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EDITOR'S NOTE

This English translation has not been published in printed form/Cette traduction anglaise n'a pas été publiée sous forme imprimée.

- 1 Presently making inroads into the field of Information and Communication Sciences (ICS), Gender Studies addresses concerns that have long been present in other disciplines, notably history, sociology, ethnology, and anthropology (see *MEI*, 2004; Réseaux, 2003). Building on what Thierry Lancien *et al.* (2001: 49) demonstrated, Isabelle Gavillet – who engages in a general reflection on the subject for this dossier – notes that some time ago, studies on “women, minorities and the media” were considered to be lacking in the discipline. But these current changes lead Gavillet to raise the following question: “Is the long-called for multidisciplinary in Information and Communication Sciences on the verge of actually taking place, when it is indeed true that on this subject, Human, Life and Social Sciences ask the same questions: what conditions are conducive to the production and the spread of a persistent concept?” Better still, can it be suggested that we are witnessing the implementation of what some areas of research tell us, i.e. that it is impossible to consider objects via a single discipline and thus, in this specific case, to conceive of gender in those terms. This is partly reminiscent of what the sociologist Edgar Morin (1962, *in*: François, Neveu, 1999: 21) says when he reveals that the difficulties encountered by women in the 1960s – if only to give a public voice to their private problems – were generally disregarded by the academic world, probably because they were “deemed too frivolous”.
- 2 The dossier compiled here demonstrates this. It is a dossier that forms the continuation of a study day which took place on 8 March 2004, organized by the society SAM (*Société des amis de Mots*), CEDITEC (Centre for research on discourse, images, texts, written works and

communications, Université Paris Est Créteil Val de Marne) and the following academic journals: *Communication, Mots. Les langages du politique* and *Questions de communication*¹. Specialists of political sciences – Pierre Leroux and Cécile Sourd, Marion Paoletti, Christiane Restier-Melleray – and ICS researchers – Isabelle Gavillet, Caroline Ollivier-Yaniv, Sylvie Thiéblemont-Dollet – tackle the question of the gender variable, not from a fixed perspective, but from the social issues raised by its representations (in the media, formal or informal groups). Thus, these contributors show the construction processes that shape this variable using an approach that is in line with pioneering research in the field², but with a particular focus on the media as essential actors in the social game.

- 3 As such, they seek to decipher the relationships between the sexes within a traditionally male field – politics – which is seen from the intertwined spaces that give it meaning. These relationships appear as central and determine the images, if not the stereotypes, of the Self and of the Other within a framework that includes the professional field of the media and its editorial constraints (three contributions), the political arena and how it works (all contributions), and women, for whom it is shown that their action can be founded on the reproduction of a masculine principle that is capable of legitimizing their position. Here, political life is studied from the loci of public (associations) and private (couples, families) spaces, as well as civic (town councils, governments, ministries, government) ones, even if the contributors do not explicitly use the term “civic” to denote the spaces where citizenship and state power is exercised (Heinich, 2004: 170). For if the Civic clearly belongs to the public domain, it also refers to the law that, in particular, allocates rights and obligations for each individual, as is the case for the French Political Parity Act (*loi sur la parité*³), which forms the backdrop for most of the contributions.
- 4 It is not by accident that five out of six authors are women. This characteristic is in line with previous studies in the field where there is still a high level of personal involvement. Still, the discourse is not a militant one, unlike the Gender Studies that emerged in the United States in the 1970s⁴ which was driven by the feminist movement. On the contrary, the discourse here is more in line with a French research tradition that is more pacified and remote from any ideological motivation⁵. Male domination is a central concept, with some authors addressing this through reference to the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 1998). Interactions between the public – or even the civic – and the private is also a key concept, since it offsets the postulate of a renewal of the workings of the political system by a feminization of its actors. Similarly, it enables researchers to study the mobility of the positions held by all stakeholders involved. However, when discussing the differences between the sexes, these distinctions only appear amidst the mechanisms of social constructs of prominent female personalities (regardless of whether or not they have a high media profile) with a specific political agenda. The authors’ objective is not to carry out an historical analysis, but to identify issues that are relevant to the present day. Their aim is not to suggest differences, then to analyze and criticize their manifestations, but more so to study what the various actors have to say about them, and their underlying motivations.

