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## The unquestioned power relationships of two french democratization policies. parity and participation

Clément Arambourou; Marion Paoletti<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Two main policies of *despecialization* have been implemented in the french political system: participatory democracy and parity. To understand political specialization and despecialization, it is necessary to go beyond the classical sex-race-class intersectional triptych. One should take into account other social divisions structured around social resources like political, cultural and social capitals. This article argues that, to be useful in studying political *specialization and despecialization*, intersectionality analysis needs to be enriched by sociological theory of forms of capital. Indeed, social divisions structured around forms of capital are particularly relevant to understand the social selection of political electives and that of ordinary citizens in participatory devices.

**Keywords:** Despecialization of politics, French politics, Intersectionality, Parity, Participatory democracy.

### [es] Paridad y participación: las incuestionables relaciones de poder de dos políticas de democratización francesas

**Resumen:** En el sistema político francés se han implementado dos políticas de *despécialisation* fundamentales: la democracia participativa y la paridad. Para entender este proceso es necesario acudir a la triada clásico de la interseccionalidad, sustentada en el sexo, la raza y la clase. Pero esta triada debería tener en cuenta otras divisiones sociales estructuradas sobre diversos recursos como los capitales cultural, político y social. Así, este artículo argumenta que la interseccionalidad necesita ser enriquecida con estas formas de capital procedente de la teoría sociológica para ser más útil en el estudio de estas tendencias de *despécialisation*. De hecho, se concluye que son particularmente relevantes para entender el perfil tanto de las personas seleccionadas para los cargos políticos como de la ciudadanía que se incorpora a los dispositivos de participación.

**Palabras clave:** Democracia participativa, *Despécialisation* de la política, Vida política francesa, Interseccionalidad, Paridad.

**Sumario.** 1. Intersectionality and appropriation of participatory policies by citizens. 1.1. Activism as compensation for the negative effects of gender. 1.2. The intersectional effects of social capital. 2. The intersectionality of french elected political representatives, between social properties and legitimization of speech. 2.1. The intersectional selection of french politicians, a national overview. 2.2. Political Identities and intersectionality, the local case of Bordeaux. Conclusion.

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The intersectional effects of French gender quotas in politics are disputed. According to Rainbow Murray, parity is not only for women and its logic can be understood as “women first, others may follow” (2012: 358). By questioning gender discrimination in politics, parity may also be legitimizing the presence of other minorities. Since 2007, for example, members of ethnic and racial minorities have regularly been appointed to French governments. Studies of the implementation of parity policies (Achin and Dorlin, 2008; Achin and Lévêque, 2011) show that the rhetoric of diversity (Bereni, 2009; Sénac, 2015) is now intertwined with that of parity. In today’s French politics, the role of women in politics is often seen as the representation of the diversity of French society (Achin and Dorlin, 2008). Éléonore Lépinard (2013), however, sees parity reform as an obstacle to intersectional policies promoting the presence of visible minorities in French politics, explaining this adverse effect by the way in which parity demands have been framed. In public debate and according to the universalist ideology of France, gender difference has been presented as a universal division, in order to make parity reform compatible with French political and legal identities. In practice, the rhetoric of sex as a universal difference enables to go beyond the historical opposition of French feminism toward identity politics.

Parity reform in France is part of a broader set of institutional reform policies referred as *despecialization policies* (Paoletti, 2010), aiming to open up politics to non-specialists. Over the last few decades, French politicians have regularly been criticized for their closed mode of functioning. These criticisms have compelled professionals to respond by renovating the relationship of representation. It is therefore possible to see parity reform as a response to the democratic crisis (Achin, 2001a). In French politics, parity can be seen as a special gender quota of 50 percent for each sex applied to representatives. The implementation of participatory processes is another despecialization policy, and the development of participative democracy since the 1990s has been a way of meeting the supposed demand among French citizens for a deepening of democracy. In France, participatory democracy is widely based on local and deliberative processes without decision-making powers. Parity reform (Achin *et alii*, 2007) and participatory democracy (Blondiaux, 2008) aim to involve non-specialists in political decision-making: women—who have long remained outside of the French political field—by parity reform and ordinary citizens via participatory democracy. However, an analysis of these two policies (Paoletti, 2010) shows that the disruptive potential of these reforms is neutralized, as these institutional reform policies are then reintegrated into a representative and oligarchic democratic frame, thereby reproducing political specialization. Despite some good intentions, the asymmetry between ruler and ruled remains. In this article, the aim is to see whether intersectional analysis can be useful in understanding the relative failure of these democratization policies.

