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Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France.* Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2013. xiv + 301 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. $75.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8014-5129-9; $27.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-8014-7877-4.

Review by Richard C. Keller, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

American academics often lament the apparent anti-intellectualism of contemporary politics in this country. But as Camille Robcis demonstrates in her brilliant new book, we might be careful what we wish for. *The Law of Kinship* offers keen insight into the role played by one of the twentieth century's dominant intellectual streams--structuralism--on policy debates about two key intersections in modern French history: those of public and private, and law and family. Beginning with a careful archaeology of the significance of the family to the early Republic, Robcis guides the reader through a tour of the ways in which a normative imagining of the family came to constitute the "social" in France in the fields of politics, law, and the academy, with powerful repercussions in the present. The book is a must-read for social, intellectual, and political historians of contemporary Europe, as well as the anthropologists and psychoanalysts (and perhaps historians as well) who dare to consider the troubling dimensions of their disciplines' pasts.

This is a difficult book--there is no way it could be otherwise, given the density of its subject. It is not a book to digest in a single sitting. And yet despite the complexity of the topics she places under her scrutiny, Robcis presents the material to the reader with remarkable clarity--no mean feat, considering the project explores the origins of French family law under the revolution, the development of family policy as a cornerstone of the twentieth-century welfare state, the foundation of structuralism in anthropology and psychoanalysis, a backlash against those tendencies in post-1968 philosophy and activism, and the resurgence of structuralist imaginings of the family in the 1990s and 2000s. And the book's payoffs are well worth the effort Robcis demands of the reader: I emerged from the book with a far richer understanding not only of the centrality of the family in French social and political discourse and the overlapping of this subject with structuralist conceptions of the family, but also of republicanism and the relationship between the individual and the state in contemporary France.

Robcis is a careful, deliberate worker in this book. She moves ably from source to source, establishing a rigorous and convincing narrative of the place of the family in republican ideals in the modern period, and is equally adept at drawing evidence from ministerial documents, philosophical engagements, and political platforms. Robcis begins with an analysis of the place of the social in French politics after 1789. If part of the revolutionary project was its humanism, then the law had to codify the uniquely human nature of the social as a critical component of what separated humans from animal instinct. The law became a civilizational endeavor, spelling out the ways in which human unions constituted a regulated and normative basis for social function. Men and women might be mutually attracted by a base, animal nature, but they married "because they were social and subject to law" (p. 23). Unlike other contracts, which protected private interests, marriage represented a contract that was an investment in the social, through which "we stipulate not only for ourselves but for the other...for the State, for the general society of mankind," in the words of the Napoleonic jurist and architect of the Civil Code, Jean-Etienne-Marie Portalis (p. 23). The code established clear regulations that outlined the legal bases for filiation

and kinship, adoption, inheritance, and citizenship, all in the interest of defining the social. From the outset of the republic, then, matters that we might imagine as inherently private--relationships, childbearing and child-rearing--became fundamentally public.

By the end of the nineteenth century, pronatalists, Social Catholics, and industrial paternalists marshaled their forces to take family law in a new direction, one marked by a more interventionist tendency from the state. Calls for incentives for large families--family allocations, the family vote--increasingly became the order of the day. In the aftermath of the First World War, the state considered the development of these possibilities through a series of high-level family committees that began to shape family policy through the development and deployment of the welfare state. Robcis nimbly guides the reader through the ways in which an alphabet soup of committees and organizations responded to a rapidly changing political landscape through the course of the Third Republic and the Vichy period, emerging with the development of the postwar social security system.

All that is discussed in the first chapter. This is ground that others have covered, but is essential in setting the stage for the rest of the book. Chapter two launches into the heart of the book, exploring the intellectual history of structuralism in the works of two of its principal architects: the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Here, Robcis digs into works such as Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), in which the anthropologist explores the distinctions between nature (which he sees as universal) and culture (which he sees as particular) in human societies.[1] At the heart of the developmental move from nature to culture for Lévi-Strauss is the incest prohibition. It represents, on the one hand, a move away from animal instinct, but on the other, toward the social contract, as it initiates a normalization of exogenous marriage, which then forms the backbone of a regulated society. For Lacan, an avid reader of Lévi-Strauss, it is the resolution of the Oedipal complex--closely connected to if not synonymous with the incest prohibition--that represents the possibility of entry into the symbolic order. For both thinkers, it is this move to the symbolic order that forges "a direct correlation between kinship and socialization" (p. 101).

