Suzanne Voilquin: Childlessness, Households and Community

Rachel Chrastil
Xavier University

Nearly 1 in 5 women in most Western countries today do not bear children. The exception is France, where the ratio is 1 in 10. My project, of which this paper is an early part, provides historical reflections on childlessness. In essence I ask in a variety of ways, what is the difference between the lives of people who raise children, and the lives of those who do not raise children? In this paper I explore some of these questions through the life of Saint-Simonian Suzanne Voilquin.


The recent rise in childlessness is not a new trend. A century ago, rates of childlessness reached at least the same heights; it was only during the postwar baby boom that childlessness plummeted (cohort birth c.1930). The return of childlessness has attracted media interest, but the conversation thus far has been too narrow about both its causes and its implications. Commentators who pay attention to childlessness often make it out to be a new trend¹ propelled by contraceptives, Second

¹ An exception is Elizabeth Gregory, “A Childless Generation?” *The Atlantic*, September 5, 2013,
Wave feminism, and women’s drive for high-powered careers. Most of the discussion about fertility in general (timing, spacing and number of children) concerns the work-mothering balance, *leaning in*, finding ways to motherhood after age forty.

Commentators tend to see childlessness through two intersections. The first is the intersection between the labor market, state policy, and choice: For some the market is liberating women to pursue high-powered careers; women want to work, and the labor market has welcomed them (and, for women who have children: if only state policy and workplace policy would let them, women would exercise their engagement with the market even more). Or, the labor market is constricting women’s choices: The economic downturn has led prospective parents to delay children. Or, the demographic imbalance that childlessness will bring threatens to put our economy (and especially our social welfare programs) into disarray. Or, French state policy, which allows mothers to either work or stay home—is the reason that France has higher fertility and lower childlessness than other countries.

The second intersection is between biology, technology, and choice. Commentators tend to see changes in fertility as the result of recent changes in technology, notably the availability of reliable contraception. There is an awful lot that is still unknown about fertility (after all, you cannot do a scientific experiment to determine when fertility drops off) and a lot of uncertainty about fertility treatments, their effectiveness, cost, morality. Some commentators peddle in fear mongering: Women who postpone children need to wake up to the reality that they won’t be fertile forever, and they had better get busy. On other side, others look to technology to allow fertility to continue far longer (women are counseled to freeze their eggs now, while they can, in the hopes that they could lead to children years down the road).

Although “choice” is at both of the intersections, most commentators do not probe the concept of choice very deeply. They posit women as exercising either a lot of choice, or not very much choice at all. On the one extreme, women are seen as the autonomous, liberal individual who makes autonomous choices. When commentators give thought to self-fashioning and choice at all, they see it as a recent phenomenon that comes out of 1970s feminism and today’s consumer culture. And, they posit that women should be able to get everything they want, just maybe not all at the same time. On the other extreme, and often at the same time, women are seen as victims of the labor market or even of their own bodies and choices. They either don’t know what’s best for themselves, or they are stymied by external forces. I find a lot of the discourse on fertility to be psychologically and ethically unappealing. It often denies that choices have consequences (Elisabeth Badinter’s *The

---

2 Another frequent view of the market—the market has increased desires and turned us into overworked, debt-burdened, frenetic consumers—is not usually linked to childlessness.

Conflict and, for all its flippancy, Corinne Maier’s *No Kids* are notable exceptions.\(^5\) It encourages a distorted view of the arc of life, with a heavy emphasis on ages 25-45, and in many cases is blind to old age and death.

I would like to expand the discussion on childlessness. It is not just a question of *why* childlessness has returned (or not), but also its implications for a range of issues, including households and the stuff that passes through them; relationships over the lifetime with extended family, the state, intentional communities, and future generations; and the narratives we tell about ourselves regarding choice, ambition, work, vocation, creativity, legacy.

To explore these implications, we need a timeframe that extends earlier than the 1970s. I’m drawing from across the last two centuries, that is to say, the period in which companionate marriage and intensive childrearing emerged as desirable and even achievable goals, in which the industrial revolution transformed work and material cycles, in which the breadwinner-homemaker household emerged and then declined. (Admittedly, longer timeframes would also be useful.)

We also need to look not only at the unit of the woman, but also the unit of the household. The dominant discourse tends to whittle women and households down to work and reproduction. I’d like to expand the material side of “work” so that it includes the full cycle of extraction, production, distribution, consumption and disposal. When I do examine the relationship between households and the market, I’d like to borrow from Jan de Vries the notion of the active, searching economic actor.\(^6\) Neither a victim of market forces nor an autonomous actor, the searching actor is a strategizer interacting with the market.

