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Identity without Politics: Framing the Parity Laws and Their Implementation in French Local Politics

Abstract

This article provides an alternative approach to the arguments of “critical mass,” whose tenets assume that policies fostering women’s rights would arise from an increase in women’s political representation. Instead, the article argues that the cultural repertoires that are used to justify women’s higher numerical presence also matter. Indeed, different repertoires—such as claiming women’s inclusion into politics in the name of women’s interests or in the name of their difference—have different political outcomes. This case study of the French sex-parity laws, which ensures a 50-percent quota of women in politics, explores the connection between the rationales to legitimize the laws and their implementation at the local level. This provides for, first, an investigation of how the requirement to make the parity claim compatible with French cultural repertoires on citizenship and sovereignty has led parity advocates to define sexual difference as universal. Then, drawing on interviews with local politicians, it shows how this rationale underlining sexual difference has failed to define gender relationships as political and, thus, to promote gender equality in local public policies.

Introduction

One of the most striking observations about France's parity laws is the stark contrast between the terms of debate over the law and what could be called its results. During the public and parliamentary debates that took place from 1992 to 2000, the parity supporters' campaign focused on what women would bring to politics. Women were suddenly invested with all the attributes missing in French politics. At a time of political crisis, women were presented as the cure for all evils: their increased presence in politics would modernize the political system, renew the political elite as well as the style of politics, bring more humanity, and finally enlarge and achieve true democracy. Women's specificity, such as their presumed proximity to "everyday" concerns, their ability to listen to and understand people's problems, and their lack of personal ambition, were also used to support the argument that a democracy inclusive of women would function differently and pursue alternative agendas. Political and strategic reasons may explain this rationale; two fundamental questions, however, remain to be answered: 1) five years after town-council elections under the parity laws, a first appraisal can be done, and we may assess whether the law is actually bringing about changes in local government and public policies. We can therefore investigate women's capacity, as they reach a critical mass, to act differently from male politicians; and 2) the assumptions embedded in such a query should not be left unchallenged, as they may convey gender stereotypes. Why do we expect women to be different and take strategic rationales designed to legitimize women's presence in politics for an accurate account of reality?

Parity first came into force in March 2001 for town-council elections. In every community with over 3,500 inhabitants, election rosters had to be *paritaires*, meaning that they needed to comprise 50 percent women, and that women had to be evenly distributed within the roster: for the first six candidates, three had to be women, and so on. With this constraint, the electoral bill ensured that women would not have less chance to be elected by being put at the end of the list. In these communities, the percentage of women in town councils increased from 21.4 to 47.5. The outcome of numerical equality has definitely been reached. Nevertheless, other changes that parity was expected to bring about have not occurred, and local political systems have not been challenged by women's presence. We could argue that we have to allow more time to witness any kind of fundamental change—after all, how much can happen in a mere five years? Nevertheless, I argue that an addition of women, even in the elite, is unlikely to change a fundamentally gendered system, mostly because

local politicians are caught in the narratives that were mobilized to support the parity law.

The discussion proceeds as follows: first, I explain how and why the assumption that women would change French political life developed during the debate on parity at a general level. Indeed, this argument implies an essentialist vision of gender that must be questioned: why did parity campaigners choose to base parity on an essentialist assumption? Was it a strategic choice, and did it help the parity constitutional reform bill to pass in Parliament? What are the legitimate narratives actors can mobilize, and what meaning do they give to the parity laws? What kind of implications may it have in terms of feminist issues? The answers to these questions enable us to understand how cultural repertoires of citizenship, political representation, and sexual difference work within French context, and how they shaped the parity public debate.

Then, I investigate how these cultural repertoires invoked during the debate shape local politicians' narratives and practices. What are the repertoires used in local context about gender and politics? It is striking how inconsistent local politicians' narratives are on this subject. Drawing on Ann Swidler's definition of cultural repertoires (Swidler 2000), I demonstrate how the rationales mobilized during the national debate have created boundaries that constrain the meaning that can be given by local politicians to the parity laws as well as their strategies of action regarding gender in public policies. Finally, I explore how the institutional context of local politics also constrains the practices of both female and male representatives, preventing them from implementing gender mainstreaming in their public policies. Hence, the parity legislation has produced a paradox: the values that parity advocates have used to support their claim, which have aroused a number of expectations from women's access to political power, cannot be used by women in order to effect political changes in favor of women.

Recent scholarship on the parity laws has focused mainly on the social movement for parity¹ (Bereni 2004; Gaspard 2001; Giraud and Jenson 2001; Picq 2002), on the parity debate and the rationales mobilized to legitimize the reform (Achin 2001; Bereni and Lépinard 2003 and 2004; Lagrave 2000; Lépinard 2002; Marques-Pereira 1999; Tremblay 2002), and on the implementation of the reform, mainly through an analysis of electoral statistics² and interviews with politicians (Bird 2003; Dauphin 2002; Heinen 2004; Sineau 2001). This article draws from an analysis of the parity debate but aims to investigate the practical consequences of the strategic and rhetorical choices that were made in order to legitimize women's political representation. Recent developments in the research on women and politics³

have pointed to the need to shift from a focus on the reasons why women's presence in politics should be increased to a questioning of the consequences of such an increase (Tremblay 2000), especially through a critical evaluation of the *critical mass* argument. Following this path, this study aims to define under which discursive and material conditions a numerical presence of women may bring qualitative changes in the political system. Through a critical argument, it refers to a case study sample of French town councils where parity has been reached.

Data

This article presents the conclusions drawn from doctoral research on the legitimization and the implementation of the parity legislation in France, as well as from a collective European research project I participated in, under the direction of Professor Jacqueline Heinen, on *Gender and Local Management of Change in Seven Countries of the European Union* (Heinen 2004). The findings of both aim to articulate a critical approach to gender quota legislations targeting political representation. The French part of the project consists of more than 100 in-depth interviews of women and men elected to town councils in ten different cities in four regions (Britany, Ile de France, North, and South West), supplemented by interviews with about 30 administrative executives and members of NGOs, both men and women. I conducted 32 of the interviews with women and men elected to local governments, mostly at the executive level, in four different French cities chosen for their different sizes (from 20,000 to 120,000 inhabitants) and for their political orientations (two left-wing cities and two right-wing cities). The interviews focused on what parity meant for the respondent, his/her conception of how gender influenced political practices, and his/her opinion on gender mainstreaming. Since I began this research in 1999, before the parity constitutional reform bill was enacted, I was able to interview local female and male politicians before and after consensus was reached on the parity principle. I have been able to compare women's opinions on what parity would bring and what parity has—or has not—brought to local political life. In addition, I collected data related to cultural repertoires on gender and political representation as framed in the press during the parity debate with a sample of 241 articles from the newspaper *Le Monde* on the period 1992–2001. This data set was analyzed in terms of the parliamentary debates on the reform, both at the National Assembly and at the Senate.