Intersectional analysis involves looking more generally at the “*race, class, and gender*” triptych which, according to Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, has become “the ‘holy trinity’ of literary criticism and cultural studies” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 3). To understand the political despecialization process, other social divisions must be taken into account. Patricia Hill Collins and Valerie Chepp give a broad definition of intersectionality which “consists of an assemblage of ideas and practices that maintain that gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ethnicity, ability, and similar phenomena cannot be analytically understood in isolation from one another”. From the intersectional point of view, social reality is “an intersecting constellation of power rela-

tionships that produce unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences for individuals and groups positioned within them” (2013: 59-60).

Collins and Chepp compared Bourdieusian sociology and intersectionality. According to them, while Bourdieu’s work is centered on class domination (Bourdieu, 1979), his social theory is compatible with the notion of intersectionality and could be improved by adding power relationships other than class relations. Sirma Bilge (2009), meanwhile, considered the Bourdieusian forms of capital to be a useful instrument for intersectionality, while Beverley Skeggs (1997) focused on capital to understand the intersection between class and gender, and Bilge (2009) took the neo-Marxist approach developed by Stuart Hall (1980) and suggested crossing the intersection of the systems of race, class and gender with the articulation of political, economic and cultural instances.

This certainly provides a way of addressing political activities by an intersectional approach, although political power relationships and the political division of labor are left out of the intersectional dynamics. Yet, it is possible to conceptualize political divisions as autonomous social divisions and power relationships integrated in the intersectional nexus. Antonio Gramsci took this way of addressing the autonomy of political relationships. According to the Italian theorist, “There are really rulers and ruled, leaders and followers. All the science and the art of politics are based on these primary and intractable facts (in some general circumstances)”. For Gramsci, the division between rulers and ruled is “in the last analysis, a division between social groups” and “a creation of the division of labor” (1975: 447). The division between rulers and ruled is based on the government of societies and the historical autonomization and specialization of this social activity.

By this way of thinking, despecialization policies focus on an intersectional power relationship built around political activities of government. Parity takes into account the gender division, but more generally, how can parity and participatory policies deal with the relationships of power implied in *specialization* and *despecialization* process?

In this article, we first examine the complexity of the nexus of power relationships structuring participatory democracy (I). We then examine the selection of French elected representatives in the era of parity (II). This article argues that despecialization of politics is undermined by specific power relationships. Many of these relationships were not taken into account at the time when despecialization was put forward on the public agenda.

This article’s argument is based on a literature review focused on inequalities in representative institutions and participatory devices. These two areas of research have been previously investigated by the authors from a gender perspective based on quantitative and qualitative methods (Paoletti, 2010; Paoletti and Rui, 2015; Arambourou *et alii*, 2016). Here, this point of view is widened by an intersectional approach. To understand the intersectional inequalities in French participatory devices, we need to base our argument on fieldwork about other national cases that resonate with the French one. Indeed, in spite of common beliefs, the French case is not as exceptional as it had been previously argued (Elgie *et alii*, 2016).

## **1. Intersectionality and appropriation of participatory policies by citizens**

The egalitarian ambition of the participatory ideal sees participatory democracy policies as an action in favor of all the historically and politically marginalized subal-

terns. Institutions of participatory democracy have been implemented to promote more inclusive (Talpin, 2010) and horizontal relationships between social groups (class, gender or ethnic groups) and political groups (elected representatives and ordinary citizens). Ideally, the typically male *libido dominandi* (Bourdieu, 2001) is excluded from this type of democratic process.

It would be a mistake, however to dichotomize participatory and representative processes excessively. The social relationships which determine the selection of participants are very much the same as those which determine the selection of elected representatives. Nevertheless, some social stigmas are less disabling in participatory systems, although the fact remains that participatory democracy functions as an ante-chamber to an elective career (Mattina, 2004).