But the household and the individuals in it are ethical actors, not just market actors. They recognize that their actions belong to them and have consequences for the future. They live in relationships with family, coworkers and intentional communities. They pursue vocations, they relate to past and future generations. If we think about individuals and households as ethical actors, it changes how we think about the causation as well as the diffusion of the childfree trend.

To explore these issues, I am examining alternative households and women who fashioned a life without children. The French socialists of the early nineteenth century are an obvious place to look. Here I focus on Saint-Simonian Suzanne Voilquin, who worked as a seamstress, edited the first all-female newspaper, traveled to Egypt, Russia and the U.S., and found her vocation as a midwife. Motherhood and its near misses punctuate Voilquin’s life story. To her great disappointment, she

---


did not raise biological children. Her marriage to syphilitic but well-meaning Eugène Voilquin led only to miscarriages. Later, in Egypt, she bore a child who died two weeks after birth. Her profound disappointment resonated as she wrote nearly forty years later: “O! holy maternity, my dear ideal! why did you always flee?” So, while Voilquin was not completely childless, and certainly not by choice, her long, rich life without children offers useful insight about motherhood, households, and individuals as ethical actors.

Motherhood

For Suzanne, motherhood took on a significance that was both personal and political. As she later wrote, motherhood represented hope for redemption. In her early twenties, Suzanne became engaged to a medical student named Stanislas. Not content to wait until marriage, he raped her and then, months later, abandoned her. This experience left Suzanne devastated and near suicide, ashamed and angry, and uninterested in marriage. Desire for children, however, eventually led her to consider a union: “Perhaps God will grant me a child, and I will be saved!” The thought of “little pink angels” was the only happiness that she sought—a refuge “from the contagious breath of men and the vices of society.”

But Suzanne recognized that to render these children all the happiness possible, she needed “a respectable name and a worthy father.” Under her contemporary circumstances, they would suffer if they were born out of marriage. They need “my love, a name, and an existence.” She reasoned that it would be acceptable to marry a worthy man so long as she offered him devotion, if not love. She accepted, therefore, “freely, but without love, the offer of [Eugène Voilquin’s] hand and his name.”

Motherhood took on additional meaning for Suzanne as she developed her critique of the male-dominated social order. She and other writers for La tribune des femmes did not question the essential

---

8 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 96.
10 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 102.
12 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 103.
mothering nature of women; their feminism was the feminism of difference in which they embraced motherhood as the source of their moral and social authority. Like the other romantic socialists, Saint-Simonians were disenchanted with politics after the revolution of 1830 failed to lead to political power for workers. The new “motto” Chacun pour soi, chacun chez soi repelled them. These women were less concerned with individual political rights than with the liberation found in association, in a critique of the household and of moral hypocrisy, in following a vocation and living honestly. This critique extended to the Saint-Simonian leadership that demanded a hierarchy under the Père and sought eventually a Mère to lead the women. Voilquin wanted to break down hierarchies, not build them up: “To create a hierarchy of women before they have done an act of free will, before they even know themselves, that is nonsense, that is saying to woman, ‘We declare you free, but walk in our footsteps, repeat our discourses and rise up, if you can, through our breath and our inspiration.’”

Motherhood, then, meant liberation. One author for La tribune des femmes viewed fertility limitations as yet one more way that “egotistical man”—a Malthusian bourgeois male voice—tried to circumscribe the powers and possibilities of women of the people. Not content merely to denigrate her work, tame her sons, and exploit her daughters, “egotistical man” whips himself into a frenzy over her contribution to population growth, “for I am truly afraid of those starving slaves. Almshouses, prisons, and penal colonies are not enough, and the cannons no longer destroy them since war has become civilized!—Oh WOMAN, your fertility is a scourge! WOMAN, be cautious!”

(Egotistical man also says to woman, “besides, you aren’t tormented by great ideas!”)

Households

Throughout the many stages of her life, Suzanne lived in and created alternative households; never in her adult life did she live in the typical European household centered on the nuclear family. Instead, she sought households with chosen companions for the exchange of ideas and the sharing of food, song and dance.

