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Aline Valette's *L'Harmonie sociale* (1892–93): From Social Theory to Editorial Practice

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ABSTRACT

When on 15 October 1892, Aline Valette (1850–99) edited the first issue of her weekly newspaper *L'Harmonie sociale: organe des droits et des intérêts féminins* [*Social Harmony: Organ of Women's Rights and Interests*] (1892–93), this activist of the French Workers' Party had already developed an elaborate social philosophy, the fruit of her double journey as a Marxist and as a feminist. In her journal, Valette synthesized her double fight for the emancipation of women and of the working class in her famous formula 'Socialism and Sexualism'. This revolutionary project is not only reflected in Valette's own writings for the journal, but also in the editorial model which she incarnated, and which inspired both her male and female collaborators.

This article studies the manner in which Aline Valette, through her conception of female editorship, succeeded to propose a social paradigm that embodied her vision for a society concomitantly socialist and sexualist. Socialism for this editor is based on the contradiction between Individualism — the excess of which is the source of social inequities, and Collectivism — the only solution to reestablish social harmony. This opposition reflected within her journal through the subtle balance between plurality of voices and opinions on the one hand, and the attachment to a common journalistic enterprise on the other. Likewise, Valette, who defended Sexualism as a means to revoke masculine domination, did not exclude male journalists from her editorial staff, and in doing so, procured a particular position for her 'feminine' journal within the press, which at the time was predominantly produced by and destined for men.

KEYWORDS

L'Harmonie sociale, Aline Valette, women editors, sexualism, socialism, France

Aline Valette (1850–99) (Fig. 1), although largely forgotten today, was one of the pioneering figures in the history of journalism and of social movements in *belle époque* France. Both a feminist and a socialist, she stands out for her visionary effort in rallying the forces of both movements for social change, an endeavour that still preoccupies intellectuals and activists of the twenty-first century.¹ On 15 October 1892, she launched *L'Harmonie sociale: organe des droits et des intérêts féminins* [*Social Harmony: Organ of Women's Rights and Interests*] (1892–93), which was the first periodical publication in France to embed the rights of women in a socialist terrain.²



Fig. 1 Aline Valette (1850–99), reproduced from vol. 2 of the *Encyclopédie socialiste, syndicale et coopérative de l'Internationale ouvrière* (1912), p. 29. Gallica

Within this weekly newspaper she developed an original theory on the condition of women, associating the defence of their rights with those of the working class. She called it 'sexualism'. As editor-in-chief, Valette assumed a double mission: firstly didactical in laying down the theoretical groundwork for her new philosophy, and secondly practical in integrating the main principles of sexualism, namely those pertaining to the collectivist vision she had for society, as well as the new status she promised women, within her own editorial model. This article will demonstrate the manner in which Aline Valette, through her practice of female editorship, proposed a

- 1 A 2004 paper by the British political scientist Valerie Bryson notes the resurgence of interest in Marxist and anti-capitalist theory on the one hand and the rapid evolution of feminist debate on the other, proposing to view Marxism and feminism as 'complementary aids to the understanding of society'. Valerie Bryson, 'Marxism and Feminism: Can the "Unhappy Marriage" Be Saved?', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9.1 (2004), 13–30 (pp. 13–15) [accessed 3 December 2019].
- 2 Marilyn J. Boxer, 'Linking Socialism, Feminism, and Social Darwinism in Belle Époque France: The Maternalist Politics and Journalism of Aline Valette', *Women's History Review*, 21.1 (2012), 1–19 (p. 4) [accessed 15 October 2019]. A number of scholars, among whom Marilyn Boxer, Jean Quataert, Charles Sowerwine, Patricia Hilden, and Robert Stuart, to name a few, have tackled the historical role and contributions of French socialist women in the larger history of social movements in France during the Third Republic (1871–1914). Nonetheless, the journalistic enterprise created by these female activists is yet to be studied as a literary corpus having its own footprint on the practice of the periodical genre, which is what I attempt to do, in part, in this article.

social paradigm embodying her vision of a society concomitantly socialist and sexualist, and in doing so, explored the functional potentials of the journalistic enterprise.