Concerning the implementation of the parity laws, available data from the *Observatoire de la parité* on 2001 elections offer a first

appraisal of the implementation of parity in town councils. First, in communities under 3,500 inhabitants, the parity laws did not apply, as these constituencies have a specific set of electoral rules that make it difficult to implement parity on electoral lists. The spillover effect of the reform on these communities was limited, as only 30.5 percent women were elected to their councils, versus 47.5 percent in communities over 3,500 inhabitants. As results for other national elections suggest as well, where there was no rule, women's percentage did not increase in a significant way.⁴ Moreover, the electoral bill imposed 50 percent women as candidates but did not dictate the final results of the election. In France, the order of the list presented to voters usually follows the hierarchy of the positions people will occupy when elected. The first one will be the mayor, the next ones will be members of the executive board, and the rest of the list will be part of the council. When the council gathers for the first time, a few days after the elections, they elect the mayor and the executive board. Up until then, the composition of the council followed the order of the campaign's list. But with the parity law in effect, for the first time, candidates were not elected following their order on the list. Consequently, according to a study of 12 *départements*⁵ (regions), there are only 26.6 percent women in municipalities' executive boards, versus 18.9 percent in 1995, and only 7.1 percent female mayors in cities over 3,500 inhabitants.

Moreover, the law does not implement gender parity at the "inter-communal" level in decision-making bodies, which are composed of representatives elected by town councils, whereas it does represent an emerging locus of power. Indeed, an increasing number of town's responsibilities are being transferred to this level. According to estimations made by the *Observatoire de la parité*, only 5 percent of inter-communal structures are directed by women. Local political elites are obviously withstanding the implementation of parity, thanks to the means offered by local political institutions. Women may be entering municipalities while political power is in fact shifting toward another institutional level. Hence, the borders that used to maintain women's exclusion from masculine realms may have shifted but have not disappeared.

Framing the Public Debate on Parity: Cultural Repertoires on Gender and Difference

The parity debate focused on many related outcomes: in the political arena, the debate dealt with problems such as the implications of parity for republican universalism and the preservation of the French Constitution (Bereni and Lépinard 2004; Scott 1997a; Vogel-Polsky

1994). In the feminist intellectual arena, parity was an opportunity to replay and enliven old issues in new ways. The opposition between *differentialisme*—what is known as French feminism—and *universalism*—a feminism that advocates formal equality—which has been recurrent in the French feminist movement, was enacted again. However, this was different from second-wave feminism, as some feminists clamored for representation in the name of women’s difference, whereas others rejected the bill in the name of formal equality (Lépinard 2002; Picq 1997). Parity campaigners’ strategy consisted of using the law to increase women’s representation in politics. Indeed, political parties proved historically more reluctant to implement their own gender quota policies than in other countries,⁶ and parity advocates believed that only the power of the state could compel political parties to allow women’s participation in the political sphere. As it was first presented in Françoise Gaspard, Claude Servan-Schreiber, and Anne Le Gall’s book *Au pouvoir citoyennes*, the principle of parity in the political realm required only an electoral bill. But it became rapidly apparent as the debate grew that the Constitutional Council, which had already banned a law allowing a 25-percent gender quota for local elections in 1982, would draw on its previous jurisprudence and oppose any new attempt to implement gender quotas in political representation. This judicial restriction has encouraged parity activists to ask for a revision of the Constitution. However, such a reform requires more political support than ordinary laws: three-fifths of the Congress⁷ must approve the constitutional change.

Therefore, campaigners for parity had to frame their claim so as to reach a political consensus across the political spectrum. They had to elaborate parity as a good principle, as a concept that would accord with the common interest, and fit within French political culture. In the political arena, far away from the turmoil of the feminist debates, an assumption consistent with this need for consensus strengthened as the debate went on, supported especially by female politicians and the Socialist Party, which was a major advocate for the reform. It argued that women’s presence among the political elite would renew and modernize political life, would lead to a better understanding between citizens and their political representatives, and would bring more humane qualities and less selfishness into politics. Eventually, it was the argument on sexual difference that made the difference in the debate and created consensus. The study of the public and parliamentary debate shows that a great range of arguments were used to try to convince power holders to support the reform. These arguments draw from a set of *cultural repertoires*, that is to say, those cultural resources that helped to define and categorize the notions that were at play during the debate. Ann Swidler uses the notion of

cultural repertoire to describe how culture works and how people use it: “This image suggests that culture cultivates skills and habits in its users, so that one can be more or less good at the cultural repertoire one performs . . . It is in this sense that people have an array of cultural resources upon which they can draw” (Swidler 2000, 24). Swidler insists on the fact that people do not have a single, unified set of attitudes or beliefs. Thus, a person tends to try various rationales with little concern for coherence, as long as they constitute resources for his/her strategy of action. This ability to shift according to the context can help us understand why the terms of the public debate changed over time. In order to account for this winning strategy, we need to understand those cultural repertoires of gender, sexual difference, and political representation that were mobilized during the debate.

Bypassing French Cultural Repertoires on Citizenship and Political Representation

The parity constitutional reform bill was first presented by the government in December 1998 to the National Assembly, where it was adopted, and then to the Senate, which rejected the National Assembly’s version because it implied the modification of the third article of the Constitution that defines national sovereignty. It stated that equal access of women and men to political offices should be facilitated by the law. The Senate proposed another version, but it redefined the nature of the problem: the Senate asked for a revision of the fourth article of the Constitution rather than the third, thus making political parties, rather than the law, responsible for the desired increase in women’s presence in politics.⁸ The theoretical debate about the philosophical foundations of parity took place during this first reading: senators insisted on protecting the French conception of the Republic, national sovereignty, and citizenship in order to prevent a breakup of the body politic, whereas deputies argued that gender equality required the acknowledgment of the presence of both sexes in the sovereign people.