Suzanne was born at the turn of the nineteenth century in Paris’s 3rd arrondissement, in the parish of Saint-Merry. In fact, until in her early thirties, she lived in this area of the Right Bank, between Les Halles and the Marais, north of the Place de Grève. Her nuclear family

---

13 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 110.
14 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 113.
included older brothers and a younger sister. Her early life was shaped by her father’s memories of the revolution and her mother’s religious faith.

What kind of household might Suzanne Voilquin have aspired to have, if she had followed the trends of her day? Perhaps one like the household in which she grew up: one following the long-standing European Marriage Pattern centered on the nuclear family, a household in which family members engaged in a range of productive activities, but had unequal standing. More specifically, Suzanne’s childhood came at the end of the period Jan de Vries calls the “industrious revolution,” characterized by households with multiple wage earners who spend their labor time on market production (rather than on household labor), reduce their income pooling, and prefer services, public consumption and individuated consumption to intensive household production and consumption. 17 (I’m not sure whether her mother worked for wages—if so that would signal the continuation of the “industrious household”—but in any case, we have hints of weak pooling in the fact that her father would travel for months out of the year.)

As is typical in the European Marriage Pattern, the family proved to be relatively weak, for fortunes rested on the success of the marital couple rather than on an extended in-house family. Suzanne’s nuclear family declined during her adolescence. Her mother died from cancer that, out of modesty, she hid from family and doctors until it was too late. For a time, Suzanne lived with her brother—this is the period of her traumatic romance with Stanislas. Then, her father’s naive business dealings led to insolvency; when the business collapsed, the family floundered. Suzanne and her younger sister Adrienne took up needlework and lived together on rue Michel-le-Comte.

Voilquin’s search for an alternative, female-centered household threads through her tale of childhood formation, personal disappointment, and social awakening. It began long before she encountered the Saint-Simonians. As a young child, she was briefly attracted to religious life, but only to remain in the companionship of the respected and beautiful Sister Suzanne. Voilquin’s ardor for the religious life ended when Sister Suzanne explained it involved separation rather than chosen companions; that it involved renunciation, a word “deep as an abyss and cold as death.” This knowledge sent Voilquin home with a renewed love for her mother and Adrienne, and a revised

opinion of Sister Suzanne, whose life now evoked pity: “Poor dear Sister Suzanne! henceforth everything was subjugated in her; imagination, thoughts of love, distinguished intelligence, everything followed the straight and narrow.” Listening to Sister Suzanne saddened Voilquin, “without knowing why…[having] not yet revolted against this rectilinear future.”

Indeed, Suzanne’s relationship with her sister Adrienne, whom she raised almost as an adopted daughter, shaped Suzanne’s early adulthood households. After Adrienne’s marriage to Mallard, Suzanne found herself, “alone, totally alone!” and refused to continue living in the same apartment. She moved to rue Sainte-Opportune to be near Adrienne and Mallard. At this point, Suzanne considered marriage; still scarred from Stanislas, she wanted to marry only for the sake of motherhood. She met Eugène Voilquin, an architect, who sought her hand in marriage. Mallard took up Voilquin’s part, noting his openness, education and family; it would be sad to remain an old maid. And, Mallard continued, if Suzanne married, then the four of them—sisters Suzanne and Adrienne, with their two husbands—could set up house together. And so they did, in an apartment on rue de la Tixeranderie. This arrangement already departed from European Marriage Pattern in which couples set up separate households (even if they lived in close proximity to extended family), so perhaps it made the leap into the Saint-Simonian family all the more imaginable.

According to the household model proposed by Jan de Vries, the industrious household was still in full swing as Voilquin reached maturity. In the 1830s, women and children contributed about 40 percent of household income. Not surprisingly, Voilquin earned wages both before and during her marriage.

In 1831, soon after becoming acquainted with Saint-Simonians and their ideas, Suzanne and Eugène were invited to move to a large house in an area of Paris far from their home. There, with financial help from like-minded supporters, they hosted a daily “fraternal table” promoting their philosophy. This move entailed not only leaving the neighborhood where Suzanne had lived for over thirty

---

18 Voilquin, *Souvenirs*, 55.
19 Voilquin, *Souvenirs*, 100.
years, but also their work and Voilquin’s clientele. Soon, legal action against the Saint-Simonians dried up their funds and forced them to move to a more modest location on nearby rue Cadet. The couple found themselves in financial straits compounded by the suspicion of landlords who took offense at Saint-Simonian morality. Suzanne embraced the simple decor—"luxury, comfort even were banned"—and in any case, they were able to rent an apartment large enough to welcome some thirty to forty individuals twice a week. On Fridays, with the aid of long wooden planks, they created a study hall where Eugène led sessions for reading and debating Saint-Simonian ideas. On Wednesdays, they moved the furniture aside; for Suzanne’s evening, dancing was as important as discussion.

