qui regarde l’autre avec un a priori positif et chaleureux”

“Savoir dresser ses cartes, c’est peut-être le meilleur moyen de faire de la République quelque chose d’ancien et d’ancrage davantage, moins penser aux différences.”

“Marianne d’aujourd’hui:” Clarissa

“Marianne, c’est un peu chacune d’entre nous”

“C’est une citoyenne, pour moi, tout simplement. Une femme à laquelle on peut faire raisonner. Ce n’est pas une question d’origine ou de physiognomie, mais d’engagement républicain.”

“Pour moi Marianne, c’est une insoumise ouvrant le chemin”

“C’est quelqu’un qui n’a pas peur de s’engager, même dans le danger. C’est cette âme rebelle qui m’attire chez elle.”

“Marianne d’aujourd’hui:” Samira
(Fig. 10) Map of European nations (shown in red) that had approved legal suffrage for women by 1920. Source: “The Women Suffrage Timeline,” WomenSuffrage.org.

(Fig. 11) Map of European nations that had approved legal suffrage for women by 1930, with the new additions depicted in red and the existing countries in pink. Source: “The Women Suffrage Timeline,” WomenSuffrage.org.
(Fig. 12) Map of European nations that had approved legal suffrage for women by 1944, highlighting the addition of France amongst its neighboring countries. Source: “The Women Suffrage Timeline,” WomenSuffrage.org.

(Fig. 13) The Frequency Distribution of Repertoires of Inclusion by Women’s Organization Identity. Source: Lépinard, “Doing Intersectionality” (894).
(Fig. 14) The Frequency Distribution of Repertoires of Inclusion by Women’s Organization Function. Source: Lépinard, “Doing Intersectionality” (896).

![The Frequency Distribution of Repertoires of Inclusion by Women's Organization Function](image1)

(Fig. 15) Evolution of Immigrant Population Distribution in France. Source: “Distribution of the immigrants according to their country of birth,” INSEE.fr.

![Evolution of Immigrant Population Distribution in France](image2)
(Fig. 16) Gender Parity Percentages in the French Government (1997-2014). Source: “Gouvernements et parité,” HCEfh.fr.

(Fig. 17) National Unemployment Rate by Gender. Source: “Unemployment according to the ILO standard (annual average) by gender and age group,” INSEE.fr.
(Fig. 18) Average Net Salary for Full-Time Jobs by Gender. Source: “Percentage change in average annual net salary for full-time jobs, by gender,” INSEE.fr.

(Fig. 19) Percentage of Working Parents by Gender and Number of Children (< 3 years old). Source: “Vers l’égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes,” 6.
(Fig. 20) Daily Household Time Use of Employed Women and Men. Source: “Depuis 11 ans, moins de tâches ménagères, plus d'Internet.” INSEE.fr.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Household Time Use of Employed Women and Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen, laundry, chores</td>
<td>2:36</td>
<td>1:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>0:37</td>
<td>0:19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gardening, animal care</td>
<td>0:09</td>
<td>0:14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hobbies</td>
<td>0:05</td>
<td>0:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total domestic time</td>
<td>3:27</td>
<td>2:06</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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76


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