Introduction

In December 1837 the French education minister, Count Achille de Salvandy, named Eugénie Chevreau-Lemercier to the July Monarchy's newly created post of "general delegate" for nursery schools (*déléguée générale pour les salles d'asile*). Chevreau-Lemercier later termed this "the first time that a woman was officially charged with a task of this nature," presumably unaware of a different precedent set before the Revolution of 1789 by "the king's midwife," Angélique Le Boursier du Coudray, paid by the royal government to instruct midwives throughout France.[1] Although not the first woman school inspector, Chevreau-Lemercier was the first one who served the national government and had responsibility for more than a single city or department. Her thirty-year career begins the history of women holding the type of administrative post of responsibility treated in this study: a post requiring extensive knowledge of laws and decrees regulating a public institution, and often entailing supervisory or regulatory authority over other persons. These positions were significant because they long represented the most prestigious professional employment available to French women at a given moment. As state-sponsored efforts to define suitable activity for women in the public sphere, such jobs were also focal points for disputes over changing gender roles. Several generations of professional women figure in this history of women administrators' careers and relationship to the French state and larger society between 1837 and post-Second World War decades.

The appointment of Chevreau-Lemercier and other nineteenth-century inspectresses also raises issues prominent in historians' recent assessments of the impact of the Revolution of 1789 on women's roles in the public and private spheres. Joan Landes's *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (1988) is but one of the studies singling out Jean-Jacques Rousseau's educational treatise *Emile* (1762)

[1] Eugénie Chevreau-Lemercier, *Essai sur l'inspection générale des salles d'asile* (Paris, 1848), 5; Nina Rattner Gelbart, *The King's Midwife: A History and Mystery of Madame du Coudray* (Berkeley, 1998).

for its foreshadowing of revolutionary and republican decisions that formally excluded women from the rights of citizenship, the universalist language of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen notwithstanding. Rousseau's assumptions about innate personality differences between men and women dictated different social destinies for his characters: a public role for Emile and child rearing and housework for Sophie. Jürgen Habermas's influential book on the emergence of a new eighteenth-century "bourgeois public sphere" treated that sphere as a space intermediate between the royal government and private households, wherein occurred critical discussion of government policy – discussion that contributed to destabilizing the Bourbon Monarchy and Old Regime. Some privileged women participated in the salons where such discussion unfolded, and some found outlets for publishing, but women had no place in the public assemblies launched by the Revolution of 1789. Indeed, Lynn Hunt presented the Revolution as a "family romance," whereby sons overthrew paternal authority but denied sisters some of the rights claimed for men in a reordered society.[2]

In 1793, as the Convention outlawed women's political clubs, André Amar of the Committee on General Security explained why women should not have political rights:

> because they would be obliged to sacrifice the more important cares to which nature calls them. The private functions for which women are destined by their very nature are related to the general order of society; this social order results from the differences between man and woman. Each sex is called to the kind of occupation which is fitting for it.[3]

Subsequently Napoleon I, scornful of the "weakness of the brains of women, the changeableness of their ideas," enshrined differences between male and female rights in the civil code of 1804, particularly the famed requirement of wifely obedience to husbands.[4] During the revolutionary year of 1848, the positivist philosopher Auguste Comte reiterated that "public life belongs to men and women's existence is

[2] Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, eds., *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France* (Ithaca, 1996); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance and the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1992); Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Sacre du citoyen, histoire du suffrage universel en France* (Paris, 1992).

[3] Quoted in Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson, eds., *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795* (Urbana, 1979), 215.

[4] Ferdinand Buisson, *Nouveau dictionnaire de pédagogie*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1911), s.v. "Légion d'honneur (Maisons d'éducation de la)" and "Filles (Instruction primaire, secondaire et supérieure des)."

essentially domestic," adding that civilization "constantly develops" and perfects "this natural diversity."[5]

To respond to such rigid divisions of gendered spheres of activity and to claim "the rights of man" for women, revolutionary-era feminists like Olympe de Gouges (beheaded in 1793) or Jeanne Deroin (active in 1848) proffered arguments incorporating notions of both gender equality and difference. Indeed, nineteenth-century feminists in France and elsewhere frequently contended that women's unique contributions to society warranted their equal sharing in the "universal" rights of man – feminists thereby creating the blends of gender equality and difference termed "paradoxes" by Joan Scott.[6]