After Suzanne’s “moral divorce” from Voilquin, she moved briefly into a sixth-floor apartment on the Left Bank, before gaining the financial support of a bourgeois Saint-Simonian and his mother, which allowed her to move into the Marais on rue des Juifs (today rue Ferdinand Duval). She worked for a sympathetic bourgeois family three days a week, an arrangement that allowed her four days to write for the newspaper and organize meetings.

Suzanne held an animated salon that attracted several dozen like-minded people weekly. And she built her alternative community. Even during Enfantin’s imprisonment (and even though women had been excluded from the leadership at his house), she and her associates sang and danced to violins at Enfantin’s house in Ménilmontant, and strolled home happily singing along the

---

boulevards—this in the Paris that Balzac described as filthy and unwalkable. She lived this way, it seems, until her depart for Egypt in 1834. The fact that Suzanne Voilquin chose an alternative household is not at all surprising; for now I am simply trying to establish what she did and see where it goes with further research.

Material Objects

What about the stuff that flows through the household? Which objects take on more sentimental value? Are the material cycles for childless households the same as those of households with children? What happens to your stuff when you die? Here I ask us to think of Suzanne Voilquin as a producer and consumer, to try out bringing together de Vries’ economic analysis of households with the analysis of one woman’s memoir. The central concept is Z-commodities, the ultimately consumed commodity.

A Z-commodity might be something concrete, such as a house or a steak dinner, or it might be something abstract, such as health. Very often, Z-commodities are not just purchased off the shelf. A fuller understanding of them includes a lot more than just the purchase price and the use. We have to think about households as producers, as well as consumers, of these Z-commodities. A Z-commodity is a result of purchased goods and of time. When Suzanne and Eugène Voilquin hosted Saint-Simonian evenings, the Z-commodity might be the furthering of their ideals. Purchased goods might include food and drinks, not to mention plates, furniture and the space in which to hold the salon. Time includes the time to earn money to purchase these goods, time to transform the purchased goods into something useful (cooking, cleaning, setting up), and time to actually hold the salon. The allocation of time, the ultimate scarce resource, is crucial to understanding household economics. The more time used on earning money, the less is available for both transforming the purchased goods and enjoying the ultimate commodity. If you’re working eighty hours a week, it’s hard to find time to cook a lavish dinner or enjoy a party. In a household with multiple individuals, the allocations of time are even more complex. And, households vary in their level of efficiency and expertise: “the retained nutrients of consumed food depend on the cook’s human capital; detecting the combinatory possibilities of available goods requires consumption capital; fully exploiting the symbolic values of goods requires social capital.” Crucially, a given Z-commodity can be achieved through a variety of combinations of purchased goods and time allocations. If I want a cup of tea, I can order one at the teahouse, or I can purchase the same dried tea and make it myself at home. If I want a clean house, I can do it myself or hire someone else. Over time, my preference might change depending on my income, the opportunity costs, and the other members of my household. I might specialize in one area of household production, such as caring for the yard, while another household member might focus on preparing meals. The market exerts influence on these decisions through wages and prices, but de Vries argues that the household has a say, too.

27 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 136-137.
Over the course of centuries, households have made broad shifts in the kinds of Z-commodities they desire, as well as in how they get them: in the allocation and pooling of time and resources among household members. (They leap from one consumer cluster to another, following the “Diderot Effect.”) The cumulative changes in these household decisions are at the heart of de Vries’ inquiry and at the heart of the difference between the industrious household and the breadwinner-homemaker household.