Towards a Compound Analysis of the 'Woman Question'

Valette's editorial project came as a corollary of her militant career. Her journey towards activism began when she founded the first Teachers' Union in France, to which she was elected secretary in 1878.³ During this period, she developed a keen interest in the condition of working women, which led her to become the first woman work inspector in the Seine department.⁴ In charge of overseeing working conditions for female employees in workshops, Valette acquired a first-hand knowledge of the reality of work for proletarian women.⁵ It was in fact through her daily contact with the problems created by female industrialization that she developed a conscience of social inequities that are particular to women of the working class.⁶ She began gravitating towards socialism by joining a Guesdist study group, and at the age of forty, became one of the first women members of the Parti ouvrier français [French Workers' Party], more commonly referred to as POF.⁷

At a time when female participation in political parties was highly limited, Valette succeeded at imposing herself as a figure to be reckoned with within the ranks of the POF. Jules Guesde, the leader of the party, described her as 'la seule femme qui ait compris le socialisme' ['the only woman to have understood socialism'].⁸ Valette mobilized her notoriety within the party and benefitted from the particularly distinguished position she acquired there in order to promote the cause of women, more precisely that of working women and poor mothers.⁹ As one of the oldest defenders of gender equality, she found in socialism a suitable ground to fight for women's rights.¹⁰ The POF has historically distinguished itself as the first political party in France to inscribe the principle of gender equality in its programme. What is more, the party gave a platform to several pioneering activist women such as Aline Valette, among others, thus granting female voices higher exposure in the public domain.¹¹

This socialist political background strongly permeated Valette's ideas, since it was through the prism of French Marxism that she elaborated her position on the 'woman question'. Her stance was based on the juxtaposition of the defence of the proletariat as a social class exploited by capitalism, and the defence of the rights of women, as a social category mistreated due to their gender. From its very first issue, her weekly fixed its editorial line around this notion of the convergence of social and sexual struggles.¹²

3 Charles Sowerwine, *Les Femmes et le socialisme: Un siècle d'histoire*, trans. by Pierre Martory (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1978), p. 53.

4 Laurence Klejman and Florence Rochefort, *L'Égalité en marche: Le féminisme sous la Troisième République* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1989), p. 92.

5 Evelyn Diebolt and Marie-Hélène Zylberberg-Hocquard, *Marcelle Cappy — Aline Valette: Femmes et travail au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Syros, 1984), p. 10.

6 Charles Sowerwine, *Sisters or Citizens? Women and Socialism in France since 1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 60.

7 The terms 'Guesdist' or 'Guesdism' refer to the socialist faction led by Jules Guesde (1845–1922), a French Marxist who represented the collectivist branch of the party. Diebolt and Zylberberg-Hocquard, p. 8.

8 Sowerwine, *Les Femmes et le socialisme*, p. 59.

9 Boxer, p. 2.

10 Klejman and Rochefort, p. 91.

11 Robert Stuart, "'Calm, with a Grave and Serious Temperament, rather Male": French Marxism, Gender and Feminism, 1882–1905', *International Review of Social History*, 41.1 (1996), 57–82 (pp. 60, 63, 65).

12 The term 'les luttes des sexes' ['sexual struggles'] is used in *L'Harmonie sociale* to describe the then state of the debate on 'la question sexuelle' ['the sexual question'], also referred to by contemporaries and historians as the 'la question féminine' ['the woman question']. Dr Z., 'Mise au point', *L'Harmonie sociale* (11 February 1893), 1.

