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What really is new under the spotlight? (Re)-discovering parents and parenting in France:

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Introduction

As in many other European and non-European countries, an explicit parenting support policy made its way onto the French political agenda during the early 1990s: a 'turn to parenting' complete with its trail of new terms, instruments and institutions. In France, some decision-makers now consider this parenting support policy (*politique de soutien à la parentalité*) as a new, but still financially marginal, 'pillar of French family policy'. It responds to a growing political demand for a solution capable of guaranteeing the success of the parental educational mission, or at the very least of helping avoid its failure, as well as the consequences of such a failure for the entire community.

One may well wonder, however, whether this policy represents a real innovation or merely the revival of a longstanding tradition of 'policing families'. In spite of this well-known tradition that first emerged in the 18th

century, which has been thoroughly documented by historians, many international experts argue that we are at a turning point (Daly, 2013a) and engaging in a new 'parenting culture', combining moral panic with acute risk consciousness (Furedi, 2008; Lee and al., 2014). One of the main issues is thus the question of change. What's new under the spotlight?

In this paper, we analyse the French case, in a bid to clarify this question. We argue that the slow policy process that led to current French parenting support policy is at once the consequence of a political desire to structure and manage a myriad of grassroots initiatives, and the outcome of an ideological battle (Martin, 2014). This battle brings into conflict fundamental alternatives pitting universalism against targeting, parental empowering against parental control, offering support to parents via services versus re-educating them through advice and behavioural training, and local and community actions versus national regulatory actions. A fiercely-fought battle of ideas around the parenting issue is taking place behind the scenes, mixing old and new ideas, reactivating norms and stereotypes that are deeply rooted in our social history concerning the private and public spheres respectively as well as the respective roles of mothers, fathers and public institutions.

While mapping the field of positions and presenting the arguments of a selection of actors of this policy framing in the French context ¹, we stress the reactivation of old and deep-rooted oppositions and controversies between left- and right- wing parties as well as between republican and Catholic milieux, concerning family, private life issues and the challenge of secularization.

Although parenting support does indeed concern many European and non-European countries, following a mainstream of ideas, instruments and issues, we argue that the French configuration has certain specificities that need to be addressed, not only in order to estimate the commonalities but also to avoid making hasty generalisations. Our paper is organised in three steps: first, consideration of the hypothesis of an international turn to parenting; second, a presentation of the policy process and arguments in the French configuration; third, a return to a very longstanding tradition of policing family and, finally a conclusion on our main question: “What really is new?”

An international turn to parenting

According to the analysis of the past 25 years, it seems clear that parenting is becoming a new issue at international level, as well as one that is commonly admitted to. The first common indicator of a change is

¹ This paper is based on a collective research project funded by four national research agencies (France, England, Germany and the Netherlands): the PolChi research (see <http://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/213091.html>). In France our material is based on a systematic analysis of official reports at national and international level, as well as interviews with 20 experts and high-ranking civil servants involved in this policy domain in France and 20 professionals in charge of implementing the policy at local level. See the report Martin et al. 2014.

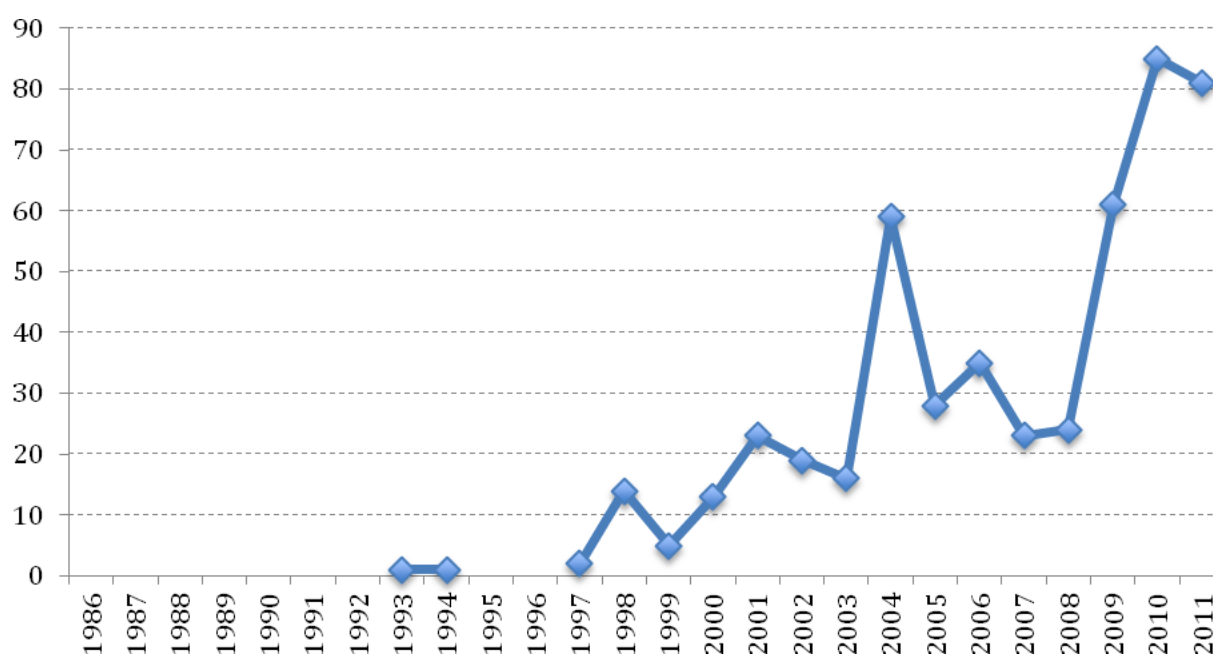
certainly the adoption and spread of new terms. This is currently the case in English, with the verb “parent” and noun “parenting”, as well as in French with the noun “parentalité” (and “parentage” in Québécois). These terms are not substitutes for previous and well-established others such as family, parenthood or kinship. Indeed, the emergence of these neologisms in the two languages is relatively recent and has been gradually integrated, over the past two decades or so, to the lexicon of public decision-makers, politicians, media and professionals working in the field of childhood and the family, as well as the health education and disease prevention sector.

