



## Reassembling Documents of Life in the Archive

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### ABSTRACT

We usually perceive archives as the end of the active life of a document, a place where a document is deposited to be protected and preserved for the creation of future memories and histories. And yet archives are beginnings as much as they are ends: they give their documents a new life and particularly with the advent of digitisation, new and diverse forms of life; but they can also deprive their documents of a future life, by hiding them through mysterious cataloguing structures, complex classification practices or merely spatial arrangements. Apart from curators and archivists who create and organise archives, often hiding documents in them, researchers also create archival assemblages when they bring together documents from diverse archives and sources around the world. But researchers, like archivists, often hide the archival strategies or sources of their research, through their immersion in the power relations of knowledge production. In this paper I look at the creation of an archival assemblage from my research with documents of life written by French seamstresses, active in the feminist circles of the romantic socialist movements of the nineteenth century. What I argue is that as researchers we need to become more sensitive to the life of the documents of life we work with; simply put: we cannot engage with documents of life while ignoring the life of documents within the archive and beyond.

*Keywords:* archives, assemblages, feminist labour history

## ARCHIVAL ASSEMBLAGES AND GENEALOGICAL APPROACHES

In this paper I look at the creation of an archival assemblage from my research with documents of life written by French seamstresses, active in the feminist circles of the romantic socialist movements<sup>1</sup> of the nineteenth century (Tamboukou 2015). This work is part of a wider project of writing a feminist genealogy of the seamstress, looking at submerged and marginalized histories of women working in the garment industry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Tamboukou 2015, 2016). The paper unfolds in three parts. In the first section I look at connections between Foucault's genealogical approach and archival research in the social sciences; then I look at practices of interrogating the order of the archive and finally I give an overview of 'the other archive'<sup>2</sup> that I have created in the context of this research. Moving to the first section then, how is the genealogical approach to be understood?

As a Nietzschean insight reconfigured in Michel Foucault's analytics (1986), genealogy is concerned with the processes, procedures and apparatuses, whereby truth and knowledge are produced. Genealogy writes the history of the present: it problematizes the multiple, complex and non-linear configurations of the socio-political and cultural formations of modernity.<sup>3</sup> In the context of my research: what were the conditions of possibility for needlework to emerge as the feminine labour problem par excellence, how has the seamstress been marginalized in the social and political movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and why is women's work still a riddle even amongst feminist theorizations and debates?

In addressing the historicity of such present questions and problems, genealogy conceives subjectivities and social relations as an effect of the interweaving of discourses and practices, which it sets out to trace and explore. But instead of seeing history as a continuous development of an ideal schema, genealogy is oriented to discontinuities. Throughout the genealogical exploration there are frequent disruptions, uneven and haphazard processes of dispersion, that call into question the supposed linear evolution of history. In this context of reversal, our present is not theorized as the result of a meaningful development, but rather as an event, a random result of the interweaving of relations of power and domination. Genealogy as a method of analysis searches in the maze of dispersed events to trace discontinuities, recurrences and play where traditional historiography sees continuous development, progress and seriousness. Women's work in the garment industry is a paradigmatic case of uneven historical developments and its study seriously deviates from the canon of analyzing the industrial formations in modernity. As Judith Coffin has

aptly pointed out, ‘in many instances, concerns to preserve gender hierarchies trumped economic rationality, technological efficiency or political self-interest’ in the economic histories of the garment industry’ (1996, 6).

As a methodological approach, ‘genealogy is gray, meticulous and patiently documentary’ (Foucault 1986, 76); it is the art of archival work par excellence. Foucault was indeed an archive addict and spent most of his research life immersed in a bulk of archival documents that he kept digging and excavating in the *Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal* and the *Bibliothèque du Saulchoir* amongst many libraries and other state and local archives. But while a lot has been written about Foucault’s genealogical approach as ‘a history of the present’ (1979, 31), the minutiae and micro-practices of his archival work have been mostly passed over in the existing and ever thriving bodies of Foucauldian literature.<sup>4</sup> Foucault in fact wrote very little about the nuts and bolts of his archival work. However, we know something about his visceral excitement when reading a record of internment in the beginning of the eighteenth century at the *Bibliothèque Nationale*:

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It would be hard to say exactly what I felt when I read these fragments. No doubt, one of these impressions that are called ‘physical’, as if there could be any other kind. I admit that these ‘short stories’ suddenly emerging from two and a half centuries of silence stirred more fibres within me than what is ordinary called ‘literature’, without my being able to say even now if I was more moved by the beauty of that Classical style, draped in a few sentences around characters that were plainly wretched, or by the excesses, the blend of dark stubbornness and rascality of these lives whose disarray and relentless energy one senses beneath the stone-smooth words (1994, 158).