It defended the cause of ‘ces deux opprimés de la forme sociale moderne — la femme d’une part, le prolétaire de l’autre’ [‘the two oppressed figures of the modern social form — the woman on the one hand, the proletarian on the other’], and called for their ‘union constante dans une action commune’ [‘constant union in a common action’].¹³ Valette’s logic stemmed from the idea that analogous mechanisms of oppression were at work for both women and the working class. She saw in the notion of ‘production’ a mutual source of domination for both categories. She wrote in one editorial: ‘Or, comme les prolétaires ont été, de tout tempos [sic], la classe qui produit, le sexe féminin a été, de tout temps, le sexe qui produit; et comme la classe qui produit a été la classe sacrifiée, le sexe qui produit a été le sexe sacrifié.’ [‘Just as proletarians were, since time immemorial, the class which produced, the female sex was, since time immemorial, the sex which produced; and as the class which produced was the sacrificed one, the sex which produced was the sacrificed one.’]¹⁴ The female production alluded to in this passage refers to that of the human race, or reproduction. Through this play on words around the terms ‘producer’ and ‘reproducer’, Valette introduced the two vectors of the double oppression of women in industrialized societies: ‘Que les femmes viennent à comprendre que leur double asservissement résulte de leur double qualité de productrice et de reproductrices.’ [‘Women must come to understand that their double enslavement results from their double quality of producers and reproducers.’]¹⁵ At the heart of this vision of double oppression lies the figure of the working woman, twice scorned and exploited due to her class and her gender. Valette deplored the lot of the working woman, ‘la sacrifiée, l’exploitée,’ [‘the sacrificed, the exploited’], for whom ‘la servitude économique se compliqu[e] [...] de la servitude domestique’ [‘economic servitude is worsened by domestic servitude’].¹⁶

Sexualist Theory

Based on this observation of the double exploitation of women as workers and as mothers, Valette elaborated a new theory, the goal of which was to respond to this hybrid situation inflicted on poor women. Aided in this mission by Pierre Bonnier, a Marxist and fellow journalist in *L’Harmonie sociale*, Valette introduced her new theory on the emancipation of women which she called ‘sexualism’. The term itself is a neologism invented by Valette and Bonnier, who stated that they were seduced by the simplicity of the word, by its efficiency, by the richness of the rhyme produced between the two terms, sexualism and socialism. Their phonetic proximity symbolized in Valette’s eyes the correlation between the fight for the rights of the producing and reproducing forces in society.¹⁷ The expression ‘Socialism and Sexualism’ thus became the slogan of the new ideology propagated in Valette’s newspaper. (Fig. 2)

According to its theoreticians, sexualism presents itself at first glance as a synonym of feminism. ‘[N]ous avons voulu caractériser d’un mot le mouvement féministe’ [‘We wanted to characterize the feminist movement in one word’], they wrote.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the need for a new term to substitute that of feminism, which was in full expansion at the time, implicates the existence of differences and nuances in the vision for the

13 Aline Valette, ‘A nos lecteurs’, *L’Harmonie sociale* (15 October 1892), 1.

14 Aline Valette, ‘La Femme prolétaire’, *L’Harmonie sociale* (3 June 1893), 1.

15 ‘Socialisme et sexualisme’, *L’Harmonie sociale* (29 April 1893), 2.

16 Aline Valette, ‘La meilleure part’, *L’Harmonie sociale*, (11 February 1893), 1.

17 Dr Z., ‘A parte’, *L’Harmonie sociale* (13 May 1893), 1.

18 Ibid.



Fig. 2 'Socialisme et sexualisme' on the front page of *L'Harmonie sociale* (29 April 1893). Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand

emancipation of women.¹⁹ Sexualism can therefore be better described as a socialist counterpart to feminism. Indeed, inspired by Marxism, sexualism can be defined as an effort to take into account, within the fight for the rights of women, the fact that they are dominated both as producers and reproducers, doubly exploited by masculinism and by capitalism.²⁰ According to the sexualist theory, women could be emancipated as producers with the advent of a collectivist socialist regime that would give the means and gains of production back to the working force. However, women would only be emancipated as reproducers, or as mothers, through a sexualist revolution that would

19 Karen Offen, 'On the French Origins of the Words Feminism and Feminist', *Feminist Issues*, 8.2 (June 1988), 45-51 (p. 47).

20 Sylvie Chaperon and Florence Rochefort, 'Féminisme et marxisme: Des liens conflictuels', in *Marx: Une passion française*, ed. by Jean-Numa Ducange and Antony Burlaud (Paris: La Découverte, 2018), pp. 275-84 (p. 276).

acknowledge their role in the preservation of the human race and value maternity in order to grant them a more superior position in society. The promise of sexualism to 'reorder societal priorities in favor of mothers and children' was based on reclaiming maternity, which in the individualist capitalist society constitutes the very cause of the oppression of women, and turning it into a social function, properly acknowledged in a collectivist and sexualist society.²¹ Therefore, it was through its maternalist agenda that sexualism sought to install a new social paradigm where women, thanks to their maternal role, could be assured a more superior position in society.

