

Open Forum

Le Women's Lib: Made in France

Judith Ezekiel

UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE-LE-MIRAIL

ABSTRACT This article traces the French construction and demonization of American feminism (*Le Women's Lib*) by a segment of the women's movement and by public left-wing intellectuals. The joining of anti-American and anti-feminist traditions produces a new entity, dubbed French *anti-amér-féminisme*. The development is traced in the writings of one women's group, Psychanalyse et Politique, and in the debates around a so-called political correctness (PC). Defending the image of a France distinguished by harmonious gender rapport and relations of seduction, this entity is used as a mechanism to encourage French women to reject feminism or to define a different, homegrown heterosocial version. Using the examples of debates in women's studies, parity democracy and sexual harassment, the author demonstrates how *anti-amér-féminisme* has had material repercussions on French women's lives, such as limiting the scope of sexual harassment law.

KEY WORDS anti-Americanism ♦ anti-feminism ♦ feminism ♦ French feminism ♦ French intellectuals ♦ parity democracy ♦ political correctness ♦ sexual harassment ♦ women's liberation ♦ women's studies

As US academic feminists promote a made-in-America *French feminism* (for critiques, see Moses, 1998; Delphy, 1995; Ezekiel, 1995a, 1995b), French intellectuals have constructed – and demonized – a made-in-France *Women's Lib*. Few prejudices can be so candidly espoused, be it in the media, Left or Right, in a Latin Quarter cafe, or at a fashionable dinner party chock-full of public intellectuals. Neither anti-Americanism, nor anti-feminism is a new phenomenon. A significant body of literature exists on the history of French anti-Americanism, which goes back nearly three centuries (e.g. Bishop, 2001; Fauré and Bishop, 1992; Hollander,

1992; Lacorne et al., 1986). On anti-feminism, we have a fine anthology, *Un siècle d'antiféminisme* (Bard, 1999). However, on the marriage of the two, on what I've dubbed *anti-amér-féminisme*, pickings are slim. And yet, since the emergence of contemporary feminism, French *anti-amér-féminisme* has been a remarkably persistent phenomenon. It appears regularly, on the Right and on the Left, inside and outside the women's movement. As a card-carrying feminist and radical, finding this entity on the Right hardly surprised me. However its presence closer to home, in the women's movement and among left-wing intellectuals, was another matter entirely. If this article deals solely with France, my country of adoption, it is neither to appeal to Gallophobia (no doubt parallel examples exist in other countries) nor to target the specific people who use it. It is my contention that this particular traffic in feminism, rather than a transatlantic dialogue, is a closed circuit, 'Franco-French' debate. Forged to serve domestic agendas, far from serving French women's interests, it serves as a tool that can result in damaging, material consequences.

Anti-amér-féminisme shines bright in a constellation of other forms of anti-Americanism, among them opposition to multiculturalism. However, more pertinent to the specific entity discussed here is the defence of the supposedly harmonious male-female rapport and the relations of seduction viewed as central to French culture. *Anti-amér-féminisme* operates here in two ways. First, it acts as a powerful repellent to scare French women away from the dangers of 'American-style' feminism. It is an anti-satanic talisman, the crucifix that repels vampires. Get thee hence, or in one bite, you too will be transformed into a monster. Second, it deflects *anti-feminism*, diverting it from French women and feminists towards Americans only. Activists from the early years of the movement in France and elsewhere remember the hateful treatment to which they were subjected: 'ugly, lesbian, man-hating puritans' who 'just need a good fuck' (as one French feminist friend retorts, 'Well whose fault is that?'). In recent years, these epithets have been reserved for American feminists and their Gallic dupes.

So as not to be struck down by these thunderbolts of misogyny, certain French women, including some feminists, deploy *anti-amér-féminisme* to protect themselves. It serves here as a kind of primitive lightning rod, one that deflects attacks and redirects them towards American feminists. If I call the lightning rod 'primitive', it is because it is not always effective for those who use it; there can be collateral damage. Finally, the lightning rod separates the 'good' from the 'bad' feminists. Those who chose to remain exposed, perched high on their hill, can be struck down. Those who deploy it, asserting in passing their heterosociality, are marked as loyal to universalist ideals, and to a mixed Left.

DEMONIZATION OF AMERICAN FEMINISM IN THE
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT (LE 'MLF DÉPOSÉ')

If many prejudices develop in ignorance of their targets, this was hardly the case here. The American women's movement began before its French counterpart and influenced it greatly in the early years. In the mass media, the reference to the US is omnipresent. 'First cousin to the female movement in America', a typical article in the *Express* wrote at the time, the Mouvement de libération des femmes 'was born of May 68 and the American example' (Bercoff, 1971).

Within the movement, the influence is undeniable. In that first May 1970 article, 'Combat pour la libération de la femme', published in *L'Idiot international*, alongside the signature of Monique Wittig were two Americans (Wittig et al., 1970). The first demonstration, the tribute to the wife of the unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe, took place 26 August 1970 to coincide with the US Women's Strike Day for the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage. Over a third of the articles in the first major publication, *Libération des femmes: année zéro*, consisted of translations of soon-to-be classics of the US movement. Strong communications networks meant that French feminists brought back new projects, terms and symbols, introducing for example the word *sexisme* into the French language.