Male/female: a question of domination

- 5 In this edition, gender is questioned within a triangular relationship comprising the public sphere, the political arena, and women, as follows: gender in general (Isabelle

Gavillet), ministers (Caroline Ollivier-Yaniv), candidates in the 2001 French municipal elections (Marion Paoletti), wives or daughters of male politicians (Christiane Restier-Melleray, Pierre Leroux and Cécile Sourd) who are mainly from a migration background (Sylvie Thiéblemont-Dollet). The majority of these women are quite well-known, either because they hold an important political office (minister, town councillor, president of an association, etc.) or because, owing to their private status, they rub shoulders with the political world. The result is an approach based on the personalization of these actors which is facilitated by the media spotlight on such a small group. From this particularity comes the toing and froing between each party's constraints and issues within the specific context of the feminization of politics: via the Jospin government in 1997 (Caroline Ollivier-Yaniv), the association "*Ni putes ni soumises*" [Neither whores, nor submissive] created in April 2003 (Sylvie Thiéblemont-Dollet, who also deals with issues related to immigration and the suburbs), and the French Political Parity Act of 6 June 2000 (all authors, with the exception of Isabelle Gavillet). The objective is the same for all contributors: to study the gender-political world-work triptych in order to test the idea that women can change certain practices. This focus is comparable to wider debates on the status of women, in which professional claims are tension points. But the answer is crystal clear. The postulate of a feminization of politics must be put into perspective as there are obvious contradictions between the different discourses – described by Marion Paoletti as "enchanted" – and the uses of the discourse environment itself.

- 6 Yet, the integration of women in the Jospin government, along with the Political Parity Act, was explicitly aimed at modernizing political life. Already back in the 1990s, some political personalities were in favour of this equality. This is the case for Françoise Gaspard⁶ (1995) – Isabelle Gavillet retraces her career – who described in an interview the advantages of this bill whilst widening the issue to include domains other than politics: "The need for equality is highly symbolic. It strongly expresses the need for a parity democracy, and beyond that, a society that is jointly run by women and men. [...] It not only concerns political power, but all consultative councils and committees, governance bodies (e.g. hospital boards, local authority council housing boards) along with civil society administrations, companies and organizations. It will force a radical rethink on the gendered distribution of roles within both public and private spheres". There is an idealism to her comments (at the time of this quote, she no longer held political office) that two years later was to be found in the statements of some personalities, cited by Caroline Ollivier-Yaniv. For example, commenting on the nomination of Marylise Lebranchu, Lionel Jospin, the then prime minister, said "A woman in the Ministry of Justice [...] means perhaps a more humane outlook, one that is more concrete, which has more of a focus on the great principles of justice, but also on the daily realities of justice itself" (Sineau, 2001: 197). Whereas Serge July, founder of *Libération*, wrote "The Jospin government constituted on 4 June 1997 is made up of a small, young, plural and ... feminized team. For women are well and truly at the centre of the Jospin system" (*ibid.*: 182). The entry of women was, therefore, decided and commented upon on the basis of gender differentiation. This is confirmed by Marion Paoletti, who studies the first application of political parity in the 2001 municipal elections when feminine virtues were "intensely celebrated and embedded within the thematic of proximity". But what are the characteristics of this renewal in which women play such an important part? For Paoletti, these elections are part of a maternalistic concept of politics whereby "the experience of women as mothers in the private sphere could give them specific qualities, an 'ethic of

solicitude' and care. When imported into the public domain, this compassion could transform politics". These words tie in with the works of Sylvie Pionchon and Grégory Derville (2004), themselves inspired by the work of Mariette Sineau (1988, 2001) as they highlight the fact that women who enter politics are always concerned with the Other (2004: 183) and this is a perception that women have internalized from their experience of daily life and from the reunification of their visions of the private and public sphere. Put differently, if we believe Serge July (see above) or other media professionals – who, when writing about politics, take gender into account – this suggests that “the presence of women in politics is not something that should be taken for granted; it continues to be experienced and described as a transgression” (Pionchon, Derville, 2004: 96). This can also be found in the principles defended by essentialist arguments in which, because men and women are biologically and psychologically different, political action is the only means of limiting the social inequalities that result from such inherent diversity. Thus, the Political Parity Act is part of a dual movement in which, thanks to legislation, women can enter a domain with low female representation and once there, change its governing rules and mechanisms. On this point, it is interesting to note that women who are on the campaign trail have as much to offer as men. They themselves, during interviews, foreground or admit the positive differences that characterize them: they say that they are “less ambitious and selfish, and more altruistic and down to earth” than their male counterparts. These personal traits overlap those identified in opinion polls carried out at the time on the ideal qualities that a mayor should possess, i.e. availability and closeness to the people.