Against the backdrop of political decisions and cultural values excluding women from the public sphere, the appointment of inspectresses like Chevreau-Lemercier may seem surprising. If both nature and civilization presumably dictated the existence of separate masculine and feminine spheres, why did the nineteenth-century French state begin hiring women for certain public functions? A discourse on women's roles that acquired new significance after the Revolution provides one answer. Both traditionalists and reformers increasingly emphasized women's role in the transmission of not only moral but also social values to children. Recognition of mothers' influence as the first educators of children had figured in the late seventeenth-century treatises of the abbé Fénelon and his ally, Mme de Maintenon: critical of aristocratic women prominent in salon society, both moralized that women should concentrate on household duties.[7] After the revolutionary and Napoleonic years, as conservatives and reformers vied to control the apparatus of an increasingly powerful French state, the social role of the "mother-educator" (*mère-éducatrice*) assumed new importance; and if mothers were to inculcate "correct" attitudes, they too needed knowledge of public issues.[8]

In response to both political concerns and many families' new demands for schooling for children of both sexes in a changing society, the nineteenth-century French state gradually expanded educational

[5] *Discours sur l'ensemble du positivisme* (1848), quoted in Michèle Riot-Sarcey, *La Démocratie à l'épreuve des femmes, trois figures critiques du pouvoir 1830–1848* (Paris, 1994), 14.

[6] Karen M. Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (1988): 119–57; Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996). See also Mona Ozouf, *Les Mots des femmes, essai sur la singularité française* (Paris, 1995).

[7] Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton, 1976), 173–87.

[8] Pierre Rosanvallon, *L'Etat en France de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris, 1990); Barbara Corrado Pope, "Maternal Education in France, 1815–1848," *PWSFH* 3 (1976): 368–77.

opportunities for girls as well as boys. Official rhetoric underscored the moral and social value of girls' education, but some families, particularly in towns and cities, also wanted daughters, like sons, to acquire knowledge and skills which might prove useful for earning a living, should that necessity arise. Women teachers were preferred for nursery schools and girls' schools because of the common belief that innate maternal qualities gave them special understanding and skills, although there was disagreement over whether nuns possessed such qualities to the same extent as lay women.[9] Indeed, women teachers were the first large group of employed women to benefit from "maternalism," defined by Seth Koven and Sonya Michel as "political discourses and strategies" which celebrated "women's capacity to mother" and insisted that society would profit if motherhood was "transformed . . . from women's primary *private* responsibility into *public* policy."[10]

Like the growth of nineteenth-century French education, chronicled by François Furet and Jacques Ozouf and by Raymond Grew and Patrick Harrigan, the state's appointment of limited numbers of inspectresses was a response to intertwined political, social, economic, and cultural changes.[11] The first rationales for their appointment built, not surprisingly, upon the same set of assumptions about gender that favored maintaining Catholic schools' separation of boys and girls, even though coeducation in *écoles mixtes* long remained the norm in many poor villages.

The four chapters of Part 1 chronicle, from several perspectives, the history of the first inspectresses' gender-specific assignments in schools, prisons and correctional institutions, public assistance, and workplaces. Politicians and higher-level administrators, the creators of inspectresses' jobs, provided official rationales for their roles and fielded criticisms of them. With varying degrees of enthusiasm, administrative superiors and male colleagues evaluated inspectresses' execution of duties. Inspectresses also had much to say about the nature and significance of their responsibilities. As women who moved from the home into a public

[9] Linda L. Clark, *Schooling the Daughters of Marianne: Textbooks and the Socialization of Girls in Modern French Primary Schools* (Albany, 1984); Rebecca Rogers, *Les Demoiselles de la Légion d'honneur au 19e siècle* (Paris, 1992); Sharif Gemie, *Women and Schooling in France, 1815–1914: Gender, Authority, and Identity in the Female Schooling Sector* (Keele, 1995).

[10] Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York, 1993), 2–4.

[11] François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, *Lire et écrire, l'alphabétisation des français*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1977); Raymond Grew and Patrick J. Harrigan, *School, State, and Society: The Growth of Elementary Schooling in Nineteenth-Century France, A Quantitative Analysis* (Ann Arbor, 1991).

sphere, they had to respond to critics who contested such public roles for women. Inspectresses not only echoed male officials' pronouncements but also sometimes tried to expand their range of duties and to advocate appointing more women administrators. Based on the personnel files of more than eighty pre-1914 inspectresses and on some inspectresses' private papers and publications, Part 1 treats these women administrative pioneers and gives prominence to their voices and interactions with colleagues and the clienteles served. Still other contemporary perspectives on the significance of women's new positions of administrative authority appeared in commentary by feminists, appreciative of trailblazing appointments which demonstrated women's talents, and in contrasting antifeminist commentary penned by worried moralists and critics.