The French movement tended more towards Americano-*philia* rather than -*phobia*; blatant hostility, as shown by my survey of French feminist periodicals of the 1970s, appears rarely, be it among the supposedly reformist Ligue du droit des femmes or the most far left of the *lutte de classe* (class struggle) groups. Authors criticize global sexism and offer in exchange a shared utopian vision for the future.

Nevertheless, despite the strong links, many remained ambivalent, as witnessed by the dearth of writings on the US in early periodicals and histories. No doubt, the media portrayal of a French movement that 'copied' *le Women's Lib* contributed to this ambivalence. No doubt, activists retained anti-American reflexes of the far-left groups from whence they came. Perhaps they resented the burden that debts carry with them. Irrespective, the ambivalence appears in early writings – such as the reproachful tone between the lines of the first feminist newspaper, *Le Torchon brûle*, angry that even the left-wing press spoke more of the American movement than about the one blooming under their eyes. Similarly, in the earliest histories, the US is notably absent, mentioned only to proclaim that it did *not* influence France. The sole reference in *L'Histoire du féminisme* by Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe points out the French influence over there, through de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, which 'nourished the reflections of those who were later to become the principal theoreticians of Women's Lib [*sic*]' (Albistur and Armogathe, 1977: 434–5).

This ambivalence offered a fertile ground for the demonization of American feminism within the movement.

Anti-amér-féminisme begins as the French movement starts breaking into differing parts, called *tendances*, specifically in Antoinette Fouque's influential group, becoming known as Psychanalyse et Politique.¹ The future Psych et Po, as the group was called, convened an international meeting to 'identify the originality of the European movement' ('Etre ensemble . . .', n.d.: 17); *originality*, we understand, in opposition to the US. At this 1972 meeting, in la Tranche sur Mer, Psych et Po delighted in 'discovering' the similarities among the groups that show 'a level of consciousness and a more politicized potential for struggle than in the USA' ('Un groupe de filles . . .', n.d.: 18). Simultaneously, this group in formation had begun to denounce what they called 'feminism':

Feminism is not women's struggle. Women's struggle must include the fight against feminism. Feminism as an ideology (from the bourgeois vanguard to reformism), preserves the powers that be in a repetitive, oppositional provocatory [*sic*] process. (*Chroniques d'une imposture*, 1981)

Anti-feminism and anti-Americanism meld into an effective repellent. Psych et Po attacks the 'hypocritical American ideology with which all feminism conforms'. In an article titled 'The American Style: Capitalism . . . Imperialism . . . Feminism', Psych et Po associates President Carter with feminism to denounce its capitalist nature:

The distance between feminism and those in power is small, and perhaps even non-existent. For if Carter lies between American feminists and the Congress, it is not to separate them, but to ensure the liaison-identification between America and feminism. (Dhavernas, 1980: 39)

Thus, America *is* feminist and feminism *is* American, an equation that appears repeatedly over the years, particularly in the debate over parity democracy.

These declarations merely represent the tip of the iceberg. Fouque used *anti-amér-féminisme* to make sure her disciples steered clear of all American influences. Nadja Ringart, a member of the group at the time, remembers that she had tried to be ecumenical and accepting of the other groups in the movement until 'Antoinette painstakingly demonstrated that I was wrong to believe in sisterhood; that illusion imported from the Americas' (Ringart, 1977).

Recently, Fouque acknowledged her intentions:

My concern was both to build an original movement as opposed to American Women's Lib, too oriented towards the outside, the conquest of winning equality in work, and the struggles against discriminatory behaviour and laws. We needed a European movement, heir to the wealth of

contemporary ideas, a cultural movement, a movement of civilization and thought attentive to emotions, to the interiority of the subject, to the subject's identity, concerned with the intimate. We needed not only consciousness raising [a reference to the US] but a discovery of the unconscious, a 'revolution of the symbolic'. (Fouque, 1995: 137)

If Fouque spoke of a new 'European' identity, and she repeated this assertion when she was elected to the European Parliament in 1995, it was rapidly clear that the identity was French, and the ideology her own. Thus, the demonization of American feminism became a part of Psych et Po's identity from the start.

L'ANTI-AMÉR-FÉMINISME AND THE FRENCH 'PC' CONTROVERSY

After a period of calm, the 1980s witnessed a rise in both anti-Americanism and anti-feminism, the latter sufficiently visible to inspire a major conference at the Pompidou Centre on the 'New Forms of Contemporary Antifeminism'. Every paper delivered at this conference criticized anti-feminism, with one notable exception: the talk on the US, titled 'The Women's Movement in the USA: The Ins and Outs of Puritanism'. Despite the author's frank acknowledgement of her ignorance – 'I am not an expert on feminism and even less on feminist criticism, and I make no claims to rigorous analysis' – she proceeds to declare that American feminism is on the wane, that all that remains is an 'academic feminism' that is 'only understandable within a legalistic, moralizing discourse specific to puritan thought' (Lichtenstein, 1991). Her knee-jerk *anti-amér-féminisme*, used as a lightning rod to separate the French from the bad, signals what follows.