I find this way of thinking compelling and worth pursuing. (Why? Because it offers an alternative to the models I am used to encountering, in that rings true at least for some decisions.) Eventually, I want to use it to examine how the childless household differs from the household with children. For now, I would like to see if this idea can combine with my reading of Suzanne’s households to yield anything interesting. Admittedly, so far this has been hard to do (but I am hopeful that I will find more as I research in the Gimon Collection!). Suzanne doesn’t tell us much about how she ate or slept or clothed herself. She says almost nothing about the goods she purchased, whether for immediate use or for transformation through household labor. The few material objects she mentions are symbols of attachment and affection. They are all gifts, not purchases: The ring from Stanislas, later worn on a black ribbon around her neck.29 The clothing from a sympathetic friend.30 The gold watch from her father that she sold to pay for her passage to Egypt.31 The white burnous from Enfantin that shielded her from Egyptian sun and allowed her to pursue her medical training dressed as a man.32

What about household furnishings? Whether in her own house or visiting others, Suzanne interprets the lack of luxury as a sign of happiness. She comments on the lack of material comforts in her homes, such as the house on rue Cadet in which she and Eugène hosted Saint-Simonian gatherings. Later, in Old Cairo, she was able to afford a five-room apartment complete with terrace and servant girl. Still, the furnishings remained simple: a cotton mattress and mosquito netting, a table, a stool and her trunk for seats, and a simple rush mat as its sole ornament. But “every pioneer has started thus!”33 She is skeptical of the luxury she witnesses in the Bey’s palace in Egypt. In Marseilles, she visits political prisoners on behalf of republican friends. Under the watchful guards, she joins them for an evening featuring a dilapidated chair and iron utensils… but “one is not in prison to have every comfort.”34 Good conversation draws them together and bouillabaisse brings them back for another festive meal (admittedly, local women purchased the fish and other ingredients; they used their human capital to make it delicious and their social capital to imbue it

28 de Vries, Industrious Revolution, 29.
29 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 88.
30 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 205.
31 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 223.
32 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 263.
33 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 249.
34 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 220.
with local culture and to invite Suzanne to join them). Suzanne finds community wherever she travels even though she raises eyebrows traveling alone or in the company of women.

Even if we adopt de Vries’ view of the modern consumer as an “active, searching consumer” whose knowledge and experiences (consumer capital) allows for the exploitation of “the combinatorial possibilities of available goods” — that is to say, even if we view the consumer as an actor rather than an atomized victim of the market—it’s pretty hard to boil Voilquin’s life into a consumer. It is hard to see in Voilquin a hedonist modern consumer seeking comfort (whether personal or social); she does seek pleasure, but derives pleasure through relatively non-consumptive activities, such as dancing, singing or conversation. Even though purchased and transformed goods go into these experiences, it is awfully convoluted to interpret her goals of association, emancipation, and vocation as Z-commodities; Voilquin repeatedly gave up material security to pursue her ideals. She did not leap from one consumer cluster to another, and her Z-commodities were relatively unattached to the market. I say all this not to dismiss the concept of Z-commodities but rather to make it stronger: the reduction of everything to Z-commodities would render the concept meaningless. But it does not explain everything.

**An Ethical Actor**

It is useful to think about Suzanne Voilquin not just as an economic actor, but also as an ethical actor. She recognizes that her actions belong to her: she ascribes her own independence of mind and love of female dignity to her spontaneous development around age fifteen. She did not learn this from Saint Simonian ideas; “No, it was part of my being.” Furthermore, she interprets poverty as a source of liberation. Looking back at her first attempt to run a household, Voilquin writes, “children of the people learn everything quickly; from childhood, misery emancipates them.”

Suzanne thought constantly about the future, with an attitude both full of wonder at the possibilities and humble about her own understandings. In touring the pyramids of Giza, she was overwhelmed by the thought of the centuries past and future that these monuments would witness. But she admitted that she didn’t know what the future would be like—or at least, the Suzanne writing the memoirs in the 1860s used the terms of uncertainty, given that the Saint-Simonian dream had clearly not materialized. “The world is not yet ready to hear us… And, if it wanted to hear us, who could dare say at this hour if this man that we call le Père is in the right? Of all the women existing in our time none have been able to study our sex enough to understand its needs; I don’t know anyone whose love of humanity is large enough to dare conclude, either in accepting or in rejecting the word of this great emancipator!” She was not prepared to embrace wholeheartedly Enfantin’s the moral

---

36 Voilquin, *Souvenirs*, 64.
37 Voilquin, *Souvenirs*, 70.
38 Voilquin, *Souvenirs*, 257.
theories. Instead, she believed that she and her associates needed to try things out in view of the future. “All that women can do right now is experiment, in view of the future, at their own risk and peril, with the moral theories of le Père.” But women who take this path “hover just the same over the abyss!” The Saint-Simonian circle had discovered free love, but the rest of the world continued to punish and ostracize women for sexual deviation, and Voilquin had learned to mistrust men’s motives when they declared women free to love. Some just wanted pleasure without duty. Voilquin wanted women to experience their own liberation first, freedom from their Christian education as well as from men’s desires, to make their own moral edifice and build a new future. She longed for a moral sentiment built by women acting together—“it is this sentiment, completely feminine, that will create what Saint-Simonians call la Mère!”—not a specific individual woman to lead them.40