Ellie Lee underlines this popularity in the introduction to the book she co-edited on *Parenting Culture Studies* and indicates that the number of books about parenting more than doubled between 1980 and 2000 (Lee et al., 2014, p. 5). To give another example of this success, a basic consultation of the SAGE documentary, using *parenting* as keyword provides access to almost 21,000 published articles, 15,600 of which (almost 75%) have been published since January 2000, mainly in the following disciplinary fields: Psychology, Public Health, Sociology, *Youth Studies* and *Behavioural Sciences*². Last but not least, in the French

² . The popularity of this keyword is such that a new journal entitled *Parenting, Science and Practice* was created in 2001, defining its field as: “*Parenting: Science and Practice* strives to promote the exchange of empirical findings, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches from all disciplines that help to define and advance theory, research, and practice in parenting, caregiving, and childrearing broadly construed... The journal brings parenting to science and science to parenting”, see <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=hpar20>

context, we can mention the explosion of the word match frequency of the term *parentalité* in the media, as noted by Julien Damon (see figure 1)

Occurences of the term "parentalité" in AFP (Agence France Presse) publications



Source: AFP cited in Damon, 2012, p. 167.

Although the French expression *parentalité* at once integrates the meanings of both parenthood and parenting (leading to a certain amount of misunderstanding), both neologisms - parenting and *parentalité* - indicate a new focus on the role of parents, regardless of gender: mothers

and fathers. For Mary Daly (2013b), the apparent gender neutrality of the term 'parent' with regard to the respective roles of mother and father, is not so much a proactive strategy in defence of the idea that the parental role is (or should be) less and less gendered (more gender neutral), as a way of denying this gender issue in parenting matters (gender blindness). Other experts argue that this 'neutral' term could also refer to the extension to fathers of the normative messages and prescriptions traditionally addressed to mothers alone.

Be that as it may, as Ellie Lee argues: "the message to mothers (and also fathers) is that the health, welfare and success (or lack of it) of their children can be directly attributed to the decisions they make about matters like feeding their children; 'parenting', parents are told, is both the hardest and most important job in the world. Tomorrow depends on it" (Lee et al., 2014:2).

Without returning to the emergence and roots of these notions of parenting and *parentalité* themselves, and their anchorage in various theoretical and disciplinary backgrounds (see Martin 2012a), we might note that these terms aim to focus on parent and on parental practices and their impact on children. As New Labour aptly formulated it, parenting is "what parents do rather than what they are" (cited by Lewis, 2012, p. 102). One could add: "what they should do". The nature of parenting support is thus to 'support' and 'educate' parents in their child-rearing

role” (Daly & Bray, 2015: 634) - to socialise these primary actors of socialisation.

Out of the debates and institutional reforms concerning childhood and private issues over recent decades, a second argument aimed at identifying change has emerged: a new backdrop. One crucial impetus that must be mentioned is the 1989 signature of the international Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) - in other words the recognition that children have specific interests that must be guaranteed. Another contextual element is the impact of the Dutroux affair on public opinion in 1996. Many other family tragedies have occurred since then, demonstrating the need to protect children from potential harm from parents (and other adults). Since the beginning of the 1990s, the general issue of a ‘risk society’ has developed dramatically. This also affects family and private life, particularly when youth delinquency is presented as a result of parenting (ir)responsibility. Although these issues are highly controversial among experts and political actors, they impose a double-edged risk in case of failure of the parent-child relationship: the child is either a victim or a threat, as he or she grows older, yet the parent is always to blame.

