



Le « syndrome de la dénatalité »
Demographic issues in family planning
debate (France 1950-1960's)

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Introduction



- 1956 : “Happy motherhood” want to modify the law of July 31, 1920 : this law suppress abortion, abortion propaganda and the sale of contraceptive products.
- 12/1967 : the Neuwirth Law : the work of this association is very partially achieved. The liberalization of contraception was achieved after an intense debate in the media
- The demographic argument is one of the most insistent and the most tenacious throughout the debate :
 - how is the demographic argument mobilized to counter the proposal to modify the law ?
 - What are the consequences of this argument ?
 - What adjustments does it lead to?
- Background :
 - the singular history of the French population lead to the establishment of a demographic sensitivity, ie a specific population awareness
 - The public space is already saturated by demographic information

The Terms of the Debate



- The french demographic history justifies the attention paid to the collective implication of modifying the law and the risks of a falling birth rate
 - This is the «dénatalité » complex
 - ✦ « The dropping birth rate has put our demographic existence in peril since the end of the 19th century... We owe to the lowering birth rates the fact of being the oldest nation in the world » (Sutter, 1956)
 - ✦ the baby boom is a « still fragile renewal... we cannot forget that (France) has been the first and gone the farthest along the path of limiting births » (Girard, 1959)

Adhering to a consensual value



- The French population growth is not as comparable as the world growth.
- The French population growth is desirable
 - « We joyfully note that for several years there has been a rise in birth rates, capable, to a still limited extent, of opposing the ageing of the population... It would not be a question for good French to lower a much desired birth rate » (Weill-Hallé, Maternité heureuse, 1, 1956)
- The condemnation of this « consensual » value are rare

The demographic consequences of changing the law



- **Population quantity**

- The reality of the « accidental children » ie unwanted children and the failure of contraception in the baby boom : evidence from INED' surveys

- **Population quality**

- The healthiest families will be most informed on contraceptive techniques; the population growth will be supported by the lower class : “contraceptive knowledge risks not reaching the most prolific layers of the population but those who are the least prolific and have the highest quality of life” (Girard, 1959)

The response



- The adults and children' well being are linked to the birth control: evidence from the Indianapolis survey
- The unwanted child are not wellcome:
pathologization of the « non planned » child
 - « Are they desirable for society these « children despite ourselves », unloved, misunderstood, subject to emotional disturbances that will continually expose them to punishment? » (Lagroua Weill Hallé, 1961)
- The Planned Parenthood activists oppose the « family optimum » to the « demographic optimum »

Conclusion



- Since the Interwar, the « denatalité » syndrom lead to a demographic sensitivity that continued throughout the 1950's and the 1960's
- The demographic sensitivity compel to reason on the collectif effects of access to contraception
- The Planned Parenthood activists work to another hierarchization of issues making the family's well being the key of the population quality
- The debate contributes to reinforced the demographic information and discussion in the public space and impose a new family model

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