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However, as Foucault humbly admitted his subsequent analysis of these texts was dry and the dream to ‘restore their intensity’ failed (ibid.). What he did instead was to compile all these ‘poem-lives’ (ibid., 159) in a volume with a few preliminary remarks, leaving the stories themselves to convey their intensity to the reader directly. Foucault’s anthology of the prison archives of the Hôpital Générale and the Bastille, published in the Gallimard collection *Parallèle Lives*, also included the volume *Le Désordre des familles* (Farge and Foucault 1982). This was a collection of ‘*lettres de cachet*’, letters signed by the French King enforcing the incarceration of people whose families had asked that they be imprisoned or confined in asylums. Foucault co-edited this volume with the historian Arlette Farge, who has written beautifully about the art of doing archival research (1989). It is thus from Farge’s influential text, *Le Gout de l’Archive* that we can literally have a taste of some of the theoretical, methodological and affective practices in the archive that Foucault both deployed and experienced. More importantly it is from Farge’s work that my overall ‘archival

sensibility' (Moore et al. 2016) vis-à-vis forgotten documents, subsumed life-stories and marginalized 'narrative personae' (Tamboukou 2014) emerges.

### ARCHIVAL SENSIBILITIES

How is 'archival sensibility' to be understood in the context of writing a feminist genealogy of the Parisian seamstress? Archival sensibility encompasses a set of practices that highlight the need to study archival documents carefully, in the sense that they should not be simply treated as sources of nice quotations or as illustrations of an analysis that was not led by their study. Although we always go to the archive with some questions in mind, we should also let its documents surprise us, allow them to interrogate our a-priori judgements, understandings and prejudices and let them redirect our analytical paths and routes of interpretation. Archival documents will always offer us exciting stories or quotations but their place should be formative and not illustrative or simply evidentiary in the historiographical practice. As Farge has pithily noted, 'a quotation is never proof, and any historian knows that it is almost always possible to come up with a quotation that contradicts the one she has chosen' (1989, 74).

But there is more to 'archival sensibility': although archival documents are often assemblages of fragmented, broken and discontinuous stories, traces of the past rather than representations or mirrors of it, their fragmentation should not be continued in the researcher's discourse. On the contrary we need to be sensitive to the lives of the documents found in the archive, try to understand and map the conditions of their possibility and attempt to imagine their lives before and after our encounter with them. Finally, we need to be sensitive to their potentiality, the forces and effects of their intensity, which we need to facilitate and set in motion, rather than block, hide or sidestep. Simply put, we cannot engage with documents of life while ignoring the life of documents within the archive and beyond.

Feeling Foucault's disappointment at having neutralized the visceral forces of the poetic lives he encountered in the archive, I have been similarly mindful of the danger of my own analysis stripping out the intensity of the stories that I have excavated in the archive of the Parisian seamstress. Dangers of drying up my archival documents notwithstanding, I have yet tried to listen to some of the flickering voices that erupt from the archives by allowing their order of discourse to mingle with my own interpretation and understanding. In this light I have chosen to present some documents in their wholeness (see Tamboukou 2015, 2016), but I have also created a virtual archival site, carefully mapping the archival

sources of my research, and wherever possible giving links to the cited documents.

It has to be noted here that my archival research has drawn on different genres of auto/biographical and political writings including journal articles, political brochures, memoirs, letters and autobiographical fiction. The personal and the political are tightly intertwined in these documents that draw on the seamstresses' lived experiences to offer acute observations and analyses, emotional and affective responses to the events of their times and even *de profundis* confessions of life decisions and choices. Suzanne Voilquin's divorce story that features in the very last issue of *La Tribune des Femmes* is a breath-taking example of the blurred distinctions between the personal and the political in the assemblage of the seamstresses' 'documents of life'.

In offering my readers the opportunity to study and appreciate the documents' poetics, textual economy and discursive order, I have attempted to open up a dialogical scene wherein the inevitable dryness of the researcher's analysis can be enlivened in its entanglement with archival stories. It is this idea of developing 'the other archive' (Moore et al. 2016) that I want to present and discuss in the next section.