### 1.1. Activism as compensation for the negative effects of gender

Despite the absence of any legal requirements in terms of parity, women are present in participative programs (Paoletti and Rui, 2015). Amongst the wide range of participatory programs, participatory budgeting appears to be particularly attractive for women (Sintomer *et alii*, 2008), resulting in equal participation of women and men (Mazeaud, Talpin, 2010). It is also the case of the pilot participatory system for ethical debate in a French hospital studied by David Smadja (2015). Citizens' conferences and juries are formed by drawing lots or representative panels, and therefore also foster equal gender participation (Sintomer 2007; Lefebvre 2011).

Apart from these specific systems, however, sociological studies do not systematically report gender-equal access to participatory programs. In his study of a participatory system in a French city with a population of 17,000, Guillaume Petit (2014) showed that there were fewer women than men (except for the 41-50 age group which was characterized by equal participation). This was also the case of a public consultation organized by the Intermunicipal Authority of Bordeaux on urban mobility (Raibaud, 2015). In her study of American public participation practitioners, Caroline Lee showed that “[g]ender dynamics vary according to the topic under discussion, with topics like engineering, toxic waste remediation, and budgeting tending to attract male participants and less instrumental topics on social harmony and community visioning tending to attract more women” (2015: 85-88). These observations can certainly explain the variable participation of women (and men) in France.

Although women do take their place in public spaces, their voices are not necessarily taken into account (Mansbridge, 1980). Indeed, women speeches in politics are considered too far from the dominant cold and rationale style of argumentation (Young, 2002). As a consequence, women continue to encounter specific and gendered barriers. For example, when women speak as mothers about practical, day-to-day experiences, they suffer from a lack of regard in participatory systems, finding themselves facing noise and interruptions (Raibaud, 2015). This is also the case when women are presidents of associations. However, when women speak as experts or elected representatives, they are listened to more, while still being contradicted by men who judge themselves to be greater experts than any woman.

The gender hierarchy can thus be offset—but not erased—by technical and professional competences. An observation of democratic innovations in the Spanish Autonomous Community of the Basque Country also showed women's voices

to be less heard (Martinez Palacios *et alii*, 2015). Jone Martinez Palacios and his colleagues showed that experience of activism and involvement in the *subaltern feminist counterpublic* (Fraser, 2001) —which can be defined as an arena where feminists define oppositional interpretations of social reality— increased the ability of women to speak with authority and hold their ground with men when speaking in public. It appeared that past experience as an activist and as a feminist gave weight to the words of women. In this case, women were able to politicize unequal social relations and matters of private life (parenting and conjugality) which would otherwise be considered as secondary. Here, the political capital —and more precisely activist capital (Matonti and Poupeau, 2004)— acquired through practical experience of participation, decision-making and political activism, compensated for gender stigma.

Participatory devices for women only provide an opportunity to scrutinize differences among women. They have been studied outside Europe, in Brazil (Sa Vilas Boa, 2015) and post-war Burundi (Saiget, 2015). The studies have shown that hierarchies are also formed in single-sex situations, with sexual preference, color, age, religion and class determining the weight of individuals in the debate. In these single-sex participatory systems, feminist activism remains a valuable resource and creates a considerable divide between participants. The politicization of different social relations is determined by the relationships of power between feminists and non-feminists. In Recife, during women's conferences organized since 2001 by the municipality to deal with gender equality issues, the most valued points of view are those which had been previously politicized by feminist activists. More weight is also given to the points of view of women with considerable militancy experience. Recife's participatory devices therefore exclude people and marginalizes some opinions, particularly those of women from lower-class (often black or colored) districts. In the medium-term, however, the different points of view are negotiated and the imbrication of sex and class becomes a tool for differentiation between participants.

All in all, despite the inclusive spirit of participatory democracy and the extensive involvement of women, speech in such systems remains gendered. Political capital accumulated through past militancy —particularly feminist activism— is the best way to balance out gender dominance. But political capital also divides women in single-sex spaces. In more institutional and formal arenas, meanwhile, elected representative and expert status give women more authority than activist capital. Nevertheless, an analysis of the reproduction of domination in participatory systems should not lead us to underestimate progressive dynamics in terms of gender. The quantitative feminization of participants tends to give greater value to stereotyped female forms of communication: a concern for process rather than effects, the attention to feelings and individual experience and not only to rational arguments, the ability to listen and to preserve relations and social ties. All these qualities fit well with democratic deliberation and are compatible with feminine virtues (Poletta, Chen, 2013).