A third level of change refers to family policy reforms in different countries³ - and more precisely the development of a parenting support

³ . For a development of these national cases, see the special issue “Parenting support in European countries” edited by Mary Daly in the *Social Policy and Society*, vol 14, (4), 2015. See also Boddy et al. (2009); Richter et al. (2012); Ramaekers & Suissa (2012).

policy as such. As Daly and Bray (2015) argue, parenting support seems better established in England than in many other European countries, following a turning point initiated by *New Labour* between 1997 and 2010. Jane Lewis (2011) has undertaken a detailed analysis of this process. Over time, this parenting policy has shifted away from mainly targeting those parents whose children and adolescents present anti-social behaviour problems, towards a territorially-organized universal policy. A 'commissioner' is charged with its local implementation, combined with recourse to evidence-based programmes. Despite the limitations of this investment, which presupposed recourse to costly, commodified programmes (for the training of contributors), this policy was continued by the coalition government which succeeded New Labour in 2010 - even though this government was extremely concerned with reducing public spending. According to Mary Daly and Rachel Bray, the nature of the Labour government's concern about poverty and inequality among children as well as the availability of a number of evidence-based programmes and a fascination at the time with their supposed efficacy explain why parenting support grew so quickly in England (Daly & Bray, 2015).

An analogous trend is readable in other countries. For example, starting from the longstanding experience of public child healthcare centres, mainly oriented towards public health and prevention issues (vaccinations, weight monitoring, physical development as well as motor and language skills), the Netherlands turned, with the new Youth Act in 2005, towards

the prevention of negative childrearing practices with increasingly systematic recourse to evidence-based programmes for parents, demonstrating this strong concern for proof and validation (particularly at the *Dutch Centres for Youth and Family*; 2008-2011). This change went hand in hand with a coming together of policy on youth and the family (Knijn & Hopman, 2015). The process was slower in Germany, where it was not until 2010-2011 that family policy turned to this type of programme, mainly by pursuing a similar, public health approach via a return to old interventions such as *Familienhebeammen* (midwives) (Ostner & Stolberg, 2015). This primacy of public health is also discernible in choices made in Sweden from 2009-2010, with the same recourse to standardized programmes - even though enthusiasm for it has waned somewhat in this country in recent years (Lundqvist, 2015).

In this process of defining national parenting support policies, it is important to add the incentive role played by European institutions. Even though these policies are a matter for individual member states, it is undeniable that the EU has facilitated the circulation of ideas and methods, thus contributing to the definition of orientations and suggesting best practices. Three publications can be mentioned on this issue in the course of the 2000s. First, the publication by a committee of experts on childhood and the family, under the auspices of the Council of Europe in 2006, entitled: 'Parenting in contemporary Europe: a positive approach' (Daly, 2007). With its recommendation prioritising *positive parenting*, the Council of Europe opened a new chapter - that is, "parental behaviour

guaranteeing that the interests of the child will be fulfilled" which, for the first time, unambiguously prioritized the relationship between parents and children as an object of intervention.

The 2007 report of the European Network of National Observatories on Childhood (ChildOn, 2007), entitled *Survey on the Role of Parents and the Support from the Governments in the EU in 2007* followed the same orientation, promoting socio-educational parent support, in the form of advice and counselling services. In 2012, a report ordered by the European Commission from *RAND Europe*⁴, entitled *Parenting Support Policy Brief* (European Commission, 2012), finally offered a general synthesis on the issue by placing it within its historical context and defining its principles and philosophy, prior to describing national experiences that highlight best practices. The RAND report also argues for the necessary shift towards a *Social Investment State*, with explicit references to the works of Anthony Giddens, Gösta Esping-Andersen and James Heckman, who was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics (2000) for his idea of 'capitalizing later in life' thanks to an investment in early childhood to avoid future expenditure (European Commission, 2012, p. 7 and following).

⁴ . An international think-tank of experts, founded in California in 1945, and issuing opinions on a great many research and development questions.

The French turn to parenting

The policy that took shape in France during the 1990s seems to have taken a similar – yet original – trajectory (Hamel et al., 2012; Martin, 2014 and 2015). As in other European countries, it mixes a variety of logics and objectives, blending new types of intervention, professionals and techniques with pre-existing ones. It also combines local initiatives on the ground with new official national institutions to supervise and regulate them. Overall, this policy framing mainly appears to be a recognition by public authorities, in the late 1990s, of a myriad of practical grassroots initiatives at local level and ultimately (and this seems to be a formal turning point) the creation of a new national institution: the *Comité national de soutien à la parentalité* (National parenting support committee). Created in 2010, this committee is currently the official governance body for parenting policy as such in France.

Initiatives aimed at supporting families in their educational role already have a long history in France. Our interviewees in the PolChi project have identified some key moments in this framing. Though not going as far back as the creation of the *école des parents* in 1930, one of the experts we interviewed for the Polchi research presented the beginning as follows:

« Concerning the key dates, it is important to go back to the free nursery at the Sorbonne University in 1968 – it was in a way the first parental nursery, and one of the first initiatives to accompany the family transformations of the 1970s. It arose out of civil society

- not even from the associative network. For me, the first movement to support *parentalité*, the first parenting support, came from civil society and non-governmental organizations. Next, we had the beginnings of the *Maison Verte* initiated by Françoise Dolto in 1979, ie new childcare places to welcome both children and parents together, as well as the introduction of family mediation at the beginning of the 1980s, imported from North America... All these initiatives came from civil society and were recognized by public authorities as being promising". (Expert on family, childhood and parenting issues, Polchi interview)

Another interviewee, this time in charge of parenting support policy at the CNAF (*Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales*), which is the main social security institution in charge of family policy in France, distinguishes four key moments and sequences in the definition of this new policy. From her point of view, the first step was taken at the end of the 1990s, with the creation of the REAAP network (*Réseau d'Écoute, d'Accueil et d'Accompagnement des Parents*), to coordinate and organize a myriad of local initiatives by associations and non-governmental organisations.