## THE ORDER OF THE ARCHIVE

The idea of creating 'the other archive' (Moore et al. 2016) erupted from my frustration with tracking and mapping the different archival sources for my research. There were two main reasons for my anxiety and uneasiness with the existing sources: their diverse geographies and addresses, both real and virtual, as well as the many confusions and errors in the existing bibliographical and citation references. Most importantly I was deeply upset to find out that the protagonists of my research, who were leading figures in the first autonomous feminist movement in France, had no specially curated collections of their papers, in the archival tradition of the *fonds*. This notion originated in France in 1841, when archivists were asked 'to unite all the deeds which come from a body, an establishment, a family, or an individual' (Thibodeau 1993, 256). In this light, *fonds* were conceptualized as assemblages that were much more than a simple collection of papers; they included both substantial and contextual documents and charted authorial and discursive relations between private and public documents and the historical figures that had either originated them or featured in them. Seen from a Foucauldian critical point then, *fonds* flesh out the way documents connect within a collection, but they also expose hierarchical orderings, as well as power-knowledge relations at play. What

I therefore suggest is that *fonds* create ‘the order of the archive’, which is how the French feminist seamstresses were excluded from their creation. It was such archival practices of exclusion that I wanted to interrogate and challenge by deploying practices of ‘the other archive’ (Moore et al. 2016) that I now want to map and explicate.

### ARCHIVAL DISORDERS AND NAME WARS

In mapping practices of ‘the other archive’ (Moore et al. 2016) I will now address a range of problems, questions and issues that emerged through my research with the seamstresses’ documents. We usually perceive archives as the end of the active life of a document, a place where a document is deposited to be protected and preserved for the creation of future memories and histories. And yet archives are beginnings as much as they are ends: they give their documents a new life and particularly with the advent of digitisation, new and diverse forms of life; but they can also deprive their documents of a future life, by hiding them through mysterious cataloguing structures, complex classification practices or simply impromptu spatial arrangements. Arnold Hunt’s statement is here utterly revealing: ‘As a curator myself, I’m intrigued by the ways that the physical organisation of archives can affect—and sometimes obstruct—their use by historians. As the old saying goes: where do you hide a leaf? In a forest. Where do you hide a document? In an archive’.<sup>5</sup>

But apart from curators and archivists who create and organise archives, often hiding documents in them, researchers also create archival assemblages when they bring together documents from diverse archives and sources around the world. *Olive Schreiner’s letters* and *Emma Goldman’s Papers* are lucid examples of such archival assemblages that have influenced my own approach to the feminist archive. These are digital and on-line archives that have developed as major research projects in themselves. What I want to remind us here however is that all research projects create archival assemblages, be they documents, oral interviews, transcriptions or other research data. But researchers, like archivists, often hide the archival strategies or sources of their research, through their immersion in the power relations of knowledge production that Foucault (1969) has influentially theorized in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*. It was therefore my situated position in the archive, as well as in the knowledge field of my research, that I also wanted to map, as part of the overall epistemological stance of ‘situated knowledges’ (Haraway 1988).

While recognising my own inevitable involvement in the power/knowledge relations of the archive I have attempted to unveil my practices: I

have thus created ‘a plane of consistency’<sup>6</sup> for the archive of my research by bringing together an assemblage of diverse political writings and personal documents. Not only have I analysed them, but as already noted above, I have created an archival blog for them, so that they can be accessed, viewed and revisited by future researchers. Conceived as an assemblage,<sup>7</sup> these documents continuously create new meanings through the connections they make: they develop internal relations between and amongst themselves, but also external ones with other discourses and documents. I have tried to map such external relations through a virtual outline of the analytical context of my interpretation, but also through reassembling documents and sources, which chart the cultural worlds of the seamstresses, showing how they were influenced by the intellectual production of their times and geographies.

My first move for this archival assemblage was to create virtual fonds for the historical figures of my research, by bringing together existing biographical and autobiographical documents, archival sources, as well as publications from them and about them. What emerged from this reassembling of documents was the interesting phenomenon of what I have called ‘the name wars’, quite simply the seamstresses’ decision to reject both their patronymic and marital names and choose their own names to sign their articles: Jeanne-Désirée [Désirée Véret-Gay], Marie-Reine [Marie-Reine Guindorf], Jeanne-Victoire [Jeanne Deroin] and Suzanne [Suzanne Voilquin]. As, Jeanne-Désirée wrote:

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Men give birth to doctrines and systems and baptise them in their name; but we give birth to people; we should give them our own name and take only the name of our mothers and of God. This is the law dictated to us by nature and if we continue to take the names of men and of doctrines we will be slaves.<sup>8</sup>

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Jeanne-Victoire had used more dramatic metaphors in interrogating the marital name : ‘this habit that obliges women to take the name of their husband, is it not, like the branding iron that imprints on the forehead of the slaves the initials of their master, so that they can be recognized by everyone as his property?’<sup>9</sup> The seamstresses’ patronymic opposition was neither simple, nor just cultural or symbolic: it was a socio-political act of rebellion, embedded in the materiality of their working-class position. As a matter of fact their decision to use names of their choice was ridiculed and criticized on the grounds of their proletarian background. This is how Suzanne, responded to a sarcastic article in *Figaro*, scolding ‘a half a dozen seamstresses’ for refusing to sign by their paternal or marital surnames:

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Truly, gentlemen of the selfless *Figaro*, could I please ask you to tell me how you understand human dignity, and whether half a dozen of seamstresses as you call us, are not equally respectable in consolidating their independence through the work of their needle, like other employees [...] No gentlemen, it is not because of fear or shame that we silence the name of our husbands or our fathers, but because we want to respond ourselves through our words and our actions.<sup>10</sup>

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It was the first time that such a rejection of the patriarchal surname appeared in ‘the gendered history of naming’ Carolyn Eichner has argued (2014, 661). The seamstresses’ ‘name wars’ have therefore created a whole layer of confusions, errors in citations and a scattering and dispersal of their writings—problems that I tried to address through the creation of their virtual fonds. It was after creating an auto/biographical context through charting diagrams of their names and personal documents, that I went on to create archival maps for their political writings, which I will present and discuss in the next section.

#### THE SEAMSTRESSES’ ‘LITTLE BROCHURE’

*La Femme Libre/Apostolat des Femmes* and finally *Tribune des Femmes*, was the first feminist newspaper, founded by Désirée Véret-Gay on August 15, 1832. As already noted above Véret was a seamstress and a Saint-Simonian follower in the first stage of her political trajectory. She co-edited the newspaper with her comrade and fellow worker Marie-Reine Guindorf, but withdrew from its editorial team after the third issue, which is when Suzanne Voilquin came on board and remained as one of its editors till the end. The newspaper went through a series of changes of titles and subtitles, as well as editors. All thirty-one issues are housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), but they have also been digitised and are available through Gallica, the BNF digital library.

The seamstresses’ ‘little brochure’, as they kept calling it in their articles, ran for 31 issues in two periods. Although it did not appear on fixed dates—given that its editors were also full time seamstresses—it had more or less two issues per month. Unlike the second period’s issues that were all dated on the cover—although only giving the month of the publication—most of the issues in the first period were not dated—with the exception of the second and fifth issues—but all dates can be inferred by their content and sometimes the dates in the signatures of their contributors. The seamstresses’ initial indifference to calendar time is quite striking: it shows how totally immersed they were in the revolutionary *durée*, the moment and events of their incalculable present. Time was not experienced as a linear, measurable entity to be used (and abused).



Here it is also important to remember that the seamstresses were young women: time or the passing of it did not really matter; eternity was their time. More importantly they seemed somehow to feel the untimely nature of their movement and its newspaper. Far from being constrained by any sort of calendar time their ‘little brochure’ was their way of writing for a future that their ‘present could not recognize’ (Grosz 2004, 117), it was about imagining ‘the out-of place and the out-of step’ (ibid.).

Unlike dates, which did not seem to matter, at least in the first year, names *did matter*. The first issue was entitled as *La Femme Libre* [Free Woman] with *Apostolat des Femmes* [Women’s Apostolate] as a subtitle. The second issue appeared as *Apostolat des Femmes* with *La Femme Libre* as a small print heading; this subtitle became *La Femme de l’Avenir* [Woman of the Future] in the third issue and *La Femme Nouvelle* [New Woman] from the fourth till the twelfth issue. The thirteenth issue was the only issue published as *Affranchissement des Femmes* [Women’s Emancipation], still with *La Femme Nouvelle* as its subtitle. Finally it was renamed to *Tribune des Femmes* [Women’s Tribune] carrying *La Femme Nouvelle* as a subtitle till the end of its second period. Carrying connotations of the disputes around free love that had divided the Saint-Simonian movement, *La Femme Libre* disappeared from the newspaper in the third issue.<sup>11</sup> It was with the final titles, *Affranchissement des Femmes* and *Tribune des Femmes* that the religious elements in the name of the newspaper were dropped and it was actually with this name that the majority of the issues—18 out of 31—were published. Interestingly, dates actually emerged as a constant feature after the dust of ‘the name wars’ had been settled.

Apart from the titles/subtitles changes, there was also an ebb and flow with slogans and epigraphs. The first front-page slogan appeared in the third issue: ‘With the emancipation of the woman will come the emancipation of the worker’, both nouns in the singular to denote the Saint-Simonian importance on the individual. In connecting women’s emancipation with that of the workers the editors sought to clarify their position vis-à-vis the controversies that the title *La Femme Libre* had initially caused in the Parisian bourgeois circles in general and the Saint-Simonian community in particular. But as internal differences never stopped, this turmoil was transferred to the changes in epigraphs and slogans: the fifth issue came with a new slogan: ‘Liberty for women, liberty for the people through a new organisation of the household and industry’. The link between women and the people of the first slogan was kept, but the importance of the reorganisation of the household was flagged up. The sixth issue interestingly added two words below its main title and before the epigraph: ‘Truth and Union’, thus highlighting the importance for women to be united despite their differences. But, as the

final change to the front epigraph in the tenth issue signifies, internal conflicts went on and thus the need to invoke Jean d'Arc's religious heroism: 'All being equal in rights and duties; our banner being in trouble it is fair that it should be honoured',<sup>12</sup> which remained till the end with just a small reordering in the eleventh issue.