For the senators, as well as for the majority of French legal scholars, the French Constitution does not admit categories, whether ethnic, social, or sexual. As Joan Scott notes, French theories on the Republic “refuse any link between belonging to a group or having an identity, and political representation. Only individuals are represented, not as social agents but as abstract figures of the universal human subject” (Scott 1997a). The idea that women could represent women was hence immediately rejected by parity opponents. As a senator affirmed during the debate, since, according to French law,

“the representatives do not represent citizens from their constituency but the whole nation,” they cannot represent only one part of it. Hence, one of the most powerful arguments *against* the constitutional reform bill was that it would lead to a breach of universalism. It would threaten the nation’s unity, dividing it into categories. As Senator and intellectual Robert Badinter put it: “The Republic is composed of citizens without any distinctions among them . . . No race, no opinion, no religious beliefs . . . all are citizens, only citizens.”⁹ With regard to the French Constitution, national sovereignty cannot be divided between male and female citizens, as the deputies implicitly stated in their proposition to revise the third article. There is also strong political and institutional consensus in France about the idea that ethnic differences cannot be taken into account in constitutional law, as this would endanger the universality of citizenship. Parity opponents often used this to denounce the introduction of sex difference in the constitution: it would, they suggested, open a “Pandora’s box” of group claims.¹⁰

Therefore, the centrality of universalism in the French constitution raised many problems for parity campaigners. In order to legitimate the reform bill, and the constitutional change it implied, they had to prove that it would not lead to the creation of different categories of citizens and that it would not create a quota, as in the affirmative-action policies implemented in the United States. Indeed, despite the fact that the United States never had any quota law and does not even use this word, French members of Parliament were convinced that quotas were enacted across the Atlantic and that their consequences were catastrophic (e.g., Badinter 1996). Hence, French repertoires of citizenship and political representation made it possible to contest the parity reform both by presenting parity as an affirmative action policy incompatible with French political culture (Scott 1997a) and by arguing that women would defend only women’s interests.

Magnifying sexual difference appeared to be the way to answer those problems and legitimate the reform bill and the constitutional change it implied. Indeed, if sexual difference was defined as unique, its recognition within constitutional law would not be used by other social groups, such as ethnic minorities, to claim for the recognition of their own differences. So the political elite would avoid a shift toward what is considered in France to be a *communitarian* conception of citizenship. At the beginning of the public debate, some parity advocates, like Françoise Gaspard, Claude Servan-Schreiber, and Anne Le Gall (Gaspard et al. 1992), argued that gender difference was socio-historical and not biological. But the more the debate developed, the more campaigners for parity tended to invoke “nature” or

an immutable version of “culture” in their assertions to convince senators and deputies. They affirmed that sexual difference prevailed over any other difference because it was an *immutable* characteristic, constitutive of humankind (Agacinski 1998; Halimi 1994 and 1997). They invoked biology, reproduction, anthropology, and a vision of gender relations as marked by an ontological complementarity in order to distinguish sex difference from other differences and women from other minorities. In short, they defined gender difference as a universal one, acceptable by the French Constitution.¹¹ They thus succeeded in universalizing their claim. By arguing that parity would benefit the common good, they managed to legitimize the reform (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). Their eventual *tour de force* recognized sexual difference while rejecting any social embodiment of the abstract figure of the citizen, arguing that it was a difference that was more different than others. Though some parity advocates insisted upon the fact that gender was not biological but socially constructed, the public debate on parity tended to strengthen an essentialist approach to gender difference. Indeed, it worked to consolidate the cultural repertoire of sexual difference as a natural one and to repudiate women as a social group.

A Pragmatic Bypass: The Parity Rhetoric as Good for Politics

Philosophical debates may have no end, whereas in politics, decisions need to be made. When the bill was rejected by the Senate and went back to the National Assembly for a second reading, the deputies maintained their position on the third article: the reform bill was blocked. Despite parity campaigners’ efforts to reconcile sexual difference with universalism, senators stuck to their cultural repertoire of an abstract citizenship. It thus became necessary to change strategy. When the bill arrived at the Senate for a second reading, members of the government insisted that both Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and President Jacques Chirac agreed to the reform and that senators should comply with the president’s wishes (Tremblay 2002). In order to do so, senators switched theories for pragmatic reasons. The Minister of Justice, Elisabeth Guigou, who was in charge of the bill for the government, underlined the fact that it was time for the senators to leave theoretical problems aside and find a solution to women’s under-representation as well as an agreement between the National Assembly and the Senate. She told the senators: “We have a pragmatic aim, not an ideological one.”¹² Guy Cabanel, the senator in charge of the bill for the Senate, encouraged his colleagues to change their position, as he stated that they had to save the project, despite their reluctance, as the senators did not want to be perceived

as “the undertakers of the idea of equality between men and women.”¹³ Some intellectual and legal scholars also shifted frames, in order to deal with the concrete issue rather than the theoretical one. Whereas the immutability of universalism had been in the midst of turmoil since the beginning, they finally accepted the fact that, if it was for a good reason and if it would solve a crucial and urgent problem, one could compromise with universalism. Therefore, the only logic that could be found in their discourses was that of action: when they could not oppose the reform anymore, they shifted their position to a more pragmatic one that could justify parity, despite their previous opposition to it, and still make their rationale appear consistent with their former beliefs.

To strengthen their position, parity campaigners underlined the pragmatic benefits that politics would gain from women’s participation. Such a strategic move was successful, as everybody could agree to such a statement. Both sides, opponents and supporters of the law, assumed women’s participation would be good for politics. Some opponents, especially right-wing female politicians, claimed a law would be humiliating and was not necessary. But they still believed that the presence of more women would change the way politics were made. French politics could thus be rescued from the crisis it had been enduring for several years. This crisis involved numerous scandals and trials involving politicians, mass disaffection from formal politics, lack of confidence in the political elite—all of which have been underlined to explain high voter-abstention rates during the 1990s (Perrineau 2003). Whether or not these explanations have any basis in fact, the French public sphere has been deeply swayed by them, and many claimed that the introduction of women into the political sphere would be a way of bridging the gap between the people and an increasingly distant elite. Hence, women were expected to bring fresh air into French politics. As the parity’s “Manifeste des 577” argued, “the lack of elected women makes political assemblies unbalanced; it is one of the main causes that explains the current political crisis.”¹⁴

As Isabelle Giraud and Jane Jenson have argued, this “crisis of representation” opened a window onto the political opportunity structure (Giraud and Jenson 2001). The discourse claiming that the exclusion of women was a cause of this crisis and that parity would contribute to its solution is clearly a strategic one that aims to justify the reform bill. Deprived of men’s faults—women were presented by the media and politicians as hard workers, devoted to their fellow citizens, more human, and less competitive—there was no question they would change the political system. But how? Here the discourse is less precise. Their unique qualities—gentleness, devotion, care,

etc.—were underlined to advocate for a specific political style that implicitly resides in the female gender. Few feminists argued, for example, that women would put new issues on the political agenda or that issues such as abortion or childcare would be reconsidered.¹⁵ In fact, the assumption that women would change politics did not stem from a feminist perspective, and few people argued for the parity law on the grounds that elected women would support women's interests. On the contrary, the assumption emerged from asserting gender differences: women were not expected to change gender relationships but to transform the political system. Parity was not presented as good for women but good for politics.