"1998/1999 was really the first step, with the role of the Child and Family Institute⁵ and the creation of the REAAP. At the beginning, the main idea was to support the initiatives that were emerging at

⁵ . This Institute (*Institut de l'Enfance et de la Famille*) was created in 1984 and then merged in 1997 with the *Centre international de l'Enfance* created in 1947 to become the *Centre International de l'enfance et de la famille*.

the time in various associations and localities, and to coordinate them via a network. The state sought to federate these initiatives and answer the associations' demand for better recognition. The *Délégation interministérielle à la famille* was in charge of the coordination. (*Responsable pôle jeunesse et parentalité, CNAF*)".

For this actor, four other key steps remain legible. A second step was taken with the creation of another coordination body concerning family mediation: the *Conseil national consultatif de la médiation familiale* which facilitated the creation of a national degree in 2003 (*diplôme d'Etat de médiateur familial*), a process of training centre accreditation - and ultimately a service delivery funded by the CNAF. The objective was clearly to organize the offer of this service across the national territory. Our interviewee also identified a third step in the wake of an official (and fairly critical) report by the *Cour des Comptes* in 2009 (Cour des Comptes, 2009) on the relatively low efficacy of this emerging parenting policy. The CNAF thus decided to vote on a new *Convention d'Objectif et de Gestion* (*planning and management agreement*) for the 2009-2012 period, to once again reinforce and improve how the sector operated, though the funding level remained relatively low (a 40% increase, from 53 to 75 million euros per year). The fourth step, according to this high-ranking civil servant, was the creation of the new national body called *Conseil National de Soutien à la Parentalité*.

“This really was a structuring phase, bringing points of view together, working on the definition of *parentalité* and the types of intervention included in parenting support” (*Responsable pôle jeunesse et parentalité, CNAF*).

For this interviewee, the fifth step is the publication of another official report, this time by the *Inspection Générale des Affaires Sociales* (IGAS) recommending another strong impulsion in favour of this parenting support policy - and, in particular, the doubling of CNAF funding, which has indeed been implemented (the budget rose from €75 million to €150 million) (Jacquey-Vazquez et al., 2013).

The general trend is thus a progressive structuring, recognition and reinforcement of this policy. Yet it remains a relatively modest investment, accounting for just 0.2% of the overall budget devoted to family policy and allowances (exclusive of housing). Moreover, of the €150 million per year, central government invests just €18 million; local authorities contribute some €50 million and the social security system (the CNAF) provides the remainder. Although the state remains a relatively weak partner in financial terms, in comparison to the CNAF, it plays a crucial role in terms of governance and incentives towards local and national stakeholders.

Nevertheless, this role of the state as guide and catalyst is not as unambiguous as it appears to be. The political agenda and political changes play a crucial role in renewing the arguments and priorities, the

discourse around this parenting issue and the measures to be favoured. From this perspective, important gaps separate the discourse and priorities of Ségolène Royal (socialist minister in charge of the family between 2000 and 2002) from those of the new right-wing minister in charge Christian Jacob (between 2002 and 2004), as well as from the arguments of Nadine Morano (another right-wing minister between 2008 and 2010) and Dominique Bertinotti (socialist minister in charge of the Family between 2012 and 2014).

The moralizing, punitive and security-related discourse and orientation that dominated the 2002 Presidential campaign on the right-wing is a good example of the ideological fight that took place prior to the right-wing government's come-back. The issue of insecurity - and juvenile delinquency in particular - became absolutely central. In the report I submitted to the *Haut conseil de la population et de la famille* in 2003 on *Parentalité* (Martin, 2003), I mapped this slide towards a security-focused political landscape. This ideological turn provoked a certain number of responses - such as the 2006 publication of a decree introducing a 'parental responsibility contract' in the event of problems being caused by a pupil at school or significant absence from school; the establishment of 'parental responsibility courses' and, in 2007, the creation of the *Conseil pour les droits et devoirs des familles* (Council for the rights and responsibilities of families) within municipal councils, and the publication of a decree in January 2011 introducing the suspension (or even cancellation) of family allowances for parents of children repeatedly

absent from school (at least 4 half days per month), or whose absence was unjustified (Martin, 2013).