## 1.2. The intersectional effects of social capital

In Seville in Spain, 3,000 inhabitants take regularly part in participatory budget processes, representing 0.5% of the estimated eligible population. While this very

small audience is approximately representative of the overall population in terms of gender, this is not the case of some other social characteristics. Various studies have agreed that there is a bias in terms of age in municipal participatory devices. This is also the case in France. This has been shown in the twentieth district of Paris where the young people are absent (Blondiaux, 2000). Another study in the eleventh district of Rome, Italy, shows an over-representation of people aged over 50 (36% of participants), of home-owners (60%), of people with higher education qualifications (24%) and of activists (40% are members of an association and 20% are members of a political party). Despite the presence of members of the working class, quasi-equal participation of women and the involvement of politicized individuals, these participatory budgets have failed to include the excluded.

In his study of a city with a population of 17,000 in France, Petit (2014) underlined the selection of people who had lived in the city for a long time, as well as a socio-economic bias and the over-representation of people involved in local associative networks. Managerial and professional occupations, pensioners and people with higher-education qualifications were also over-represented among the participants in the participatory system, while intermediate-level professionals and people without any activity were under-represented. Workers participating in the sociological inquiry have a specific social status. They are pensioners or union leaders. These members of the working class are therefore a double exception: in terms of their occupational category and also among the participants. Petit showed that the intensity of participation (participation in several systems) correlated positively with income level. Nevertheless, qualification and income effects were reduced by long-term residency. The most involved participants were long-term residents in the city. In other words, income effects were countered by *indigenous capital* (Retière, 2003), although this long-term residence effect acted as another hindrance to the participation of new inhabitants on lower incomes. Indigenous capital can be defined as the social capital provided by the fact of belonging to local social networks (Renahy, 2010). In the case of participatory systems, this local belonging primarily means belonging to local association networks. As capital, *social capital breeds social capital*. For people with great indigenous capital, participatory systems are an instrument to generate even more of such indigenous capital. According to Petit (2014), for participants from associative organizations, participatory systems are like associative life. In this medium-sized town of France, participatory systems and local associations are two sides of the same coin.

All in all, in Western Europe, the top-down approach to participation fails to broaden the range of actual participants. Although women are present in participatory systems, and despite the considerable activist capital of some of these women, their voices are less heard. In addition to gender, the social selectivity of the participants has been well documented. This selectivity is also linked to a special form of social capital relating to indigenous status. Long-term residence and involvement in local associations can offset socio-economic and cultural selectivity, with the result that gender and class factors do not entirely explain the make-up of the participatory audience. There is a need to also consider activist and indigenous capital, which are two forms of political and social capital respectively. Strictly political power relationships are not the only power relationships required to complement the intersectional analysis of democratic specialization and despecialization. The case of French political representatives runs along the same lines.

## 2. The intersectionality of french elected political representatives, between social properties and legitimization of speech

Participation in political decision-making processes is a quasi-monopoly of professional politicians. In an era of concerns about the crisis in representative democracy (Mazeaud, 2014), the closed nature of the group of representatives is often highlighted. This criticism has led to the despecialization policy referred to as parity and to the relative promotion of diversity in politics. Although gender quotas have been introduced into the constitutional and legal orders, there are no legal requirements on diversity. Michel Offerlé (2012; 2017) pointed out that consideration for gender and ethnic minorities in politics goes hand in hand with blindness to class inequalities, and class is often the poor relative of intersectional academic works (Kergoat, 2009).

According to Bourdieu, parity could “favor firstly women drawn from the same regions of social spaces as the men who currently occupy the dominant positions” (2001: 117). It is necessary to examine the merits of Bourdieu’s remark by studying the characteristics of French politicians. An intersectional study of French elected representatives also needs to address the question of the strategic and political uses of self-presentation (Guionnet, 2013) by female and male politicians.

To understand intersectional inequalities in French representative institutions, we focus in particular on a French local case (the political space of Bordeaux) after a general overview.