Ambiguous Consequences for Feminist Politics

Frames of the parliamentary debate shifted as the need for a solution increased under the pressure from the media and public opinion. Deputies first used a cultural repertoire concerning France's specificity, its claims for a universal and abstract citizenship, and a united nation that could not be divided into categories. Then, they switched to a cultural repertoire focused on pragmatism and the need for a concrete solution to women's exclusion from political representation. But in both cases, some cultural repertoires were left aside, maybe because they were not even available in this peculiar context. Here, I am pointing to the absence of any feminist cultural repertoire to support the reform bill. Indeed, as numerous researchers have commented (Bereni and Lépinard 2004; Delphy 1997; Scott 1997a), campaigners for parity rejected any idea of affirmative action to support parity. They often mentioned that women were not a minority and that parity was not a quota. They rejected the entire vocabulary that surrounds affirmative-action policies, and they always insisted on the fact that they were not inspired by American examples. But, as Joan Scott has argued, in the case of parity, anti-Americanism is displayed in the French public sphere as a guise for anti-feminism (Scott 1997b). Parity's advocates scarcely mentioned the fact that women might be more able to defend women's interests in politics, if such a thing exists, if they were more numerous. The idea that the political agenda would be changed was used in the beginning, but it was quickly replaced by the idea that since sexual difference is universal, it should be part of French Universalism. Hence, parity was never an incentive to female representatives to support feminist issues (Lagrange 2000; Varikas 1995). On the contrary, they had to prove that they would support the common good and not women's interests in order to comply with the public sphere which, as Habermas has pointed out, requires that political claims be universalized (Habermas

1989). Hence, the transformation of the parity claim illustrates the limits of a public sphere that cannot take into account claims that stand on the side of the particular, a side historically aligned with femininity and women's interests (Landes 1998). Female representatives could change political life, but they had to leave women's issues to one side, given that they were not allowed to represent the social category to which they belonged.

Following Maud Eduards's typology on Sweden, there are three different rationales available to justify an increase of women's representation in politics: the first one is founded on the idea that it is a question of equity, a democratic right; the second assumes that women have different competencies from men that should be taken into account in the political realm; and the last one asserts that men and women have different, often contradictory, political interests, and that women's interests find no place for expression (Eduards 1995). Some campaigners for parity sometimes used the first rationale. Most of them, I argue, used the second strategy and assumed that women's presence would "naturally" change politics because of their differences. But hardly anyone used the third rationale, which emphasizes gender relations as relations of power and men and women belonging to social, and therefore political, groups. Hence, transforming the functioning and ideological content of the political system was never in itself the outcome that parity advocates wanted to produce. This is understandable as, according to Maud Eduards, "claims for women's ability to change politics' content are acceptable as long as they don't challenge the institutional and ideological structure of politics" (Eduards 1995, 506). Finally, parity proponents used a cultural repertoire that insisted on gender difference as being universal, but ignored the notion of women as a social group who may suffer specific discrimination and hence may have their own political interests.

This strategy succeeded, as the constitutional reform bill, which "promotes equal access to electoral terms of office to women and men," was supported almost unanimously.¹⁶ However, the rhetorical arguments used to defend and define parity limited its political content. First, women may have a claim for representation, but this does not extend to other oppressed groups who have been excluded from traditional party politics and could benefit from this legislation, because their difference cannot be defined as universal in nature. Second, instead of criticizing a political system based on women's exclusion and the role that political parties may play in it, they asked for women's inclusion without calling into question that political system itself. That was probably the price to pay for getting the bill through Parliament,¹⁷ but it also emptied parity of its subversive content.

Indeed, if the central issue in all political conflict is the battle over meaning, as Dorothy Stetson argues with reference to women's rights policies in France (Stetson 1987), the meaning given to parity ended up by being the least threatening possible to political institutions. As Gill Allwood and Kursheed Wadia observe, "What could be radical or subversive has been turned into a simple demand for equality or, worse, equal opportunities," and thus belongs to Stetson's "least threatening" category of policy issues by virtue of being the kind most likely to be widely accepted (Allwood and Wadia 2000, 18). This typical case of identity politics was rendered politically neutral. In other words, it kept the identity and covered up the politics.

The assertion that women would change politics is therefore part of a larger cultural repertoire on gender difference that was mobilized in order to support the constitutional reform bill in the French institutional and political context. This is a context that does not allow discrimination, be it positive or negative, in its conception of equality and sovereignty. In these terms, then, it is crucial to investigate the consequences within local settings of this powerful rhetoric played out during the public debate—that is, to make the connection between discourses to actions: how do politicians use these cultural repertoires in local contexts? How do these repertoires constrain the logic of their practices, and in particular, how might they prevent women from effectively changing the political process?

Cultural Repertoires Shaping Women's Participation and Gender Issues in Local Politics

In order to assess the social consequences of parity framing, one must turn to the subjects and agents of the reform, in other words, the political representatives. The decision to focus on local politicians at the municipality level was made because town councils are the only political structures that have undergone a major change in terms of gender balance thanks to the parity reform.¹⁸ Hence, the local level provides a good site to explore how the parity reform has transformed political practices and cultural repertoires on gender and politics. Using discourse analysis methodology (Gilbert and Mulkey 1984), I examine the impact of the parity framing through recurrent themes and contradictions in politicians' discourses on parity, gender, and public policies. In order to appraise the extent to which the framing of the parity debate has influenced local politicians' rationales, I look for similarities and differences in cultural repertoires used to frame the parliamentary debate and used by local politicians in their interviews. The concept of cultural repertoire is particularly useful

here to understand why and how people shift from one opinion to another within the same sentence, and how they use certain rationales and silence others to pursue their strategy of action, depending on the context they face (Swidler 2000). Hence, in analyzing cultural repertoires, we must pay attention to the codes and institutions that define a particular—local or national—context (Lamont and Thévenot 2000), which may limit the array of cultural repertoires available for individuals. The parity movement and its political legitimation by the revision of the Constitution have created a context in which the repertoire of sexual difference has become widely available to justify women's presence in politics. Indeed, our interviewees use the cultural repertoires of sexual difference, which has proved crucial to the parity movement's success, and their discourse echoes some of the rationale used to legitimize the reform. However, they also tended to shift to a universal rhetoric during the interviews when it came to political representation and gender mainstreaming in local public policies. The "shifting moments" appear crucial because they indicate when the cultural repertoire of sexual difference no longer works, that is to say, when political action is involved.