Needless to say, the maternalist politics contained in sexualism granted it much criticism from its contemporaries as well as from some historians of feminism. For certain feminists of that time, sexualism presented an obstacle to the progress of the cause of women by confining them to their maternal role. Valette's critics considered that by underlining women's role as mothers, she was forcibly sending them back to their homes, thus deterring them from pursuing actual careers. As for some historians, sexualism was at best 'a theory of compromise' and at worst, a conservative theory, contrary to the views of the founders of socialism.²²

However, it is important to point out that sexualism was not the only ideology to place maternalism at the heart of its logic on women's emancipation. Indeed, the idea of maternity as an asset to the feminist struggle was quite widespread at the turn of the twentieth century.²³ When placed in the wider context of first-wave feminism, which called for 'equality in difference', Valette's defence of maternity can be seen as a pragmatic contribution to the cause of women. In effect, at the height of their activism, first-wave French republican feminists conceived women's empowerment through providing them with opportunities to demonstrate their intellectual and economic potential while also assuring protection for motherhood and children.²⁴ This feminism, also branded 'maternalist feminism', emphasized legal rights and demanded of the State 'positive discriminations' in favour of women, among which, state protection of motherhood.²⁵ The logic behind the calls for state-funded subsidies for mothers, or the idea of 'maternity as a social function', lies in the guarantee of one of the most important basic imperatives of women's emancipation: economic independence from men, since 'masculine hierarchy [was] predicated on women's economic dependence'.²⁶ In Valette's theory, the promotion of maternity, although somewhat exorbitant, never called for abandoning women's other roles in society. As a matter of fact, Valette explicitly stated the idea that work was not necessarily incompatible with motherhood: 'Le genre de production tout à fait spécial qui caractérise l'organisme féminin, sans préjudice de son rôle de production dans le domaine économique, doit assurer à la femme une place à part dans une société vraiment socialiste.' ['The altogether special genre of production that characterizes the female organism, should assure women a special place in a truly socialist society without prejudice to their productive role in the economic domain.']²⁷ Moreover, in the special issue her weekly devoted to the sexualist theory, the programme

21 Boxer, p. 1.

22 Klejman and Rochefort, pp. 91–93; Sowerwine, *Les Femmes et le socialisme*, p. 57; Jean Rabaut, *Histoire des féminismes français* (Paris: Stock, 1978), p. 203.

23 Klejman and Rochefort, p. 362.

24 Karen Offen, *Debating the Woman Question in the French Third Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 622.

25 Éliane Gubin et al., eds, *Le siècle des féminismes*, intro. by Michelle Perrot (Paris: Éditions de l'Atelier, 2004), pp. 10–11.

26 Offen, *Debating the Woman Question*, pp. 94, 101; Laura L. Frader, 'Femmes, genre et mouvement ouvrier en France aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles: Bilan et perspectives de recherche', *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, 3 (1996), 1–19 (p. 8) [accessed 1 October 2016].

27 Aline Valette and Pierre Bonnier, *Socialisme et sexualisme: Programme du parti socialiste féminin* (Paris: A.-M. Beaudelot, 1893), p. 73. English translation taken from Boxer, p. 6.

of reforms formulated at the end, entitled 'Cahier des doléances féminines' ['Book of Female Grievances'], stated that women had the right to economic existence that safeguarded their dignity through allowing them access to employment in different professions.²⁸ In *L'Harmonie sociale*, the path towards this economic emancipation for women came through the emancipation of work or production, the most important form of which was motherhood.²⁹

Exploring the Collectivist Capacities of the Periodical Genre

Valette's defence of sexualism was not limited to her dialectic work on the theory. Rather, a critical approach analysing her model of female editorship could inform a different kind of response, of a more practical nature, supporting the sexualist theory. As editor-in-chief of *L'Harmonie sociale*, Aline Valette put both the socialist and sexualist fundamentals of her theory into her practice of editorship, thus exploiting both the discursive and organizational capacities of her journalistic enterprise.