The new context at the time was the debate over a supposed 'PC', or political correctness. Since my object of enquiry concerns France, not the US, I do not examine the material reality or the debate in the US, and, given the number of articles on the question, I only touch upon the French rhetoric and representations. Note, however, in this particular transatlantic traffic, that whereas the construction and the condemnations of 'PC' in the US came almost exclusively from the Right, in France, feminists and left-wing intellectuals held the frontlines of the anti-PC crusade. Among them, prominent authors and commentators such as Elisabeth Badinter, Mona Ozouf, Josyane Savigneau, Jacques Julliard, Pascal Bruckner and Alain Finkielkraut published their scathing condemnations in progressive publications like *Le Monde*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Actuel*, *Libération*, *Télérama* and *L'Évènement de jeudi*. Shared Franco-American utopias gave way to the construction of opposing models: multicultural, fragmented America vs French Republican universalism.

The PC debate is portrayed as a transatlantic dialogue – after all, the ‘facts’ did come from the US. But at the least, the dual mediation must be stressed: the French media, including on the left, based their coverage almost exclusively on mainstream US newspapers, homogeneous and conservative in comparison. More importantly, a body of ‘knowledge’ – or rather, urban folklore – grew up around a tiny collection of anecdotes reported and repeated ad nauseum. Among the classics: the little boy expelled from his school for having kissed a little girl, the Antioch University policy of ‘asking before kissing’, etc. The debate merely required a few illustrations to support what these authors already knew.

The critical event in the rise of *anti-amér-féminisme* was the Anita Hill–Clarence Thomas incident. President Bush Senior’s appointee to the Supreme Court, awaiting Senate confirmation, was accused of sexual harassment by his former employee, black like him. In the US, the controversy raised remarkably complex and important issues, in particular how watertight race and gender categories negated black women’s existence symbolically, politically and legally (Morrison, 1992; Ezekiel, 1997; Crenshaw, 1992).

In France, the violence of the reactions was breathtaking. ‘Sordid spectacle’, proclaims the front-page editorial in *Le Monde*, in which American democracy ‘has lost a piece of its soul’. Journalists chalked it up to another case of politicians’ sexual escapades, hence further proof of the ‘puritan’ nature of America. As Annette Lévy-Willard wrote in the left-wing *Libération*, ‘the witch-hunting season is open, confusing equality and prudery’ (Lévy-Willard, 1993: 7).

French commentators mostly agreed that what Americans call harassment, the French consider harmless flirting. For feminist and philosopher Elisabeth Badinter, seen from the European side of the Atlantic, Thomas had behaved quite normally. ‘No one has accused the judge of any violence. . . . Judge Thomas is blamed with having had sexual desires and having expressed them.’ Lévy-Willard, former feminist activist, concurred: ‘What crime did Judge Thomas commit? . . . Rape? Bottom-pinching? Hand under her skirt? French kiss? Nothing. He was simply accused by Anita Hill of having tried to seduce her and, when rejected, of having blocked the lawyer’s career.’

For Badinter, Thomas was yet another victim of ‘a kind of terrorism inspired by a relentless feminist inquisition’ (Badinter, 1991: 82). Lévy-Willard scathingly condemned her ‘false American sisters’ for supposedly remaining silent about the rapes and massacres in former Yugoslavia: ‘They aren’t your sisters, since they don’t speak English?’ she asks. In any case, she scoffs, ‘you have more important causes to defend: sexual harassment and your careers . . . You just care about your asses and your hamburgers’ (Lévy-Willard, 1993: 7).

Although the defence of the universalist French Republic underpinned

all the aforementioned conflicts, another theme has occupied equal symbolic space: the defence of seduction à *la française* and of the supposedly harmonious relationships between the sexes. 'Eroticism versus feminism', as Christine Bard has written, 'that duel so dear to the French, who are so attached to a libertine tradition they assume to be spontaneously egalitarian' (Bard, 1999: 311). Attempts to preserve these relations, to defend *la douce France*, here in the role of a talisman to ward off evil, appear at the very outset of the movement.

'In France . . . men and women have a taste for each other', a 1971 *Paris Match* article explains, quoting proto-feminist Evelyne Sullerot. 'They like being together in so many areas. In America, no!' (Martory, 1971). Contrary to American feminists, 'afflicted with hideously ugly leaders', Françoise Giroud, later to be Secretary of Women's Status, explains in a 1970 article, French women 'have little taste for the war of the sexes'. Even if, she says, French men are 'surreptitious tyrants', 'the nature of the relations between men and women in France, insofar as one dares generalize [*sic*], is relatively harmonious'. And a good thing, too, since Giroud warns us of an ominous peril directly resulting from American-style feminism: male impotence (Giroud, 1970).

In the first decade of the movement, these conservative positions had little impact in the circles I examine; 20 years later, however, they have been resurrected. In their lightning rod form, they protect French women and the women's movement and help establish two opposing models. Françoise Picq, author of an authoritative book on French feminism, rightly terms this the 'nationalization of feminism' (Picq, 1995: 333).