Magnifying and Neutralizing Gender in Local Politics

As I have argued, the public debate on parity has emphasized sexual difference, and it has magnified women's specificity, claiming that they would, because of their qualities, change political life and style. This insistence on femininity as a political identity is a new version of an old tale. Danièle Kergoat has pointed out, for example, how female workers' skills are denied when they are reframed as women's traditional qualities. Their tenacity at work, their talent for detail, their taste for concrete things, their capacity to pay attention to people, and their lack of interest in technical matters and abstraction are framed as natural and therefore not as technical skills that could be recognized in the labor market (Kergoat 1992). Local representatives use the same rationale, slightly reframed so as to fit the context of the political sphere, where women are then said to be "closer to" citizens, to pay attention to people as they are, to be deprived of any kind of personal ambition, to care for details and concrete matters, and to be softer and less aggressive in political debates. Female local representatives have seized the opportunity offered by this repertoire to create a uniquely feminine identity in politics. In our interviews they stressed sexual difference and feminine qualities. According to them, women pay more attention to details, they listen to people in a different way. As one of our interviewees, a women member of the executive board of a medium-sized city, says: "Women have a much more

pragmatic vision, closer to the field work, a vision . . . lacking personal interest, they dare to say things that men don't."

Drawing on the rationale used by female deputies during the parliamentary debate, female local representatives argue that women do not share the same political *vision* with men. Despite the fact that not a single female or male local representative I interviewed could find a concrete example of this "unique" perspective women are supposed to bring to politics, none of them abandoned the repertoire of sexual difference. But, despite the fact that they could not find concrete examples, they argued, in common with parity campaigners, that women had a different "eye," an eye that would improve the way local politics work. However, at the same time, the female interviewees denied that sexual difference should be taken into account when it comes to political representation or to implementing public policies. They all agreed, for example, that even if the parity law was a success at the local level, they would rather not have been elected because of the new legislation. Indeed, they felt they should not have been elected just because they are women. To this extent, they subscribed to the republican vision of citizenship defining women and men as equal and identical, and gender as irrelevant for political representation. Sometimes they argued in the same sentence that women are different from and similar to men. How can we account for such an inconsistency, for this shifting from an emphasis on gender difference to its denial?

Representing Everyone but Women

The female representatives elected in 2001 with the parity laws rejected unanimously any idea of being representative of women's interests or of women as a group. They used the same cultural repertoire of political representation as parity's campaigners and their opponents, that is to say, they considered themselves to be representing the whole population of their constituency. They never mentioned the fact that, as women, they could or should be more concerned about women's needs. And yet, the local context allows for the use of alternative repertoires of political representation. Whereas the public debate on parity focused on political representation as the embodiment of national sovereignty, and therefore on national elections, local elections draw on another tradition of political representation, the one that Hannah Pitkin defines as "descriptive representation" (Pitkin 1967). Indeed, whereas in France, national political representation is based on the principle of the "representation of ideas" (Phillips 1995), local political representation is supposed to be representative of the socio-economic characteristics of the city's inhabitants as well. This constraint is visible in the making of electoral lists¹⁹ as well as in

the interviews I did with mayors. Indeed, electoral lists for town-council elections are not only politically oriented, but also representative of various social characteristics of the city. They always include candidates from all the different neighborhoods of the town, from all ages, from all social classes (defined according to occupation), and, more recently from different ethnic minorities, though usually in a lesser proportion to their presence in the city.²⁰ Political tracts given during a local campaign always mention all those qualities concerning the members of the list, in order to prove that people were chosen so that the totality of the list may accurately reflect the city in its social, geographical, and economic diversity. As a socialist mayor from a medium-sized city explained during his interview, “Of course, anybody must be able to recognize him/herself, or part of it. It would be strange to have everybody on the list coming from only one neighborhood . . . What’s important is that it gives a faithful picture of the city, of all its components.” The elected body hence appears as a “mirror” of the city. Whereas French cultural repertoires on political representation usually forbid any link between representatives and specific social groups, the cultural repertoires on local government, and above all the local political practices, insist on representing the diverse political interests of all the social components of the city through an *embodiment*, or, to use Anne Phillips’s term, a *presence* of its diversity (Phillips 1995).

However, while group interests may be defined by age, occupation, or sometimes ethnicity, gender is rarely understood in this perspective. One female interviewee, recently elected in a left-wing medium-sized city, explains her conception of political representation when it comes to choosing candidates for an electoral list thusly: “I’m trying to find out why I am against parity, well, whereas I benefited from it . . . it’s because I have seen the way an electoral list is made, I imagine the mayor’s problem when he does his list, people who were not unworthy from the previous term, and now he’s forced to put up new people, because they are women . . . I think it is dreadful, I think people must be on the list because they have something to say, because they deserve to be, not because they are a woman.” The example of ethnic minority women I interviewed (women of migrant origin) is particularly interesting. They understand their presence in a town council as being linked to their ethnic identity: they believe that they have the responsibility to defend their group’s specific interests. They were indeed generally chosen to be political representatives because they already worked to help their community in dealing with local institutions. But they never considered that, as women, they could defend women’s interests as well. Thanks to a more pragmatic repertoire based on local political

issues, specific interests may be defended and represented in local government, despite the French emphasis on the universality of citizenship. But this pragmatic cultural repertoire of local politics does not apply to gender. The interviews showed that, despite the implementation of the parity legislation and the increase in women's presence in town councils, it is still not legitimate to claim to represent women as a social group. As female and male interviewees argue, there is no such thing as "women's interests" to be defended, and no female representative is willing to represent them.