The model of editor that Valette portrayed is largely representative of her ideas on socialist collectivism. Her very choice of periodical publication as a textual medium to promote her collectivism constitutes by and of itself a primary form of application of her ideology. According to the collectivist doctrine, any work of production, whether manual or intellectual, had to be construed as a collective property of all of its producers.³⁰ In opting for the periodical as a collective and multi-voiced genre that 'entails a "collectivization" of writing' in lieu of a book-format publication that is more of an individual production, Valette established the premise for applying her collectivist ideals.³¹ Indeed, according to Margaret Beetham, the 'heterogeneity of authorial voice' is a central aspect of the periodical genre in the nineteenth century.³² Valette's choice to serve as editor-in-chief of a newspaper rather than sole author of her own book indicates a collectivist orientation leaning towards a less direct proprietorship of the publication. In fact, the concept of authorship does not apply in the case of periodical writing where each issue has multiple authors or contributors.³³ Consequently, Valette did abdicate a certain level of ownership over her publication in choosing to collaborate with a collective of journalists all of whose contributions constitute indivisible components of the final product. Furthermore, next to being the editor, Valette also presented herself as a journalist regularly publishing articles in her newspaper. In doing so, she seems to underline the influence of the collective nature of the journalistic enterprise that can even pertain to the editor herself.

Valette's collectivist ideology also addressed the concept of individualism and attempted to articulate a balance between the two seemingly conflicting ideas. According to Valette's theory, individualism was seen as an elementary necessity from the standpoint of personal interests, which had to be reconsidered when the interests of the collective were at hand.³⁴ A balance between these two impulses can be found in Valette's periodical in the articulation between the individual personalities of journalists and their columns,

28 'Socialisme et sexualisme', *L'Harmonie sociale* (29 April 1893), 4.

29 Ibid., p. 3.

30 Marc Angenot, *L'Utopie collectiviste: Le grand récit socialiste sous la Deuxième Internationale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), p. 139.

31 Marie-Ève Thérénty, *La Littérature au quotidien: Poétiques journalistiques au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), pp. 47–48; Marie-Ève Thérénty and Alain Vaillant, eds, *Presse et plumes: Journalisme et littérature au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Nouveau Monde éditions, 2004), p. 320.

32 Margaret Beetham, 'Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 22.3 (1989), 96–100 (p. 97).

33 Ibid.

34 'Socialisme et sexualisme', *L'Harmonie sociale* (29 April 1893), 2.

and the collective unity of the newspaper. A symbiotic relationship exists between the column as a textual unit providing the raw written material and the journal as the federating organism which allows this material to exist, by organizing, combining, and publishing it in its final form. The journalistic enterprise created by Valette in *L'Harmonie sociale* depended on this reciprocal dependence. The editor composed her editorial office with specialized journalists to whom she attributed a specific role in the newspaper. These roles corresponded to fixed columns for each collaborator: reportages on the conditions of work, political columns, news stories, literary series, financial reports, etc. In exchange, Valette's periodical acknowledged these individual contributions in two ways. First, it displayed the signatures of each journalist at the end of their column, thus emphasizing the authority of the journalist over their own text.³⁵ Certainly, if the lack of signatures was historically construed as a way of highlighting the collective character of a periodical, the ever-increasing presence of personal signatures towards the end of the century can be viewed as an emphasis on the individual components of a journalistic enterprise.³⁶ Second, the periodical acknowledged a certain right of property for permanent collaborators on the very space they have in the newspaper, which remains stable from one issue to the other. The recognition of a plurality of authorities within a community, according to a Durkheimian analysis, is the guarantee for the rights of individuals.³⁷ Within Valette's journalistic enterprise, the recognition of journalists' plural rights of authorship, under a unified periodical title, reflects the subtle balance between individualism and collectivism in her theory.