While statements about women's valuable maternal and intuitive qualities frequently colored the discourse of both official sponsors of inspectresses and inspectresses themselves, critics could reshape such themes into arguments against inspectresses' very existence. Indeed, after France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, concern about depopulation mounted, and attention to France's lower birth rate, in comparison to that of Imperial Germany, prompted public debate about the relationship between women's roles in the workplace and both low birth rates and high infant mortality rates.[12] Inspectresses, like contemporary feminists, responded to allegations that women's work outside the home harmed the French family. The pointed French debate over inspectresses and their roles was only one aspect of the widespread contesting of changing gender roles in western societies by 1900, but it was particularly important because it illustrated both possibilities for and limits to women's achievement in the professional arena.

The emergence of the woman professional looms large thematically in Parts 1 and 2. When the July Monarchy (1830–48) and Second Empire (1852–70) appointed the first inspectresses, women lacked access to the advanced formal education and diplomas held by men in the liberal professions or highest administrative ranks. Although women comprised nearly 31 percent of France's labor force by 1866, most worked in agriculture, domestic service, or clothing and textile production in

[12] Rachel G. Fuchs, "Introduction" to "Forum" on "Population and the State in the Third Republic," *FHS* 19 (Spring 1996): 633–38; Joshua H. Cole, "'There Are Only Good Mothers': The Ideological Work of Women's Fertility in France before World War I," *FHS* 19 (Spring 1996), 639–72; Jean Elisabeth Pedersen, "Regulating Abortion and Birth Control: Gender, Medicine, and Republican Politics in France, 1870–1920," *FHS* 19 (Spring 1996), 673–98.

workshops, factories, or at home.[13] Historians of the professions have underscored the centralized French state's important role in defining certification requirements for medicine and engineering, and historians of women have done the same for the development of primary and secondary school teaching, the first women's profession. The Third Republic (1870–1940), in particular, improved the training of lay women teachers.[14] Over time, procedures for appointing inspectresses, like those for other categories of male administrators, also evolved: success on competitive entrance examinations replaced special favors for individuals known to ministers and advisers.[15]

Yet in comparison to women teachers, women administrators have been relatively neglected. Susan Bachrach ably treated women in the postal, telegraph, and telephone service before the First World War, and Judith Wishnia included women in a study of lower-level civil servants "proletarianized" during the Third Republic; but, with the exception of Guy Thuillier's brief survey, the history of women in positions of administrative responsibility has been largely overlooked.[16] France's higher-ranking women administrators warrant attention because their assignments, like those of the first generation of women secondary school professors and normal school directors, represented the maximum degree of professional opportunity available to several generations of better educated and ambitious women. Furthermore, unlike the women heading France's sex-segregated secondary schools or departmental normal schools for primary teachers, the inspectresses and, later, the first professional women in central government offices functioned in public spaces not previously or generally regarded as a female domain.

[13] P. Bairoch, T. Deldycke, H. Gelders, and J.-M. Limbor, *La Population active et sa structure* (Brussels, 1968), 174. In 1866 most working women were in agriculture (48 percent), manufacturing (26 percent), or domestic service (15 percent).

[14] Gerald L. Geison, ed., *Professions and the French State, 1700–1900* (Philadelphia, 1984); Jo Burr Margadant, *Madame le Professeur: Women Educators in the Third Republic* (Princeton, 1990); Anne Quartararo, *Women Teachers and Popular Education in Nineteenth-Century France: Social Values and Corporate Identity at the Normal School Institution* (Newark, Del., 1995).

[15] Clive H. Church, *Revolution and Red Tape: The French Ministerial Bureaucracy, 1770–1850* (Oxford, 1981); William M. Reddy, "'Mériter votre bienveillance,' les employés du ministère de l'intérieur en France de 1814 à 1848," *Mouvement social*, no. 170 (1995): 7–37.

[16] Susan Bachrach, *Dames Employées: The Feminization of Postal Work in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York, 1983); Judith Wishnia, *The Proletarianizing of the Fonctionnaires: Civil Service Workers and the Labor Movement under the Third Republic* (Baton Rouge, 1990); Guy Thuillier, *Les Femmes dans l'administration depuis 1900* (Paris, 1988) and *La Bureaucratie en France aux dix-neuvième et vingtième siècles* (Paris, 1987), 549–85. See also Katrin Schultheiss, "The Republican Nurse: Church, State, and Women's Work in France, 1880–1922" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1994).