An amusing detour via the right-wing *Figaro* points to an underlying fear among *anti-amér-féministes*. Deploring the 'years of systematic confrontation between men and women' and the 'lack of sexual differentiation', the journalist complains: 'Nothing is more uniform than a crowd of American tourists. Men and women alike wear the same shorts, the same t-shirts, the same sneakers, and the same caps.' As a result, 'pleasure is a taboo subject' in America, 'the most sexually unsatisfied society in the industrial world' (Marchand, 1995). (The theme of New World men's impotence dates back centuries, as does the idea that the lack of sexual differentiation marks a backward civilization.)

The arguments espoused by the Right are adopted by left-wing intellectuals in the 1990s. For the authors cited, *anti-amér-féminisme* works as a primitive lightning rod, dissociating themselves from Americans, and they remain faithful to the dominant heterosociality threatened by this feminism. On the theme of sameness, Sylvie Kauffman laments in *Le Monde* how American men, 'paralysed' by the threat of sexual harassment accusations, must keep their eyes lowered and walk home everyday with a single image, that of thousands of women's jogging shoes, 'hopelessly alike' (Kauffman, 1996). Elisabeth Badinter declares that

American feminist inquisitors . . . share with the Puritans their hatred of sex, in particular of the male sex. Men's desire neither flatters nor seduces them – it terrifies them. In their eyes, men are not friends, allies, or lovers, but enemies and oppressors.

'What is it they want?' asks Badinter. Mixing her religious metaphors, in one of many accusations of feminism as a religion, she evokes a terrible affront to secular universalists: 'Female convents – this is their most secret desire!' (Badinter, 1991: 83).

The case of novelist Pascal Bruckner is particularly revealing. A fervent 'Americanophile', according to *Le Monde diplomatique*, 'for whom the denunciation of anti-Americanism is a full time profession' (Halimi, 2000: 10), his fervour finds its limit in the face of American feminism.

There has been much sarcastic commentary about the excesses of American feminism; we must not forget that it is rivalled in its grotesque declarations and protests by a certain virilism . . . It makes one want to leave the neofeminists and neoconservatives alone in the infernal tête à tête to search elsewhere, above and beyond differences and unavoidable misunderstandings, for a path to peaceful coexistence between men and women. (Bruckner, 1993: 78)

That path, it goes without saying, lies in France. 'Sweet France', Pascal Dupont lauds, 'has been spared the violent, American-style War of the Sexes, with its armies of ageing lesbian hags' (Dupont, 1996: 109).

Historian Mona Ozouf makes of this peaceful coexistence her banner. Although she claims to listen to 'Women's Words', as the title of her book proclaims, *anti-amér-féminisme* makes her deaf to her American sisters. 'Why does feminism in France, in comparison to the forms it takes under other skies, seem peaceful, measured, and timid . . . ? This moderation is noisily denounced by other, particularly Anglo-Saxon feminists' (Ozouf, 1995).

Ozouf proclaims that on the other side of the Atlantic, 'everyday feminist discourse' flows logically from 'female fundamentalism', a 'new American woman's religion'. She vehemently denounces American essentialism, that she patriotically claims grew out of ideas first developed in France. But France is intelligent twice over: first it produces theory, and then knows better than to make too much use of it. Ozouf proceeds to a page-long diatribe against American feminists, apparently using neoconservative author Christina Hoff-Sommers as her source. Differentialism, she says,

. . . has penetrated institutions, obtained major funding. . . . It holds the key to numerous research institutes, imposes quotas by sex in the professions/skilled jobs. . . . It spreads terrifying statistics through the press: they say that one woman in four is a victim of rape, that 150,000 die each year from anorexia, that male savagery toward pregnant women is the main cause of

infant mortality. . . . In short, it portrays a female environment that is under siege. No such thing can be said about France. (Ozouf, 1995: 388–9)

To the contrary, French women are more ‘moderate’ and ‘peaceful’ – or at least, less noisy.

Anti-amér-féminisme, when deployed as a primitive lightning rod to defend harmonious Gallic male–female relations, is by nature tautological. Here in France, there is consensus: men and women like each other. If a woman disagrees, we won’t like her any more. She will be the dupe of American feminists and a threat to the wonderful relations between men and women in France. And, since she will no longer be protected by this mutual appreciation, we will have no scruples – wait and see what horrid treatment she’ll get . . .

Demonizing American feminism in France has effects that go beyond the rhetorical bantering of public intellectuals. In its roles as a repellent and lightning rod, it has been used at the very least in jockeying for power within the women’s movement, as argued earlier in the article; for justifying power relations within institutions; and even in making or resisting legal change. Recent developments in several areas, women’s studies, parity democracy and sexual harassment, graphically demonstrate this point.

WOMEN’S STUDIES

Two examples of the usage of *anti-amér-féminisme* in women’s studies show both mechanisms, the anti-satanic talisman and lightning rod, the former to scare away potential recruits and the second both to shelter French scholars and preserve academic institutions.