This finding at the local level suggests that, as parity was not legitimized as a means of ensuring a better representation of women's political interests, this repertoire is not available for local politicians either. Within local settings, despite the fact that the context is more open to the idea of political representation as descriptive representation, the repertoire of sexual difference is not legitimate, and, when it comes to gender, local politicians conform to the repertoire used during the public debate, which does not accept any form of social embodiment of the abstract citizen. Hence, the cultural repertoires used to legitimize the parity laws limit women's integration into formal politics, as this cannot be done "in the name" of ensuring that women's interests are represented, even in local settings.

Gender Boundaries in Local Public Policies

When talking about the implementation of public policies, the representatives I interviewed also tended to shift their frame and repertoire, allowing the link between culture and action to be seen more clearly. When I asked the question "Do/would you implement public policies oriented towards women's specific needs?" the answer was almost systematically "no," be it a man or a woman. Suddenly, as the interviewees had to place themselves in a new frame, that of political action, sexual difference was no longer relevant to them. They declared that there should not be discrimination among citizens, and they maintained a universal rhetoric. Taking into account women's specific needs would have been discriminatory for the rest of the population and inconsistent with the aim of local politicians to work for the common good. Local representatives agreed with policies for elders or young people, for poor or disabled, and they did implement specific public policies for all those categories, but they declined to apply this principle to gender. Whereas class differences can account for public policies targeting specific groups in the city, the view of local representatives was that the same logic does not apply to gender difference. This phenomenon can be analyzed as an unanticipated consequence of the way parity was framed by its proponents. Hence,

as neither sex inequalities nor women's specific interests have been at the center of the parity debate, these issues are absent as well from local representatives' concerns. Interviews with local politicians revealed that in their views, sexual difference does not entail sex inequalities, and that in most public policies, gender difference is, contrary to what gender mainstreaming assumes, irrelevant. For example, a local politician in charge of urban planning declared in his interview that "there is no specific urban problem linked to the fact of being a women. If you want me to say that, I will say no." Unsurprisingly, the only public policy domain for which local representatives acknowledge the relevance of gender is family and child-care policies. But, in this particular case, gender is often reduced to the assumption that all women are mothers, and therefore responsible for childcare. As a female interviewee responsible for childhood and education in a medium-sized city argues, as she answers a question about what women would change to politics: "Well, it is linked with day to day problems. The fact that there are more women maybe we're going to be more careful about daily life, about children . . . I think that it will affect more the children than the women . . . for women I don't have examples . . . yes probably more childhood issues . . . though it's true that through children we will automatically reach women."

Our findings are thus consistent with Maud Eduards's statement in the Swedish case: "diversity of opinions [between men and women] is used as an argument to increase women's representation, in order to bring new experiences into formal politics. Paradoxically, once they are elected, women are supposed both to keep their specific position and submit to the 'public interest.' The original difference must be conformed, that is must be transformed into a gender-neutral attitude, and a more legitimate political behavior" (Eduards 1997, 157). Conforming to a certain cultural repertoire is not without practical effects and, indeed, feminist issues have not appeared, since women benefit from parity. We could say that local politicians magnify sexual difference—in order to justify women's new presence among them—using the repertoire of complementarity or women's difference, while on the other hand they try to neutralize gender, and to do so they shift repertoires when needed. Local politicians are therefore caught in webs of meaning constructed during the public debate on parity. Certain cultural repertoires had to be used and others had to be left aside, silenced (if they were ever legitimate enough to be available). Therefore, female representatives' ability to switch rhetoric, emphasizing universalism and in the next sentence sexual difference, does not mean that any rhetoric can be used in a strategic way. Women are also constrained in their rationales because some

are legitimate and others are not. If they use sexual difference in a strategic way to legitimate their breakthrough into politics, they cannot advocate for women's interests. Moreover, whereas cultural repertoires on political representation can be adapted, especially in local politics, to take account of the various social groups, this does not apply to gender.

Our interviews suggest that the legitimate cultural repertoires that can account for local public policies do not easily admit feminist perspectives. This may explain, then, that despite the rhetorical display of changes women would bring to politics, few of those expectations have yet occurred at the local level. Therefore, we need to account for the difficulty of mobilizing feminist repertoires for political action at the local level. In order to do so, one must turn to the local organization of politics, such as institutional routines or the candidates' selection processes, so as to identify those possible institutional constraints that are rooted in the specific context of local politics. What comes into play is the idea that cultural repertoires are embedded in practical contexts that ultimately give them their meaning (Biernacki 2000).

How Politics Works at the Local Level: Many Reasons to Neutralize Gender

The Context Created by the Parity Law

A major constraint that shapes the use of the sexual difference rationale by politicians at the local level is the compulsory nature of the parity laws. In general, female representatives tend to use this repertoire more than male representatives do. Moreover, women who had been elected before the parity law and already had political experience tend to use it less than female novices do. We can make the hypothesis that the more female representatives need to legitimate their presence in politics, the more they tend to use this repertoire. Indeed, the appeal to sexual difference as a fundamental feature of humankind helps to justify the idea that women and men should share political power while, at the same time, it undermines the potential competition between men and women for political office. In fact, both men and women insist in interviews on how painful it has been to dismiss male representatives "who had not proved themselves unworthy" in order to comply with the new parity legislation. It created a social context within town councils that was not conducive to women's arrival. Hence, women and men had to work twice as hard to make it look natural that they now share responsibilities. From this perspective, magnifying sexual difference

makes women's presence less painful and more legitimate. This repertoire allows women and men to speak the language of complementarity and not competition, so that they can work together without the men feeling challenged. If gender relationships had been understood during the framing of the legislation as power relations, and the parity laws as a preferential treatment for a discriminated category, it may have proved harder for women to be accepted by their male counterparts, as they would have been "stealing" electoral mandates from the men. Following Carol Lee Bacchi's account of the unanticipated consequences of American affirmative action for women (Bacchi 1996), women would then have been perceived as an undeserving category, who benefit from an unfair privilege. Hence, drawing on the same rationale as the one used by deputies to legitimate the reform, local politicians chose a rhetoric of complementarity to pacify the situation, as it invokes a traditional representation of sexual difference.

Constraints Linked to the Organization of Power in Local Governments

The rates of women's presence at the various levels of local politics (executive boards and councils) vary depending on local contexts. Although there is no systematic data available for women's presence in the executive boards of French town councils, our sample of cities shows some discrepancies. The composition of the board is determined mostly by the mayor's action as he presents to the council the names of the executive board's members, and in most cases the council elects unanimously the board that has been proposed by the mayor. Hence, to account for the variation in the bill's enforcement in those cities that have elected 50 percent women in their executive board and the ones that have elected an almost all-male board, one must turn to the functioning of town councils, and to the crucial role played by the mayor.