All these changes in names, titles, subtitles, slogans and epigraphs forcefully express the fact that there never was such a thing as a 'Saint-Simonian feminism' given the many differences that were reflected in 'the name wars', but also in the contents and discourses of the newspapers' articles. Indeed, the archive of this first feminist newspaper does not reveal any kind of linear or coherent 'isms'. The seamstresses' newspaper carries signs of what it means to write difference, but it is also a tangible trace of ideas and social movements in becoming. In the light of such nominal histories, one of the first decisions I had to make in working with this newspaper was to keep the nuances of the name changes in my citations, as I wanted to carry alive its turbulent histories. In my view, citations in the existing literature that have used either *La Femme Libre* or *Tribune des Femmes* as the newspaper's overall title obscure and simplify these histories. In her classic study *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Clare Moses (1984), for example, has mostly used the title *Tribune des Femmes*, but also *La Femme Libre* [*Tribune des Femmes*] or *Apostolat des Femmes* [*Tribune des Femmes*], which I have also found inaccurate and misleading in terms of the title/subtitle's interesting histories, as outlined above. Overall, there is no consistency in her citations, which is another cause of confusion. In their textual and discourse analysis of the nineteenth century feminist press, Clare Moses and Leslie Rabine (1993) continue the confusions above, while Joan Scott (1988) has also used the title of *Tribune des Femmes* in her work with gender relations in the Parisian garment industries.

What I have also tried to do in creating a virtual archive is to chart the different addresses of this first feminist newspaper in the Parisian socio-political map, thus highlighting how geography and history are interrelated in our interpretations and modes of understanding. Locating the various addresses of the first feminist newspaper was in itself a concrete experience in the spatiality and materiality of the nineteenth century social movements. It was from their homes that the seamstresses wrote and published, the same places where they would most probably work to make up for the meagre wages of their needlework. When an editor withdrew, the address would also change: 17 Rue du Caire was Jeanne-Désirée's home for the first four issues; the newspaper then moved to 11 Rue du Faubourg St Denis, Marie-Reines's address after Jeanne-Désirée's withdrawal. Both addresses were at the heart of Sentier, the Parisian garment area industry, but when Voilquin became editor the social and

political geography of the newspaper also changed: 26 Rue du Cadet and 37 Rue de Bussy (today Buci) were in much more elevated areas of Paris, as Voilquin's husband was an architect and she had climbed up to his social position. Finally in its second year, the newspaper acquired a professional status with proper bureaus at 21 Rue des Juifs—Ferdinand-Duval today. The geography of the newspaper thus reveals an intriguing history, or maybe the history of the journal can be starkly traced in its geography: its different addresses are thus the material traces of economic and social differences in the editorship, as well as in the theoretical and political orientation of the journal. In retracing the seamstresses' steps and addresses in Paris, I could still see and feel these differences: I could literally listen to their rhythms in the way Henri Lefebvre (2004) has suggested that we should do. In doing this I could also see how they were deeply influenced by the turbulent politics of their times, as I will show in the next section.

### 'WOMEN'S VOICE' IN THE REVOLUTION

*La Voix des Femmes* [Women's Voice] was the first feminist daily newspaper in nineteenth century France. It was edited by Eugénie Niboyet, but was run by a committee, which included Désirée Véret-Gay and Jeanne Deroin. It appeared after the Provisional Government of the Second Republic suspended the security bond, that is a caution payment against possible future offenses for newspaper publishers, as well as the tax stamp for subscribers in February 1848. The newspaper ran daily between March 20 and June 20, 1848, with a period of suspension between April 29 and May 28. There are 46 issues overall, as the newspaper ran only three times a week between issues no. 39 and 46. All issues are housed at BNF, the *Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris* (BHVP) and the Musée de l'Histoire Vivante in Montreuil, in the *Fonds: Des Trois Glorieuses à la Seconde République, 1830-1851*. Microfilms of all issues are also available at the *Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand*, but the newspaper has not been digitised yet.