As for the women’s movement at large, women’s studies in France began later than in the US, and the American example helped inspire French feminists in the early years. However, in the last decade, American women’s studies have also been demonized. A classic, if somewhat anecdotal example appeared in the journal *Sciences humaines*. In an article titled ‘Women’s Studies: When the Social Sciences Fall Victim to the War of the Sexes in the US’ (Lubecki, 1994), a photograph, spread across two pages, shows a Gay Pride march with two lesbians in the foreground. They are topless, one obese, with large breasts that sag down to their waists. The message is clear: back off, girls. Women’s Studies à l’américaine makes women ‘hideously ugly’ like these ‘ageing lesbian hags’.

Far more subtle is the seemingly innocuous usage made by the influential sociologist Jacques Commaille. In the government report prepared for the United Nations Beijing women’s conference, he portrays French women’s studies as having been structured autonomously, as they are in

'Anglo-Saxon' countries (on the notion of Anglo-Saxon, see Horsman, 1986). Today, he suggests, offering the protection of a primitive lightning rod, this approach is being replaced by a superior model, with 'a greater recognition of research projects devoted to the question of women or that touch, directly or indirectly, the questions of women (for instance, those related to work, family, health, etc.)'; in other words, he supports a strategy of integration (Commaille, 1994).

The integration-autonomy debate is an old one, on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet calling upon the spectre of American-style 'ghettoization' in women's studies (a spectre rendered more sinister by parallels oft made in France with nationalism in Eastern and Central Europe) rather than advancing the debate, ignores two important elements that are specific to the French context. First, while I concur that recent advances of French women's studies have resulted from a strategy of integration, this must be attributed more to the efforts of feminist scholars within the constraints of a highly centralized, discipline-based university system, faced with the refusal of authorities to question this system. For authorities, even sympathetic ones, exhorting the status quo as a superior Gallic model is far easier than making change. Second, in France today, supporting a strategy of integration may inadvertently legitimate the recent do-it-yourself approach: scholars in the disciplines, newcomers to women's studies, have recently gained power and authority in the field, in several cases in ignorance of the vast expertise already acquired. In an autonomous department, even 'great men' might be required to familiarize themselves with the state of the art research.

THE PARITY MOVEMENT

Another outcrop of *anti-amér-féminisme* can be observed in the movement for parity democracy, for equal representation of men and women in politics. Both mechanisms, the anti-satanic talisman and the primitive lightning rod, are at work here.

At the outset, *opponents* to parity condemned it as the French equivalent of multiculturalism. It would pave the way to a domestic Yugoslavia and threaten the Republic, they argued. First women, then blacks, homosexuals, Jews, and then, who knows? Maybe vegetarians and anthropologists! Defenders of Republican universalism equate multiculturalism with differentialism, conflating diversity and *la différence*.

Among the early proponents of parity, who rooted their positions in arguments for equality and democracy, things American were rarely mentioned. When they were, e.g. affirmative action, representations tend to be positive even in the midst of the Hill-Thomas affair. Nevertheless, parity became an unspoken, homegrown countermodel to the US.

Sociologist and socialist politician Françoise Gaspard, pioneer of the parity movement, remembers how the word *parity* 'clicked' in France ('Parité: La Révolution . . .', 1999: 81). It provided, I contend, an alternative term to 'feminism', long associated with America. Decades earlier, Françoise Parturier, one of the first to bring back news of a movement from the New World, had written that French women needed to find an alternative to the word 'feminist': 'Why . . . not speak of "feminitude", a word of suffering like negritude, a word of the downtrodden that could please and reassure' (Parturier, 1971). It took nearly 30 years to find that word. From its original use for equal male/female representation in electoral politics, *parité* has become a euphemism for 'equality' and even 'feminism'.

During a later period, parity supporters explicitly deploy *anti-amér-féminisme* in an internal struggle to dominate strategically and ideologically. Understanding that *la différence* is not the same as diversity, they mark their distance from American multiculturalism. Sex difference, they say, is different from other differences. Antoinette Fouque comes into her own, proclaiming in her 1995 book, *Il y a deux sexes*, 'beyond equality and its impasses, the term parity . . . is the confirmation of the defeat of the feminist ideology of sexual *indifferenciation*' (Fouque, 1995: 265). She reiterates her critique of the French Constitution, which, she laments, omits an essential passage: 'every human being is born a boy or a girl, and thus he is a man or a woman for his entire life'. With parity, Fouque continues, the women's movement has entered a new, more mature era in which 'sex difference has been rehabilitated' (Fouque, 1995: 271). One is born with a blue bracelet or a pink bracelet and it sticks to you all the way to the polls.

Fouque's logic is adopted by several important partisans of parity, in particular the philosopher Sylviane Agacinski, wife of former Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. In her article 'Against the Erasure of the Sexes', published on the front page of *Le Monde*, she asserts: 'French women are making a decisive change in the women's movement. In their demand, via parity, for their true share in politics, they clearly reject the *indifferentist* ideology' (Agacinski, 1999).