- 7 In fact, it is easy to understand why women kept to what was expected of them – the legitimacy of their position being acquired beforehand, at least for a large section of the general public, seemingly awaiting a transformation of politics. Therefore, they went as far as instrumentalizing the difference that characterized them, presenting it as an electoral argument; a stance that echoes Isabelle Gavillet's analysis, for whom femininity and sexed gender may very well take on the appearance of a strategic position. Her use of the word “may” is all the more superfluous, as from the basis of her argument – building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1998) setting out that “the masculine only exists because it is constituted as being fundamentally opposed to the feminine, as a virile habitus, and therefore, one that is non feminine” – one can only confirm the opposite proposition: that the feminine only exists because it is constituted as being fundamentally opposed to the masculine, as a feminine habitus and therefore, one that is non masculine. Indeed, the contributors show this when they describe the interactions between men and women in the particular framework brought to mind whenever the word “parity” is used.
- 8 Still, another argument is put forward that qualifies the previous gender-based propositions. It is formulated by Marion Paoletti and is reminiscent of the demonstration by Caroline Ollivier-Yaniv. More than just a question of gender, it is the exteriority of women vis-à-vis political parties that could highlight their difference. It is apparent that the political context touches that of the gender one, and, as Caroline Ollivier-Yaniv suggests, to such an extent that they become almost synonymous with each other. According to this author, even though the Ministry writers whom she interviewed postulate sexual differentiation as the major variable, in reality, it is political experience that comes first. Depending on the nature of this experience, the Minister, male or female, will carry out his/her job differently, and since this is still an extremely androcentric environment, women have to prove their ability more so than men. The fact

that the women under study seem to have been more meticulous than some men in their case preparation, may be due to a key trait common to the *ethos* of all the female Ministers in the Jospin government. This is a professional reason, rather than a gender-related one, owing to the lack of preparation that drives some women to adopt “an approach that justifies and consolidates their legitimacy”; an approach that, for Caroline Ollivier-Yaniv, is linked to “male domination” (Bourdieu, 2002)

- 9 Regarding such domination, four contributors (Caroline Ollivier-Yaniv, Pierre Leroux and Cécile Sour, and Isabelle Gavillet) specifically refer to the works of Pierre Bourdieu. Certainly, such a reference shows the sheer importance and contribution of this sociologist’s work to the study of the relationship between the sexes, but it also reflects how it can be borrowed from in many different ways. For Caroline Ollivier-Yaniv, this domination is a given of the political area which is found to be just as sexually discriminative in the recruitment of elites, as it is in the way that these elites function. Although women did enter the Jospin government, since they all had little or no knowledge of political and ministerial spheres, they did not contribute to the renewal of elites, nor to the feminization of politics, they merely reproduced existing practices. Isabelle Gavillet for one, rejects the idea that using the male domination theory would be tantamount to analyzing the domination of women by men. Calling Bourdieu’s theories into question, she shows that the power exercised is that of the male principle over the female principle. When they study the discourse that describes men and women, Pierre Leroux and Cécile Sour implicitly base themselves on this idea. The properties associated to women are motherliness, marriage and management of the household; whereas for men they are ambition, pugnacity, courage, authority and strength. It can thus be imagined that a man or a woman who does not follow these stereotypical characteristics would stand out and be criticised. These two authors suggest this when they explain that the media representation of women “is based largely on the use of gender stereotypes and the staging of the ‘feminine’”. Body markers play an important role in the descriptions of women that are offered to us here, and whilst Isabelle Gavillet laments over the absence of the body in gender studies, the body is prominent in the contribution made by Pierre Leroux and Cécile Sour. Indeed, in the press, an evaluative discourse on women has developed that directly brings into play a sexuality criterion: that of seduction. This goes against the suggestions put forward by Mariette Sineau who says that once a woman ceases to be looked upon as a woman, i.e. when she is over the “social age of seduction” (1988: 49-50), this will lead to more acceptance in her political or other roles. As a consequence, an important question emerges: which conformations lie behind the media? A question that is all the more relevant as the subject matter is supposed to advocate change.