The interviews show that there has been some resistance to the implementation of the law: often women were presented as first on the list, so as to comply with the legislation, and were then moved down and excluded from the executive board, which is the only site of power in the municipality. In our sample of cities, the town council's political orientation cannot account for this strategy, as both left- and right-wing town councils have implemented it. The wishes of the mayor influenced by his/her personal sensitivity toward gender equality have proved to be, for our sample, more relevant to this issue. Indeed, French local governments are marked by a hierarchical form of organization; the executive power of the mayor is extremely important, and thus the implementation of any policy

depends, to a large extent, on his/her personal will. Many interviewees have pointed out that the council is powerless, and that its task is reduced to approving the mayor's choices. Hence, the mayor's personal commitment to the implementation of the parity has proved decisive. In one of the cities of our sample, in the bourgeois suburbs of Paris, the mayor, along with the right-wing deputy of this constituency, insisted on the fact that even before parity laws, he had chosen to have 40 percent women in the town council, and that it was only fair that now they would also share equally the responsibilities in the executive board. On the contrary, another right-wing mayor from a middle-class suburb of Paris, who chose to have only two women on the executive board, considered that women lack the necessary experience to be given such responsibilities. Mayoral wishes also explain women's absence from the "inter-communal" level of decision-making bodies. Indeed, representatives for inter-communality are, like the town executive board, elected by the council but in reality nominated by the mayor. As one female interviewee recalls, when she was first elected through the parity law, she did not know much about how the local political system functioned, but she rapidly realized that the inter-communal level was a decisive one in terms of public policies and political power. She realized as well that the mayor had already decided who would be elected at this level, and that she was not on his list. Hence, she had to fight for a place on the list, asking the mayor directly. His response was to tell her she was a *pain* and then finally to agree to her request.

Local female-candidate selection also increases women's dependency on the mayor and reduces their strategies of actions. First, local recruitment functions as any political recruitment, that is to say, it does not favor feminists. As Françoise Gaspard noticed for French political parties (Gaspard 1997), women who are recruited are scarcely known for their feminist opinions. In order to have access to political power, women must silence any claim "in the name of" women. According to Gaspard, those who gained entry into this male-dominated bastion before the parity law were accepted on the condition that "they would forget, in their discourses that they are women supporting women" (Gaspard 1997, 114). This statement is still true, despite parity, in local government, probably because the debate never mobilized a feminist cultural repertoire, and so had the effect of consolidating political parties and elites in their choice to recruit non-feminist candidates. Besides, women politicians are more likely to come from "civil society" or NGOs than are men (Sineau 1988 and 2001). At the local level, networks used by mayors and candidates for the office of mayor to recruit women are not the same as for men,

who often come from political parties, whereas women are known for their fieldwork in NGOs. In the last town-council elections, Mariette Sineau notes, 72 percent of female councilors were labeled “diverse” (independent)—a labeling that designates councilors who are not affiliated to any political parties—as opposed to 56 percent of men (Sineau 2001, 273). This can be in women’s favor, as they are then considered as closer to people, embodying a proximity that is increasingly valued in local political discourses. But this is also a weakness. Indeed, coming from political parties, men enjoy political networks and supportive ties to their party fellows. Those ties are all the more important when it comes to convincing the council to vote for a specific public policy, supporting a political project, or influencing the mayor’s decisions. Conversely, women owe their positions in local government to those who selected them: the mayor or the mayor-to-be. This is confirmed by the candidates’ attitudes during the campaign: men tend to negotiate their position on the list and on the executive board, whereas women do not. They leave the choice to the mayor and accept what is given to them. Women’s legitimacy is therefore based on his will, and their ability to, for example, implement new public policies is thus constrained by their weak institutional position within town councils.

Finally, women were given the opportunity and the means to integrate into the town councils, but the hierarchical organization of political power tends to lead to a dependency on the mayor’s wishes, on his agreement with the law and its principles. Hence, the law’s implementation is versatile and shows that though women entered local politics, they remain powerless, as they are dependent on power holders, who are men in their large majority. If today, in spite of the law, women’s integration into the political elite depends upon some men’s goodwill, with hindsight it would appear that the context of local institutions and politics is still an obstacle to women’s political participation. Indeed, as Martha Minow has pointed out, “Integrated into institutions not designed with them in mind, formerly marginalized people may simply become newly marginalized or stigmatised” (Minow 1990, 377). Because the rationales used to legitimize the parity reform have failed to criticize and challenge the rules of the political game, institutional constraints still prevent women from participating at the same level as men in local politics: the organization of political power within local government, and the practical details that determine the selection of female candidates, still privilege men over women.

Critical Mass, Critical Acts

Obstacles to women’s access to political power still remain in spite of the law and, when it comes to public policies, politicians use a

universal repertoire that neutralizes gender. Therefore, both cultural repertoires and local contexts help to understand why women have not—yet?—changed formal politics. Indeed, compared to the rhetorical display around women’s capacity to change politics, concrete innovations brought by women in local settings are almost nonexistent. Despite the diversity of our case studies, even in cities where women represent 50 percent of the executive board, no real innovation is to be found since their arrival. As many feminist scholars have pointed out, it is not *critical mass* that changes politics, but *critical acts* (Eduards 1995). Hence the question remains: what are the conditions required for women to act critically now that they share political power with men?

One city in our sample has implemented gender mainstreaming and taken into account women’s rights issues. Since 1995, Rennes, a major city in Brittany, has experienced changes due to women’s participation in its local government. As Annie Junter-Loiseau notes (Junter-Loiseau 1998), one of the first women to be elected to Rennes’s council in the 1980s came from a women’s rights NGO. Supported by the mayor and helped by local feminist activism, she progressively imposed women’s rights as an important local political issue, so that in 1995, when 40 percent of the newly elected town-council members were women, they created a women’s group with social scientists to work on specific issues related to women’s identity and specificity. They published a memo with all of their criticisms concerning the local political system (time schedules, sexist behaviors, political orientation, etc.) and asked for the implementation of an affirmative-action policy for women within the city’s administration.