With the political turn and the return of a socialist presidency and government in 2012, this structural opposition was revived. As the Minister for the Family (between May 2012 and March 2014) argued in one of our interviews:

"For the previous (right-wing) government, parenting policy was geared towards the stigmatization of families. To put it somewhat crudely, this was because the parents were not good parents and so, the sanctions road was the preferred option – we even went as far as the notorious 'décret Ciotti' – which advocated the withdrawal of family benefit payments where children's school attendance was poor. When I arrived, I considered that we had to turn this problematic on its head, by saying: it is not up to us to stigmatize families but rather, on the contrary, to admit that at some point, in the process of educating their children, they may come up against questions, difficulties, and problems – and the issue is to discover how we – that is, we the state, we the institutions, we the local authorities – might try to offer responses." (Minister in Charge of the Family, PolChi interview)

These eruptions of political debate into the definition of parenting support policy clearly have multiple consequences, affecting how measures are defined and implemented, as well as how family and childhood

professionals are expected - or intended - to carry out their roles. Gérard Neyrand places considerable emphasis on this opposition between two models: support and control:

“By focusing on the relationship to the child, the social management of the family ends up being caught between two competing logics of intervention, in which the desire to support parents is set against the desire to control them. On the one hand there is the idea of joint responsibility for bringing up children and its watchwords of participation, working together, targeted prevention...; and on the other the denunciation of parental abdication of responsibility, parenting courses, and the idea of getting back on the straight and narrow, and of systematic prevention...” (Neyrand, 2011: 11).

On this particular issue, the French national configuration clearly joins the UK at the same period, in its sense of punitive accountability of parents who are incompetent and therefore guilty of their offspring's poor behaviour (the parenting contracts of 2005 in England and the 2006 *contrats de responsabilité parentale* in France; for more details see Martin, 2003).

Yet in comparison with England, one major difference persists: in France, there has been very little recourse to the evidence-based programmes that were in force in England and some other countries, mainly due to resistance to this behavioural orientation among childhood and family

professionals. In the professionals' discourse, the universal objective is a priority over targeting and formulating prescriptions.

"Nobody wonders whether these parents are at Triple P level 3 or 5. To me, that's just crazy ... " (Family Mediator, PolChi interview).

"The evidence-based programmes in France - people will not stand for it. At REAAP or CAF level, it would not be accepted. It goes against our approach to parents. We are not here to say: 'you should do this or that... (...) We are not experts... This type of expert who gives orders does exist, but it's neither our position nor our role.'" (Professional in charge of a REAAP in a Caisse d'allocations familiales, PolChi interview).

One of the best example of this resistance is the strong professional mobilization against the publication of an *Inserm* summary report (*Inserm*, 2005) on the knowledge acquired on early childhood troubles and their links to high-risk behaviours at adolescence. This report, which offered to survey the results and evidence from international research, argues that a link has been established between the behaviour of under-3s or under-5s, and future risks. This evidence was however immediately strongly rejected by many professionals and experts (psychoanalysts, paediatricians, psychiatrists, neuropsychiatrists, psychologists, etc.) arguing that such types of knowledge were just giving rise to carriers of deviance. This movement (*collectif 'Pas de zéro de conduite pour les enfants de trois ans'*) argued, in a petition: "By medicalizing to the

extreme phenomena of educational, psychological or social order, the INSERM expertise maintains confusion between social malaise and mental suffering, or even hereditary illness”⁶. In spite of this resistance, implementation of evidence-based programmes is also emerging in France via public health and health education channels, but it remains highly controversial.

Policing families: a longstanding tradition

To what extent might we really consider this French turn to parenting since the mid-nineties to be a new phenomenon? In order to identify any change in recent developments, it is important to bear in mind one longstanding tradition in analysis: what Jacques Donzelot called *La police des familles*, ‘policing family’. Beyond the legal issue and the significance of the laws governing and framing the family, the challenge is clearly normative in the sense used by Michel Foucault in his analysis of biopower⁷: “moving from a simple opposition between ‘obedience’ and ‘disobedience’ to a game of ‘distributions’ around a norm”... and “shifting the perspective from direct coercion to regulation”(Darmon, 1999: 5).

From that perspective, normativity with regard to the parental role is far from being a new question; indeed it is deeply buried in the history of our contemporary societies. We could even trace it as far back as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous treatise on education, *Emile or On Education*,

⁶ . See <http://www.pasde0deconduite.org/appel/>

⁷ "An important consequence of the development of biopower is the growing space occupied by the norm set at the expense of the law's legal system"(Foucault, 1976, p. 189).

first published in 1762. The terms of this reflection (which intensified during the 18th century) on the status of the child and the purpose of education not only laid down the bases for a distinction between instruction and education, but also for a new division of roles between family and state. Right from the outset, this normative production and this 'advice' to parents on education came up against the barrier of the family institution itself, and above all, in fact, against paternal authority - with fathers, in many cultures, considered heads of the family and guarantors of compliance with the rules within their own small 'community'. Although Rousseau recommended advances in favour of public education, he did not call paternal authority into question. On the contrary, he contributed to re-legitimizing its power - including at the expense of mothers. Almost two hundred years were to pass before this power was removed in France ('parental authority' reform in 1970).

The construction of the 'welfare state' (education, health and social) in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries has continued to modify relationships between the private and public domains, shifting this privacy barrier and intensifying this normative work (in particular for protecting children and mothers) (see Joseph and Fritsch, 1977; Donzelot, 1977; Castel, 1995; Commaille and Martin, 1998; Lenoir, 2003). In addition, in extending the scope of its action, the state has gradually relieved the family of several of its functions. Alongside this, it has however created the epicentre of what was gradually to become known as 'social', by developing responses to compensate for disabilities and support certain citizens experiencing

weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Mothers are in the front line here (especially those belonging to the working class) as special targets for recommendations and other measures aimed at control and management, from the 18th century to the present day, in particular through public health interventions (Boltanski, 1969 ; Gojard, 2010 ; Garcia, 2011).