Valette also established harmony between the two concepts through reconciling the newspaper's common editorial line with the individual subjective liberties of her collaborators, which she ensured through upholding the principle of plurality of voices and perspectives. Her periodical, contrary to other feminist publications of that era, did not present itself as a one-woman platform, designed only to express its editor's thoughts and opinions.³⁸ Rather, the editor committed herself to assuring a sufficient margin of liberty for her journalists to develop their respective subjectivities, all the while preserving the newspaper's editorial line. The role of individual signatures is once more essential in understanding this balance, since when each journalist signs the text for which they are responsible, the newspaper becomes a space of exchange, integrating an intersection of points of view.³⁹ Valette kept this effect of diversity under control through clearly defining the mission of *L'Harmonie sociale* (which can be summed up to its double struggle), thus tracing the boundaries of the discursive space in which these diverse perspectives could be expressed. Thanks to the collective mission of the periodical, these individual subjectivities could not only intersect, but also interact with each other, even unite with one another in order to serve the common purpose of the publication. Valette commented on this articulation of contrasting principles, writing: 'Dans nos colonnes, [nous] donn[ons] place à toutes les manifestations de l'activité

35 Sarah Nash, 'What's in a Name?: Signature, Criticism and Authority in *The Fortnightly Review*', *Victorian Periodical Review*, 43.1 (Spring 2010), 57–82 (p. 57).

36 A quote from *L'Atelier* illustrates this reality: 'Si les articles de notre feuille n'ont jamais été signés, [...] c'est que, [...] ils prenaient un caractère collectif qui, à nos yeux comme à ceux du public, devait avoir infiniment plus de poids que s'ils eussent été l'expression d'opinions personnelles' ['If in our paper, articles have never been signed, (...) it is that (...) they took a collective nature which, in our eyes as well as in those of the public, had to weigh infinitely more than if they had been the expression of personal opinions']. Quoted in Armand Cuvillier, *Un journal d'ouvriers: L'Atelier (1840–1850)* (Paris: Les Éditions ouvrières, 1954), p. 49.

37 Cyril Lemieux, 'Autorités plurielles: Le cas des journalistes', *Esprit*, 313 (March–April 2005), 101–14 (p. 113).

38 Boxer, p. 3.

39 Corinne Saminadayar-Perrin, *Les Discours du journal: Rhétoriques et médias au XIX^e siècle (1836–1885)* (Saint-Étienne: Presses Universitaires de Saint-Étienne, 2007), pp. 242–43.

féminine, qu'elles se rapprochent ou s'éloignent en apparence de la ligne que nous nous sommes tracées, du but que nous poursuivons.' [In our columns, (we) give place to all the manifestations of female activity, whether they seemingly come close to, or vary from the line which we traced for ourselves, from the goal which we pursue.]⁴⁰ The editor thus confirmed that the individual perspectives of her collaborators could indeed coexist with the editorial line she fixed for her newspaper, by maintaining an equilibrium between the two tendencies: plurality of voices on the one hand and the collective purpose of the journal on the other.

Reshaping Gender Roles within the Editorial Staff

As for the reflection of the ideals of sexualism in Valette's editorial model, the contiguity between the image projected by Valette as a female editor and the feminine ideals contained in her theory is striking. Sexualism, which is centred around the uplifting of the status and actual conditions of motherhood, promised to grant women (and by extension, children as well) a higher rank than that of men in the social order. As editor-in-chief of her journal, Valette symbolically embodied the image of this mother, placed on the summit of the communal hierarchy due to her decisive role in generating and maintaining the product that is *L'Harmonie sociale*. The very creation of this weekly newspaper came as a result of the activist actions and engagements of its editor.⁴¹ The role of Valette in relation to her periodical (the product of her militant career) can therefore be assimilated to that of a mother in relation to her child (the product of her very being).

Beyond this first parallel between the sexualist theory and Valette's editorial model, several other similarities can be found within the theory itself. First of all, sexualism encouraged women to develop a conscience of their true social and sexual value in order to reclaim their rightful place in society. It promoted the idea of women outclassing their male counterparts thanks to their inherent qualities. Valette's own career leading towards editorship portrayed this image of female prominence. Although she was born into a modest family (being the daughter of a railroad worker), she successfully managed to advance a career, competing with men and winning not only a key position within a largely 'masculine' party, but also the editorship of a political publication.⁴² This latter gain was historically considered as a right uniquely given to male editors.⁴³ In an era when the press made by women was still confused with the press made for women, Valette became one of the rare women editors, in charge of a political newspaper created by a woman, to engage women in political and social activism.⁴⁴ Therefore, when Valette's theoretical writings on sexualism celebrate women who advance rapidly and prodigiously in the professional and intellectual domains, one cannot but see a sort of auto-reflection on her own journey towards journalism.⁴⁵