Rennes is therefore a counterexample, as it shows that women’s participation in local politics—to the extent that they define themselves as feminists—may bring changes. In Rennes, female representatives have criticized the political system and have tried to transform it, arguing for feminist politics at the local level. Thus, their strategy is deeply rooted in their conception of their role, as women, but more importantly as feminists in politics. Hence, creating political change demands a change in the cultural repertoires used by female representatives to legitimate their newfound political power. Rather than neutralizing gender, changes ask for a recognition of sex inequalities and a political will to end them. But some repertoires are more legitimate than others, depending on the context. Rennes’s case demonstrates that for a feminist repertoire to be legitimate, some conditions are required with respect to the local context, such as a strong feminist movement or a mayor willing to implement gender mainstreaming.

Considering the repertoire on sexual difference used in politics, it is not surprising that women have not changed political life. Values invoked to claim that women would change politics actually prevented

them from doing so, as they cannot be mobilized to ask for changes in issues concerning women. Local female representatives find themselves trapped by a cultural repertoire that requires them to change the political process in the name of gender-specificity and, meanwhile, impedes their ability to represent the interests of women as a social group in order to stick with a universal conception of citizenship. Their paradoxical discourses, invoking difference and universalism at the same time—but not exactly in the same discursive context—echo the paradoxes underlined by Joan Scott about the French feminist struggle for civil rights (Scott 1998). As Scott points out, feminists had “only paradoxes to offer,” not because their rationales were paradoxical, but because they were dealing with the republican system’s crucial paradoxes, which were not supposed to be exposed to criticism, as they were the foundation for the whole socio-historical organization of the French state. Here again, female politicians have only paradoxes to offer, because they shift between repertoires, and lack the only one that would be useful and would really bring about change: the feminist one.

Conclusion

Parity advocates first framed their claim in a very radical way, calling into question the functioning of the political system and women’s exclusion from the political arena. However, faced with tremendous opposition, they quickly focused their efforts on constructing the meaning of parity by linking it to legitimate repertoires devoid of feminist claims. The campaign for parity, in the end, has been focused on the single outcome of numerical equality in representative institutions. This is mainly because this definition of women’s representation did not threaten the existing system and was compatible with strong French cultural repertoires on citizenship’s universality, political representation, and an undivided nation. It accorded with French traditional anti-Americanism, as it condemned both affirmative action policies and American feminism (Scott 1997b; Picq 1995).

Instead of elaborating an alternative rationale to the French universal conception of citizenship and sovereignty, parity advocates tried to make their claim compatible with it, as they worked to define sexual difference as universal. But, as cultural repertoires help people justify their experience and give meaning to their action, they may also trap them in reasoning those constraints on their actions (Delphy 2001). The parity debate has indeed legitimized women’s presence in politics, thanks to a rationale underlining sexual difference, but it has not defined gender relationships as political ones, marked by inequalities. This repertoire, made widely available by the media and those

social movements advocating parity, has been taken on by local politicians to frame their own experience of the implementation of the parity laws. As the interviews with local representatives show, the magnification of sexual difference has been a major rationale to define the new gender relations linked to the increase in women's presence in town councils. However, it also carries a neutralization of gender: as sexual difference was defined in ontological, anthropological, or biological terms, issues of sex inequalities and power relations have been obscured. Hence, the repertoires used to legitimize the parity laws did not legitimize feminist politics, and local politicians are still unconvinced that gender is relevant in public policies. Besides, as the parity reform did not challenge the political system, the way local politics works still restrains women's capacity to participate in the decision-making process. Therefore, the question of the impact of critical mass on politics in general and on gender issues in particular has an ambivalent answer. Our findings are consistent with other studies on women's critical mass (Sawer 2000; Grey 2002), as they show that as long as the political system itself has not been transformed, women's presence is unlikely to produce change. On the contrary, a feminist presence that challenges the organization and the practice of political power may be more successful, but also more difficult to achieve. In the French case, it seems that the more things changed, the more they stayed the same.

NOTES

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1. See for example special issues of *Contemporary French Civilization* 25 (2), 2001, and *Modern and Contemporary France*, February 2002.

2. For detailed electoral statistics, see the various reports of the *Observatoire de la parité*, which is in charge of the evaluation of the implementation of the parity laws, in particular Génisson (2002).

3. See in particular the special issue “Women, Citizenship, and Representation” in *International Political Science Review*, 21 (4), 2000, and “Women and Politics Revisited” in *Parliamentary Affairs*, 55 (1), 2002.

4. For legislative elections, financial penalties were imposed on political parties, which did not respect parity among their candidates. This incentive has proved to be a weak one, as the percentage of women at the National Assembly has increased from 10.9% to 12.3%.

5. Study made by *Elles Aussi*, an association that campaigned for the parity laws.

6. Especially if compared to northern European countries, see Bergqvist et al. (1999). For an account of women’s difficulties in French political parties, see Allwood and Wadia (2000).

7. The Congress encompasses both the National Assembly and the Senate.

8. The third article of the French Constitution defines what is national sovereignty: it belongs to all the people, and individuals or segments of the people have no right to exercise it in their own name. In this universalistic stance, the deputy represents the whole nation and not a part of it. The fourth article defines the rights and duties of political parties and their role in the democratic system.

9. Public lecture at the Senate, 26 January 1999.

10. This fear was expressed, among others, by Elisabeth Badinter in front of the Senate commission, 16 December 1998.

11. For a more detailed account of this strategy, and its political consequences, see Bereni and Lépinard (2003 and 2004).

12. Senate, 4 March 1999.

13. Senate, 4 March 1999.

14. *Le Monde*, 10 November 1993.

15. And indeed, during the first town-council political campaigns under the parity law, the childcare issue was discussed as it had never been before in a great number of cities.

16. 745 deputies and senators supported the bill, and 43 rejected it.

17. As Isabelle Giraud and Jane Jenson note: “here we see the institutional limit of making change by reforming electoral law. Those who are most at risk in any changes are those who must vote the law” (Giraud and Jenson 2001, 84). Therefore, to ensure the reform would be accepted by male deputies and senators, the rationale parity advocates used to justify it had to carefully avoid challenging men’s privileges in the political system.

18. The percentage of women at the National Assembly rose from 10.9% to 12.3%, and at the Senate, from 6.2% to 10.9%.

19. For municipal elections, candidates who run for mayor constitute a list of candidates who are chosen according to various criteria such as political affiliation, professional accomplishment, involvement in local NGOs, and place of residency.

20. Unfortunately, due to the French legislation on public statistical data, there are no data available on the ethnic characteristics of political representatives.

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