Indeed, the definition of the 'job of parenting' is an outdated notion that has been pursued over more than a century by a multitude of experts anxious to dispense advice and recommendations to parents 'in distress' – as well as by public decision-makers denouncing the risks to which parents from the 'dangerous classes' would expose children perceived as being 'in danger'. Yet haven't the very terms of this definition of the problem changed?

Advice and recommendations aimed at parents have also, for more than a century now, represented a real market which relies in particular on the feeling shared by parents that their task is difficult, and that many obstacles block the path to their child's socialization and life. Many psychologists, paediatricians, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts - and more broadly all those who might be qualified alongside Robert Castel as "therapists for normal people", using "medical-psychological techniques"(Castel, 1973 and 1981) - operate within the niche of this

growing demand for expertise and advice to parents, devoting a more or less substantial share of their professional practice to it⁸.

Most of the knowledge accumulated in the course of the 20th century in the field of psychology, paediatrics, child and adolescent psychiatry and psychoanalysis has thus been devoted to understanding, defining and directing this parental role in order to come up with the best possible conditions for the guidance and socialization of the child (see Neyrand, 2000). These experts in the parental role are now at work in the multiple links of a sprawling and mediatized market - a phenomenon accurately spotted by Robert Castel as long ago as the late 1970s⁹.

This is the reason why, to identify what has really changed in the last 25 years, we suggest picking up on the socio-historic lineage of Isaac Joseph and Philippe Fritsch in *Disciplines à domicile, L'édification de la famille* (1977), Jacques Donzelot in *La police des familles* (1977), or Luc Boltanski's study of the rules of childrearing and household teaching in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in *Prime éducation et morale de classes* (1969). These works (which were, in part, influenced by the work of Michel Foucault¹⁰) quickly took stock of the impressive observation project

⁸ For example, we might mention certain very popular authors advising parents throughout the 20th century, such as the behaviorist John Watson in the thirties, Benjamin Spock in the forties and fifties, Thomas Brazelton, Penelope Leach in the seventies or John Rosemond in the nineties. For a historical analysis of these experts and messages, see Ann Hulbert (2003).

⁹ "The discourse put out by fans of Family Planning or the 'Ecole des parents', spokespersons on radio shows specializing in family and conjugal advice, and by women's magazines and 'society' sections in magazines and weekly publications, places responsibility for the ultimate reality of the family squarely on its members' ability to intensify their relationships and use psychology to regulate them (Castel, 1981, p. 185).

¹⁰ We could add the work of Norbert Elias as a source of inspiration in this lineage of interactions between individuals and society (Elias, 1987).

represented by this interaction between the state, public authorities, social and healthcare professionals and the "entrepreneurs of family morality", on the one hand, and the familial sphere and its actors, on the other.

If we quickly recap the main orientations of these works, we realize the proximity between these researches and the phenomenon we are currently looking at. To take into account his perspective in *La police des familles*, Donzelot for example insisted on his determination to decode the modern passage from a model in which families were subjected to coercion, to a far subtler mechanism comprising over-investment in the role of the family "by making it the pre-condition for each member's fulfilment" (1977/2005: 5), and also, in the eyes of many, the guilty party in the event of a failed socialization process:

"To describe the reform movement that constituted the modern family, we have thought of it in the same way as the passage from 'government of families to government by the family'. Government of families: this is the family of the *Ancien Régime*, a political subject, capable of using its members as instruments, deciding upon their fate, accountable for the behaviour of their members before the royal power, yet likely in return to draw upon it to impose its order on recalcitrant members. Government by the family: this time, the family is no longer the policy subject in its own history. Rather, it becomes the object of a policy. Its members are no longer expected to make alliance strategies or manage affiliations, because

the family is now a means for each member to achieve their own fulfilment, each person being able to justify the deficit in their own fulfilment and blame it on the family, on condition that they have the support of a judge, social worker or therapist who will help them to identify the source of their difficulties in the failings of their family (past or present) and to free themselves in one way or another" (Donzelot, 1977/2005: 6).

Isn't this phenomenon completely analogous with regard to the parental role? Is it possible to establish a parallel between Donzelot and Furedi's hypothesis on parental determinism? It is just as easy to connect the contemporary parenting support issue to the questioning developed by Isaac Joseph and Philippe Fritsch (1977), when explaining their project in 'Disciplines à domicile', that is to say:

"working out the lineage of the normalization of intra-familial relationships, and more specifically of educational relationships since the end of the 18th century. Our hypothesis is that this normalization owes less to the overall subordination of the family to the logic of state apparatus and its role in reproducing social relationships, than to the import to its field and in its practice of disparate disciplinary tactics that originated in school, prison and hospital environments or the field of social assistance " (p. 19)..., while stressing the role of incidents "allowing deviant behaviours to be dramatized, and thus portraying 'repoussoir-figures' around which the norms for living,

and educating, were set in place (p. 22). For these two writers, "if, in the 19th century, we shifted from being a society of law to become a society of norms, as Michel Foucault says, this has been via a series of these dramatized figures, the logic of which is laid bare by a body of specialists in the order of knowledge" (idem).