### 2.1. The intersectional selection of french politicians, a national overview

Offerlé (2012; 2017) underlined the selection of French politicians, stating that the French political class is *pre-gerontocratic* and masculine. Other important biases are qualifications and socio-professional status. In France, like in other European democracies (Best and Cotta, 2000; Cotta and Best, 2007; Mény and Surel, 2009), middle-class educated men are overrepresented in politics, especially among members of Parliament (MP). This statement can be analyzed in more detail by studying different political institutions.

Michel Koebel (2012) directed his attention towards local politics and looked at changes in the composition of elected municipal councils between 1983 and 2008. His study revealed that mayors were increasingly members of the intermediate and upper layers of the salaried professions and decreasingly members of independent professions (farmers, craftsmen, retailers and liberal professions). This social selectivity in municipal institutions depended on the size of municipalities. In municipalities of less than 500 inhabitants, only 11 % of municipal councilors were managers or professional people, whereas in municipalities of more than 100,000 inhabitants, this was the case of 58% of the elected office holders. The higher the position in the political hierarchy, the greater this social selectivity (Gaxie, 1980). In this way, managers and professional people were over-represented among municipal executives, as were people aged over 60 (Koebel, 2014).

Catherine Achin (2001b) conducted an initial review of the effects of parity law applied to municipal ballots. She crossed socio-professional category analysis with gender. Like Koebel, she showed the domination of managers and professional people. Nevertheless, she noted that female elected representatives were less often members of this social category – 22.8% of women compared with 35.4% of men.



Generally, female and male elected representatives at the municipal level had different social profiles. Women were less often retirees and more often not in active employment (Sineau, 2011), meaning that French local government does feature an increasingly rare figure in French society: the home-maker (Paoletti, 2008). The women elected to municipal councils were also three years younger than the men, on average (Marneur, 2016) and less often members of a political party (Paoletti, 2005). Koebel (2014) explained why a higher proportion of women are technicians and associate professionals than men, by a combination of parity constraints and social and sexual divisions of labor. In today's France, women occupy less highly-rated jobs than men. Maud Navarre (2015), meanwhile, showed the overqualification of the women in municipal elective office (measured by diploma). According to Victor Marneur (2016), in rural municipalities, indigenous capital is a valued political resource for women.

The gendered division of elective activities is a reality in France. Koebel (2014) underlined the under-representation of women in the more prestigious municipal executive positions —like finance and urbanism —and their over-representation in less glamorous areas— like family, early childhood or school matters. Women are more often mayors of small villages than of big cities (Marneur, 2016) —Anne Hidalgo's political leadership in Paris being an exception. Nevertheless, this relegation of women far from senior political positions can be overcome and women can run for mayor in suburban areas on the strength of their level of qualification and of professional skills that are transferable to the political field (Marneur, 2016). Obviously, women with considerable (elective and/or partisan) political capital can challenge this sexual division of political activities (Navarre, 2015).

Most women's political experiences are quite different from the ones of men. Fieldwork in the Regional Assembly of the Île-de-France Region (Dulong and Matonti, 2007) showed that men spoke more than women. Men also felt more comfortable about speaking and interrupting other speakers, and heckled more than women. This difference is explained in part by the different political capital of the men and women who are elected, but even when they had as much experience as men, women speakers felt less confident. Delphine Dulong and Frédérique Matonti also studied the sexual division of the activities of elected political office holders. Due to their greater domestic workload, women have less time than men and tend to focus in their political activities on issues and themes with which they are already familiar with. The political divisions therefore reflect the gendered division of labor in society, although there are some factors that counter this specialization. Dulong and Matonti underlined the weight of political experience. If the younger women in the Île-de-France Regional Assembly were ready to take on supposedly male topics, it is because they have experienced positions as leaders in the socialist youth movement.