The expansion of higher-level administrative opportunities for women thus mirrors an important evolution – albeit a contested one – in the attitudes of the state and society toward women's appropriate roles outside the home. The situation of France's pioneering women officials also invites comparisons with that of counterparts in other countries.

After the First World War and the tragic loss of French manpower, many women found new employment opportunities in central government offices, and some gained access to ranks in the professional civil service barred to them before 1914. Part 2 examines women's steps toward equality in administrative employment since the First World War, focusing particularly on higher-ranking women pioneers during the interwar decades. Whereas prewar inspectresses had gender-specific duties, the women finally admitted to central administrations' professional ranks did work formerly reserved to men, as Chapter 5 notes. In turn, rationales for women's new place in interwar offices often stressed their intellectual equality with men, rather than gender differences, frequently linking egalitarian claims to women's increasing enrollments in universities. Such emphasis on women's intellectual and professional equality with men was significant, for it represented an adjusting of notions about gender at a time when France still resisted votes for women – unlike the United States, England, Weimar Germany, or other western nations which enfranchised women soon after the First World War.

Against that interwar political backdrop, it is not surprising that women's expanded administrative roles also encountered critics and challengers, especially during the Depression decade surveyed in Chapter 6. Nor is it surprising that certain ministries and duties continued to be considered more appropriate for women than others, as Chapter 7 demonstrates. During the Second World War, under the collaborationist Vichy regime treated in Chapter 8, higher-level women administrators faced new threats to their jobs, but, paradoxically, for some this troubled setting eventually provided new opportunities, often extending beyond 1944. Women whose careers began during the Third Republic remain central in Chapter 8 and the final chapter on developments since 1945. With the award of the vote in 1944, women at last achieved formal equality with men as citizens, yet for women aspiring to higher-level administrative careers tensions remained between formal equality and deeply rooted ideas about gender differences.

In Part 2, as in Part 1, individual careers and women's perceptions of them provide revealing illustrations of changing gender roles and constructions of such roles in relationship to the state. For a limited number of cases, interviews and correspondence with former civil servants

proved an invaluable supplement to archival and published records. Nonetheless, personnel files remain the essential documentary basis, although a 1979 law restricts their usage for persons born within the last 120 years. Thus individual examples in Part 2 often omit a person's name; when names are cited, it is because information comes from published sources and unrestricted archives, or because some women who graciously consented to interviews or wrote informative letters did not request anonymity.

Part 1

Defining a feminine sphere of action, 1830–1914

1 Public roles for maternal authority: the introduction of inspectresses, 1830–1870

> The inspection of nursery schools (*salles d'asile*) can be done usefully and correctly only by women . . . Inspectresses will intimidate less and will persuade more readily than men can.
>
> Eugénie Chevreau-Lemercier (1848)

Madame Chevreau-Lemercier's appointment as the first national nursery school inspectress in 1837 was but one part of the July Monarchy's larger effort to address a host of social, economic, and political problems which might drive the populace to unruly behavior. Schools were a central concern of the government of King Louis-Philippe, the Orleanist installed after Parisian crowds doomed the second Bourbon Restoration king, Charles X, in July 1830. Education minister François Guizot sponsored the law of 28 June 1833, often dubbed the "charter of primary education" because it required each commune to provide a public primary school.[1] Four years later Salvandy issued official guidelines for a newer institution which combined educational and charitable functions, the *salle d'asile* or nursery school.[2] Each measure demonstrated the importance attached to education in a country facing not only the continuing problem of adjusting its political system to the ideals of liberty and equality enshrined by the Revolution of 1789 but also the substantial changes resulting from industrialization and urbanization in some areas. Schools could benefit both employers and workers in an economy where reading and writing seemed more useful than during an agrarian past.[3] They were also a vehicle for inculcating moral values and disciplined habits, prized by government and employers alike, particularly as unrest among urban workers continued after the Revolution of 1830.

[1] Joseph N. Moody, *French Education since Napoleon* (Syracuse, 1978), 42.
[2] Jean-Noël Luc, *La petite enfance à l'école, XIXe–XXe siècles, textes officiels relatifs aux salles d'asile, aux écoles maternelles, aux classes et sections enfantines (1829–1981) présentés et annotés* (Paris, 1982), 66–74.
[3] Furet and Ozouf, *Lire et écrire*. Literacy rates in some urban areas actually dropped during early industrialization.