The question is thus to understand the current way to extend and reconfigure this normative work and this tradition of analysis. In so doing, we could certainly focus more precisely on the novelty of this emerging policy towards parents' practices and distinguish which part of this novelty is context-related and which part is directly linked to the interventions and practices.

Discussion: what's new under the spotlight?

In conclusion, we propose to stress three key results. First, new policies and institutions are undeniably emerging in different countries during a single period (late 1990s – early 2000s), using a new and similar terminology, common arguments and issues, but also generating a new market in programmes and instruments. Second, this emergence is framed by pre-existing ideological and professional fights, political battles in the course of political change and campaigns, as we argued for the French case. And third, the turn to parenting is also rooted in a long tradition which probably varies according to countries, but which is reactivated along the process by multiple come-backs and old ghosts.

Because of this ideological battle, observable change over the past two decades is structured by very classic oppositions, most of which are implicit. This is clearly the case in France, where normative work and institutions around family issues are particularly active. We therefore suggest a line of analysis referring to some national specificities that may have to do with a particular political party system shared by many southern European countries.

A common “parenting culture”?

In UK, the current parenting support policy is analysed as a new trend concomitant to or initiated by the Third Way. Following different authors - in particular Frank Furedi - Ellie Lee, Jennie Bristow, Charlotte Faircloth and Jan Macvarish recognize that a ‘parenting culture’ has been developing for a long time, and that its “basis lies in the working through of the separation out of ‘the family’ from the wider economy and society” (Lee, 2014: 7). Yet the novelty now refers to the “explicit focus on the parent and their behaviour” (op. cit.: 9), as well as on “parental determinism” and the necessity of targeting the “parenting practices of those who claim welfare benefits” (idem): parenting as a social problem, in short.

“We can be sure that ‘parenting’ is not a neutral term to describe what parents do as they raise their children. Rather, the transformation of the noun ‘parent’ into the verb ‘parenting’ has taken place through a sociocultural process centring on the belief

that 'parenting' is a highly important and problematic sphere of social life; indeed, 'parenting' is almost always discussed as a social problem and in some way blamed for social ills" (Lee, 2014: 9).

Val Gillies speaks of the *rise of parenting* driven by the 'Third Way'. This author promotes the view that a profound cultural change affecting the role of parent, due to a focusing of the attention of the public authorities on the act of 'parenting', gave rise to the idea of thinking of *parenting* as a competence likely to give rise to learning, leading to training actions, and necessitating a process of professionalization.

"Parents have always been held responsible for the behaviour and development of their children but recent years have seen a cultural shift in the way childrearing is conceptualized and targeted by policy makers. In the past, intimate family relationships tended to be viewed as personal, private, and outside the remit of state intervention... Parenting is no longer accepted as merely an interpersonal bond characterized by love and care. Instead it has been re-framed as a job requiring particular skills and expertise which must be taught by formally qualified professionals." (Gillies, 2008: 95-96).

Here is an initial difference between England and France. This idea of framing parenting as a job requiring skills and training employs precisely the terms used by a movement named *l'école des parents*, created in 1930 (and still in existence today), whose objective was, at the very

beginning: "to teach parents to educate and instruct one another so that their children become future social and moral values" (quotation in Donzelot, 1979: 181). This movement (largely inspired by Catholicism and psychoanalysts) had a precise historical context: defending family and parents against intrusion by the state and its agents (teachers and public health professionals) in private matters.

As one of the European countries in which family has been considered an *affaire d'Etat* since the very beginning of the 20th century, France thus has an important specificity, namely the struggle between two forms of familialism: state familialism versus Church familialism (Lenoir, 2003). The current parenting support policy provides a perfect battlefield on which to expend these arguments, opposing Republican and religious positions.

For the moment, as a high-ranking civil servant we interviewed in the PolChi project stated, the republican argumentation is still clearly dominant, even when it takes into account the fact that some citizens have more needs and demands than others: But this radical movement:

"We remain faithful to the ideal of republican universality, but we are careful to ensure we support more people having higher needs, in a sort of proportioned universalism" (High-ranking civil servant, author of an official report on parenting support, Polchi interview).

Republican Universalism vs. Catholic Conservatism

France offers many historic examples of this structural opposition between the Catholic Church and the *République*. One of the latest expressions of this tension was *La manif pour tous*, a social movement, which contested both the adoption of *mariage pour tous* (same sex marriage), and the socialist government's initiative aimed at raising children's awareness of gender equality issues at school (*l'ABCD de l'égalité*).¹¹ This conservative movement condemns a hypothetical 'gender theory' at the same time as it defends 'natural' sex differences and the necessity of distinguishing between mother and father. They only have a problem with an (apparently gender neutral) parenting policy where they believe it leaves the door open to gender confusion.

To understand this drastic opposition, it is useful to recall the crucial arguments concerning political conflicts and coalitions and their specific combination in many southern European countries, linked to the fight between the state and the Catholic Church, between a Republican elite and Catholic movements (Martin, 2015b). This opposition is absolutely central to understanding the configuration of the Welfare state in these countries, particularly where family issues are concerned.