The social selection of politicians depends on their positions in the political spectrum. Luc Rouban (2011) focused on the first twelve legislatures of the Fifth Republic (1958-2007). Looking at the occupation of the MP's fathers, he showed that 40.8% of the MPs of the main party of the French right (UNR-UDR-RPR-UMP) were part of the upper classes. This was only the case of 8% of communist Members of Parliament (among which 79.6% were from a working class background). Analyzing the previous occupations of French MPs over time, it was shown that they increasingly came from the middle classes. Levels of qualification are an important variable to understand the social selection of MPs. In 2007, only 4% of MPs had no

formal qualifications. Louis Chauvel (2007), meanwhile, focused on the age of MPs. In 1981, the ratio of over 60s to under 40s was 6 to 1. In 2007, it was 9 to 1, making French MPs among the oldest in Europe (Arnoux, 2007).

In recent decades, the composition of the National Assembly has seen two major changes: an increase in MPs from the middle classes and a rise in the number of women (Rouban, 2011). Thanks to the parity laws, in 2012, 27% of French MPs were women (against just 5.5% in 1981). Party affiliation is a far-from-negligible variable for women. Throughout the Fifth Republic, the parties of the left have been more open to the election of women (Achin, 2005). Rouban (2011) noted that the level of the previous occupation of French MPs was lower for women than for men, but then again women's occupations in France today are of a lower level, on the whole, than men's. In terms of social background, women are more often from the upper and middle classes than men. These data support the hypothesis of greater social selection of women in politics (Latté, 2002).

Under the Fifth Republic, the access of women to national political roles has tended to be more by appointment to government than through legislative mandates (Achin and Lévêque, 2006). Two presidents of the French Republic —Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981) and François Mitterrand (1981-1995)— boosted this process. Throughout the Fifth Republic, women ministers have been recruited on the basis of their competence, rather than of their political elective career. Nowadays, despite the absence of official regulatory requirements, French governments have reached or come close to gender parity. Since 2010, no French government has ever had less than 30% of women and since 2012, there has been strict parity. In France, many women ministers —Rama Yade (Union for a Popular Movement, UMP), Rachida Dati (UMP), Najat Vallaud-Belkacem (Socialist Party, PS), Myriam El Khomri (PS), etc.— also embody the intersection between diversity and parity. Less experienced than men, political social capital (i.e. the political personal relationships) inherited or accumulated constitutes the main political resource for female ministers (Behr and Michon, 2014).

Only two women —Ségolène Royal (PS) in 2007 and the radical-right leader Marine Le Pen —which the political party, the National Front, is not a government party— in 2017 have been candidates in the second round of the presidential election. Like former President François Hollande (PS) and the new President Emmanuel Macron, Royal is a technocrat, a graduate of the National School of Administration (ENA) and comes from the upper class. In the course of her political career, she has been elected MP several times and was President of the Poitou-Charentes Region. Her profile is not fundamentally different from that of men. However, her presidential campaign strategy focused on offering a different way of doing politics and on her identity as a woman. In order to rethink the intersectional analysis of political representatives, it is therefore necessary to take political self-presentation into account.

## 2.2. Political Identities and intersectionality, the local case of Bordeaux

The political game in Bordeaux<sup>2</sup> has been studied extensively (Lagroye, 1973; Garraud, 1994; Médard, 2006; Victoire, 2014). However, none of these studies has taken

<sup>2</sup> Bordeaux is a city in southwest France. It is the core of a metropolis (a political and administrative division) of almost 740 000 inhabitants.

account both of political identities and intersectionality. An intersectional analysis of the political game in Bordeaux shows that successful political careers in recent times have involved strategies of legitimization through “proximity” (Le Bart et Lefebvre, 2005) and the politicization of sexual issues.

In 2001, the first year of implementation of the parity reforms, two future socialist leaders entered politics in Bordeaux. The first was a woman called Michèle Delaunay, the second a man called Vincent Feltesse. In 2001, Michèle Delaunay was elected as an opposition councilor to the city council led by former Prime Minister Alain Juppé. At this time, she was 54 and had been working as a hospital doctor. Her political legitimization was based on the idea that she was not a member of the local political class, but a professional (Arambourou, 2014). In 2007, she won the legislative election against Alain Juppé. In 2012, she was appointed to the Ayrault government as Minister for Senior Citizens, losing that position in 2014. In 2001, Vincent Feltesse was elected mayor of Blanquefort, a suburb of Bordeaux. In 2007, he became president of the Intermunicipal Authority of Bordeaux. Like Delaunay, Feltesse played on his social and personal characteristics rather than on strictly political ones: his young age (he was born in 1967), his casual dress style, his progressive approach to his role as a father, his interest in new information and communication technologies and the image of a dreamer. Politically, he promoted participatory democracy and gender equality. These democratic and sexual issues symbolized a political renewal embodied by Feltesse.