The role of the newspaper as expressed in the summary of its vision, which was included in its first 25 issues under its subheading, was to open up a space for women to affirm themselves on a daily basis, to identify their problems and advance 'their moral, intellectual and material interests.'<sup>13</sup> Apart from being a political platform, *La Voix des Femmes* was also going to be 'a library of practical instructions for women'<sup>14</sup> and in this light the newspaper included a range of industrial, commercial and cultural activities as a way of encouraging women to immerse themselves in all aspects of active life. From its third issue onwards, the newspaper introduced a column entitled 'Programme of Spectacles': it listed all theatrical and musical performances in Paris and featured in most of the

newspaper's last pages till the end. Apart from a mere listing of the Parisian cultural events, the newspaper introduced 'a feuilleton', that is a literary column, mostly run by the editor's only son Paulin Niboyet;<sup>15</sup> it also included extended drama and book reviews, as well as poetry. Finally, news from the stock market became a standard column of the newspaper in most of the issues between March and April 1848.

The feminist press in the February 1848 revolution opened up paths for women to emerge from the margins and shadows of the private sphere wherein even their socialist comrades as well as the radical members of the provisional government would rather have them remain. Raising women's political consciousness was at the centre of the editor's vision, who throughout her editorials, kept urging women to action: 'we have to work, not only around us but upon ourselves, to conquer through esteem the place that belongs to us.'<sup>16</sup> The February revolution came to a tragic end during 'the bloody June days'<sup>17</sup> when the proletarians took to the barricades again to protest against the government's decision to disentangle its promise to guarantee work for all from its political projects. This time the revolutionaries were defeated: they were either killed, imprisoned or exiled. *La Voix des Femmes* shut down on June 20, only two days before the uprising began. The hopes 'for the right to work' and the equality aspirations of the first daily feminist newspaper fell together but the seamstresses' revolutionary spirit did not: it re-emerged through a new publication with politics in its title as I will discuss next.

*La Politique des Femmes* [Women's Politics] was a weekly newspaper run by Désirée Véret-Gay as its director and Jeanne Deroin as its co-editor. The feminist maxim that the personal is political was powerfully encompassed its title, but only for a very short period. The first issue appeared in the same week that the June uprising erupted, followed by the infamous decree that prohibited women's participation in political clubs; not only were women denied the right to vote, they were excluded from the sphere of politics by law. Moreover the Republican government re-imposed the caution tax on all publications, which made the seamstresses' newspaper both legally and financially untenable. The second and last issue appeared on August 4, as a dissenting voice within a regime of oppression and persecution to thank its supporters, but also to say 'au-revoir' to its readers in the spirit of hope and perseverance. Both issues are housed at BNF but are also available in microfilms at the *Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville* (BHV). The second issue is also digitised and is accessible through Gallica.

*La Politique des Femmes* reclaimed women workers' voices in the political procedures initiated by the 1848 revolution. It was indeed the question of power not only between women and men, but also amongst women

themselves that the first issue of *La Politique des femmes* highlighted.<sup>18</sup> It was high time young women workers spoke; they had come of age in the course of the revolution and ‘wanted to live in their own way’ Désirée Véret-Gay argued in her first editorial.<sup>19</sup> What she also highlighted was the fact that although women’s political aims were the same as men’s, their perspective was different and thus ‘we must each have our originality’, so that ‘under the vast banner of socialism women’s politics can march in front alongside men’s politics’.<sup>20</sup> Women’s active involvement in politics was also seen within an international context, wherein the European revolutions that were unfolding at the time, were particularly mentioned (see Jones 1991). But while the political was flagged up in the newspaper’s title and subject content, it was not separated from the social and its material conditions of possibility. Both issues of *La Politique des Femmes* presented a carefully designed project for a commercial association of seamstresses, a project that would further develop in their next newspaper that I will now discuss.

*L’Opinion des Femmes* [Women’s Opinion] was a monthly newspaper published in two periods. Its first two-page issue, directed by Jeanne Deroin with Désirée Véret-Gay as a co-editor, appeared on August 21, 1848. As already noted above, it was a continuation of *La Politique des Femmes*, under a different name as the very possibility of engaging in politics was denied to women after the government put down the June 1848 revolt. *L’Opinion des Femmes* folded after its first issue; it would reappear in January 1849, the year that Jeanne Deroin became the first woman to stand as a candidate for national elections. Her motion was symbolic: it gave her the opportunity to campaign—during a period that women could not speak even within socialist meetings and clubs—and it was a bold defiance of the law, which limited candidacy for public office to men. In her appeal to the electors of the Seine department, published in *L’Opinion des Femmes* on April 10, 1849, she asked her fellow citizens to honour the republican dogmas of liberty, equality, fraternity for all, women and men. In its second period the newspaper ran for six eight-page issues till August 1849. All seven issues are housed at BNF. They are also digitised and available through a different document in Gallica.