In this argument, the spectre of American feminism lingers close by. Fouque had warned against 'the politically correct, terrorist version' of parity (Fouque, 1995: 273). For Agacinski, there are problems on both sides of the Franco-American controversy:

The 'French' erasure comes from submerging both sexes in an abstract humanism from which a single model surfaces, that of a sexually neutral human being. The 'American' erasure comes from submerging women in a wholesale particularism in which one finds minorities of all sorts. (Agacinski, 1999)

For Agacinski, thanks to parity, 'the new French feminism simultaneously

rejects both types of neutralization of the sexes by affirming that sexual duality is humankind's only universal difference'.

Fouque takes this another step by elevating parity to the status of model for Europe. After praising the European Community for being favourable to women, she concludes, 'Above all, Europe is the continent of the birth of parity.' During the preparatory stages for the UN Beijing conference, 'even if the idea exists in the US,' she claims, 'it was the Europeans who appeared as the promoters of the idea of parity' (Fouque, 1995).

With parity, we have come full circle. American feminism, sometimes denounced as essentialist, sometimes as egalitarian, but always accused of Puritanism and excesses, served as a tool in the creation of the women's movement's *tendances*, and three decades later helps establish essentialist parity as a countermodel. A model for France, for Europe, for the world.²

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND THE 'WAR OF THE SEXES'

Of all examples of *anti-amér-féminisme*, none is so flagrant as the usage in the debates on sexual harassment, and none so clearly show its impact on social policy. Political sociologist Abigail Saguy, in her comparative study of sexual harassment law in France and the US, shows how various protagonists, most strikingly, members of parliament, have used the association between sexual harassment and American feminism to delegitimize the issue (Saguy, this issue; Saguy, 2000).

Véronique Neiertz, then head of the women's rights division of the Ministry of Labour, initially supported a broad scope for the law she was to introduce, similar to those in the US and the European Community's recommendations. She declared publicly that one must not limit the definition of sexual harassment to an abuse of authority. Along came the Hill-Thomas affair and the *anti-amér-féministe* crescendo. The transmission from the media and their public intellectuals to the legislative process is direct and immediate. In an official report of the French Senate, Senator Franck Serusclat tells how in the US men no longer dare open doors for women, citing as his source, 'recent newspaper articles'. A distinction must be made, the senator goes on, between 'the will to humiliate a woman as such', and what is 'merely flirtatious behaviour' (Sénat, 1992).

Neiertz subsequently toned down her bill, restricting it to harassment by a 'hierarchical superior'³ so as not to condemn sex or seduction. The Socialist Party MP who reported on the bill to the National Assembly lauded it as measured and compatible with French culture (Jenson and Sineau, 1995: 287). As we have already seen, these arguments differ little from those used previously. What is new is how powerful decision-makers, from whom one might expect more rigour, have taken anecdote for data.

This attitude persists. A recent official report explains the distrust French legislators have for 'the slippery slope', or the path taken by 'Anglo-Saxons', and warns that one must 'be careful not to shake up entirely the codes of seduction between men and women' and to 'take into account specific French realities and mentalities' (Conseil d'état, 1999).

As this article goes to press, several developments have revived this debate. A new law has broadened the definition of sexual harassment (Saguy, this issue), a petition is circulating against sexual harassment in the universities, and a specific case has targeted a prominent academic. Predictably, the spectre of America is not far away. No doubt it is one of those countries 'in the grips of the overlapping forces of Puritanism and feminism' to which psychoanalyst Michel Schneider (2002) alludes in his *Le Monde* opinion piece. However, for Schneider, the main enemy is now from within. He decries the 'desexualization' of French society that stems from its 'maternalization'. A dreaded 'Big Mother' and her representatives watch over us, saving us from all that is bad, often being, he assures us, the same things we desire. The impressive list ranges from cigarettes to machismo, mad cow disease to street pick-ups, globalization to STDs. The culprits for him are government and politicians who are supporting the new laws, notably Lionel Jospin. Luckily, he reassures us, the French people are more sensible, as shown by the lack of sexual harassment convictions, proof that the people, at least, do not 'confuse desire and abuse of authority'.

MONICA TO THE RESCUE

The relative moderation in the demonization of American feminism in recent debates is symptomatic of a shift in zeitgeist. Eric Fassin (2001) argues that the 'rhetoric of America' (Jean Pierre Mathy's term) has been freed up for new uses, in part because the quotas of the parity movement offer a French replacement for what was previously an American reference. However, there have always been potential homegrown targets in all past clashes. I would add another source for the decrease in hostility: a former White House intern.

At the outset of the Lewinsky affair, French commentators reacted predictably: it was, they exclaimed, yet another proof of American Puritanism. Then a funny thing happened: even from afar, they were forced to recognize, that apart from the politico-pornographic saga, most Americans cared little about Bill Clinton's sexual infidelities per se, and, moreover, the most common targets of their accusations of Puritanism, American feminists, continued to support the president. The first media response was jubilation: 'We told you so! We knew American feminists

were hypocrites.' The nominally left-wing *Nouvel Observateur* quoted neoconservative Norman Podhoretz as saying that 'the sexgate is in the process of discrediting the American feminist movement' (Daniel, 1998: 65).