Moreover, the elevated position sexualism promised women was not solely communicated via discourse in *L'Harmonie sociale*, but was also reflected through the articulation of male and female journalists' roles and contributions in the paper. In

40 Dr Z., 'Point d'arrêt', *L'Harmonie sociale* (4 March 1893), 1.

41 Sowerwine, *Sisters or Citizens*, p. 60.

42 Diebolt and Zylberberg-Hocquard, pp. 7–9.

43 French women got the definitive right to publish their own journal after the 1881 liberal law on the freedom of the press. Vincent Robert, 'Lois, censure et liberté', in *La Civilisation du journal. Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse au XIX^e siècle*, ed. by Dominique Kalifa et al. (Paris: Nouveau monde éditions, 2011), p. 89.

44 On the so-called 'feminine' periodicals published by men see Evelyne Sullerot, *La Presse féminine* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1963), p. 6. On the first official feminist periodical, *Le Droit des femmes*, also published by a man, Léon Richer, see Klejman and Rochefort, p. 45.

45 'Socialisme et sexualisme', *L'Harmonie sociale* (29 April 1893), 3.

her exercise of editorship, Aline Valette came across as the incarnation of this female figure placed on the top of her community. Although she regularly contributed as a journalist in the newspaper, this did not prevent her from assuming a more distinguished position within the editorial staff. To begin with, the first columns of the front page are systematically reserved for Valette's editorials. Therefore, it is her own writings that preside over the rest of the content by setting the tone for the themes and topics of each issue. Also, even though her signature found at the end of her articles can present her as simply one journalist among others, this effect is completely undone by the ostentatious display of her name in the masthead: 'Directrice: Aline Valette' is visible in large print in the masthead of every single issue. What is more, Valette seems to have a ubiquitous presence in all the pages of her weekly. Her written contributions are not only limited to the front page, but extend to the whole of the newspaper, regularly appearing on subsequent pages. When she occupied several columns in one issue, she always used an abbreviated form of signature limited to her initials 'A.V.' This choice reveals a false desire to conceal her identity (only superficially hidden) since it paradoxically accentuates the 'over-exposure' of the editor within her periodical. In her misleading attempt to camouflage her quasi-omnipresence in the pages of *L'Harmonie sociale*, Valette inversely highlights her distinguished position as editor. Her role as editor-in-chief vis-à-vis that of the other journalists can therefore be further assimilated to that of a mother, whose utility to the community grants her access to a more privileged rank.⁴⁶

It is worthy of mention that Valette's portrayal of female superiority in her editorial model did not stem from an egotistical motive, but rather from a quest to create positive representations of women in the journalistic field. The promotion of a higher status for women does not only reflect in Valette's own posture, but also extends to include those of her other female collaborators. Although the editorial staff on *L'Harmonie sociale* comprised both men and women, the number of female journalists Valette recruited was superior to that of male journalists. This decision can be regarded as a form of historical revenge over the journalistic establishment that had long favoured male pens over female ones. Even in the so-called 'presse féminine' ['feminine press'], men did not only take on the role of editor, but they even composed two thirds of the editorial staff in that category.⁴⁷ Valette's desire to endorse women's participation in journalism can also be detected in her choice to reserve the most visible columns of her weekly's front page almost exclusively for female collaborators. Her own editorials are regularly followed by the writing of a female columnist called Claire Jemme, who reports on the conditions of work for women. In between these two opinion pieces signed by women, a shorter unsigned column entitled 'Échos' ['Echoes'] provided the weekly news, the larger portion of which concerned female interests. Hence, the front pages of *L'Harmonie sociale* mark its editor's desire of promoting a higher status for women in journalism as a reflection of the position they are promised within sexualism.