Following van Kersbergen's work about Christian democracy and the link between religion and the welfare state (van Kersbergen, 1995), Kees van Kersbergen and Philip Manow (2009) paid special attention to the crucial

¹¹ See <http://www.cndp.fr/ABCD-de-l-egalite/accueil.html>.

role of the electoral and political party systems. They intend to explain the difference between Social Democrats and Christian Democrats when looking at the role of religion in the framing of western welfare states. They reveal two different coalitions in each configuration:

“The Social Democratic generous welfare states, which we find in the Nordic countries, have been the result of a coalition between Social Democratic parties and parties of agrarian defence (red-green coalition). One important precondition for this coalition has been the absence of a strong religious cleavage in the Scandinavian countries. On Europe’s continent, in turn, we find welfare states that are the product of a coalition between Social and Christian Democracy (red-black coalition). This is due to the fact that the second cleavage represented in the party systems of continental Europe, besides the dominant left-right or labor-capital cleavage, has been the religious cleavage, a cleavage inherited from the state-church conflicts in the wake of the national revolution in which Liberal states’ elites challenged the church in its former domains such as education or poor relief” (Van Kersbergen and Manow, 2009, 22).

In a recent paper, Philip Manow goes further and argues:

“The fundamental character of the political conflict reveals the explanatory limits of an argument based *solely* on socio-economic analysis. In these conflicts, religion becomes relevant, first in the explanation of the totalitarian episodes of the southern countries – since

religion renders coalitions between workers and peasants impossible and thereby fosters the fascist path. These totalitarian episodes are then, second, an important explanatory factor for the persistence of political polarization in the postwar period, inter alia manifested in the fragmentation of the left in their party systems" (Manow, 2015, 37).

For this author, this combined religious/political factor is crucial in each mono-confessional southern country, since it at once explains the radicalization to both right and left of the political arena: reactionary and anti-republican Catholicism since the 19th century, the rift between a reformist and a radical left wing and the violent clash between radical secularism and radical religiosity, between a clerical right and an anticlerical left.

"The split between communist and social-democratic parties in the countries of southern Europe (Italy, Spain and Portugal, but also France)... is closely related to the decidedly anti-republican position held by the Catholic church in the mono-denominational Catholic countries of Europe's South, since the deep divide between a sharp anticlerical labor movement and pious farmers under close tutelage of the church left the political left without allies for a reformist strategy" (Manow, 2015, 33).

These religious and political factors offer a much better explanation than do the economic factors: the differences between Nordic, continental and southern countries, all of them concerned by late industrialization. Where a political alliance was possible between smallholding farmers and workers

in the (protestant) northern countries, it was clearly rejected, “due to non-economic reasons” (Manow, 2015, 40) in the Catholic south, marked by the violence of the confrontation between pious rural classes and the Marxist workers’ movement.

These conflicting ideologies are undoubtedly still at work in the framing of parenting support policy and in France, they take the form of contrasting options: supporting (rather than controlling or condemning) families, and choosing universalist and egalitarian (rather than targeted and punitive) measures.

A turn brought about by a new inter-generational challenge

Though the processes of constructing a parenting issue do resemble one another from here to there and from then to now in Europe – for instance, in the act of backing measures and policy with arguments and 'scientific proof', or the use of a universal purpose to cover a targeted approach and differentiated social treatment - in short of euphemistically addressing the question of social class and inequalities - it does seem that the context in which this construction is produced also has its specificities, because of the changes that have occurred in terms of both familial practice and lifestyles, on the one hand, and the state's ability to intervene to guide these transformations, on the other (Martin, 2012b).

We can thus, for example, ask how today's parenting support might allow us to update Robert Castel's diagnosis (1981) in terms of *the management of risk*. Back in the late 1970s, Castel had observed (by

using the psychological 'human potential intensification' techniques that were typical of humanist psychology of the 1970s and 1980s) that it was no longer a matter of "healing a disease, fixing a dysfunction or remedying a deficiency, but rather of working on each individual's personal and relational capital in order to intensify and improve its performance" (Castel, 2011: 11). In this way, Castel identified "a reorganization of social policy and interventions by the social state ('the active social state') in the sense of activation of the individual" (Castel, 2011: 12). Today, it seems we have moved on to an additional stage – one in which the problem is no longer just the production of the working adult via their psychological optimization, but rather that of focusing attention on the role played by those very adults that have become parents in their socialization function - within a context in which the levers of social advancement are in total collapse.

In this sense, it could be argued that parenting support serves to complete personal development (even standing in for it, to some extent) since demand has moved so far from the ambient hedonism and individualism of the post-May 68 generation and towards the uncertainties of the present time, particularly with regard to the future of new generations (Castel, 2009). From adult-centred to child-centred policy, in a way. The contemporary focus on the parenting issue focuses on fresh priorities because of the rising pertinence of the question of children's rights and public powerlessness in the face of the difficulties encountered

by new generations - children, adolescents and young adults - which in turn echo the supposed threats posed by antisocial behaviour.

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