Rapidly, however, their tune changed: upon second thought, the whole thing might just be good for American feminists. To begin with, Sara Daniel (1998) wrote, it will push 'the marginal concept of sexual harassment' into the background. 'Flirting will no longer be a crime in American offices', Annie Cojean (1999) adds in *Le Monde*. More important, continues *Le Nouvel Observateur*, the women's movement will benefit: 'designated as responsible for all the excess', it will 'be forced to go through criticism-self-criticism' and 'perhaps finally enter into its age of reason'. Six months apart, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Libération* and *Le Monde* all conclude that there is hope for American feminists. No doubt by reviving their interest in sex and seduction, they will finally see the light and join the ranks of their French sisters in heterosocial harmonious relations.

NOTES

My gratitude to Philippe Roger for his support and for three years of fascinating seminars at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Thanks to Anne Lovell for taking precious time to comment on this article and to send me pertinent documents; to Liliane Kandel and Claire Moses for the ideas they have shared with me in our lively, to put it mildly, discussions; and to Abigail Saguy for providing me with invaluable data, including some unpublished, on sexual harassment.

1. This group, which at one point included in its ranks both Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, owned *des femmes* publishing house and bookstore. It later trademarked 'women's liberation movement' and sued one of the groups who opposed it. The group was an important actor in exporting *l'écriture féminine*, mistakenly called 'French feminism' in many countries.

One interesting illustration of Psych et Po's anti-Americanism appears in an article published in its magazine, on Vietnam shortly after the end of the war in 1975. In an issue whose front cover announces that 'Women expel the American rapists from their land', a full spread appeared with two articles, one on the French, the other on the American war. The short article on the French war specifically singles out 'French colonialists' whereas the long article on the US war condemns 'Americans' and 'the US', holding the people and the nation in their entirety responsible for the atrocities ('Les Femmes chassent les violeurs . . .', 1975).

2. Many French feminists have condemned – and I share their critiques – the essentialist turn taken in defence of parity, essentialism having previously occupied a fairly marginal place in the women's movement and even in the parity movement itself. No doubt they feel vindicated in their belief that the concept of parity is by its nature essentialist. However, within the parity movement there have been proposals rooted in different philosophies, such as Françoise Gaspard's proposal for a temporary law, or Gail Pheterson's and my own for translating affirmative action into an idea with a strong tradition in Europe, that of historical reparations.

4. Of course, partisans of the French law, in arguing that there had to be a 'hierarchical relationship' – meaning professional or class hierarchy – for there to be abuse of power, disregard feminists' crucial insight into gender hierarchy.

REFERENCES

- Agacinski, Sylviane (1999) 'Contre l'effacement des sexes', *Le Monde* 6 February: 1ff.
- Albistur, Maïte and Daniel Armogathe (1977) *L'Histoire du féminisme du moyen âge à nos jours*. Paris: Editions des femmes.
- Badinter, Elizabeth (1991) 'La Chasse aux sorciers', *Nouvel Observateur*.
- Bard, Christine (1999) 'Les Antiféminismes de la deuxième vague', pp. 301–28 in C. Bard (ed.) *Un siècle d'antiféminisme*. Paris: Fayard.
- Bercoff, André (1971) 'Femmes: toutes griffes dehors', *Express* 15–21 April.
- Bishop, Tom, ed. (2001) *Les Antiaméricanismes*, Florence Gould Lecture, Spring. Proceedings of conference organized with Philippe Roger and Yves Hersant. New York: NYU Center for French Civilization and Culture.
- Bruckner, Pascal (1993) 'La Croisade de Susan', *Le Nouvel Observateur* 15–21 April.
- Bruckner, Pascal (1995) *La Tentation de l'innocence*. Paris: Grasset.
- Chroniques d'une imposture* (1981) Paris: Association mouvement pour les luttes féministes.
- Cojean, Annick (1999) 'The Main Victim of the Lewinsky Scandal is "Sexual Correctness"', *Le Monde* 16 February.
- Commaille, Jacques (1994) 'Études et recherches sur les femmes: Quelques axes et perspectives', Annexe 4 du rapport 'Les Femmes en France: 1985–1995'.
- Conseil d'état (1999) 'Projet de loi concernant la protection contre le harcèlement sexuel sur les lieux de travail. Avis du Conseil d'état', 26 janvier; available at: www.etat.lu/CE/html/43804.html
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1992) 'Whose Story Is It Anyway? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill', p. 403 in Toni Morrison (ed.) *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*. New York: Pantheon.
- Daniel, Sara (1998) 'Féministes au secours de Clinton', *Le Nouvel Observateur* 24–30 September: 64–5.
- Delphy, Christine (1995) 'The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move', *Yale French Studies* 87.
- De Pisan Sugier, Annie and Anne Tristan Zelenski (1977) *Histoires du MLF*. Paris: Calman-Levy.
- Dhavernas, Marie Jo (1980) 'Des divans profonds comme des tombeaux', *La Revue d'en face* 8.
- Dupont, Pascal (1996) *L'Amour en guerre*. Paris: Seuil.
- 'Être Ensemble, Travailler Ensemble: Qui Organise Quoi?' (n.d.) *Le Torchon brûle* 5, 17.
- Ezekiel, Judith (1995a) 'Anti-féminisme et anti-américanisme: un mariage politiquement réussi', *Nouvelles questions féministes* 17(1): 59–76.
- Ezekiel, Judith (1995b) 'Le "Spectre de la victime": femmes, féminisme en Amérique aujourd'hui', *Les Temps modernes* 593: 167–200.
- Fassin, Eric (2001) 'Good Cop, Bad Cop. Modèle et contre modèle américains dans le discours libéral français depuis les années 1980', *Raisons politiques* 1 (February–April): 77–87.
- Fauré, Christine and Tom Bishop, eds (1992) *L'Amérique des français*. Paris: Bourin.