In addition, the prevalence of female contributors to Valette's journal can be linked to another principle of her theory that highly stresses the importance of the engagement of women, as the first agents of change towards the advent of a sexualist revolution. According to sexualist theory, 'dans la lutte des sexe, le sexe asservi et exploité,

46 'Dans une société, où domine l'esprit socialiste, l'utilité des individus composantes à l'égard de l'ensemble, classe les individus ; l'être qui a le plus de charges est le premier parce que sa contribution à la vie sociale est la plus grande. Le travail le plus utile à une société est la maternité.' ['In a society, where a socialist (i.e. collectivist) spirit dominates, the utility of its composing individuals to the whole classifies the individuals. (...) The individual with the most contributions comes first (...). The most useful contribution to a society is motherhood.'] 'Socialisme et sexualisme', *L'Harmonie sociale* (29 April 1893), 2-3.

47 Rosemonde Sanson, 'La presse féminine', in Kalifa, pp. 523-24, 530.

[...] devra prendre en main la révolution nécessaire, sans plus compter sur l'homme pour résoudre la question sexuelle, — devenue la question des femmes' ['in the gender struggle, the enslaved and exploited gender (...) has to take into its own hands the necessary revolution, no longer counting on men to resolve the gender question — which became the woman question'].⁴⁸ Since Valette's newspaper was set out to be the media platform campaigning for sexualism, it follows that the journalists collaborating in this organ had to conform to the image of the army fighting for this very same cause. In light of this consideration, the editorial staff assembled by Valette not only evidenced a larger percentage of female journalists, but also positioned them in the front ranks of the fight for the sexualist revolution.

Consequently, male journalists who formed the minority of the editorial staff in *L'Harmonie sociale* assumed a less prominent role in the journal, thus reflecting the position of men according to the sexualist paradigm which favoured female superiority. Sexualism did in fact prescribe that men's role was limited outside the direct process of evolution and advancement of life in general.⁴⁹ For instance, Pierre Bonnier, the co-theorist of sexualism, did not assume an equal position to that of Valette within the newspaper, as he was only allocated one column per issue, and his signature typically fell on the second page. This example confirms the commitment to female leadership within the journalistic and ideological paradigms pertaining to sexualism. The efficiency of this choice in bringing female journalists to the fore can be attested to by several historical references which mainly link sexualism to Valette's oeuvre and neglect to state the role of her partner Bonnier.⁵⁰ Bonnier's use of the pseudonym 'Dr Z.' is also responsible for his lower exposure compared to that of Valette. The use of pseudonyms, often linked to female pens in the nineteenth century, was construed as a means of protection, masking contributors' identities and thus protecting them from exposure in the public domain.⁵¹ In Valette's weekly newspaper, however, this rule was reversed, and it is the traces of the male pen that were obscured, consequently bringing to light female ones. This inversion of gender-related literary norms provided a micro-image of the society in which the principles of sexualism would dictate gender roles.

Conclusion: The Multiple Communicational Capacities of a Periodical

The correlation between sexualist theory and the editorial model for Valette seems to hold a double interest. First, it allowed Valette the activist to defend her ideological agenda by responding through this practical approach to criticisms of her theory. By accommodating her editorial model to sexualist principles, she could portray the image of a woman emancipated from the domination of the man in a sexualist society. Even more, she gave the example of how a woman could preside over her male counterpart, without necessarily creating antagonisms between both parties. Second, the interest of the contiguity between the sexualist theory and Valette's editorial practice lies in revealing the multitude of ways in which a periodical can be mobilized to serve a social cause. Through the adoption of her ideological principles in her editorial practice, Valette reminds us that the periodical genre not only represents a textual medium in which

48 'Socialisme et sexualisme', *L'Harmonie sociale* (29 April 1893), 2.

49 Ibid.

50 Marilyn J. Boxer states that one of the goals of her 2012 paper on sexualism is to 'acknowledge Dr Bonnier for his feminism' (Boxer, p. 2), which implies the overlooking of Bonnier's contribution in the sexualist theory.

51 Monique De Saint Martin, 'Les femmes écrivains' et le champ littéraire', *Actes de la recherche en science sociales*, 3 (1990), 52–56 (p. 55) [accessed 15 October 2015]; Christine Planté, *La Petite Sœur de Balzac: Essai sur la femme auteur*, 2nd edn (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2015), p. 9.

an ideal can be promoted via discourse, but rather a living social enterprise in which individuals' roles, their postures, and the links that bind them together, all contribute to shaping the model of the society sought after.

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