Being a woman in politics – a media perspective

- 10 Following a study of the press corpus by Pierre Leroux and Cécile Sour, it is evident that in all newspapers, the physical appearance of women in politics is a common denominator: this particularity shows a gap between the objectives of the law and its commentators, and the rhetoric around three women – Marine Le Pen, Ségolène Royal and Cécilia Sarkozy, who are “all invested, albeit differently, in the world of politics”. The study is based on a daily paper, a popular weekly, and a news magazine: *Libération*, *Paris Match* and *Le Point*, respectively. All three, despite their differences, have “a common

vision of politics that is centred on competition between agents of the political world". From this point of view, the vocabulary used to describe these agents is explicit and redundant. Some of the words and phrases used are as follows: "icon of populism" [*égérie*] (Marine Le Pen), the "*passionnaria* from Marais poitevin (Ségolène Royal), *pétroleuse* (Marine Le Pen), Iron Lady [*dame de fer*] (Marine le Pen again) and the *éminence grise* (Cécilia Sarkozy). Hairstyles, clothes and the ability of these women to seduce are also judged. Cécilia Sarkozy is described as elegant and flamboyant, appreciated for her willowy figure, whilst Ségolène Royal's pleated skirts are deemed unattractive as they hide her figure, and Marine Le Pen is seen as having a strong physical resemblance to her father, whose stocky figure she is supposed to have inherited. Still basing themselves on Pierre Bourdieu (1998: 94), the authors identify a tendency to evoke women in light of the symbolic domination exercised by the gaze of Others, submitting them to a "constraint of femininity". Isabelle Gavillet speaks of similar, but much more ferocious, observations made by journalists and politicians about Édith Cresson when she was Prime Minister. She believes that such offensive words may be an attack on the person's femininity, but more probably, they are a specific tactic of political power strategies, rather than an attack on gender. A similar female rhetoric showing an animosity "marked by the seal of power" was reported by Élisabeth Schemla (quoting Edwige Avice (1993)). It can be seen how the notion of domination is related to incorporating structures that go far beyond the register of the domination of women by men. For women play with that gaze of Others to present a self-image that conforms to a so-called model. According to Isabelle Gavillet "the issue is no longer to know what is said about gender, but also, who thinks they know the truth about gender? In this perspective, it seems that women have just as much to say as men". And because they verbalize this in a publicized space, the places and the means that they use to do this cannot be ignored.

- 11 Whilst the political arena and the games played therein must be taken into account to analyze these discourses, the media and its constraints are also determining factors. For Pierre Leroux and Cécile Sourd, the press cannot be considered to offer a reflection of the Social because, "to a large extent, it reflects, to quote Pierre Bourdieu, 'principals of vision and division', and thereby transmits a reflection that is partly distorted by the prism of its specific constraints". Consequently, if those representations of women are what they are, it is, of course, because they are linked to the Social, but also because journalists "have limited linguistic (and possibly visual) resources at their disposal to account for social facts, due to the specific constraints of journalism". Here, the two researchers follow on from the work of Erving Goffman (1998: 159) about advertisers who must "use the limited 'visual' resources available in social situations to tell a story".
- 12 Christiane Restier-Melleray also uses "media [logics], whether they be economic, sociological, or organizational" to understand the mechanisms through which some female figures – Sylviane Agacinsky, Bernadette Chirac and Cécilia Sarkozy – achieve visibility. She explains that "a realistic analysis of working conditions for journalists, particularly characterized by the increasingly systematic repetition of news agency dispatches, enables us to understand why information has become so standardized". Regarding journalistic coverage of the book *Journal interrompu* (Agacinsky, 2002), she explains that, even before it was published, all of the major newspapers and magazines were quoting the same excerpts.
- 13 Apart from these data on the professional practice of journalism, we still have to understand why the media is so interested in women who move in political circles. Pierre

Leroux and Cécile Sourd, and Christiane Restier-Melleray all agree on this issue and challenge the notion that such an interest is new – an interest that has mainly arisen because there are very few women in this field. Christiane Restier-Melleray even goes as far as saying that these women breathe new life into the sector and inspire journalists into writing about non-routine subjects. Therefore, it is not the subject matter that is new, but rather, for Pierre Leroux and Cécile Sourd, the parity context in which it takes place, and for Christiane Melleray-Restier it is the media focus placed on these women's position that is tagged as “the wife of ...”. Despite the extremely different profiles of the women studied for their media coverage, the same issue arises – that of the public/private relationship. Pierre Leroux and Cécile Sourd note that the representation of women tends to refer to their traditional role in the domestic world. Philosophers or researchers may historically have attributed a certain power to this role, a power also described by Françoise Duroux (1984). A constituent element of a feminine universe, this power is based on a gendered division of the Social “and it is delimited by prohibitions, to move, to decide, to will” (*ibid.*). From this viewpoint, some divided representations identified by the contributors also form a prohibition, albeit a symbolical one, of course.