Finally, and most notably, Voilquin was an ethical actor in terms of her sense of vocation. Vocation, the sense of a calling for one’s life, is not the same as work or career. It is not as sensitive to the market as work or career. It is more than just sheen on top of production. Suzanne Voilquin discovered her vocation as a midwife in her mid-thirties, during her time in Egypt. Later, Suzanne earned a diploma in midwifery in Paris, and practiced her profession in France, Russia, and the United States. She writes with an enviable sense of purpose: “I strongly feel that God did not take away from me my dear little angel and save me from the plague so that I could spend the years he still gave me doing nothing.” Family duties would not suffice. “My old father and my sister can count on me, but this narrow life alone is not enough for me; it would soon smother me.”41

Suzanne wanted to offer her services for free, but she had to resort to using it as “a trade” because she did not have time to make money writing newspaper articles. Eventually, in 1838, she created an association called the “Maternal Society Founded in Favor of Unwed Mothers.” Each associate paid dues to support services, notably free childbirth, to impoverished mothers “outside of legality.”42 Voilquin envisioned this society alongside established traditions Saint-Simonian traditions. For the anniversary of the founding, she planned a festival of maternity, which she hoped would join the birthdays of Saint-Simon and of Enfantin as the three major Saint-Simonian holidays.43 She wanted to use her training to “establish a center of influence,” to promote the Saint-Simonian cause and the feminist cause, and to foster women “rising up in all the beauty of her nature,” not “pale copies of the Sister of Charity.”44

What did Voilquin and her associates suggest regarding the fostering of vocation? Marie-Reine (Reine Guindorf) in La tribune des femmes saw the solution in a reorganization of the household with

39 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 189.
40 Voilquin, Souvenirs, 190.
41 Voilquin, letter to Prosper Enfantin, January 29, 1838, quoted in Moses and Rabine, Feminism, 275.
42 Voilquin, letter to Prosper Enfantin, February 5, 1839, quoted in Moses and Rabine, Feminism, 277.
43 Voilquin, letter to Prosper Enfantin, February 5, 1839, quoted in Moses and Rabine, Feminism, 277.
44 Voilquin, letter to Prosper Enfantin, January 29, 1838, quoted in Moses and Rabine, Feminism, 275.
“association as its foundation.” She argued against the breadwinner-homemaker household even as it began to emerge. Only those with the taste for household work should perform those duties, allowing other women to “develop themselves in any direction that suits them.” This arrangement, this communal household, would prevent disorder and allow each woman to pursue her chosen path. Marie-Reine assumed that the various desires of women would serve the needs of society. She did not condemn household work, but she did object to the privatization and individualization that expanded and intensified household work and made the household the very antithesis of the efficient, large-scale factories that were just starting to emerge. The breadwinner-homemaker household (at least one without a lot of servants) demanded a generalist in all household matters and made the division of labor impossible. It eschewed efficiencies of scale in favor of private domesticity. And it prevented most women from pursuing their vocations.

How does vocation relate to childlessness? Vocation is useful because it provides one way of getting away from the market-bound analyses of women without children. Career and motherhood are usually seen as at odds with each other, and success in both, it is suggested, can only be achieved with favorable workplace and state policies or with a woman’s herculean labors, excessive organizational skills, and luck. Vocation may or may not come into conflict with motherhood. Some people, both with and without children, have a strong sense of vocation—and some people, both with and without children, do not have a strong sense of vocation. Raising children can be a vocation. Is vocation experienced differently for those without children?

Conclusion

The value of considering Suzanne Voilquin is that she helps us to illustrate, think through, and ask different questions about households. In what ways are child-free households today really different from households of people with children? Are they as different as Suzanne Voilquin’s households? Who belongs to them? What communities do people form—and hold so close that they decide to share a roof? What is the relationship between vocation and reproduction, as opposed to production and reproduction? I look forward to our discussion on these questions and the possibilities offered by the French socialist press.

---

45 Marie-Reine [Reine Guindorf], “To Women,” *Tribune des femmes* 1: 201-205, quoted in Moses and Rabine, *Feminism*, 315.

46 Marie-Reine “To Women,” 315-316.