- Fouque, Antoinette (1995) *Il y a 2 sexes: essais de féminologie 1989–1995*. Paris: Galimard.
- Giroud, Françoise (1970) 'Fragile comme un homme'. *Express* 31 August–6 September: 43.
- Halimi, Serge (2000) 'Les "Philo-américains" saisis par la rage', *Le Monde diplomatique* May: 10.
- Hoff-Sommers, Christina (1994) *Who Stole Feminism?* New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Hollander, Paul (1992) *Anti-Americanism: Critiques at Home and Abroad 1965–1990*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Horsman, Reginald (1986) *Race and Manifest Destiny: Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jenson, Jane and Mariette Sineau (1995) *Mitterrand et les françaises: un rendez-vous manqué*. Paris: Presses de la fondation national des sciences politiques.
- Kauffman, Sylvie (1996) 'Les Américaines sont à l'aise dans leur baskets', *Le Monde*.
- Lacorne, Denis et al., eds (1986) *L'Amérique dans les têtes*. Paris: Hachette.
- 'Les Femmes chassent les violeurs américains de leur terre' (1975) Dossier, *Quotidien des femmes* 3.
- Lévy-Willard, Annette (1993) 'Aux Fausses soeurs américaines', *Liberation* 8 March: 7.
- 'Libération des femmes, année zero' (1970) *Partisans* 54–55 (July–October).
- Lichtenstein, Jacqueline (1991) 'Le Mouvement des femmes aux Etats-Unis: envers et endroits du puritanisme', abstracts from the conference 'Les Formes nouvelles de l'antiféminisme contemporain', Centre Georges Pompidou, 28–29 November.
- Lubecki, Jacek (1994) 'Women's Studies', *Sciences humaines* 42 (August–September): 38–9.
- Marchand, Stéphane (1995) 'Etats-Unis: le féminisme du ressentiment', *Figaro* 4 September.
- Martory, Pierre (1971) 'La Révolte des femmes', *Paris Match* 15 May.
- Morrison, Toni, ed. (1992) *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*. New York: Pantheon.
- Moses, Claire Goldberg (1998) 'Made in America: "French Feminism" in Academia', *Feminist Studies* 24(2): 241–74.
- Ozouf, Mona (1995) *Les Mots des femmes: essai sur la singularité française*. Paris: Fayard.
- 'Parité: la révolution que divise' (1999) *Le Nouvel Observateur* 14–20 January.
- Parturier, Françoise (1971) 'Naissance d'un nouveau féminisme', *Figaro* 2–3 January.
- Picq, Françoise (1995) 'Le Féminisme, une redéfinition des identités?', pp. 328–35 in Ephasia (ed.) *La Place des femmes: les enjeux de l'identité et de l'égalité au regard des sciences sociales*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Ringart, Nadja (1977) 'La Naissance d'une sect', *Libération* 1 June (reprinted in *Chroniques d'une imposture*, Paris: Association mouvement pour les luttes féministes, 1981).
- Roger, Phillipe (2002) *L'Ennemie américain: Une Généologie de l'antiaméricanisme français*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- Saguy, Abigail (2000) 'Defining Sexual Harassment in France and the United States 1975–1998', dissertation, Princeton University.
- Schneider, Michel (2002) 'Désir, vous avez dit désir?', *Le Monde* 6 March.
- Sénat (1992) 'Rapport fait au nom de la Commission des Affaires Sociales sur le projet de loi relatif à l'abus d'autorité en matière sexuelle dans les relations

de travail et modifiant le code du travail et le code de procédure pénale', Seconde session ordinaire de 1991-92, annexe au procès verbal de la séance du 19 mai.

'Un groupe de filles de Toulouse' (n.d.) 'Toulouse Tranche'. *Le Torchon brûle* 5, 18. Wittig, Monique et al. (1970) 'Combat pour la libération de la femme', *L'Idiot international* May: 13ff.

Judith Ezekiel is the author of *Feminism in the Heartland* (Ohio State University Press, 2002) and articles on American feminism and on French women's studies, published in journals such as *Les Temps modernes*, *Nouvelles questions féministes* and *Women's Studies Quarterly*. She earned her PhD from the University of Paris-VIII, and is currently an associate professor at the University of Toulouse-Mirail where she teaches US women's history and social movements and is a member of the Simone-SAGESSE research centre. She is cofounder of Women's International Studies Europe (WISE) and the Worldwide Organization of Women's Studies; she created and runs the electronic discussion lists WISE-L and *etudes-feministes-l*. She is an associate editor of the *European Journal of Women's Studies*. [email: ezekiel@univ-tlse2.fr]