Although Deroin worked towards pushing away violence and oppression from the field of politics, violence was there to stay: in August 1849, *L’Opinion des Femmes* published a draft for a federation of workers’ associations, *L’Association Solidaire et Fraternelle de Toutes les Associations Réunies*.<sup>21</sup> The association would materialize the right to work by providing tools, raw materials and interest-free loans for its members. The plan also included structures for the organisation of cultural and family life, as well as institutional regulations. As Michele Serrière has noted this was

not just a plan for an association, but rather a utopian programme for the reorganisation of the whole society: 'the future always ends up giving reason to dream', she poetically noted (1981, 38). Given the overt socialist direction of the plan it is not difficult to understand that the government intervened swiftly: *L'Opinion des Femmes* was fined with five thousand francs for publishing against the anti-associationist laws and was forced to close down.

Apart from revealing the harshness of the political reality the French feminists went through, the multiple names and geographies of these first feminist newspapers are traces of resistance in the long revolutionary durée of the nineteenth century. One of the themes that has also forcefully emerged from the seamstresses' genealogical archive is the importance of internationalisation and the role of the labour movement in forging, supporting and sustaining universal ideas, as well as real and material links. Not only did the nineteenth century feminist movement transcend national boundaries, it actually developed and unfolded within an international matrix, despite language barriers, travel restrictions and the many wars, revolutions and conflicts that shook Europe during this period. As Bonnie Anderson has succinctly observed it is precisely its international character and perspective that 'makes this movement seem so modern' (2000, 2).

### ARCHIVAL EXCAVATIONS, ARCHAEOLOGY AS A METHOD

What is interesting in considering the range of feminist newspapers that I have presented above is the peculiar diversity of the archives, locations and forms that they have been preserved. It took a lot of effort on my part to locate all these diverse types and locations of the documents, despite the fact that some of them were cited in the relevant literature, but often in very confusing ways, with the notable exception of the careful bibliographical details of Michèle Riot-Sarcey's, *La démocratie à l'épreuve des femmes* (1994), which I have updated by adding the on-line locations of those documents that have now been digitised. Indeed the fragmentation of the documents in the existing literature has been extended to the fragmentation of their citations, exacerbated by the fact that the on-coming rush of digitisation has not been yet incorporated in the full citations of these documents, not even in libraries or archives such as the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* or the *Archives Nationales* that hold both printed and digitised forms of these documents. One would expect that these documents would have been gathered at least in a feminist library such as the *Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand*, or a feminist archive such as the *Archives de Marie-Louise Bouglé* at the *Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris*, or on the website of the Association, *Archives du Féminisme*. This is not the

case however, and sometimes even the references in the existing literature were misleading since the catalogue system of the archives had changed and documents had been reshuffled and redistributed to the point that not even archivists responsible for the collections had been able to track. There were for example two letters from Désirée Véret-Gay and nine from Jeanne Deroin that were supposed to be in ‘Cartons 42 and 47’ in the *Fonds Bouglé* of the BHVP, according to Riot-Sarcey’s list of sources (1994, 346). The problem is that there is not even such a thing as *Fonds Bouglé* in the official BHVP catalogue anymore. Bouglé’s papers have now been renamed as *Archives Marie-Louise Bouglé*, since they include *fonds* of many feminists. Moreover, the whole system of ‘cartons’ has changed and when I visited the library in September 2014 looking for these eleven letters, they were unable to find them. It actually took me seven months, many e-mail exchanges with the archivists and a second visit to the BHVP in April 2015, to eventually locate them, after following an obscure footnote in a draft of a conference proceedings paper on Deroin’s years in exile that I unearthed in the *Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand* (Baker 1997, 15, n. 20).

It is important to note here that the history of *Bouglé’s* archives is very interesting in itself: Marie-Louise Bouglé (1883–1936) was an active feminist at the turn of the twentieth century. She worked as a secretary, but in 1921 she began an intense archival work, collecting materials about and around women, including books, journal articles, pamphlets, essays, studies, as well as personal correspondences. She thus founded a feminist library, which opened in 1923 and run on a voluntary basis, open to readers twice a week. After her premature death in 1936, her husband André Mariani looked after the library but it eventually became part of *La Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris* in 1946. However, the collection was divided: its books became part of the general collection of the library, while its manuscripts were unsurprisingly stored in the basement. They were unearthed in 1977 by a graduate student, Maïté Albistur and were catalogued as a separate collection. Although it was initially named as *Fonds Bouglé* it was eventually renamed as *Archives Marie-Louise Bouglé*, but the two names of the collection are still in use, even in the continuously updated website of the *Archives du Féminisme*.<sup>22</sup> Thus, confusions still continue as my adventure with Gay’s and Deroin’s letters has shown.