So how does one link the abstruse thought of Lacan and Lévi-Strauss to an emerging family policy in the nascent welfare state? This is where Robcis is at her best. Her chapter on "The Circulation of Structuralism" points to an episteme of familialism in mid-twentieth century France, one in which both politics and academics were steeped in the deep and ineradicable connections between the familial and the social. Of particular note here is a group of what Robcis calls "bridge figures," a cluster of intellectuals who moved between the worlds of psychoanalysis and politics. These included Georges Mauco, a right-leaning analyst whom the state recognized as an expert on population and immigration; Françoise Dolto, a media-savvy analyst and pediatrician; and André Berge, an analyst who was director of the Centre Claude Bernard, a psycho-pedagogical center that Mauco had founded in 1946; as well as venues such as this center and the Ecole des parents et des éducateurs, an institution for family and education counseling that was steeped in conservative moral values and which sought the "renewal of the family spirit in France" (p. 119). Through the work of these and other figures, versions of structuralist concepts of the family permeated the political and media worlds in the postwar period, with important influences on family and education policy.

As they did in so many arenas, the 1960s brought a powerful critique of familialism. Some transformations were political, some demographic. For example, a series of reforms to immigration law led to a doubling of the immigrant population between 1945 and 1975, facilitating a significant population increase. The Mouvement Républicain Populaire, the party that had been among the strongest forces behind the familialist urge in the mid-twentieth century, also lost much of its base in the postwar period. The regime of President Georges Pompidou also placed a lower priority on family policy than did his predecessor, Charles de Gaulle. Pompidou's concern was less with growing the population than with meeting the housing and education needs of France's existing population; likewise, the oil crisis of 1973 struck the French economy, with the Sécurité sociale budget taking significant hits.

New developments in family policy were geared more toward particular populations and situations than toward the idea of the "family" in general. For example, in place of benefits for large families came benefits for single parents and parents who cared for orphans: these were targeted toward the parents' needs, rather than an abstract idea of the family as constitutive of the social.

A further critical development was more directly a product of 1968: the rise of "anti-Oedipal" philosophies. Robcis provides here a deep exegesis of the work of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Luce Irigaray, signaling a broader "critique of the structuralist social contract" that aimed at "producing freer subjects and less authoritarian societies" (p. 169). Here Robcis plays again to her strengths, offering incisive readings of these thinkers' challenges to Lacan at both theoretical and institutional levels. Such movements, of course, went beyond the text: Robcis offers an engaging narrative of the emergence of two critical political movements in the 1970s that both facilitated and capitalized on the backlash against familialism: the feminist organization Psych et Po, and the Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire.

The 1980s and 1990s, however, witnessed a return to familialism that remains central to French political and intellectual culture in the present. Two cases in particular--the battle for assisted reproduction and the Pacte civil de solidarité or PACS, which proposed to extend social benefits to couples regardless of their sexual orientation--saw a resurgence of a structuralist family logic in French political discourse. Biotechnologies such as artificial insemination and surrogacy raised important questions about the relationship between biology and society, as they made possible what Robcis calls alternative kinships. Likewise, although the PACS did not specifically mention adoption or citizenship, an official recognition of couple status that extended to same-sex partners raised the possibility of an authorization of same-sex parenthood. Actors on both the political right and left invoked a passionate defense of republicanism in their efforts to quash these measures: both called on a structuralist model of the family as a core social--not religious--value, in which parents of each sex played essential roles in "the establishment of a stable frame" for childrearing and society (p. 255). For not only policymakers but for many social scientists who weighed in on the debate, what was at stake in these battles was not any one particular case, but the law as a symbolic order itself, one that represented "the sexual and gendered imperative for the existence of culture" (p. 256).

The influence of social science on policymaking is of course not an exclusively French phenomenon. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and sociologists weighed in on both sides of segregation in the United States, for example, with important effects for the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, and the Moynihan report on *The Negro Family* played a critical role in shaping Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. But as Robcis points out, American examples of social science intervention in politics are characterized by their empiricism: regardless of their political stance, they are data-heavy, valuing the particular over the normative. In France, the opposite has been the case. What has been at stake is culture itself, in the form of the law. Robcis is careful to note that neither Lacan nor Lévi-Strauss intended for their work to shape a broad legal frame for the family as constitutive of the social. Instead, their work points to an ahistorical foundation for a political culture that allows it not to consider the republic as a historically contingent phenomenon, but instead, to resist history in the form of social, political, and demographic transformation. This is as a result a heady book, one with important implications for historians and other students of French political culture who seek a rich and troubling analysis of the history of the republic. We should all give this volume the careful reading it merits.

NOTE

[1] Claude Lévi-Strauss, trans. by James Harle Bell, John von Sturmer and Rodney Needham, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

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