There have been fewer new leading figures on the right of the political spectrum in Bordeaux. In the municipal elections of 2014, Virginie Calmels (aged 43) entered politics. She was elected to the city council and appointed as First Deputy Mayor by Alain Juppé. In 2015, she was selected to lead the right-wing list for the regional elections. When presenting herself, Calmels underlined her involvement in the management of companies and emphasized her attachment to the Bordeaux region—she was born in Talence, a suburb of Bordeaux. Like Delaunay, she was proud to be a newbie in politics. For Calmels, her political competence is derived from her professional competence (Arambourou *et alii*, 2016). She also has a business school diploma.

These self-presentations are paradoxical. Michèle Delaunay is in fact the daughter of Gabriel Delaunay, who served as Prefect of Gironde—the department of which Bordeaux is the capital—and was a close associate of former Bordeaux Mayor Jacques Chaban-Delmas (Lagroye, 1973, Médard, 2006). In fact, Delaunay’s daughter has a deep knowledge of local politics. As an hospital doctor, she is also a member of the local upper class. Before being elected Mayor, Feltesse was a member of the local socialist leader’s cabinet at the Gironde Department and Aquitaine Region. Unlike Michèle Delaunay, he is not a doctor, but he is a graduate of HEC, a prestigious French business school. He also has a Master’s degree from another leading school, the Institute of Political Studies of Paris. When he took up his local elective office, he was already a true professional politician in the Weberian sense—politics had been his only professional activity for several years. His pitch about doing politics differently concealed his belonging to the political class. For example, in 2014, when he lost the Bordeaux municipal elections, he was appointed to serve as an advisor to the Elysée presidential palace thanks to his relationship with French President Hollande. Social capital in politics is not only a parachute for those defeated in elections, it is also a launch pad for political careers. This is also the case of Calmels.

She was recruited by Juppé but she was not new to the sector. Her former partner is Christian Blanc, Member of Parliament and former Minister in the government of François Fillon (2008-2010). Her current boyfriend, Jérôme Chartier, is a right wing MP and a close ally of the candidate of the Republicans for the presidential election of 2017, F. Fillon.

### 3. Conclusion

Comparative politics highlight the necessity to move “well beyond France as an exceptional case” (Elgie *et alii*, 2016: 9). Indeed, French political life is facing the same challenges as other democracies. In this way, the policies to improve democracy examined in this article—gender quotas and participatory policies—are commonplace in many other political settings. Therefore we postulate that the intersectional inequalities structuring French participatory apparatuses and representative institutions can help to understand democratization processes outside of France.

To understand the involvement in participatory systems and progress up the political career ladder, we must take into account power relationships in areas other than gender and class (or race). Power relationships structured around social capital (indigenous status and relationships in the political field, cultural and in particular educational capital, and political capital, especially that derived from activism) are also of great relevance. According to Karl Marx, “capital is a social relation between persons” (1976: 560). For Bourdieu, social characteristics “function as capital, i.e. as social relations of *power*” only in a specific social field (1989: 375) such as that of politics.

Despecialization policies which are sensitive to social, cultural and activist capitals are difficult to build. If these capitals rank social agents, diploma and activism are political resources for gender and sexual minorities ; without them, they have little chance of being present in the democratic process. For Sirma Bilge (2010), it is not possible to support a normative intersectionality in which all dominations are equal. In the case of political specialization, it can be hypothesized that gender and class are particularly relevant. Nevertheless, political and activist knowledge on the one hand and a variety of forms of social capital on the other, are likely to be crucial factors. These forms of capital are social resources whose accumulation is relatively autonomous. Forms of capital must not be substituted for the major social divisions like gender, race and class. Sexual, racial and social divisions are linked with the building of *social groups* in the strongest sense of the term (Brubaker, 2002). But capital is undoubtedly a useful concept to apply intersectional analysis to political phenomena and especially the social relations between rulers and ruled.

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