### NO ARCHIVES, NO HISTORY

Women have been hidden from history, Sheila Rowbotham (1973) famously declared some forty years ago, thus initiating the feminist project of unveiling the silenced female subjects of the historical discourse. What I mostly encountered in my research was not so much silences in the

archives but silences in the catalogues, their hidden structures, the fact that catalogues often do not reveal what is not included in their descriptions. In many cases even unravelling the mystery of the changing names of documents—such as the very first feminist newspaper that has yet to get a definitive name—was an adventure in itself. And yet once I had survived the frustration of finding a document and mapping its complex archival geographies, such ‘nomadic documents’, as I have called them would become points of entry for genealogical emergences, allowing new questions and intellectual problems to emerge. Perhaps the feminist project of the twenty-first century might be to unveil the hidden structures of the archives and create assemblages of diverse documents. It is to this project that I have tried to contribute, through the creation of ‘the other archive’ (Moore et al. 2016) that I have presented and discussed in this paper.

In creating this ‘other archive’ I have addressed an important gap in the literature around early socialist feminism, namely the way their personal, political and creative narratives have been read, presented and used. As I have argued throughout the paper, the seamstresses’ narratives have not been properly analysed as ‘documents of life’ (Plummer 2001). They mostly appear in a fragmented way, as ‘data’, as rhetorically powerful quotations, as evidence of the researcher’s/writer’s argument as well as discourses to be deconstructed. In this context, the reader rarely has an overview of their life as documents, their order of discourse, their position within the wider archive they are part of, as well as of the life of their authors. In addressing the thorny question of ‘the death of the author’ in the post-narratological scene of life-history research, I have configured the editors of the first feminist newspapers in France as ‘narrative personae’, conceptual figures that emerge from political and personal narratives, but who are not reducible to the contents or discourses of these narratives. In further retracing their social, political and spatial practices I have marked their passages, rather than positions, ultimately presenting them as nomadic figures. Thus although their stories cannot reveal a unified image of their authors, it is through these stories that certain concepts, ideas and events can be expressed, rehearsed and dramatized, so that their enactment can create a scene for dialogic exchanges, communication and understanding in life history research and beyond.

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## NOTES

- 1 Here I refer to the St Simonianism and Fourierist movements, which have attracted a significant body of literature both in the French and Anglophone historiographies. See amongst others, Pilbeam 2014 and Beecher 2001.
- 2 The 'other archive' is a notion that Niamh Moore, Andrea Salter, Liz Stanley and Maria Tamboukou (2016) have coined in their collective work on archival research in the social sciences. It refers to the archives that researchers create in the process of their work.
- 3 I have discussed the genealogical approach extensively in my work. See Tamboukou 1999, 2010, 2015.
- 4 I have reviewed and discussed this literature elsewhere at length (Tamboukou 1999, 2003). For more recent studies see also Garland 2014, Fuggle et al. 2015.
- 5 Arnold Hunt is a curator at the British Library, see his contribution in a discussion about the politics of archival practices at: <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/discussion/qa-how-archives-make-history> [Accessed 9-1-2016].
- 6 Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual vocabulary, 'a plane of consistency' brings together diverse sources, theoretical directions and methodological approaches. It is a site wherein heterogeneous elements can be hold together in their difference: 'a continuum of intensities, combined emission of particles or signs-particles, conjunction of deterritorialized flows: these are the three factors proper to the plane of consistency' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 70).
- 7 The notion of the 'assemblage' derives from Deleuze and Guattari's collective work (1988) and denotes an accumulation of real and symbolic components that create entities through their entanglement and interaction.
- 8 *Apostolat des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle* 1(7), 70. November 4, 1832.

- 9 BnF/BdA/FE/MS7608/CdG/Deroin, 36.
- 10 *Apostolat des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle*, 1(8), 86–87, December 1832.
- 11 For a discussion of the free love debates in the Saint-Simonian movement see Pilbeam 2014.
- 12 'Égalité entre tous de droits et des devoirs; notre bannière étant à la peine, il' est juste qu'elle soit à l'honneur'.
- 13 Summary of the newspaper's vision under the subheading: 'Daily socialist and political newspaper, organ of everybody's interests'. It appeared in all issues between 1 and 25, but was dropped for the rest of the issues between 26 and 46.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 See 'Feuilleton du Journal la Voix des Femmes' in *La Voix des Femmes*, issues 7, 8, 12, 13.
- 16 Ibid., (3), 1, March 23, 1848.
- 17 The June days began as a protest against the government's decision to close down the National Workshops that women workers had fought hard to establish and soon became a violent rebellious event. See Tamboukou 2015, particularly Chapter 5.
- 18 *La Politique des Femmes*, (1), 1, June 18–24, 1848.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 *L'Opinion des Femmes* 2 (6), 3–6, August, 1849.
- 22 See Albistur 1985.