- 14 Christiane Restier-Melleray points out the contradictions at work in this foregrounding of the Domestic: “to make the Domestic visible, i.e., relationships based on belonging to the private sphere, is to call into question the crucial distinction between the public and the private. Hence the debates on the illegitimacy of the presence of these wives, hence the latter's own discourse on the fact that they would never influence any political decisions”. Expectations of these women are fluctuating and contradictory: “Although they have the power of speech, we expect them to maintain their discretion”. One consequence is the unequal treatment of Sylviane Agacinsky, Bernadette Chirac and Cécilia Sarkozy – an inequality related to the position that each one holds in society. Of these three women, Sylviane Agacinsky seems to be most fiercely criticized because in her position as an intellectual, she has to publically juggle diverse roles. And if there is a consensus on Bernadette Chirac, it is probably because she represents the only model that is socially acceptable today in the public space”; that of mother. This argument is similar to that set out by Marie-Joseph Bertini (2002) who believes that what we are witnessing is not the feminization of our societies, but that of their maternalization.
- 15 More directly than the other contributors, Christiane Restier-Melleray raises the gender issue according to the differences between the sexes in the fields of politics and the media and she concludes that journalists, irrespective of their own gender, use persistent stereotypes in their representations. But she also mentions standards that transcend this consideration and that, consequently, show how difficult it is to class gender as the only explanatory variable of the differentiation phenomena. Thus, Christine Clerc (*Le Figaro*, 13/10/02) writes the following about Sylviane Agacinski: “During the run up to the general election, Sylviane Agacinski already surprised us when she climbed off her elitist pedestal to confide in us how much her husband loved her mashed potatoes”. In this quotation, women's issues, social categories, political representativeness, even literary stakes are all intermingled. It is not only because Sylviane Agacinski is a woman that Christiane Clerc speaks of her in these terms, but because her social status and role that are so far removed from most people. In the political world, representativeness, if only partial, is a crucial concept.

Conclusion

- 16 This dossier is interesting both on the thematic level and the methodological one. First, as the contributors have considered women from the viewpoint of the differences between them, then gender must be present in the proposed results – which does not prevent the contributors from describing possible solutions to resolve these issues, the complex keys that encompass factors other than gender. Second, because the women focussed on for this study have a private life, part of which is public (e.g. as they are wives or daughters of politicians), making their family life visible is part of a strategy in which gender is an important element. This position means that they are exposed to a great number of onlookers hoping to gain access to the private life of a public persona, since this is precisely how it is portrayed.
- 17 Therefore, it is clear that an initial question on gender provides a framework for the results obtained, even if these results broaden the issue further. However, the results differ when researches pose a question that is not based on the divisions between the sexes, even when the underlying analytical pretext is the female politician. This is shown by the contribution by Sylvie Thiéblemont-Dollet who studies the links between Fadela Amara – who was elected president of the national “*Maisons des potes*” federation in December 2000 and a founding member of the “*Ni putes ni soumises*” association –, the political sphere, and the media. In this analysis, it is not the status of the woman which lies at the heart of the discourse, but rather that of the militant and the public recognition of a women’s movement (a movement that was initially comprised of female second generation immigrants, but which gradually spread to encompass women from all backgrounds). Seen in the context of all of the other contributions, this particular study gives the dossier a specific colour, hence the detailed comments in this respect. It shows that the Political cannot be detached from wider concerns and that even though the place of women in this field is being examined, it is, in fact, the Social that is being questioned.
- 18 First a few words of context. Originally formed as a collective, “*Ni putes ni soumises*” was given institutional form when the movement became a *loi 1901* association [a not-for-profit association under the French 1901 Act], a decision that would guarantee its legitimacy. From then on, three types of strategies – perhaps instrumentalization ones – have emerged. One strategy is the work of Fadela Amara who, as part of her efforts to turn the stigma on its head, used “her triple attribute – being a woman, a second-generation immigrant and a child of the suburbs – as an asset and a resource to make her voice heard and to enter politics”. Another one is that of politicians who “associate [Fadela Amara] to their projects or claims”. And the third strategy is that of the journalists who “allude to Fadela Amara and her movement in their articles, as an essential reference to their self-representation”. For Sylvie Thiéblemont-Dollet, referring to the historian Michèle Perrot (2001; 2002), this process may mean that “[...] claims by women, long condemned and despised by the media, have become an object of success and conquest now that the battles have been won, duly recognized or potential vote-clinchers”. If we are to believe Nathalie Heinich (2004), the recognition of “*Ni putes ni soumises*” may mean that in our society, values have progressed because the oppression of women is now seen as increasingly unbearable. For even if these values “are not directly linked to fact, they have the power to guide collective action capable of transforming them” (Heinich, 2004: 177). And Heinich is happy to add that “It is not so much that

effective emancipation is diminishing, but rather that intolerance to oppression is progressing” (*ibid.*). It must be added that this use of concepts and values – corresponding at a certain point in time, to wider concerns – has been observed in movements other than just women’s movements. For example, ecological, humanitarian and cultural ones have all undergone similar processes. But the defence of women’s interests – and therefore sexuality to a larger extent – has an effect on the components at the very core of the social fabric. These are fundamental symbolic operators who produce the rules and the norms, but also the archetypes and myths, giving meaning to all periods of an individual’s life. That is why, when speaking of women or when representing them, one cannot avoid raising subjects linked to the relationship that each of us has with the opposite sex, and the social order.

- 19 No locus in this order can exist independently, whether it be the family or the work place, the media, or justice – each of which is linked to the man/woman dyad that, in fact, has a relational dimension. The contributors have fully understood this; all of them have analyzed the processes and shown what is at stake in the relationship between women and politics. And although the theme of the domination of men over women served as a starting point for this dossier, the results lead to a more complex conclusion that reveals the various types of reproduction of this domination, in which the strategic dimension plays a major role. In this game, men and women may have a vested interest in the endurance of this domination; a phenomenon of consolidation highlighted by the authors, although the reasons put forward and the mechanisms described differ from one contributor to the next. Finally, gender research leads to much wider issues that go beyond the mere study of the subject itself. Hence the need to vary approaches by studying, for example, the counterpart to what has been developed here, namely, the masculinization of so-called feminine professions “in order to study evolutions in the field of the gender division of labour, but also resistances to change” *Association française de sociologie* [French Sociological Association] 2005).

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NOTES

1. See D. Desmarchelier, J. Rennes, coord., “Usages politiques du genre” [Political uses of gender], *Mots. Les langages du politique*, 78, 2005.
2. On this subject, see the work of Christine Guionnet and É. Neveu, *Féminin/Masculin. Sociologie du genre* (2004) that retraces the origins and the evolution of the theme.
3. In politics, the idea of a political parity law originated from the fact that women were underrepresented in government. In the 1990s, the European Community studied this issue with the objective of reaching effective equality. On 28 June 1999, the principle of the law was adopted in the French Constitution, with a majority vote from MPs assembled in the two *congrès* chambers at Versailles. Then, on 8 December 1999, a bill on equal access for men and women to political functions was adopted by the Council of Ministers and then on 25 January 2000 by the MPs. The law came into effect for the first time, during the 2001 municipal elections, and then in the 2002 general elections.
4. Even though the first reflections on gender roles in the 1930s are to be found in the work of M. Mead (1935), the concept of gender only took form in the United States in the 1970s following research by the psychologist R. Stoller (1968) which enabled it to be distinguished from the

notion of sex (men/women). These reflections were followed by the work of British sociologist A. Oakley in 1972, that saw sex as biological and gender as cultural. 1972 also saw the publication of “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” by the anthropologist Sh. Ortner, that caused a sensation. She challenged the systematic linking of women with the idea of nature, whilst that of culture would tend to be systematically linked to man. From this point on, gender is distinguished from sex and researchers concentrate more on male-female relationships

5. It must be noted that in France, the notion of gender, considered as too vague and systematically associated with American feminism, itself deemed sectarian and radical, did not really take on in the 1990s. French universities preferred another rhetoric based on the relationships between the sexes, or social gender relations, or social gender. It is only when the European Community started to question “issues of gender and political parity in pursuit of effective equality” (Teixido, 2005: 56) from 1993 onwards that, in the field of politics, some work appeared on the issue; although, ten years earlier, J. Mossuz-Lavau and M. Sineau (1983) had already anticipated the debate by bridging the gap between gender studies and politics and through the publication of a survey focusing on the visibility of women in the voting context, elections and eligibility for election.

6. A militant of the Socialist Party (*Parti socialiste*), Françoise Gaspard was elected Mayor of Dreux on 13 mars 1977, then an MEP in 1979 and 1981. She has not held any political position since her defeat in 1988. Since 1990, she has been a lecturer at *École des hautes études en sciences sociales*.

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